

Authoritarian and bureaucratic church structures

African Christianity inherited hierarchical, authoritarian, and bureaucratic church structures from the missionaries. These structures tended to undermine the African communal way of life. The recent Pentecostal and charismatic emphasis on loose church structures and spontaneous religious expression is now creating powerful, authoritarian church personalities. The search for relevant church structures must cut across both the older churches and the newer Pentecostal and charismatic churches.

Capital intensive missions

The first Evangelical missions in Africa were industrial missions. They believed in both the gospel and commerce. This concept was later dropped as a result of the debates between “social gospel” and “pure gospel,” that is, “deed” versus “word.”

Christian missions raised funds and personnel from their home mission office and gradually became more and more dependent on the home mission. As a result, the economic and personnel potential of the field missions was not fully developed. The powerful personalities of some of the new Pentecostal and charismatic movements have not addressed this issue, nor have they provided an alternative. Instead, they have tended to rely more heavily upon Western capital and monetary philosophy. Internal resource generation and personnel development must be given priority attention in Africa if change is to occur.

Indigenisation policies and mission/church relations

The indigenisation policy of some Christian missions led to the founding of national churches in the 1950s in some African countries. This phenomenon occurred mostly among non-denominational

Christian missions. These independent faith missions did two important things. First, they developed new church structures and organisations, and second, they trained Africans to take over their mission work. They emphasised building churches that were self-governing, self-supporting, and self-propagating, in accordance with the “three-self” formula espoused by Rufus Anderson, Henry Venn, and Roland Allen. Denominational missions, on the other hand, such as the Baptists, Presbyterians, Methodists, Anglicans (CMS), and Catholics, merely trained Africans to take the places of missionaries and subsequently incorporated the African mission churches into their world denominational church structures.

Indigenisation principles had a profound influence upon Christian missions. These policies defined in general terms the nature of the church, its quality, structures, etc. The preparation of Africans to take over the mission work depended very much upon what missions understood by these indigenous policies and also what models they used in implementing them. The following techniques were used:

Evangelism and church planting

Principles of evangelism were taught to early converts, who became itinerant evangelists alongside the missionaries. Church planting resulted from a variety of missionary activities, including evangelism, itineration, education, medical work, literature work, etc. Organised evangelism and church planting based upon indigenisation principles were quite evident even during the pioneering stages of the mission work.

Theological training

Christian missions founded many vernacular Bible training schools with the primary purpose of developing indig-

enous Bible teachers, evangelists, and pastors who would later provide church leadership.

Teacher training

Teacher training centres were also built by Christian missions with the primary purpose of developing indigenous teachers. Similar advanced schools were established with the view of preparing indigenous leadership within the African church.

Pastoral training

Pastoral training was the least developed by Christian missions. Theological institutions were mainly centres of training evangelists and Bible teachers. Pastoral training and church administration were less emphasised. The missionaries felt that these two areas should not be introduced to the Africans too soon. Unfortunately, this simple preference became doctrinaire over the years. Licensing and ordination of Africans for pastoral duties and church leadership were most difficult to come by, so the number of national church leaders was very limited.

Training of African evangelists

African evangelists were trained as an auxiliary work force to that of the missionaries in the mission field. For the most part, indigenous missionary agencies similar to those of Western societies were not formed. One exception was SIM in Nigeria, which developed an indigenous organisation, the African Missionary Society/Evangelical Missionary Society in the late 1940s.

Church autonomy

The issues of church control and church autonomy plagued the indigenisation policies of Christian missions in Africa. Relinquishing control and granting autonomy to Africans was the most difficult aspect and created the greatest source of conflict between Western missionaries and African

church leaders. The major cause of this conflict was the missionary ecclesiology, which was incompatible with African expectations and their simple biblical understanding of the church.

Transfer of mission vision

Two simple truths failed to be realised when it came time for Western missionaries to transfer the vision of mission to Africans. These truths were, "Like father, like son" and "Like begets like." By and large, the African church has failed to grasp the mission vision and burden of Western missionaries. This is our greatest puzzle, and it is the greatest indictment of mission work in Africa. How could a missionary not transfer his vision and burden of mission to Africans? And how could Africans not catch the vision and burden of mission from the missionary who brought them the gospel of Christ? The most serious weakness of the African church lies in this area. This aspect needs to be re-introduced to the African church today.

Contributions of the African Church to the Global Church

The place of the African church within the global church needs to be clarified. Discussions and issues arising from partnership consultations reflect the problem. We must recognise that the indices used to measure the contributions of the African church may not necessarily be the same as those that are being used to measure global success, strength, and influence. Judged by the contemporary issues facing it, the African church may be said to occupy a very weak position within the global church. We must look elsewhere to find a standard that gives the African church a position within the global church. 1 Corinthians 1:18-31 provides a theological basis in this case. The position of the African church can be judged not

only from a human perspective, but also from God's divine wisdom. If we look at the African church from this perspective, its contribution will become more apparent. The church can be strengthened if its contribution is appreciated.

Numerical size

With over 230 million adherents, the African church is bound to shape the global church by its size alone. Andrew Walls has noted that the center of Christianity has shifted from the North to the South. This is an astonishing change. Kwame Bediako asserts that the vibrant life and size of the African church demand that a serious study be made so as to ascertain the church's place, role, and contribution to global Christianity.

The non-Christian world has recognised the size of Africa in world affairs, and this fact has influenced the appointments of Boutros Boutros Ghali of Egypt and Kofi Anang of Ghana as Secretaries General of the United Nations and Chief Emeka Anyoku of Nigeria as Secretary of the Commonwealth. The World Evangelical Fellowship has done the same, with Tokunboh Adeyemo of Nigeria as its Chairman. The World Council of Churches has made similar appointments. But we must go beyond just having a "black face." True representation must be based upon equality and upon respect for the dignity and worth of persons. It also means understanding the views and needs of the person being represented. It requires hearing and not just listening. Representation means allowing the other person to be a participant and not just a spectator. A spiritual understanding of representation will definitely make the African church the centrepiece of global strategies of mission.

General weaknesses

The weaknesses of the African church in terms of biblical theology, resources,

and leadership all serve to manifest God's strength and wisdom in raising up his church in Africa. The Bible is clear on how a weaker brother should be treated. The weaknesses of the African church should not translate into paternalism, a dependency syndrome, dominance, or lack of respect for human dignity and worth. Critics of mission work in Africa usually give up on mission when they come across the manifest display of human weakness. But this is a gross failure to understand that God uses the weak things of this earth to manifest his glory. A lot has been done by weak missionaries to establish the church of Christ in Africa.

The church in Africa is still struggling with human weaknesses in its short missiological history, resulting in crises of mission/church relations in Africa. In global Christianity, weakness will become a virtue in a biblical sense if we correct some of the problems of mission ecclesiology in Africa by recognising and assigning to the African church its proper place and role in global Christianity.

Potentials and possibilities

The African church is numerically strong and has great potential. Africans have some general characteristics which can be utilised in the global strategy of mission. They generally possess vitality of life, with the ability and the perseverance to live in very harsh and difficult conditions. Furthermore, Africans generally understand the language of the spirit world. Can Africans be recruited as missionaries by Western mission agencies? We are all aware of the fact that Western sporting clubs recruit African stars to play for their clubs. Westerners should likewise tap into the potentials and possibilities that abound within the African church.

Indigenous missions

We do not have adequate information about indigenous missionary movements in Africa. Serious research is needed in this area. We have identified the following models. There could be more of which we are not aware.

1. The pioneering missionaries trained itinerant evangelists who helped to evangelise Africa along with the missionaries.

2. Some Africans received prophetic messages and visions and went out to evangelise Africa quite independent of Western missionaries and mission churches.

3. African missionary societies were founded by Western missions for Africans to run parallel to the Western mission agencies. Only a handful of Western missions did this experiment.

4. Christian youth movements of the 1970s gave birth to independent mission agencies. Leaders of such agencies were usually young university graduates.

5. Migrations and movements of peoples contributed to the spread of Christianity across Africa.

New expressions of Christianity

Either by reacting against Western mission models and methods or by spontaneous development, Africans have sought ways of affirming their culture and values. The result is that there are many new ways of expressing Christianity through theology, liturgy, worship, and cultural expressions. These theological forms and expressions of Christianity in Africa must be subjected to critical biblical scrutiny so as to ascertain their biblical authenticity.

Global migrations of African peoples

As noted above, migrations of African peoples to other parts of the world have significantly aided in the spread of Christianity. Such migrations should help the

church in Africa to define its position in the global church today. Both Africans and Western missionaries must go beyond the mission legacy by overcoming the shortcomings of the past and must move towards creating a new mutuality and a new spirit of working together to evangelise the whole world.

Current Problems and Challenges

Problems

Following is a summary presentation of the current problems facing the African church. Space does not permit elaboration.

1. The African church has a weak biblical and theological base. In other words, there is inadequate biblical teaching in the churches and Christian communities. This area does not refer to the spirituality of the people or theological reflections and expressions of Christianity. Rather, there is inadequate ecclesiology/theology of the church to handle issues such as church life, missions, spirituality, morality, social matters, and ethnic/tribal conflict.

2. The African church has a weak vision for mission. Quite a lot is happening in the area of missions, but there is still general weakness in this area. The vision and burden of mission were not properly transferred by the missionaries, nor were they properly received by the African church leaders. The African church needs to make this aspect its highest priority.

3. The African church has weak leadership, especially in its modes of training and development.

4. The African church has inadequate financial resources and trained personnel.

5. The African church faces numerous crises, such as poverty (both internally and externally induced); external debts; ethnicity, tribalism, and social conflict; bad

politicians and governments; and militarism and corruption.

Challenges

The African church faces some serious challenges worth mentioning.

Strength and power of traditional religions and worldview

The church in Africa seems not to have a good knowledge of the traditional African religious beliefs, religious practices, general religious and cultural life, and traditional theological reasons for adhering to the traditional religions and cultures. Many African theologians and scholars were trained in the West. Unfortunately, Western theology does not address adequately the theological questions and issues arising from the Christian study of African traditional religions and cultures. The traditional religious beliefs and practices are in great measure different from those of Christianity. There may be similarities in some areas, but there are differences in terms of religious purposes, religious meanings, religious motivations, religious beliefs, religious practices, and theological foundations.

This background is essential if we are going to formulate a biblical theology that can address adequately the African traditional religions and cultures. Furthermore, this background is necessary to help African Christians sort out traditional religious beliefs, practices, and behaviour that are in conflict with their Christian faith. Many African Christians have serious problems understanding how the Bible and the Christian faith should address their traditional African religious system. There are those who still hold to some of the “precious” traditional religious beliefs, practices, and behaviour, even after becoming Christians.

The manifestations of dual religious beliefs and practices among African Christians are abundant. Many professing Christians go back to their traditional religious practices, because these are thought to meet certain needs. For example, they consult traditional diviners, sorcerers, medicine men/women, and other specialists. We have observed that this is indeed a pervasive religious phenomenon in African Christianity. The most crucial theological issue at hand is that most African Christians lack sufficient knowledge of the Bible and its teachings on African traditional religions and cultures. It is very important for African Christians to know how the Bible addresses these matters.

Even though the influence of the African traditional religions and cultures is profound in modern Africa, most African Christians have little knowledge of how this influence is exerted. They live under its influence every day but still exhibit much ignorance of it. The religious life of a traditional African can be better understood if the nature and functions of the traditional religion and culture can be well defined. For this reason, a working definition of African traditional religion is essential, first of all, to our understanding of the impact of Christianity in Africa and, second, to developing a theological method to address the challenge of traditional religions to Christianity.

Nominalism of second generation Christians

Nominalism among second generation Christians is on the increase in Africa. Children born to Christian parents show a lack of interest in Christianity. However, nominal second generation Christians are the major target of the Pentecostal and charismatic movements. Credit must be given to these groups for their work in this area.

Growth and influence of new religions and cults

The decline of living standards and spiritual standards in many African countries, especially in the educational, medical, economic, and social sectors, has given impetus to the rise of new religions and cults.

Growth and strength of Islam in Africa

Post-independent Africa has witnessed an increase in the growth and strength of Islam in Africa. If the conquest of North Africa by Islam in the 8th century is a lesson for the church, then the challenge of Islam in Africa today cannot be ignored.

Influence of global culture and values

The influence of global culture and values cannot be taken lightly, since any negative effects could entrench Africa in its traditional dependency role. If globalisation leads to the liberation of the global man or woman, then the enslavement of any man or woman is to be dreaded. The challenge for global Christianity is how to use globalisation as a liberating tool for the church in Africa.

The greater proportion of the problems confronting Africa today have been externally induced. Similarly, solutions to some of these issues need to be external. Global Christianity has a great role to play in helping the African church face some of these formidable forces.

Overcoming Barriers and Working Together

The emergent problems and issues resulting from the history of missions in Africa require that an effective collective effort be instituted. It is only by working together that we can successfully overcome some of the barriers. Below is a list

of strategies to consider in the new millennium.

1. Promote and strengthen African indigenous missions.
2. Identify and prioritise areas of needs in mission.
3. Identify and prioritise areas of co-operation.
4. Suggested projects:
 - Find out which mission agencies or societies are doing missions in Africa.
 - Formulate new strategies of mobilising African churches for missions.
 - Formulate a new philosophy and curriculum of mission.
 - Embark upon leadership training for practical mission.
 - Network and facilitate mission.
 - Find mission partners outside of Africa.

Conclusion: Some Guiding Questions

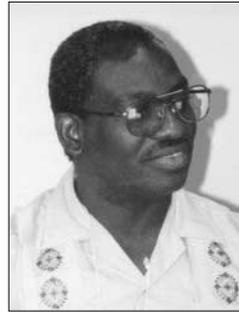
We conclude this paper by stating some guiding questions.

1. What lessons can the African church learn from historical missions, especially Western missions of the 19th and 20th centuries?
2. In what ways can the African church be helped and strengthened in its mission strategy for the 21st century?
3. Given the weak position of Africa in the global community, does God have any need and use for the church in Africa for his strategy of global evangelisation?
4. What are the most serious challenges for the church in Africa, and how can they be addressed?
5. Historically, Africa has been a mission field. How can the global church move from being a sender of missionaries to Africa to being a partner *with* Africans in global mission?

6. What has the African church done to further the cause of mission? What models of mission were developed from the African church? What can Christians from other continents learn from African missions? What are the obstacles that hinder African missions, and how can we overcome them?

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Missiological challenges from the South Pacific region

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THE SOUTH PACIFIC REGION is the home of three racial groups: Melanesians, Micronesians, and Polynesians. The area encompasses 11 sovereign nations scattered over the mighty Pacific Ocean, with an approximate total population of 6.5 million. These island nations were brought under the power of the gospel in the 19th century. Like other regions, this one has its own missiological challenges and concerns to face. At the same time, the people of the South Pacific are ready to move out to the unreached areas with the gospel. This paper seeks to highlight these challenges and concerns, as well as the joy of reaching out to others. The paper is in three parts:

1. *Light to* the South Pacific, which sets out the coming of the gospel to the South Pacific and the response of the Islanders to the gospel.
2. *Light for* the South Pacific, which highlights the needs and the concerns of the church in the South Pacific.
3. *Light from* the South Pacific, which outlines the desire of the Pacific Islanders to take the gospel into the world.

Light to the South Pacific

When Matthew the evangelist reflected on the appearance of Jesus the Saviour in Galilee, he saw it as the fulfilment of the Old Testament missiological expectation. He saw in the Lord the light that would penetrate the dark world of the Gentiles, bringing hope to those living in the shadow of death (Matt. 4:12-17). Light is a missiological symbol which evokes pleasant home memories among Pacific Islanders. John Williams, one of the early LMS missionaries to the South Pacific, saw light as one of his three guiding principles for the expansion of the missionary movement from the Eastern

to the Western Pacific (Hitchen, 1984, p. 576). The South Pacific nations have always seen themselves as people of the womb of the new dawn and the going down of the sun. Tonga is the first nation in the world to welcome the sun every day, and Samoa is the last country to bid farewell to it. Light starts in the South Pacific and finishes in the South Pacific.

The nations of the South Pacific are forever grateful for the light of the gospel that was brought to them. Even though the sun ascended and descended over our heads, our lives were as dark as the deepest part of the Pacific Ocean, impenetrable by the sunlight. When the light of the gospel beamed on us, it found us busy killing and eating each other. A missionary vividly captured the Pacific way of life in a stanza of a song he wrote: "Dark were the days when men lived in fear, / Fear of the arrow, stone-club, and spear, / Fighting and hatred filled every hand, / That was my country, that was my land" (Basket, 1971, p. 198).

Nothing but the power of the gospel could conquer cannibals for the kingdom of light. The light received is light to share. The gospel not only removed the arrows, stone-clubs, and spears from our hands, but also transformed our warring deep sea canoes into bearers of the good news—the message of freedom, love, and peace. Our enemies, once the targets for our weapons, became targets for the gospel of peace, friendship, and fellowship. Instead of carrying destructive spears by our side in the canoes, we carried the sword of the Spirit, God's healing and renewing power for the transformation of the peoples of the islands of the South Pacific. Conversion for us was our call to take the gospel from island to island. In the history of world mission, the Pacific Islanders became the first non-Western people to be involved in cross-cultural missionary work. The Fijian and the Tongan deep

sea canoes, formerly used for war, carried these missionaries from island to island until they reached the dark continent of New Guinea. The Pacific Islanders, in company with John Williams, James Chalmers, and many others, went out without looking back. Many never returned to their homeland. John Williams was killed and eaten by Ni Vanuatuans (New Hebridians). James Chalmers was killed and eaten by Papua New Guineans. Many Pacific Islanders went home into the presence of their Lord at the hands of cannibals; others died from black water fever, malaria, and other sicknesses.

Fiji suffered a great measles epidemic in the late 19th century, which claimed 40,000 Fijians, including 200 pastor-teachers. Dr. Brown, head of the Methodist Mission Board from Australia, arrived in Fiji by ship in 1899. His intention was to take Fijian evangelists to commence mission in New Guinea. After what the church had gone through, Dr. Brown felt reluctant to ask them to release the few teachers and pastors they had. He therefore decided to go to the theological institution to recruit some of the students for New Guinea. After he spoke to them, the students were given time to think about his request overnight. The next morning, when the principal asked those who wanted to go to stand up, the entire student body of 84 stood. They had made their decision with their wives and children. Neither the principal nor the British administrator could persuade them to remain home. They went. Most of them died, but the church was planted on the soil of New Guinea (Tippett, 1977, pp. 42-44).

The saying is ancient, but its missiological content is fresh and refreshingly worth repeating: "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church." The seed of the gospel planted on the islands of the South Pacific has borne 100-fold and more. Today, the most prominent build-

ing in every village is the church, the centre of the community life and activity. It stands as an eternal testimony to the commitment and sacrifice made by the missionaries of the cross—white, brown, and black—who side by side fought for the faith of the gospel. Charles Forman (1982, p. 90) captures this phenomenal change: “As the old religion has provided the framework and rationale for the traditional way of life, so Christianity was seen as a new framework within which there could be a rationale for the new way of life that was appearing.” When the Methodist Mission handed over its work and responsibility to the Fijians, at the installation of the first president of the church, the official presidential stole carried “two symbols of faith, the cross which is a reminder of the power of the gospel, and a deep sea canoe, a cultural symbol of the commission to go forth beyond the reef” (Tippett, 1977, p. xi). The present-day mission of what is known as the Deep Sea Canoe Missionary Movement will be taken up in part three of this paper.

Light for the South Pacific

The church in the South Pacific region has grown by leaps and bounds. I was reminded of this growth when I heard an African brother at a conference in Oxford, England, describing the phenomenal growth of the church on the continent of Africa. He said, “The church in Africa is one mile wide but only one inch deep.” This African brother could well have been describing the church in the South Pacific. The countries of the South Pacific are the most missionised countries in the world. Today, South Pacific Islands nations consider themselves Christian nations. Figures from the 1980 census show that 95% of Papua New Guinea citizens described themselves as belonging to a Christian church (Synders, 1986). David Barrett’s

(1982, p. 552) figures in the *World Christian Encyclopedia* show that in the 10-year period 1970–1980, the number of nominal Christians stood at 23.5%, which is about a quarter of those who claimed to belong to a Christian church. For the same 10-year period, Barrett presents the yearly rates of conversion (2.74%) as almost equal to the percentage becoming nominal (1.91%).

Nominalism is a missiological phenomenon the South Pacific churches cannot ignore. Nominals are real handicaps to the progress of mission in the world. Neither God nor the church can use nominals in mission around the globe or in the locality to which the church belongs. Nominals are like excess luggage the deep sea canoe cannot afford to take on board. On the other hand, nominal Christians are potentials for the mission of the church. Nominals are there because the church has failed in her mission towards them. The presence of the nominals testifies to the fact that the church has no vision or mission to recover the untapped resources within her reach for her mission to the world.

Factors contributing to nominalism

The factors contributing to nominalism are many. The gap between conversion and nominality reflected in the figures given above suggests that the church has no follow-up programme for new Christians. In missiological terms, the church has failed and is failing to bring new converts to full maturation in their faith or to incorporate them effectively into the membership of the church. My experience of the Papua New Guinea situation tells me that our keenness to evangelise sadly lacks effective follow-up programmes.

The second factor leading to nominalism in our churches is “people stealing” or name-making programmes. In 1972, I

was involved in coordinating a Ralph Bell Evangelistic Crusade in Papua New Guinea. In our pre-crusade preparations, the two areas we had great difficulties agreeing on were counselling and follow-up. In short, we did not have faith in each other to allow people from other churches to counsel and follow up the people who belonged to our churches. We did not want people to use counselling and follow-up sessions to take our people away, in order to increase their church membership and thus make a name for themselves. Missiologically expressed, we lacked the courage and the faith to trust in the sovereign ministry of the Holy Spirit to use God's people to encourage and nurture new Christians.

This brings us to the third factor contributing to nominalism: conversion that is not reflected at a worldview level. Our Lord sent the Holy Spirit into the world to lead those who come to him by faith to live under his Lordship. Missiologically understood, to believe in Jesus Christ is to denounce all previous loyalties and to embrace Jesus Christ as Lord without turning back. Those whose entire lives have been dominated by the power and influence of magic, sorcery, and witchcraft would not readily exchange the faith of their forefathers for a new faith, without power encounter and culturally relevant teaching.

The fourth factor for nominalism grows out of the need for relevant teaching and culturally relevant evangelism. The Christian Leaders Training College (CLTC) is an interdenominational, Evangelical Bible and theological institute established in 1964 to train students from Evangelical churches in Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, and other South Pacific nations. For many years, the staff and students used to go out every weekend to carry out open air evangelistic meetings at nearby plantations and market places. We went there

to announce the King's message about life and death, following the pattern of open air evangelism done in Australia, New Zealand, America, and Europe. We followed this pattern of evangelism and still do it, with some slight modifications, because missiologically we felt that whatever worked in the West must work in the non-Western world, because it appeared to be a sacred and God-ordained method. We believed blessings were bound to flow in if we followed the set procedures.

Reaching communities

We are slowly beginning to realise that in community-conscious societies, the most effective way to present the King's life-giving message is to do it in the context of the community. In the language of the Church Growth Movement, reaching the people in their homogeneous groups is far better than reaching them as isolated individuals. The Holy Spirit moved the early church out for evangelism at a worldview level—meeting the people where they were, as they were, walking with them step by step, and sitting and talking with them about the deep realities of the world they lived in.

The Bible endorses the importance of the family in relation to the community to which each family belongs and in relation to world mission. In the South Pacific, a nuclear family exists within the circle of the extended family. The existence of family within the family demonstrates community solidarity and mutuality. A converted and committed nuclear family is an effective tool for evangelism to reach out to the extended family. As far as world evangelism is concerned, families are keys for effective evangelism among Muslims. Christian families with a deep commitment to the principles of marriage and to the Lord of all human families have much to offer to the Muslim world, lifting up the dignity of women and demonstrating

the sacred bond of marriage, which nothing but death can separate.

Challenges and concerns

Not only is a culturally relevant evangelistic method important, but culturally relevant teaching is also vital. Unless the biblical teaching is related meaningfully to the culture of the people, Christians will remain babes in their faith.

The use of name-making programmes mentioned above is of deep concern to many South Pacific church leaders. From our perspective, missionaries came and continue to come to us preaching two gospels—a Bible-centred gospel and a church-centred gospel. The Bible-centred gospel, rooted in the person and work of Jesus Christ, is a message to which South Pacific Islanders have no problem subscribing. What concerns us most is the church-centred gospel or denominational distinctiveness that is also preached. My observation shows that missionaries appear to be much more concerned about converting us to their particular denominational doctrines rather than helping us grow in our Christian faith. In the 1960s and '70s, Evangelical missions in Papua New Guinea, as members of the Evangelical Alliance of the South Pacific, agreed to respect each other's areas of work and witness. Today, that agreement is no longer honoured. Some members deliberately enter other Evangelical mission/church areas to establish their denominational names. This kind of activity splits villages and families into different groups, thus destroying the family units which are important keys for evangelism.

A further weak link in the chain of world mission in our part of the world is "drifting" Christians. These are Christians who get carried away by the different teachings they hear. They are like dry coconuts swept across the Pacific Ocean, following the direction of the current.

These people float around on the sea of emotionalism. They want a Christianity that is full of excitement with very little cross-bearing. They want healing without a faith commitment to the Healer. This group also is an untapped potential for world evangelism.

Contextualising the gospel

What the South Pacific churches need today is for God's Word to be a lamp to their feet and a light for their path (Ps. 119:105). Light for the South Pacific in this case calls for clear and meaningful teaching of God's Word. There is a real need for the contextualization of the gospel. Many people still think that Christianity is a white people's religion and that Jesus Christ is a white person who does not understand Melanesians, Micronesians, and Polynesians and is therefore irrelevant to them (Gaqurae, 1985, p. 211).

The task of contextualising the gospel can best be done by nationals who know the Word of God and the culture of their people. The Evangelical churches in the South Pacific need well-equipped leaders at master's and doctoral levels who can theologise and contextualise the gospel for their people. At present in the Evangelical churches belonging to the Evangelical Alliance Fellowship, we have one or two people with master's degrees but none with a doctoral degree in Christian ministry. In comparison to other non-Western countries, the Evangelical family in the South Pacific lacks top-level academics and other leaders. This is understandable, because the Evangelical body of the South Pacific region is for the most part a forgotten part of the world. Evangelicals have poured a great amount of their resources into Africa, Asia, and Latin America, because these are the areas where the great populations of the world live. It is important that we continue to give priority to these regions, but we should not

neglect smaller regions with less population, such as the South Pacific.

As far as I can recall, the gathering at Iguassu was the very first world Evangelical gathering in which an Evangelical from the South Pacific region was asked to make a presentation. I am grateful to Dr. William D. Taylor for this insight and confidence in his Evangelical brothers and sisters in the South Pacific region. I trust that in the years to come, the world Evangelical leaders will endeavour to correct this weakness in our Evangelical body. One word of caution: Do not lump us together with Australia or New Zealand or Asia. We are Melanesians, Micronesians, and Polynesians, with our own identity and destiny under the same Almighty God.

Meeting the shortfalls

Now let me address what we are doing to meet the shortfalls we see in our Evangelical work and witness in the South Pacific. At this point, I will concentrate on the work of the Christian Leaders Training College (CLTC), an interdenominational, Evangelical Bible and theological college based in the Western Highlands Province of Papua New Guinea. The college was set up by the Evangelical missions in 1964 to offer training in English to upper-level church and community workers. In order to assist the young Evangelical churches financially, the college's founding principal, the late Dr. Gilbert McArthur, decided to set up a business programme alongside the Bible and theological programme. Today the business programme of the college subsidises the tuition fees of all the students by meeting in full the salaries of all the national staff and 50% of most of its overseas staff. In the college's 35 years of ministry, some 2,000 students have graduated and are serving the Lord in many parts of the South Pacific.

To meet the shortfall in suitable Bible teaching and Bible study material in the churches, in 1972 CLTC set up a theological education by extension (TEE) department within its ongoing teaching programme, at the request of Evangelical Bible schools. The department has developed many sound Evangelical Bible study courses which are very popular. Some of the material has been adapted in Australia, New Zealand, other Pacific nations, and around the world. Some 300 students in Switzerland are doing the "Come Follow Me" course translated into German. At present, a total of 5,200 students are enrolled in TEE courses in English and Pidgin English (the trade language) in Papua New Guinea. Our goal is to have 1,000 TEE students in other parts of the South Pacific by the year 2000. To promote world mission in our churches, two courses on mission are available: "Launch Out" studies in missions and the "Deep Sea Canoe" based on Alan Tippett's book by that title. TEE tutors for the programme are trained using the TEE method through a short course called "Take the Teaching." In the past two years, 700 students have enrolled in this course. Following the concept of "Discipling the Whole Nation," discipleship courses have been written, including "Go and Make Disciples," a new course emphasising discipling others.

Realising that it is very expensive to send students overseas for post-graduate studies, CLTC has decided to offer a master's course at home, drawing on lecturers from Australia and New Zealand at present. We will be glad to welcome lecturers from other parts of the world. Seeing the need to equip church and community leaders in urban areas effectively, CLTC has established two Extension Centres, one in the nation's capital, Port Moresby, and the other one in the city of Lae. To meet the rapid growth of the Port

Moresby Extension Centre programme, CLTC is erecting a three-story building on its Port Moresby property in 1999. As a follow-up to the first South Pacific Consultation on World Mission in Suva, Fiji in 1989, CLTC has conducted Missions Week and Launch Out programmes annually on its main campus since 1990 to promote mission in the churches. To cater to the growing interest in the churches to send missionaries, CLTC has commenced offering a Diploma in Mission and is working on setting up a Centre for World Mission.

At the regional level, Evangelicals in the South Pacific region need to develop theologically and biblically based materials to address such issues as cargo and its relationship to the spirit world; the ongoing challenge of nominalism; land and its relation to the ancestors; the role of the ancestors in the community; a theological apologetic for saying farewell to the dead; the inadequacy of our systematic theology in the areas of death, heaven, and after-life (especially the ancestors); the ongoing challenge of animism; commitment and transformation in the lives of the people; the significance of Acts 26:18; the problem of sin in relation to Romans 7:7; meaningful Bible teaching after power demonstration; group and individualistic approach to conversion; repentance and deliverance from the fallen structures of the culture; the historical use of the prayers of renunciation; the ongoing teaching that accompanies the discipling process; and developing and equipping top-level leadership.

While these areas need to be addressed, what is stirring the hearts of the Christians in the South Pacific is the challenge to re-launch the Deep Sea Canoe Missionary Movement. This introduces us to the third part of this paper.

Light From the South Pacific

For over 200 years, Christians in the South Pacific lived on “milk and honey,” enjoying the goodness of the gospel with no thought of sharing it with the rest of the world. However, in the last 20 years we have been witnessing the rise of a mighty wave about to roll over from the Pacific Ocean into the Indian and the Atlantic Oceans. From the womb of the dawn, a new missionary wave is about to burst forth. The youth of the Pacific are on the rise. They want to take their place among the missionaries of the cross. We want to take the light from the East back to the West. However small we are in number, we want to have a share in God’s purposes for the world. Already we have our spies out, driving the stakes into the ground, ready to move in and claim territory for the Lord. We hear Africans and Asians saying, “Send us more Papua New Guineans!”

Once Papua New Guineans discovered the power of the gospel over the forces of sorcery, magic, and witchcraft, they immediately joined the Eastern Pacific Islanders in preaching the same gospel they had previously sought to wipe out, experiencing the same sufferings they had previously brought on the Pacific Islanders. Those from the seaboard areas began to penetrate into the hinterland with the gospel. Many went to people who were their enemies or people with whom they had had no dealings in the past. When the highlanders received the gospel, they were transformed by its power and soon joined the missionary force, taking the gospel to those beyond their own ranges of mountains. So the gospel spread from the coast to the highlands, from valley to valley, from mountain to mountain. In 1964, as a student of the Baptist Theological College in Sydney, Australia, I visited the Baptist work in Papua New Guinea. I was quite amazed

to witness the Baptist church, after 15 years of receiving the gospel, commissioning some of its senior pastors as missionaries to a new area. As these men were sent forth, others promised to stand with them in prayer.

A burst of missions

Prayer has played a very important role in the lives of the South Pacific Islanders. Every time our forefathers crossed the Pacific Ocean from one side to another, they did so on the wings of prayer and faith. They prayed to their ancestral spirits, in whose power their faith rested, to take them safely over the great ocean. Today we still follow their example, except that our prayers are directed to the Lord of the ocean, the anchor of our faith.

In the last 20 years, prayer and faith continue to be the basis of the drama that unfolds. In 1982, Marilyn Robertson Rowson, a faculty member at CLTC, wrote a paper for her course with the Fuller School of World Mission entitled, "Can History Repeat Itself for a Burst of Missions From Melanesia?" She became so excited by the concept of a burst of mission from Papua New Guinea that she started praying for it. That year God brought Walo Ali and his family to be students at the college. God had already placed a similar burden and interest for world mission on Walo's heart. Marilyn and Walo shared their burdens together and decided to meet every Tuesday during lunch hour to pray for a burst of mission from Papua New Guinea. Soon they were joined by some more students. This prayer meeting turned into the Global Prayer Warrior (GPW) Movement, whose aim was to mobilise the Melanesian churches to pray for the birth of the Melanesian Missionary Movement.

In December 1989, the first-ever South Pacific Consultation on World Mission was held on the campus of the University of the South Pacific in Suva, Fiji. The two

major concerns of the consultation were the formation of the Evangelical Fellowship of the South Pacific (EFSP) and the formation of the Deep Sea Canoe (a vehicle to move South Pacific missionaries across the world). Halfway through the consultation, a divinely directed drama took everyone by surprise (God moves in mysterious ways, his wonders to perform). What took place that morning, none of us had ever dreamed of or thought about. The drama? After a fine devotional exposition of Scripture brought by Dr. Theodore Williams of India, Michael Maeliau of Solomon Islands took the microphone. On behalf of the Melanesians, he thanked all who had had a part to play in bringing the light of the gospel to us, the Melanesian people. Then he continued, "I want to say I am sorry to you, our Polynesian brothers and sisters, our brothers and sisters from Australia, New Zealand, Europe, and America, for killing and eating the missionaries you sent to us. We didn't know who they were. We didn't know what they had come to do. We didn't know that they were messengers of the cross. We your Melanesian brothers and sisters sincerely ask you to forgive us for what we did to the missionaries you sent us."

Continuing on, Michael said, "We want to ask you, why didn't you tell us that we too have the same responsibility to take the gospel to the world? Why did you treat us like children? Did you think we were only good at receiving but not good enough to give? Well, let me tell you, we are coming. We are coming to you. We are coming, whether you like it or not. You can kill us and eat us, but we are coming. We did that to your missionaries. We are not afraid to die."

Before Michael could place the microphone back on its stand, the entire Australian delegation, both men and women, walked up to the platform, handkerchiefs in their hands, eyes wet. Their spokesman,

Rev. Ray Overend, said, "We want to say *we* are sorry to you our Melanesian, Micronesian, and Polynesian brothers and sisters for the paternalistic attitudes we have shown to you. We are sorry for treating you like children. Please accept our apologies." In God's timing, the entire morning turned into a time of reconciliation between the nations, apologising and accepting apologies from each other. Tongans apologised to the Samoans, Fijians to the Indians. An English man apologised to the Pacific Islanders. An American missionary said, "I want to say I am sorry to you, our Pacific Islands brothers and sisters, on behalf of us Americans, for the damage we brought to you during the Second World War."

Before that morning of divine encounter with God and with each other had ended, the whole gathering was on the platform, crying and hugging each other. Michael called me as chairman of the consultation to the microphone. I stated, "This is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes. Today I declare the Deep Sea Canoe launched. It is not in its final shape. We will take the Deep Sea Canoe home to our individual countries to work on it to give it its final shape." I then called on the late Dr. J. Oswald Sanders, a great missionary statesman and Bible teacher, to close the morning's programme in prayer. On the evening of that same day, the Evangelical Fellowship of the South Pacific was established.

Ongoing results

Four specific things have come out of the Fiji consultation:

1. The Evangelical Fellowship of the South Pacific (EFSP). Part of its responsibility is to coordinate and direct the Deep Sea Canoe Movement.

2. The South Pacific Prayer Assembly. This group was established in 1991 and has met on a yearly basis in different South

Pacific nations. It is a prayer movement for reconciliation amongst the Pacific nations and the mobilisation of the South Pacific churches for world mission through prayer. The Melanesian churches, in initiating the prayer movement, believed that they cannot move into the world with the message of reconciliation without being reconciled to their Polynesian brothers and sisters for killing and eating the missionaries they sent to the Melanesian nations. Cleaning our own back yard is the prerequisite for going forward with the message of reconciliation.

3. The establishment of the Launch Out Missions Movement through CLTC in the past 10 years to mobilise Papua New Guinean churches for mission beyond their shores.

4. The commencement in 1999 of a Diploma in Mission at CLTC to prepare Papua New Guineans for cross-cultural missionary service and the setting up of the Centre for World Mission.

In the South Pacific, Papua New Guinea is the largest island and has more population than the other islands. More than this, Papua New Guinea is rich in mineral resources. It also owes a great debt to the rest of the world, because it has singularly enjoyed a greater number of missionaries per capita than any other country. It is important for Papua New Guinea to recognise that the resources God has given her must be used for God's purposes. To whom much is given much will be required. The arrows of mission from East and West, North and South have ended up in Papua New Guinea. The time is right for Papua New Guinea and other South Pacific nations to rise up and be involved in God's mission around the world.

At the ninth Prayer Assembly held in Port Moresby in 1999, two regional movements for youth and women emerged. These two initiatives were born out of two conferences that were held prior to the

Prayer Assembly itself. These movements recognise that both youth and women have a significant part to play in what God is doing, both in the region and beyond, through this new missionary movement.

Conclusion

The nations of the South Pacific are forever grateful for the light of the gospel brought to them. They are in need of well-trained leaders who can meaningfully contextualise the gospel to their people, making clear the relevance of Jesus Christ in their daily living. The nations of the South Pacific believe that the time has come for them to join hands with fellow Christians around the world to bring the gospel to the nations of the world.

Here are some questions to consider in conclusion:

1. How can we turn nominal Christians into a productive missionary force?
2. What is our missionary message? Is it denominationalism or Jesus Christ? How can we cooperate in places with established Evangelical witness to overcome the problem?
3. How can we cooperate internationally in sending out missionaries? How can we prepare missionaries to work internationally?
4. How can we participate in leadership development for the South Pacific churches?
5. How can we help the "drifting" Christians?

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THIS PAPER SEEKS to present some missiological contributions that come from the church in East Asia, through a study on Christian encounter with people of other faiths. The immediate context of the paper is Malaysia, a multicultural and multi-religious country of 23 million people; the broader context is Asia as a whole, particularly East Asia. Asia is undergoing tremendous challenges: the challenge of economic and social interdependence that comes with globalization; the challenge of religious resurgence among Asian traditional religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, and Chinese and Japanese religions; the growth of Islam and Islamization in Southeast Asia; the challenge of increasing restrictions for missionary entry; and the challenge of the maturing churches in Indonesia, China, Korea, and the Philippines.

Surely Asia defies any sweeping generalizations, given its diversity and vastness. And there are no easy answers to the challenges facing Evangelical missions. Therefore, I am painfully conscious that this paper is merely one attempt to reflect on the challenges facing Evangelical missiology from a Malaysian perspective, rather than a synthesis of other Asian Evangelical writings. I look forward to learning from and interacting with Western, African, Latin American, and particularly Asian colleagues. Note: The term “Evangelical” is used in this paper to refer to conservative Evangelicals who identify themselves, at least informally, with the Lausanne Covenant (Covell, 1993, p. 163).

**Evangelical
missiology
from an
East Asian
perspective:
a study on
Christian
encounter
with people
of other
faiths**

KANG SAN
TAN

Christian Encounter With Other Religions

In *Transforming Mission*, David Bosch (1991, p. 477) highlights two crucial theological issues facing the church. They are (1) Christianity's relationship to secular worldviews and (2) Christianity's relationship to other religions. For some missiologists, the theology of religions is the theological issue for Christian mission in the 21st century (Sharpe, 1974, pp. 77-95; Anderson, 1993, pp. 200-208). Anderson (1993, p. 200) states, "No issue in missiology is more important, more difficult, more controversial, and more divisive for the days ahead than the theology of religions."

In addition to the theological issue, there is also a contextual dimension to the problem. While the problem of non-Christian religions is heightened in the West in recent times (1950s onward) due to the rise of pluralism as a celebrated virtue, the problem of religious plurality has been a fact of life in Asia since the first millennium. How Christians relate to people of other faiths is a long-standing issue in Asia. Today, the problem is heightened as the church in Asia witnesses the revitalization of other religions, the ethnic violence that is often divided along religious lines, and the growing theological relativism within the church.

Modernization, ethnicity, and the religious encounter

The study of Christian encounter with people of other faiths must now grapple with the processes of multi-ethnicity, modernization, and globalization in Asia. Modernity refers to the increasingly global culture produced by (1) the processes and institutions of modernization and (2) the intellectual developments of the past 250 years in the West. According to Berger (1973, p. 9), modernization is "the insti-

tutional concomitants of technologically induced economic growth.... Modernization consists of the growth and diffusion of a set of institutions rooted in the transformation of the economy by means of technology."

Harold Netland, Professor of Mission at Trinity International University, in an unpublished article highlights two implications when modernity is seen in terms of modernization. First, modernity is not simply a Western phenomenon; it is a global phenomenon. Second, as a worldview, modernity is not something a particular culture either has or does not have in completed form. Rather, we should think in terms of a continuum of modernization, with different societies being at various stages on the continuum.

Malaysia, as is true of most Asian countries, is undergoing a rapid process of modernization. How does modernization affect Christian encounter with people of other faiths? Peter Berger (1973, pp. 79-80) highlights the effect of modernization on religion: "Through most of empirically available human history, religion has played a vital role in providing the overarching canopy of symbols for the meaningful integration of society.... This age-old function of religion is seriously threatened by pluralization. Different sectors of social life now come to be governed by widely discrepant meanings and meaning-systems. Not only does it become increasingly difficult for religious traditions, and for the institutions that embody these, to integrate this plurality of social life-worlds in one overarching and comprehensive worldview, but even more basically, the plausibility of religious definitions of reality is threatened from within, that is, within the subjective consciousness of the individual."

According to Berger's secularization thesis, modernization will eventually re-

sult in the relativizing of all perspectives, especially religious perspectives. There will be privatization of religious beliefs and a pluralization of ideologies and worldviews. In addition, Netland (1994, p. 94) highlights that modernity poses a direct challenge to the biblical perspective on two points: "First, the notion that one particular religious figure and one religious perspective can be universally valid, normative, and binding upon peoples in all cultures.... And second, even if in principle it is granted that one religion is superior to the rest, and that one religious figure might be universally normative, why should we assume Christianity and Jesus Christ are in this privileged position?"

If Berger's and Netland's observations are correct, one can expect a greater openness for dialogue among the religions. At present, Malaysia has not witnessed the type of cultural pluralism that takes place in the West. Urbanization and the bringing of all races together have not resulted in the type of pluralism espoused by Western liberals such as John Hick and Paul Knitter, where all religions are homogenized. On the contrary, due to the "extreme pluralism" where race and religion coincide, modernity and religious plurality sparked religious revivalism (Ackerman & Lee, 1988) and in some cases resulted in increased intolerance. At the time of writing, East Timor has yet to recover from the ravages of ethnic violence along religious lines. Therefore, despite the process of modernization, Christianity still enters into missionary encounter with other religions in a highly sensitive atmosphere of religious intolerance.

Ethnicity and religious relations in contemporary Malaysia

The following section seeks to illustrate the complex realities of Christian encounter with people of other faiths in Malaysia. In presenting a study on race relations

in Malaysia, I hope to illustrate the complexities facing the church in East Asia whenever religions coincide with ethnicity. The same study can be done for each country of East Asia, exploring the dynamics of ethnicity and its varied implications for Christian mission.

The racial composition in West Malaysia is as follows: 54% Malays, 34% Chinese, 8% Indians, and 4% other minority races such as Sikhs, Siamese, Eurasians, and aboriginal peoples. In the same census, the religious composition was as follows: 56% Muslims, 19% Buddhist, 15% Chinese religionists, 8% Hindus, and 2% Christians.

Most Chinese in Malaysia practice a mixture of Taoism, Confucianism, and Buddhism. They borrow from and freely integrate their folk religious practices with the three Chinese religions to fulfill the practical needs of family, finances, and business. It is common for Chinese homes to have a kitchen god, a family-ancestor altar, and a Buddhist or Confucius deity. Most Chinese in Malaysia are adherents of the Mahayana tradition (Ackerman & Lee, 1988, p. 47). Many Mahayana religious groups are affiliated with the Malaysian Buddhist Association. Apart from many small temples scattered throughout the country, a few Mahayana temples such as Kek Lok Si (a Pure Land Sect temple) bring symbolic unity to Buddhists. Increasingly, as more Mahayana monks are being trained (mostly in Taiwan), these temples may appoint a resident monk.

Theravada Buddhism in Malaysia received its influence and funding mostly from Thailand and Sri Lanka. Through the Buddhist Missionary Society, there was a resurgence of missionary interest among university students during the early 1970s. There were other groups, such as the Japan based Nichiren Daishonin Buddhist Movement and the non-sectarian Dharmafarers' Movement, that emerged during this period of Buddhist revivalism.

The Hindu religious system in Malaysia can be broadly arranged around three categories: family shrines in villages, large temples dedicated to well-known deities such as the Sri Maha Mariyamman Temple, and newer non-sectarian movements such as the Ramakrishna Mission (Ackerman & Lee, 1988, pp. 46-47). 80% of Indians in West Malaysia are Hindus, mostly of the Saivite tradition. Most of the smaller village temples rely on the *pandaram* or ritual specialists who do not have formal priestly training, while the larger urban temples may employ some initiated priests (*kurukkal*) from India. Similar to their Muslim and Buddhist counterparts, many Indians turned to their religions for ethnic identity during the religious revival of the 1970s. As more than 80% of the Indians in Malaysia are of Tamil origin, Ackerman and Lee (1988, p. 97) note that the Tamil influence is strong: "Tamilization of Hinduism became the order of the day as various urban religious movements took to organizing classes and religious gatherings using Tamil as the principal medium of communication. Religious experts from Tamilnadu were invited to deliver lectures and instruct Malaysian Hindus on Saivite philosophy."

Christianity draws its adherents mostly from Chinese, Indians, and indigenous peoples. The 1990 census revealed that Christians constitute 7% of the population in Malaysia as a whole. As stated earlier, Christians constitute only 2% of the population in West Malaysia, while in the East Malaysian states of Sabah and Sarawak, they are 27% and 29% respectively. The Christian population is largely middle-class and is concentrated in urban areas. Slightly more than 51% of the Christian population are Chinese, 35% are Indian, and the remaining are mostly indigenous peoples of East Malaysia. About 4% of the Chinese and 8% of the Indians profess Christianity as their religion.

Analysing Malay and Non-Malay Relations

Because religion largely coincides with ethnicity, interreligious relations are greatly affected by individual racial perceptions of the other ethnic groups. This sharp division is most pronounced when it comes to the relationship between the Malays and non-Malays in Malaysia. Relations among the races become more complicated when they function not only as a sociological or religious category, but also as "a tool of the state for resource allocation and political control" (Ackerman & Lee, 1988, p. 4). Within such a framework, the Malaysian government implemented the New Economic Policy (NEP), a social engineering program that was enacted to achieve the twin goals of eradicating poverty and restructuring society. More specifically, the NEP set a goal that Malays would control 30% of the commercial and industrial sectors by 1990; non-Malays (i.e., Chinese and Indian) would control 40%; and foreign investments would be limited to 30%. In other words, the Malay-Muslim identity was "materially reinforced" (Ackerman & Lee, 1988, p. 4).

In addition, political parties draw their support along ethnic constituents, making communalism a key political issue since the independence of the country. Though the Chinese and Indians are part of a political alliance in the government, the Malays are in control of the political process. The conjunction of ethnicity and political power (from which economic interests are inevitably linked) deeply polarized not only the issue of race, but also the religious commitments of the people in Malaysia. If a Malay decided to convert to another religion, that person would lose not only his or her ethnic identity, but also his or her social, political, and economic privileges.

The complex relationship outlined above, where ethnicity functions as a tool for resource allocation and political alliances, was further complicated when Islam was enshrined as the state religion in the Malayan Constitution of 1957. In return for the recognition of Malays' special rights and Islam's special position, the immigrant communities were accepted as citizens with equal rights. Furthermore, two legal strictures that have been used to restrict the freedom of religion are the federal law and the state law. Many state laws clearly restrict the freedom to propagate religion. For example, section 156 (2) of the Malaccan legislation states: "Any person, whether or not he professes the Muslim religion, who propagates any religious doctrine or belief other than the religious doctrine or belief of the Muslim religion among persons professing the Muslim religion shall be guilty of an offense cognizable by a Civil Court and punishable with imprisonment for a term not exceeding one year or a fine not exceeding Three Thousand dollars" (quoted in Koh, 1987, p. 17).

Muslim sensitivities are now legalized in such a way that any attempt to proselytize Muslims can result in imprisonment without trial. Various legislation was introduced not only to define the Muslim's religious responsibility, but also to curtail directly any activity among non-Muslims perceived as challenging the superior position of Islam vis-à-vis other religions. It was in this context that in the Twelfth Schedule of the Federal Constitution, a Malay came to be defined as someone who (1) habitually speaks the Malay language, (2) professes the Muslim religion, and (3) conforms to Malay customs (Kaur, 1993, p. 91).

In conclusion, Malay ethnic identity becomes inseparable with its social, religious, material, and legal categories, there-

by creating an extreme polarization between the Malays and non-Malays in the country. That division also unites the non-Malays as a category, with Christianity strongly associated with the non-Malay grouping. In a society of extreme pluralism and polarization, the Malaysian church, as a reconciling community, has the responsibility to seek creative ways to bring about spiritual renewal and racial reconciliation.

I have thus far argued for the need to place Christianity's relations with other religions within the context of the historical and complex forces of nationalism, religious resurgence, and modernization. In particular, I tried to illustrate that there is no such thing as a purely religious conversation in Asia. For example, Christians need to understand that ethnicity and religion in Malaysia are complicated by the way that they have become markers not only for communal and religious identity, but also as tools for resource allocation, political affiliation, and constitutional restrictions.

Future Developments for Asian Missiology

Missiology is the study of the expansion of Christianity through the critical examinations of biblical and systematic theologies on the one hand and cultural anthropology, church history, sociology, and the study of religions on the other. As we look into the future, there are developments within Evangelicalism that should contribute positively toward new directions in Evangelical missiology in Asia.

Doctrinal developments

Evangelicals are increasingly aware that new situations require fresh theological categories. Alister McGrath (1992, p. 492) in his seminal study on the origins of doc-

trines, noted how significant doctrinal developments during the history of the Christian church arose in response to religious encounters with those outside the Christian faith: "Dialogue is one pressure to ensuring that this process of continual self-examination and reformation continues. It is a bulwark against complacency and laziness and a stimulus to the source of faith rather than resting content in some currently acceptable interpretation of them."

In fact, McGrath (1990) identifies evangelism and mission as the keys to the future development of Christian doctrine. Until recently, most creative theological engagements with other religions have been in the field of missiology rather than in the arenas of biblical or systematic theology. Today, fresh attempts are being made by systematic and biblical theologians (Beyerhaus, 1996; Pannenberg, 1988; Pinnock, 1992; McGrath, 1990) to formulate theological perspectives on other religions. Wolfhart Pannenberg, for example, provides a fresh model for engaging non-Christian religions within a context of commitment to Christianity (Grenz, 1989). Pannenberg's understanding of theology as the quest for the eschatological truth of God means that all religious truth claims are provisional and result in a more positive evaluation of all religious traditions (Pannenberg, 1988, pp. 297-299). Peter Beyerhaus (1996, pp. 14-16) proposes a tripolar view of religions where the three sources of the origin of religions are taken seriously. These sources are the human, the divine, and the demonic.

In general, the Evangelical community's perspectives on Christianity's relations with non-Christian religions have gradually shifted from Barth's model of total discontinuity (Christ against religions), to Kraemer's model of radical discontinuity (Christ above religions), to a

post-Lausanne II dialectic model of "continuity and discontinuity" (Christ in creative tension with the religions). This dialectic model is to be differentiated from the Catholic's inclusive model (Christ as the fulfillment of religions) and the pluralist's model (Christ in the midst of religions).

As we think of the future, these developments within Evangelicalism provide some building blocks for Asians doing theology cross-culturally and will give rise to disciplines such as cross-cultural apologetics, cross-textual readings of religious texts, and the critique of Asian philosophies from Evangelical perspectives. Traditionally, Christian reflection on God, Christ, and the gospel is done primarily within Christendom. However, within the dynamics of sharing the gospel across racial and religious lines, missiological reflections must be done in conversations with other religions and presuppositions.

Shift in epistemological framework

In order to foster a genuine development in Asian missiology, Evangelicals need to break away from the traditional framework of doing theologies (Bosch, 1991, pp. 422-425). Among the implications of the new epistemology highlighted by Bosch that are relevant to Asians seeking missiological reflection are (1) profound suspicion that Western theology was designed to serve the interest of the West, (2) refusal to endorse the idea of the world as a static object which only has to be explained, (3) emphasis on commitment as the "first act of theology," and (4) emphasis on doing theology in context (Bosch, 1991, pp. 424-425).

Paul Hiebert (1994, pp. 19-34) argues that the epistemological shift in the philosophy of science, from idealism and naive realism to critical realism, presents

valuable insights for missionary encounter. Thomas Wright (1992, p. 35) explains critical realism as follows: “This is a way of describing the process of ‘knowing’ that acknowledges the reality of the thing known, as something other than the knower (hence ‘realism’), while also fully acknowledging that the only access we have to this reality lies along the spiraling path of appropriate dialogue or conversation between the knower and the thing known (hence ‘critical’). This path leads to critical reflections about ‘reality,’ so that our assertions about ‘reality’ acknowledge their own provisionality.”

According to Hiebert (1994, p. 25), the critical realist “makes a distinction between reality and our knowledge of it, but like naive realism, it claims that knowledge can be true. Theories are not regarded as photographs of reality, but as maps or blueprints. Just as it takes many blueprints to understand a building, so it takes many theories to comprehend reality.”

This shift in epistemological foundations for science affects the epistemological foundation of systematic theology. In particular, the critical realist acknowledges the objectivity of Scripture without insisting that there is only one way of interpreting and knowing truths (Hiebert, 1994, pp. 31-34). According to Hiebert, one implication of critical realism is a deeper interest in translating the gospel into culturally appropriate forms. This requires deep knowledge of other cultures and religions. As Hiebert (1994, p. 49) states, “Missionaries, therefore, must study other religions and dialogue with their leaders, not to create a new synthesis between Christianity and other religions, but to build bridges of understanding so that people may hear the call of the gospel in ways they comprehend, without compromising the truth of the gospel.”

Biblical interpretations

Any Evangelical theologies need biblical studies. But Asian Evangelicalism has inherited ways of reading the Bible from Enlightenment thinking and ways that are strangely similar to post-modernism (Wright, 1992, p. 60). Biblical scholars such as N. T. Wright (1992, 1996), Bar-Efrat (1989), and Robert Alter (1981), through their emphases on narrative and historical studies, have brought fresh approaches to biblical interpretations. These are exciting developments for Asian theologies. In *Jesus and the Victory of God*, Wright (1996) develops the use of stories as Jesus’ tools to transform the prevailing Jewish worldviews. Walter Brueggemann’s works (1993a, 1993b) are another example of the type of developments in biblical studies that will fund imaginative proclamation of the gospel for Asian missiological thinking.

Given alternative faith commitments among non-Christians, God’s starting revelation begins with the present experience and action of people. People (in the context of our discussion, unbelievers) can be encouraged to reflect on their daily life experiences in the light of the Christian Bible, the Christian story, and the Christian vision of the kingdom of God. The community’s story and vision serve as a critique of the unbeliever’s present experience and as a guide to future action. At the same time, the present experience of the unbeliever serves as a critique of the community’s tradition and may lead to its revision.

Some Implications for Encountering Religions

In this final section, I seek to explore some implications for an Evangelical encounter with religions, taking into consideration the doctrinal, biblical, and epis-

temological developments highlighted above.

The study of other religions

The resurgence of religions and of post-modern interests in spirituality have contributed to the popularity of various disciplines such as comparative religion, philosophy of religions, and history of religions. Such new interest accorded to the study of other religions produced a new generation of scholars of religions throughout Asian institutions of higher learning. Most of these scholarly studies are in Asian languages and focus on specific contextual interests of each region. Evangelicals within each country need to identify these centres of religious studies, promote in-depth studies on various religions, and engage in meaningful dialogues with these writings. Two excellent examples of what I mean by such studies are *Christianity Through Non-Christian Eyes* by Paul Griffiths (1994) and *Majesty and Meekness: A Comparative Study of Contrast and Harmony in the Concept of God* by John Carman (1994). Most of us (Christians are not exempt) do not like to hear criticisms from others about what's wrong with our religions, and even fewer are able to withstand the temptation of telling others what is wrong with their religions. In particular, there are many things about life and God that can be learned from non-believers and other religions. The key missiological contribution of such an approach with non-believers is it enables believers to learn more about others and how they perceive themselves, and about ourselves and how others perceive us.

Interreligious dialogue

Interreligious dialogue has been a controversial issue among Evangelicals. Fundamentalists and conservative Evangelicals are generally wary of the idea of dialogue. Part of the problem is the fact that "dia-

logue" means different things to different people. Dialogue in this paper refers to "a conversation in which each party is serious in his approach both to the subject and to the other person, and desires to listen and learn as well as to speak and instruct" (Stott, 1975, p. 61).

With the collapse of Enlightenment thinking and positivism, Evangelicals increasingly realized that one-sided proclamation could not function by itself in a relativistic culture. This understanding gave rise to receptor-oriented, person-centered, and dialogical approaches (Bosch, 1991, pp. 477-480; Clark, 1993, pp. 102-126). Vinay Samuel and Christopher Sugden are both actively involved in theological education in Asia. At the First Conference of Evangelical Mission Theologians, held in Bangkok in 1982, these men called for "a praxiological approach" that "go[es] into a context with deep convictions shaped by the gospel" (Samuel & Sugden, 1984, p. 129). They highlight the fear of syncretism as the key reason Evangelicals have not entered into dialogue. They explain that some of the false assumptions beneath this fear are (1) the belief that both Christianity and pagan religions are closed systems; (2) the stress on the uniqueness of Christ rather than on the universality of God at work in history; and (3) the judging of other religions based on an Evangelical's abstract belief system (Samuel & Sugden, 1984, pp. 132-133).

In Malaysia and in most parts of Asia where Christianity is a minority religion and Christians suffer various kinds of political, social, or religious restrictions, the maintenance of traditional approaches to evangelism that focus merely on proclamation is problematic. Due to various legal and cultural restrictions, churches tend to retreat into a form of ghettoism. As Lesslie Newbigin (1964, p. 28) states:

“Ghettoism—a practical withdrawal into the position of a tolerated minority, a cultural and religious enclave within the majority community. Correspondingly, the great need is to find ways of breaking out of this isolation and entering into real dialogue with men of other faiths.”

The question is whether Asian Christianity can discover forms that can be useful in communicating the gospel and yet do not violate the basic tenets of faiths. And the issue is not just how the non-Christian will hear; equally important is how the Christian will listen. For how shall they hear if we do not listen?

The contribution from anthropological insights

Anthropologists such as Paul Hiebert (1985, 1994), Jacob Loewen (1975), and William Smalley (1978) have brought anthropological insights into the mainstream of Evangelical missiology. In his book *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries*, Hiebert (1985) points to the importance of (1) understanding people in their cultural and historical contexts, (2) understanding the effects that cultural differences have on missionaries and their message, and (3) building cultural bridges in bicultural communities. We thank God for the growth of indigenous missions from within Asia. It is no secret that Asian missionaries, without critical reflection, have repeated the same mistakes of cultural imperialism and domination practised by their 19th century Western colleagues.

Local cultural style of conflict management

At the end of the day, whether informally or through scholarly exchanges, Christian encounters with other religions need to address the problem of criteria for evaluating truth claims across cultures and religions. Without some form of evalu-

ation, the distinctive characteristic of our Evangelicalism is lost.

By way of illustration, there is a style of conflict management among the Malays in Malaysia that is commonly termed the “The Malay Way.” Diane Mauzy (1986, p. 213) describes The Malay Way as follows: “[It is] a method of problem solving and conflict avoidance that has helped to soothe political tempers. It emphasizes traditional courtesy and good manners, wide consultation, compromise, avoidance of direct confrontation when possible (but leaving a role for innuendo), and a striving for consensus rather than imposing the will of a (sometimes narrow) majority.”

Despite the decline of The Malay Way in the political arena, traditional courtesy and consensus building are still highly valued virtues in the Malay community. In many Asian societies—the Thais and the Japanese in particular—there is a high value placed on a cultured non-confrontational conflict-management style.

As I have tried to demonstrate, the evaluation of truth claims is problematic when one considers the interrelations between historical prejudices, ethnic identities, and the relativistic cultures we live in today. Many of the Evangelical writings in the West on the subject of pluralism and dialogue have been given to the conceptual role of truth, as ought to be the case. But too much emphasis can be placed here, as though it is the only criterion of truth. For Christians in Asia, living in the midst of other religions, a more functional concept of truth can also be helpful. In Asia, the way one communicates truth cannot be divorced from the truth one communicates.

If Christianity’s truth claims are to be taken seriously by other religions, then Christians in Asia need to master social graces, not only in behavioural patterns

but also in communicational styles and attitudinal changes.

Encountering the Triune God in Creative Tension With the Religions

Christian encounter with other religions that is firmly rooted in God's sovereign character must hold in creative tension the aspects of both God's righteous judgement and his loving kindness. Without such "biblical realism," Christianity's approach to other religions is bound to fall into reductionism.

Commitment to the God revealed in Scripture means Christ becomes the model for approaching people of other faiths. More specifically, a distinctive Evangelical theology of Christian encounter holds a high Christology that does not compromise the truth of the finality of Christ over world religions. If Jesus is central, religious encounter will follow Jesus' total mission: the challenge of discipleship, the confrontation with demonic powers and religious authorities, a compassion for the lost, and the creation of a new society. The implications are profound, because Christians are not merely to be interested in sharing the gospel, but also to be seeking the total transformation of the person and societies. In the Asian context, for example, Evangelicals should be willing to work with other religious groups on common concerns, such as constitutional freedom of religions, human rights issues, the role of religion in society, racial polarization, and the general decline in morality. Such engagements with structural evils are not to be considered as "second class" involvement within the mission of the church.

Within a trinitarian perspective, one needs to take into account the role of the Holy Spirit in the world and in the church. Christian encounter is possible because

the Holy Spirit is the one who reveals the mystery of the kingdom, has been active before Christ's earthly ministry, and continues to reveal God's truths to all people, unbelievers included. Evidences of the hidden work of the Spirit include revealing truths about Christ in dreams to unbelievers, planting in the minds of unbelievers an irresistible desire to worship the Creator, and convicting unbelievers of their sins through their conscience that was created in the image of God.

The Holy Spirit points to the place of prayer and spiritual discernment in Christian encounter. Recognizing the hiddenness of God's working in people's minds and hearts, the role of the Christian is to explain truth in intelligible fashion and to help unbelievers discern God's work in their lives. God's part is to make the truth effective. The real enemy is Satan, who blinds the eyes of unbelievers, not unbelievers themselves. Therefore, believers approach non-believers with an attitude of dependence upon the Lord, as well as an attitude of humility and compassion in relation to people of other faiths.

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21

Evangelical missiology from India

K. RAJENDRAN

INDIA IS A NATION of dichotomies. It is extremely difficult to explain India as rich or poor, educated or uneducated, Hindu or secular, progressive or regressive, Aryan or Dravidian, high caste or low caste, North Indian or South Indian, majority or minority—the list is endless.

Since its independence in 1947, India as a nation has progressed in many ways. It has now arrived at a crossroad—the crossroad of intolerance and communalism. The political parties are bent on cashing in on the feelings of the various religions in the country. In the process, they are setting one religion up against another to win the favour of the major vote banks. The major Indian political secular congress has been replaced by the communalist BJP (Barathiya Jantha Party), instigating the feelings of Hindus against the minority groups of Muslims, Christians, and others. There is an attempt to rewrite history as the history of triumphalistic Hindu contributions to India, rather than acknowledging the contributions of all people to build the nation. In the midst of all these triumphalistic statements, the poor continue to be poor, the landless continue to be landless, women continue to be treated as inferior to men, and the poor and the untouchables continue to be harassed as a part of the Hindu ethos/theology.

Most of these attributes apply to Christians also, whether Evangelical or ecumenical, inclusivist or exclusivist, Methodist or Mennonite or Anglican. In this very divisive situation, everything that is said or done has two sides and is often justified, whatever the case may be. Against this backdrop, we need to consider the contribution of Evangelical missiology.

The Impact of Christianity in India

The pioneering European missionaries were brave and sacrificed much for the sake of bringing the gospel to India. About the spread of the gospel, C. B. Firth (1961, p. 127) observes, "It was early in the 18th century, while the Jesuits were still carrying on their work in Tamilnadu, the Protestant missionaries first appeared in India." The early Protestant missionaries, starting from Bartholomaeus Ziegenbalg, Heinrich Plutschau, Christian Friedrich Schwartz, William Carey, Alexander Duff, Ida Scudder, Isabella Thoburn, John P. Jones, William Goudie, Stanley Jones, Waskom Pickett, and many others who followed them, accomplished much. They revolutionised India by preaching the gospel, winning people for Christ, discipling, establishing churches, igniting social changes, and even influencing the Freedom Movement.

These missionaries had much to do with building modern India and with developing a new ethos in the country through their many social endeavours. Isaac Taylor Headland (1912, p. 4) wrote that the products of missions are regenerated human beings. All other things are simply by-products, consciously or unconsciously, directly or indirectly, the result of mission work. Khushwant Singh (1992, p. 76), a secular journalist, states, "More far-reaching than the number of converts it made was the influence of Protestantism on Hinduism. Protestants took active part in suppression of *sati*,¹ ending female

infanticide, and suppressing the thugs [rowdies and ruffians]; alleviating the condition of Hindu widows and temple prostitutes; raising the marriage [sic], etc. It was the Christian missionaries ... [who] roused the admiration of Hindu reformers like Ram Mohun Roy, whose *Brabmo Samaj*, set up in 1829, drew a great deal of its inspiration from Christianity. So also did the *Prarthana Samaj*."

These missionaries impacted India in the areas of politics (Singh, 1992, p. 76), education (especially uplifting education for women and thus elevating their pitiful status), and journalism (thus influencing the mass thinking) (Beaver, 1981, p. 199). They also brought peace between warring European colonialists and the Indian kings (Firth, 1961, p. 137)² and disciplined many Christians in India.

In 1969, Dr. Radha Krishnan, the President of India, hosting Bishop and Mrs. Pickett, fervently wished that Christians in all parts of India were far more numerous, because significant peace and law and order prevailed in the areas where there were more Christians (Firth, 1961, pp. 31-32). Swami John Dharma Theerthan (p. 17) summarised the situation in these words: "The direct results of Christian missionary activity are but a small fraction of what Christ has accomplished in numerous ways in all the varied departments of thought and behaviour of many millions in this continent. The transformation that has been effected in the inner and outer life of the nation is one of the profoundest phenomena of human history."

¹ *Sati* was a Hindu custom in which widows were burned with their dead husbands. Although *sati* was not practised by all Hindus, the gruesome practice was perpetuated by many as religious fanaticism. *Sati* was outlawed in 1829 by the British Viceroy to India, William Bentinck, through the efforts of William Carey and Raja Ram Mohun Roy.

² Even Hyder Ali, a Muslim ruler, had a high regard for Schwartz. When the English found out that Hyder Ali had allied himself with the French, they wanted to negotiate with him. For this task, none could reach him except Schwartz, for Hyder Ali had said, "Let them send me the Christian [Schwartz]; he will not deceive me."

Thus the success of the missionaries is measured not just by words but by the fruits of their labour. There is ample evidence of lasting impact by the pioneering missionaries as a result of their labour of love and their commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Indian Missionary Movements

Foreign missions

Before the independence of India in 1947, foreign mission organisations were affiliated with church denominations, including Baptists, Presbyterians, Anglicans, Mennonites, Methodists, and others. The churches established by these missions consolidated their members at the time of independence, and for a time there were no foreign missionary movements doing pioneer work in the country. Thus there was a definite discontinuity in pioneering missions.

International affiliated missions such as CCC, OM, YWAM, BGEA, IEHC, AFC, YFC, SU, UESI (IVF), ECC, and others carried on their ministries without much interruption. Their success was due to Indian personnel and funds coming partly from India. Thus the work to fulfil the Great Commission was carried on, even in the absence of classical missionaries.

Indian indigenous missions

The number of Indian missions has increased from only three or four prior to Indian independence to over 125 that are affiliated with the India Missions Association (IMA) today. Outside IMA, there are scores of other mission agencies, including several denominational agencies (Jayaprakash, 1987, pp. 22-68). Patrick Johnstone (1993, p. 276) quoted 198 mission agencies in India in 1993. A. Gnanadasan (1998), a minister of the ECI, listed 300 mission organisations in 1992. These mis-

sion societies have achieved much in sharing the gospel with millions. Yet there is more—much more—to be done. Rev. Vasantharaj Albert (1995, p. 36) points to the following progression in the number of Indian missionaries:

1972 – 543
 1980 – 2,208
 1983 – 3,369
 1988 – 10,243
 1994 – 12,000
 1997 – 15,000

There could actually be 20,000 missionaries including 5,000 church workers involved cross-culturally in E2 and E3 evangelism. This is an approximate figure (Sunder Raj, 1997, June). Thus, India has become the largest cross-cultural missionary sending country in the Two-Thirds World (Pate, 1991, p. 32).

Evangelicalism in the Light of Evangelisation

Evangelical Fellowships: EFI, FECl, and PFI

The Evangelical Fellowship of India (EFI) was born in 1951 as an overarching fellowship and a catalyst for many of the Evangelical churches, associations, and networks in India. Its goal is to promote unified action directed towards spiritual renewal in the church, active evangelism, effective witness, and a safeguarding of the Evangelical faith in the church (Arles, pp. 32-34). J. C. Thiessen (1955, p. 39) remarks that the EFI “gives priority consideration to the recovery of spiritual life in all the churches of India.”

EFI has done much to awaken Evangelical vision and to promote a renewed focus for mission in India. Das (p. 34) notes, “In the first two decades of its existence, the various activities of EFI served to strengthen the Evangelicals. For example, Union Biblical Seminary was established in 1953 for Evangelical theological

education, All Christian Book Club in 1953, and the Evangelical Radio Fellowship of India in 1957, to name just a few.”

EFI achieved much by a gathering of Evangelicals in several congresses: the All India Congress on Mission and Evangelism at Devlali in 1977; the All India Christian Communication Seminar at Nagpur in 1978; the All India Christian Education Seminar and All India Church Growth Seminar, both at Hyderabad, in 1978; the All India Conference on Evangelical Social Action at Madras in 1979; and the All India Evangelical Women’s Conference at Pune in 1979. These conferences contributed positively to the growth of Evangelical movements in India (Arles, p. 33).

EFI gave birth to many associations and networks, including IMA, EFICOR, CEFI, EMFI, ENFI, and others. It was the Evangelical counterpart of the National Council of Churches in India (NCCI). EFI specifically came into being to counter liberal influences of the ecumenical church (Sunder Raj, 1997, July). It is still pressing on to contribute to the Evangelical churches and missions in India. New leadership has provided it with a new lease on life.

An EFI pamphlet (1991, p. 39) states, “In 1974, the position of neutrality towards the ecumenical movement adopted by EFI began to find disfavour with some members of EFI who wished for a more authentic Evangelical structure.” As a result, the Federation of Evangelical Churches in India (FECI) was born at Akola, Maharashtra, with eight different church denominations joining as members (McMahon, 1971, p. 8). Daniel Abraham (quoted in Harris, 1997, p. 115), the president of FECI, said in his presidential speech during the 20th anniversary of FECI, “The FECI came as a result of a long felt need

in the Evangelical churches in India to stand united in upholding the fundamental biblical truths against the attacks of liberalism and other similar destructive forces that are actively at work in the church today.”

Because EFI seemed to lack theological clarity, in 1979 the FECI Theological Commission started an Association for Evangelical Theological Education in India, which with the Asia Theological Association started promoting Evangelical separatism, thus destabilising the Serampore accreditation for theological studies (Harris, 1997, p. 39).

While EFI is an overarching body of Evangelical missions and churches, FECI defends primarily the Evangelical churches, and thus it is a church-oriented association (Sunder Raj, 1997, July). However, at present FECI is docile.

Another organisation is the Pentecostal Fellowship of India (PFI). This group has many active works, including a large number of women workers.

Other groups to enhance evangelisation

The increase in the number of missions and missionaries necessitated setting up associations and networks for better organisation of efforts. The prominent associations are EFI, IMA, FECI, PFI, EHA, ETANI/ETASI/ETAI, EMFI, and a few others. The prominent networks are CGAI, AD 2000 Movement, NIHNW, CONS, DAWN, National Forum for Measuring the Results of Indian Evangelisation,³ Tent-maker Centre, ELFI, GRCP, MI 2000, and others. Some support groups are GFA, MUT/MUF, and others. The social action agencies which worked through the churches and missions are EFICOR, CASA, World Vision, Inter Mission, and others.

³ This group was pioneered by IMA through the National Consultation on Missions and Evangelism at Hyderabad in 1996.

All these associations and networks have a mandate to support missions in India.

Apart from the above associations and federations, the following national federations also have unique functions. The names themselves suggest some of their functions: National Council of Churches in India (NCCI); Christian Medical Association of India (CMAI); Indian Christian Media Association (ICMA); National Association for Christian Social Concerns (NACSC); India Association of (Itinerant) Evangelists (IAE); Evangelical Literature Fellowship of India (ELFI); and All India Association for Christian Higher Education (AIACHE). Each federation has scores (some hundreds) of organisations in its federation, representing thousands of staff workers spread all over India (Sunder Raj & Team, 1992, p. 136).

Ten Mega-Confusions in Missions and Churches

In carrying out the Great Commission of the Lord Jesus Christ, Indian missions and churches have become confused. This confusion has resulted in a polarisation in theology, which in turn has affected the philosophy and methods of evangelisation, as well as the training of theologians, missiologists, and others. It partly explains why India has not been evangelised as a whole and why the percentage of Christians, on the average, remains at only 3-4% of the population. Bookish and twisted theological thinking lacks intensity for an overall strategy for India. It will eventually result in pluralism and extreme inclusivism, resulting in the stagnation and diminishing of the church of Christ.

Confusion #1: Ambiguous terms and meanings

In the midst of growth, a need has been recognised to consolidate the terms and meanings of all that is being done in relation to evangelism. There are many definitions of evangelism, mission, holistic outreach, and other terms. These terms need to be defined according to a general consensus of understanding before the missions grow further. Otherwise, there will be a very high probability of divisions and further confusion. The suggestion is for a core group to compile consensus definitions of each concept and term used in mission work. This is top priority.

Confusion #2: Social work and evangelism

Joshi Jayaprakash (1987, p. 20b), in his survey of missions in 1987, said that 57.17% of the missionaries were involved in church planting, and only 7.17% were doing development work. Today, among the 125 IMA missions with 20,000 missionaries, the majority are equally involved in church planting and social work. This means that since 1987 the amount of social work performed by missions has increased dramatically. It also implies that in the future, social work might grow more than direct evangelism. This change in focus is related to the holistic approach in evangelism. The increase in social work needs to be watched and a balance maintained, or else missions could become merely social organisations. Thus there is a need for missions to keep reiterating their goals, visions, and ethos of the end result—leading people to Christ—both to themselves and to their workers.⁴

⁴ Reiteration of the ultimate goal of the mission can be done by repeating vision statements, printing them in all mission publications, gathering workers periodically and informing them where the mission is heading, etc. Doing these things will keep the missions on track. The leadership must be thoroughly convinced where they want to take their mission. If the leadership is weak, it could confuse the agency and weaken it, with disastrous results.

**Confusion #3:
Neglecting major
unreached people groups**

Muslims, middle and upper class people of the cities and towns, the handicapped, and the non-animistic Hindus of India are yet to be reached with the gospel. Very few missions train people for reaching specific people groups. They are also unprepared to pay adequate allowances for the missionaries who work with such peoples (Daniel, 1997b, p. 8).⁵

**Confusion #4:
Strong tribal and
“win the winnable” emphasis**

Undue emphasis has been given to tribals, who comprise only about 8% of the total population of India. This is connected to the fact that these people are generally open to the gospel, and it is economically easier to support missionaries who live among them. It also comes from a “win the winnable” philosophy. This strategy needs to be consciously revised.

**Confusion #5:
Homogeneous unit
principle emphasis**

There is much stress on reaching people according to the homogeneous unit principle (HUP) concept of “one people at a time.” Regarding this concept, Indian missions are divided into two strong camps, for and against. Although HUP has worked in some people groups, many missions sing a song of oneness in Christ, but they are not really convinced that it will work.⁶ Many mission leaders and missionaries feel that theologically HUP is not right, in light of the “one body/one in Christ” concept. Some feel that HUP will not work in cities where people are not divided along caste lines. HUP proponents counter this objection by classifying working groups as part of the people groups in the cities. However, many of the other backward castes and the forward castes will never come to Christ unless they are brought to him as communities.⁷ Once a realisation dawns on them that they will be divided in their communities if they accept Christ, they shun Christianity even if they believe that Christ is the way of salvation.

⁵ For additional information, refer to the appendix at the end of this chapter.

⁶ Except among mature Christians, oneness is often merely a lip service rather than reality. Inability to celebrate oneness is more of a cultural problem than anything else. Accepting others with different cultural, language, and habitual behaviours is difficult. Christian oneness must be consciously cultivated. Unity is often put to the test in situations such as a marriage between people from different backgrounds. Even Christians continue to marry and relate in a mono-caste framework. Although Christians are better at relating to others in the church, there are still many discrepancies and divisions which affect missions. Is this a theological problem or a missiological problem? There is a long way to go in accepting others as brothers and sisters in Christ.

⁷ There are three forward castes (FCs) of Indians (priests, warriors, and the business class). After them are the other backward castes (OBCs), the scheduled castes (SCs), and the scheduled tribes (STs). The tribals constitute only 8-10% of the Indian population. About 30% of the population is included in the SCs and OBCs. 60-70% of all Indian missionaries work among the 10% of tribal Indians. The remaining 90% of the population has only about 30% of the missionaries. Most of these work among the SCs and OBCs and not among the rest. Just the Muslims of India (14%) are much more numerous than the tribal population. There is definitely a lopsided approach in thinking about and strategising for Indian evangelism.

Sensitivity and innovation are needed in Indian missions. Multiplication of philosophies must be encouraged to win many communities to Christ. Although Christians may agree on the “one in Christ” concept, initially some people groups may have to be brought to Christ in their own communities. Sadly, though, some groups who came to Christ 100 years ago still cling to their own communities. Where is their spiritual maturity? Is this a theological problem or a missiological one?

The issues of numerical church growth versus spiritual growth and of personal conversion versus group conversion are related topics in the discussion of HUP emphasis. Peter Wagner (1981, p. 181) takes a middle-of-the-road position, saying, “The homogeneous unit principle, though it is a penultimate not an ultimate characteristic of the kingdom of God, does provide a useful tool not only for the effective implementation of the evangelistic mandate, but also for helping people of differing human groups to live together in greater love and harmony.” A balanced and pragmatic approach must be designed according to the receptivity of people.

Confusion #6: Contextualisation

For many Christians and missionaries, the cathedral is synonymous with Christianity. Stanley Soltau (p. 120) cautions, “There is sometimes a tendency to forget the wide difference between the two and to think that to introduce Christianity means also introducing Western ways of life.” When Christians are diverted from the finality of Christ, they became sidetracked with their goals and purposes, and evangelism is neglected (Rajendran, 1996).

Francis Xavier, the famous Jesuit who served in India from 1506 to 1552, followed the thinking of the medieval mis-

sionary church that everything in non-Christian life and systems should be abolished before Christianity is introduced. Of course, he changed his mind when he reached Japan, where he saw a culture superior to that of the West (Fuller, 1980, p. 13). Frederick Norris (1984, pp. 55-56) called this abolishing act a “radical displacement,” in which Christianity with all its Western (or whatever the national culture of the missionaries) cultural baggage was transplanted whole, and ethnic religion was brushed aside as valueless. Such an iconoclastic mindset seemed to have deterred the contextualisation of Christ’s teachings to the cultures in India.

To the question of why Christianity did not take root in India, Khushwant Singh (1992, p. 76) explains, “Christianity did not make strong impact on India. The chief reason for this was that Christianity was never able to erase the taint of being alien to the soil of India. Efforts made to Indianise Christianity had a limited success. India did not produce a Christian saint of its own.... Sadhu Sunder Singh came close to it.... Other [Indian Christian] leaders ... were good men but without the charisma of sainthood ... were hardly known outside of Christian circles. What Indian Christianity needed in the Indian setting was a *Mabatma*; all it produced were men and women, good scouts, girl guides, directors, YMCA and YWCA.”

In this Indian context, it has become inevitable to contextualise the teachings of Christ in multiple ways of service, worship, and proclamation. Neill Anderson (1993, p. December 13), president of Freedom in Christ Ministries, says, “The world is changing at an alarming rate.... The ecclesiastical challenge is to give anxious people the timeless message of Christ and present it in a contemporary way that relates to a changing culture.” Vishal Mangalwadi (Richard & Mangalwadi, 1997) sees

the need for an inward change in Christians and not just an outward one. When there is an inward change, he notes, there is less fear and less worry about syncretism when contextualising to Indian culture.

The issue of contextualisation has no clear solutions either in the churches or in the missions. Many agree that there is a need for change, but what changes to make and how to go about making them are unclear. Very little has been done to change the scene and swim against the current of Christian traditionalism. Once people are entrenched in their tradition, it is hard to change them.

Bruce Nicholls (p. 386) differentiates indigenisation and contextualisation as follows: "An earlier generation used the word indigenisation, which meant relating the gospel to the traditional cultures of the people. Contextualisation includes all that is right in indigenisation but in a wider context including contemporary and changing cultural patterns of life. Increasingly Christians worldwide are recognising that the gospel must be contextualised from one culture to another if God's kingdom has to be established on earth."

S. D. Ponraj (pp. 37-38) explains, "Contextualisation means to translate or interpret the gospel and its implications in terms of the needs of the whole man and society. Contextualisation was not another word for indigenisation, but includes the concept. Both words have important meanings in the context of planting churches in India."

Doug Priest, Jr. (1984, p. 200) suggests that in a cross-cultural church-planting situation, the church should maintain as many of the indigenous forms as possible. It should explore the need for functional substitutes but remain alert in order to safeguard the faith against the incorpora-

tion of pagan beliefs. This is where the tension exists.

O. M. Rao (p. 110) reflects, "It is necessary that the Christian faith should be interpreted in the context of its environment and culture. It involves risk, as all interpretations of the Christian faith face in terms of the communication process in different places and times. The Indian Christian thinker should engage himself in this task and thereby be exposed to the risk involved. But in interpreting the Christian faith in the context ... one has to watch.... No interpretation is valid if the core of the Christian faith is sacrificed on the altar of adoption to the Indian situation."

Frederick Norris (1984, pp. 56-57) outlines six ways to contextualise. First, there is *radical displacement* of the culture, in which the old host culture is completely shelved. Second is the *discontinuity theory*, in which Christianity feels superior and feels no comparison with the local culture, but it still seeks to adapt itself to the cultural forms of the people. Third, there is the *uniqueness theory*, in which both religions are recognised as unique, but Christianity is assumed to be superior. Fourth is the *legitimate borrowing theory*, in which the commonality from both religions is accepted and borrowed so as to be truly indigenous. Fifth is the *fulfilment theory*, in which the gospel of Christ is accepted as the fulfilment of people's quest in that culture. Lastly is the theory of *relativistic syncretism*. In this it is accepted that all religions contain different truths that lead to the ultimate Truth.

Indigenisation, contextualisation, and the term de-Westernisation are all inter-related themes. Rajaiah Paul (1952, p. 106) heatedly called for de-Westernisation nearly a half century ago: "The fact is that after 200 years of [Protestant] Christianity, the Christian message is still being presented in a language unintelligible for the

most part to the people of the country. For two centuries or more we have been studying Christian theology as presented by the Western minds and in Western books, and we have trained ourselves to think only along those lines. Indian Christians have not yet begun to think for themselves and re-think ... and re-define the Christian message in thought forms and in language that our countrymen will understand.”

Ralph Winter, in his speech at the GCOWE conference in South Africa in August 1997, challenged people to de-Westernise Christianity to accommodate the coming of mass movements to Christ, without any hangover of imperial Westernism attached to the message of Christ. Ebenezer Sunder Raj (1997, September), responded that the concept of de-Westernisation is not something that the church in India should worry about. This problem is a hangover from the past. Now all that the missions and the churches need to do is to think and act in responsible ways which would accommodate mass movements to Christ. Thus, it is not a question of de-Westernisation, but instead one of developing strategies to present Christ without compromising the message. For this, the church and missions do not need to be either inclusivists or exclusivists. Rather, they need to present the gospel and change the forms of Christian traditions to make them palatable to the majority of the people in the country.

The above men all agree that there is a great need to change our approach to the evangelisation of India. Stanley Soltau (p. 120), a missionary to Japan, emphasises the fact that the introduction of Christ will inevitably bring changes: “As the gospel enters the lives of the people, it will naturally change many of their customs, but it must be understood that it is the gospel that is making the change and not the Western [or any] missionaries.”

O. M. Rao (p. 2) points out that missionaries do not need to infuse other cultures into the community to “make” them Christians. “The present task of indigenisation is to apply some surgery, separating the Christian message from Western culture, then translate that same message into the context of Eastern culture.”

S. D. Ponraj (pp. 37-38) suggests three broad areas to consider in contextualising. These are contextualisation of the theology of the gospel interpretation, contextualisation of forms of the gospel expression, and contextualisation of the church in its leadership, finance, and witness. He goes on to say that there should be more detailed focus on witness, evangelistic methods, leadership, church government, finance, worship (including seating, reading, and posture), church buildings, and lifestyles.

Rao (pp. 2-9) cautions about the danger of going to extremes with contextualisation and indigenisation. For one thing, indigenisation is not being more Indian than Western. Second, there is a great temptation for the Ashramites to compromise with the Hindus in the extremity of identification. Third, Western culture must be separated from the message of Christ. Fourth, there is a need to identify the essential and non-essential elements in Christianity. These non-essentials, in St. Paul’s terminology, were truly permissible, yet for the higher purposes they were not beneficial (1 Cor. 10:23). Thus, when sacrificing non-essentials, it is for the effective retention of essential truth. Lastly, some react to the term indigenisation, as they feel the common man would equate the indigenised forms to Hindu forms. Some feel also that these efforts are not successful and thus should not be attempted. This mentality must be overcome.

According to Soltau (pp. 122-126), the distinguishing features of the indigenised

churches or missions are their strength, their rapid growth, a more wholesome relationship between the missionaries and the locals, a more effective presentation of the gospel, and a wider outreach.

S. Pillai (1997), a first-generation follower of Christ, queried, "Why could the churches not be kept open for people to visit at any time of the day or night?" This is a question that is relevant to the culture. More innovative ways for contextualisation must be found. However, these will need to be made in the midst of the traditionalists within the church itself.

Confusion #7: People group adoptions

Some feel that peoples should be reached not on caste lines but on language lines. They say that each group must be reached by the spoken languages of the people. However, some language groups are too large for this approach to be effective. Among them are the Bhojpuri in UP and Bihar and the Maithili in Eastern Bihar and Bengal. These language groups must be further divided into dialects and caste groups.

With IMA leading the PIN code research, NIHNW, GRCP, GFA, GEMS, and a few other supporters of this concept are trying to get missions to concentrate on placing missionaries in each PIN code area. Thus it would be easier to measure the results of mission work. In each PIN code area, missionaries would be free to adopt any HUP or language division in their work. Whatever the method, peoples *must* be reached.

Whatever the strategy may be, the confusion lies in the adoption of people groups. Some in the U.S. and many in India claim to be people group clearing-houses. This causes much confusion and must be worked on.

Confusion #8: Neglect of missionary welfare and short-sightedness in future recruiting

Many Indians joined mission organisations in the wake of the departure of Western missionaries after India gained independence, and also as a better understanding of missions dawned in the churches. As a commitment to the Lord and to the Great Commission, many left lucrative jobs in which they could have flourished. Most workers served in the tribal areas. As they sought to carry out the Great Commission, their wives and children were forced to bear the brunt of many hardships.

In the current Indian missionary scene, workers suffer from deficient medical care, insufficient salary, inadequate schooling facilities for children, meagre retirement benefits, lack of retirement housing, and inadequate insurance coverage.

Pastoral care

There is also a great need for missionary pastoral care as the missionary force expands. Workers face mounting personal pressures and the strain of sharing Christ with those who do not understand. Many missionaries face pressures from their own organisations in the form of difficult relationships with co-workers, poor leadership, clan-ruled authority structures, unorganised plans, and inadequate training for accomplishing the task. In the organisational structure, too much accountability is expected of some missionaries, while others go scot-free due to favouritism.

The lack of adequate teams for pastoral care, the absence of able administrators, and incompetent leadership in some missions are issues that must be addressed in order for missionaries to work effectively. More training in missionary pastoral care has to be planned in the future.

In addition, those providing pastoral care need encouragement. Unfortunately, even if some recognise the need for pastoral care for missionaries, they are often discouraged as wasting time.

Medical needs

When missionaries fall ill, they are often faced with inadequate medical facilities, and they frequently have no medical insurance. Also, most missions do not settle the affairs of the family members of workers who die on the field.

Children's care

Children of missionaries often study in hostels which may be 1,000 kilometres away. Most families are able to be together only once a year during holidays. They have to separate again just when the children and parents are getting adjusted to each other. Some missions have been insensitive and have laid undue burdens on families by requiring the children and parents to be separated by great distances, just because it is cheaper for missions to support the children in certain prescribed schools. Missionaries have been unable to bear the expenses for the children to study in schools within 100 kilometres, where the parents could meet them frequently. This situation has angered both parents and children.

Ironically, much money has been contributed towards scholarships for non-Christian children, and much social work is being done for others, but when it comes to meeting the expenses of the missionaries, missions and donors shy away as though the missionary is destined to suffer! This abrasive short-sightedness will result in the missions not reaching peoples effectively with the gospel of Christ. Many potential missionary candidates today prefer various kinds of social work through the mission, where the pressure to share the gospel is less and the

salary is better. The progress of future mission work is dependent on how missionaries are being cared for. This area is being carefully watched by the new generation and by other concerned people.

Inadequate salary to meet genuine needs

Modern Indian indigenous missions do not have sufficient money to do the best for their missionaries (Winston, 1997, August). Publications urge readers, "Pray for financial support and more workers for all the Indian missions" (IMA, 1996, p. 3). Individual missionaries struggle for survival. One former missionary to the Muslims in Assam said that his mission, 10 years back, paid him a monthly salary of 400 rupees. After 10 years, he received around 1,000 rupees a month. The mission insisted that both husband and wife work in the same mission. This meant the man's wife could not pursue her career. This worker felt that even if his salary was doubled, financially he could not survive. Therefore, he resigned and left the mission.

Lesslie Newbigin (1977, p. 54) asks, "How has it come that we use the name 'evangelist' for the lowest category of church workers—half trained, half paid, and half starved? How does it come that respectable Christians feel uncomfortable with the very idea of evangelism?" One particular mission was reported as having 87 workers, but it did not have a regular pay structure for the missionaries. Each missionary was paid 200–300 rupees a month. The missionaries struggled to survive. According to Roy Daniel (1997a, p. 6), living in a one-bedroom house in North India cost a missionary, his wife, and two school-age children Rs. 4,000 a month in 1991. Today it would cost Rs. 4,000–6,000 in large cities and Rs. 6,000–10,000 in cosmopolitan cities and commercial town-

ships, excluding house rent (Daniel, 1997b, p. 8).

Missionaries have as many material needs and aspirations as anyone else. Just because they have committed themselves to the cause of evangelism, people expect them not to entangle themselves in so-called “worldly” things. Shyam Winston (p. 21) notes, “The missionary is not above material needs but has intentionally ceased to give priority to his material welfare in the presence of a call to evangelise. His material needs still exist, and they must be met by those sending him.”

Several missionaries who were interviewed agreed that missionaries and Christian workers did not have much savings, nor any health insurance, nor retirement benefits, nor death relief schemes. The consensus was that this state of affairs resulted from the false theology called “faith,” until some disaster such as a heart attack struck them. One missionary’s wife became mentally ill, and the mission could not treat her because of lack of funds. Eventually the missionary died, and his wife was left mad and homeless on the streets (Winston, 1997, September).

Many Indian missionaries are reluctant to speak about their financial needs for fear of being branded as “unspiritual.” Instead, they quietly suffer insecurities (Shunmugam & Shunmugam, 1997). Missionaries have endured much in the name of “true spirituality” and “faith.” With this line of reasoning, many missionaries have entered upon mission work without adequate physical preparation, and some have needlessly suffered. These situations lead to problems when the missionary faces a crisis, or when he retires and has no place to go, or when he dies and his family is left stranded in the streets with no sustenance.

These warped “faith elements” have come from many sources. Some are from the convictions of the missionary himself. Some missionaries believe that having insurance means dependence upon men and is therefore unspiritual. Some plainly do not want to pay the insurance premiums, and so they take chances, mainly because of a lack of funds. Others feel that money should not be tied down to insurance premiums when it could be used to support missionaries and buy the tools for evangelism. Some of these ideas have also come from the inflated life-stories of famous missionaries such as William Carey and Hudson Taylor. It was Hudson Taylor who said, “God’s work done in God’s way will not lack God’s supply.”⁸ These kinds of thoughts have been taken to extremes.

Some convictions have come from the missions. Most missions project the convictions of their leader(s) in their policies. Some policies are indistinguishable as to whether they are derived from biblical ethos or situational convictions. One such conviction is appealing for funds. Men like Hudson Taylor applied the principle of looking solely to God for their needs, and they seemed to have done well. At times the principle was applied to extreme degrees by subsequent followers. Others who did not repeat such practices were judged “unspiritual” by some so-called “spiritual giants.”

Some agencies have held onto convictions which are obsolete and irrelevant for the present era, as carryovers from the past. Some convictions have come from the nations from which a particular mission originally emerged. Each mission carries its special culture and thus develops its own convictions and work ethos. Some are biblical, and some are cultural and interpretive.

⁸ Hudson Taylor’s quote is inscribed in the stone at the entrance of SAIACS, Bangalore, India.

These convictions and faith elements have a bearing on the lifestyle of missionaries. Because missionaries' salaries are low, the only place they can survive is among the tribal people. They cannot survive economically in other situations or work strategically to win India for Christ. Thus the cities, the Muslims, the women, the educated, and others are neglected in India. Reaching people groups is partially connected to meeting the actual needs of the missionary, as secular companies do. Are missionaries less than normal human beings? Are missionaries' expenses in any way less than those of others?

Many promotional workers do not present the whole need of missionaries but only parts to donors. The actual expenses have to be appealed from donors instead of partial funds.

Pension and retirement housing

The missionary's self-worth must be strengthened by planning for housing and a pension after retirement. A missionary who has given his life for the service of the Lord Jesus Christ, in the front lines, is worthy of his own house and a respectable life when he retires. Even secular companies have recognised this. The missions must be very careful of false teaching that the things of this world will not last, and so missionaries do not need a house when they retire. Some mission leaders make missionaries feel guilty by messages of a lost world and Jesus' imminent return. This automatically makes a missionary feel that even thinking of a house and pension after retirement is sinful. This attitude perpetuates insecurity

both in the missionary and in his family members.

All the above issues have weakened the efforts of missionaries and have become factors for missionary attrition and future recruitment. Recruiting quality missionaries will very much depend on how missions will tackle the situation of missionary welfare. Lack of attention to missionary welfare will cause missionaries to abandon missionary work. It will also result in some missionaries moving to other missions where the facilities are better, causing missions to lose their experienced leaders and church planters. This also will affect future new missionaries who watch how the missionaries are being treated. More and more, missionary appeals must have more than emotional appeal. If the needs of the missionaries are not looked after, the missions in India will diminish. Is this a theological or a missiological problem?

Confusion #9: Foreign funds, Indian funds, and partnership

There has been much discussion about indigenous funds and local funds. Some people, especially foreigners, would like to know when the Indian church is going to assume total responsibility for the evangelisation of India in terms of utilising local finances. The answer is not simple, in light of the vastness of the need in the entire nation. The church is young, as far as its missionary endeavour is concerned. While these factors are present, some assume that the church in India is weak and irresponsible and that it does not see the necessity of giving for missionary work.⁹

⁹ In an interview with Mr. Ebenezer Sunder Raj, the question was posed, "Why are Indian churches not giving money for evangelisation of this nation?" This question assumed that the Indian churches were irresponsible and were not giving enough to reach the nation. Knowing that this assumption was not true, Mr. Ebenezer declined to comment. The churches need education and need to be coached.

Although there might be some truth in this, several factors need to be kept in mind:

1. The church in India has progressively given much towards meeting the need for their own evangelism in the past 50 years (Dozo, 1984, p. 23).

2. The church in India is small compared to the vast task of Indian evangelism.

3. The vast majority of the church is from the lower, Dalit strata of society, which is unable to bear the whole burden of the huge task. Christians are from 14 scheduled castes, according to Roger Hedlund (1986, p. 154). Ashish Massey (1992, p. 89), a Christian sociologist and journalist, reflects, "The Christians are simply poor. They get little opportunity to seek employment outside church institutions. They have very little role in business." Within mission organisations, missionaries are paid meagrely, and missions have focused only on the poor and the tribals. The major parts of Indian society have not been touched.

4. The Evangelical church, which has been responsible for most of the evangelisation efforts, has been very small and is still emerging. "The task is too big without partnership," concludes George Ninan.

5. The church is still being educated in the area of giving, especially giving for mission needs. Rajaiah Paul (1952, p. 110) observed, "The Indian Christian community ... has not yet learnt the importance of Christian giving." Although this statement was made nearly 50 years ago, the struggle of teaching Christians still exists.

"Our church members need to be informed of the unreached people of the world who have to be reached with the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, and remind them of their responsibility and privilege to share the gospel with those who have never heard. We have also to

educate our members to pray for unreached people and ask God to send more labourers to gather them" (Massey, 1992, p. 89).

Some missions claimed that they were indigenised, and thus there was a great applause for their efforts. Unfortunately, most of these missions are barely able to meet the needs of their missionaries. Lawrence Keyes (1983, p. 74) reports that according to a study made in 1980, an average of 35% of Third World missionaries did not receive their promised full salary. Lack of finances is one of the main reasons that missionaries have chosen to work among the tribals and villagers. Of course, the tribals and villagers are also unreached. But more than that, with the kind of salary the missionaries receive, they cannot afford to live in the growing cities and towns. This also affects the education of missionaries' children. In addition, most missions provide no pension, no medical insurance, no life insurance, no savings, and no plans for retirement housing.

These deficiencies are basically due to the inability to manage with the paucity of funds. Although the vision of reaching India is big, the means to meet the need are inadequate. Often the money which should be spent on missionary welfare is spent on the social needs of those who do not know Christ. The salary of the missionary is comparable to that of the poor of India. Some missions take advantage of the situation and try to recruit more people for less money. Number games among these indigenised missions are performed at the cost of missionaries' welfare. Instead of looking after two missionaries with the funds available, agencies employ 10 missionaries to make the numbers look better. Some missions may not consciously play the numbers game, yet their burden for unreached people makes them lose sight of counting the cost

of maintaining missionaries (Winston, 1997, August).

Missions which claim indigenised funding explain that their missionaries are supported by the church in India. There are also funds raised from non-resident Indians (NRI). Many of the larger indigenous missions employ foreign funds through their sister organisations for social activities. These funds sometimes support the evangelistic and holistic activities on the mission field. Thus, some large indigenised missions have one agency for Indian funds and another for foreign funds. Lawrence Keyes (1983, p. 75) says that it is a good idea to separate missionary salaries from projects. He suggests, "Perhaps the best policy, in the light of world nationalisation and missionary indigenisation, is to support special missionary projects, but allow the national churches to pay personal salaries." Thus, indigenisation of funds is somewhat of a myth, providing only a partial perspective.¹⁰

Ashish Massey (1992, p. 89) claims, "Foreign sources are sizably curtailed, and the indigenised resources have not developed so far to fill the gap." Therefore, financially the Indian church is not able to bear all that is demanded to meet the great needs of all the missions in India, in all their evangelistic and social activities. However, the Indian church does have the manpower which could be trained and which could contribute to the evangelisation of India and in neighbouring countries.

The church must be educated regarding the priorities of giving. Many in the church do not know the difference between giving to a glamorous crusade speaker and giving to missions like FMPB. Most of the giving has been based on returns and non-returns. Because of lack of

education in missions and in giving among the Christians, the best and most worthy appeals have not raised all the needed funds. Some groups do not know how to appeal for the credible work of missions. Thus, the wrong people have received much money from the Christians, while the credible missions have suffered. Giving should be based on understanding and enlightenment, not on excitement. It should be based on objective information, rather than just inspiration towards the wrong cause. Christians in India need to be taught to give. This is nearly as great a task as reaching an unreached people for Christ.

Overall, in the growing Indian missions, much is done indigenously. Notable amounts of money, manpower, leadership, and strategies are acquired from within India itself. However, the proportion of funds from within India and from abroad is hard to pinpoint. The Indian church has also grown in maturity in the last 50 years, to the extent of upholding much of the mission work. A great deal of Indian missionaries' salaries (though not adequate) and some projects are paid by the churches in India. For training and for large capital expenses, many overseas partners are involved in one way or other. We praise God for these meaningful partnerships.

Confusion #10: Preparation of leadership for the future

The Indian missions have come of age in their first generation. Most of the leaders in the Evangelical mission organisations are in their 50s. One issue which is slowly affecting the missions is the issue of the next set of leaders. Across India there is going to be a time of leadership change in missions. It has been noticed

¹⁰ The names of the partially indigenised agencies are not given here for security reasons.

that a number of missions are ill prepared for this inevitable occurrence. Many of the past and contemporary charismatic leaders, consciously or unconsciously, have not prepared new leaders to take over upon their retirement or in any other eventuality. Many see themselves as indispensable, or they are insecure about letting go of their power in a position. There is a reluctance to let go of the power of an office, as occurs with many secular politicians. Those in a position tend to view it as a life-long “post.” There is a great respect for the “post-position” but not for the person himself for the contributions made.

The existing old leadership style in the Indian missions scene is generally either patriarchal with dictatorial tendencies or else family oriented, where the parents pass on the leadership to their next of kin. Often a mission is passed on to the family, the way a private company is passed on to the sons and daughters and other family members. Even though secular companies have changed to corporate leadership, the pattern of leadership transfer is still felt on the Indian scene. Not giving leadership to the next generation early enough is going to be the greatest single challenge of Indian missions in the near future.¹¹

The office of Christian leadership must change in the ethos of discipling, mentoring, and passing on the mantle while the original leaders are still present. The experienced leaders could always function as consultants and advisers. Often the excuse for not mentoring and installing new leaders is that “the right person is not available” or that everyone is “too young” or “too immature”—as though some of the older leaders were and are “very mature” for the job. However, a balance has to be maintained to identify and place poten-

tial leaders as they are being tested in a growth-producing environment and are fulfilling the responsibilities given to them. Discernment must be exercised to distinguish the talkers from faithful people. Conscious search and a sense of mentoring multiple candidates over a period of time should lead missions to find and install the next generation of leadership.

The proliferation of missions is attributed in some cases to the fact that the non-relatives in missions have felt that they have no chance of leadership if they continue with certain existing missions. When the leadership issue explodes, there is much politicking without the matter being dealt with at the leadership level. Often matters have been taken to the grassroots level for a political campaign. Culturally, there is very little direct talk in private. Matters are reduced to clichés, or the confrontation is postponed until the issue blows up in the faces of the ones involved.

This problem has to be recognised and tackled immediately by the present leaders. Executive boards, especially the “Yes Boss” ones, must start asking pertinent questions to the existing directors on this issue without threatening the leadership. The boards need to become a positive influence in placing the leaders of the future. Often the boards themselves get used to certain leaders and become complacent. They complain when the team breaks down because the leadership is in a rut and is nonproductive. Instead, the boards need to become proactive and guiding groups.

This is again a matter of biblical ethos being exercised. Openness, honesty, brokenness, confronting issues as soon as possible, and believing the best in each other, especially at the leadership level, must take place, or else the missions will

¹¹ Already several cases of this problem have been reported around the country.

inevitably break down. Evangelicalism without the practice of the above ethos will be worse than secular political leadership. May God save the missions from such disaster. May God help each of the leaders to be serious in the responsibilities toward the men and women God has placed in their hands. May the leaders be the stewards of the ministry and pass it on to good, growing leadership. May they cause the talents of their people to proliferate and let many ministries blossom to tackle the issue of unreached India. Pray!

Conclusion

In the 53 years since Indian independence, missions have sprouted, and the churches have matured. Many associations, networks, and support groups have emerged. In spite of the progress, there are dichotomies in ethos, a lack of consensus, and a lack of comprehensive strategies. There is a sense of fragmentation in missions which needs to be mended. This is seen in the ambiguity of concepts and duplication of efforts. Missions in general are heading off on a slight tangent in terms of where they ought to target. There has to be more application of biblical principles to keep missions close to God's intention for the fulfilment of the Great Commission of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is necessary for a true Evangelical missiology which will help Indian evangelisation move in the direction it should go.

All the mentioned confusions in Indian missions today have to be vigorously worked out, even the ones that come from outside India. Each issue must be thought through, and both local and international flaws must be dealt with. To impact all of India, more appreciation, trust, cooperation, and supportiveness of each other are needed to keep missions moving forward in unison. The future of mission recruiting efforts depends heavily on how exist-

ing missionaries are treated. The future missions leadership will depend on how new leaders are groomed and mentored over a long period of time. Waiting until the present leadership can no longer serve before transferring the reins of leadership will cause missions to suffer and become ineffective in their missionary vision and movement.

Evangelical Christianity and missions basically flow from the experience of the Lordship of Christ in the daily lives of individuals. If the Lordship of Christ is ignored, then self will take over and destroy the missions. Indian missions need many models of leadership and not just talkers. Thus the contribution of Evangelical missiology needs to be seen in each of the above areas in order to impact the nation for Christ.

Appendix: The Realities of Actual Indian Challenges in Presenting the Gospel

I. Massive population growth

India's population has burgeoned since its independence:

1947 – 400 million

1987 – 800 million

1997 – 950 million

The percentage of Christians ranges from 2.6% to 4% across the nation (Johnstone, 1993, p. 274). The unfinished task of reaching all peoples, including the population that is added every year, is daunting. While many are coming to Christ, the evangelistic efforts are not keeping up with the population growth. Thus the percentage of Christians will remain the same or will decline.

As the population grows, there is a need for innovative multiple means, methods, and mission partnerships to present Christ to the masses. Harvesting missions must humbly acknowledge the grace of

God in using other agencies and methods to bring people groups to Christ. Such an understanding increases the mutual respect of Indian missions with empathy and appreciation.

2. The status of women

According to the 1991 census, India has 437,597,929 males and 406,332,932 females. Andrea Singh (1983, p. 103) observes, "India is one of the few countries in the world where males outnumber the females in the population as a whole, and the gap is steadily increasing." The sex ratio in India has always been in favour of males (Matthew, 1995, p. 462).

"The teachings of the Bible will help people with renewed minds to understand the equality of men and women as the equal creation of God. Till then, dowry deaths and perpetrators of gender violence will go unpunished" ("5,000," 1997, p. 7).

"Women have a very important place in influencing their family to certain religious, cultural, and social values" (Pramila, *Urban*, p. 17). "In the Indian society, generally women have been the custodians of religious faith" (Hedlund, 1992, p. xi). "The condition of women is the truest test of a people's civilisation. Her status is her country's barometer" (Azariah, 1915, p. 18). Traditionally, non-Christian Indian women can be reached only by Christian women. Men cannot influence them as much as women (Athyal, 1995, p. 108). "Women are more receptive to the gospel in most instances than men, and they are easily reached by the women missionaries" (Abraham, 1992, p. 104).¹² Thus there is a great need to plan creatively to help the women of India to understand Christ.

Most women in mission are prepared to be assistants and prospective wives. Very little emphasis has been given to the need for women to win the women of India (Pramila, 1997). Often it is automatically assumed that missionary wives will do this. However, this is not the case, as many wives struggle to survive in the mission field looking after the needs of their husbands and children and offering hospitality to the cascading crowds. Most wives trained for mission have ended up assisting their husbands in their ministry, which has had a very positive effect. This configuration of a husband and wife team is good and has some influence among the women. However, could there be more ways to reach half of the population of India apart from reaching them incidentally as a by-product?

Historically, since there is no alternative, the male missionaries have taken this challenge on themselves as a general strategy, without any specific plan. This muddles the mission trainers, as they are unable to train women for anything specific. "What God intended for the Christian woman was partnership with men in the ministry and mission of the church. However, those in charge of training programmes for women and full-time workers found the obstacles to partnership so many and so formidable that they kept wondering out loud what specifically they were training the women for" (Wigan, 1948; cited in Webster & Webster, 1985, p. 38).

Most women missionaries who have been recruited for missions serve either in Christian schools, hostels, or mission offices. Very few end up directly influencing non-Christian women for Christ (Annathai, 1995). Apart from these indirect

¹² It has also been noticed that some Christian women influence their neighbours especially through the children. This needs to be explored more in the future.

ventures, there has not been any specific emphasis on reaching the women of India on a mass scale. Operation Mobilisation's Gospel in Action Fellowship and Blessing Youth Mission have extremely effective women's ministries. According to the latest research (Pothen, 1990, p. 255), 72% of the national women missionaries are working with Pentecostal-Charismatic Missions (PCM) (P. T. Abraham, 1992, p. 104). In spite of the above efforts, very little is being done by Christian women to reach out to other women, compared to the outreach by men missionaries to other men.

There has been much talk and very little action on a large scale to affect Indian women. Even if there were training centres available, missions usually have not known the proper way to employ trained women missionaries, especially if they were single. Hedlund (1992, p. xi) aptly summarises the situation by saying, "The role of women in ministry has been a neglected theme among Indians.¹³ Significant conversion movements to Christ in Andhra Pradesh and other areas are led by women." Graham Houghton in his research found that the Muslim *Zenana*¹⁴ and the upper class Hindu women are out of reach of evangelism by male members. Thus it becomes apparent that it is necessary to establish special work among these women who live behind *Pardab*.¹⁵ In light of this, Houghton (pp. 79-80) notes, "It was deemed necessary to employ a special female agency, known as Bible

women, to reach them and enlighten them in their homes."

If Indian women are touched with the gospel, they will influence their families more than many men (Pramila, *Urban*, p. 47). Thus, it is imperative to reach women with the gospel by innovative means, in order to influence the society through them. Ironically, oblivious to this situation, with very few exceptions, the majority of mission workers are men, even though nearly 50% of the population of India consists of women. What will the implications of this oversight be?

3. Cities and the urbanites

Almost 30% of India's population—300 million—live in cities. There are six megacities having more than 8 million people each and 303 cities with more than 100,000 people each (IMA, 1996, p. 4). Many from the rural population have been moving to urban areas in search of better income and education, even though the living conditions in the cities for these new migrants are deplorable (Abraham, 1992, p. 9). The urban poor and the middle class must be targeted and reached with the gospel. Kevin Murphy, a business executive, reminds us, "There is more to India than Mother Teresa and her poor charges" (Matthew, 1995, p. 547).

The urban worldview is shaped, first of all, by the environment and associations. Secondly, it is shaped by education and enlightened minds. Thirdly, industrialisation, automation, and modern tech-

¹³ In Christian circles, the topic of women in ministry centres around whether women are to be ordained in the church as the pastors or not. The equal partnership of women in the mission field is a subject largely bypassed, knowingly at times!

¹⁴ *Zenana* means "women" in the Urdu language. Thus the term "zenana work," that is, the work among women, came into being.

¹⁵ *Pardab* means "veil, curtain." Even today in most villages, women live behind the curtains. Without covering their faces, they do not venture into an open area. Even if they are emancipated from covering their heads, they do not sit with visitors in the sitting room with the men. This scene is slowly changing in the city areas.

nology have caused city dwellers to be more efficient and competitive in their jobs (Misra, pp. 5-6). Further, materialism and consumerism have changed people's lives. The mass media—radio, television, cinema, newspapers, and magazines—have swayed people for both good and bad with their appeals. Lastly, the process of internationalisation and globalisation has opened people's minds to new worlds. Brand new worldviews and ethos have emerged. New values have blended with old perceptions, beliefs, and lifestyles. Thus, cities today offer many opportunities and are composed of a new class of people for whom the missions in India are hardly prepared!

The church and missions need to plan strategies to reach the powerful, growing, urban middle class while these people are open, before they settle down in their new society and become complacent to the gospel of Christ.

Urban church planting among the middle class is a pioneering effort in most cities. This situation will not change unless there is a new perspective, in contrast to the old one in which missions means targeting tribals, the down-trodden, and the rejected poor. Thus the scope of missions must become broader. Would that the church and missions become like Abraham praying for the salvation of Sodom and Gomorrah!

4. The educated

India's literacy rate has risen from 5.1% in 1901 to 52.21% in 1991 (Sachdeva, 1995, p. 712). The reading appetite of the educated has grown enormously. The newspaper industry illustrates this point. "At the end of 1991, the number of newspapers [dailies, tri/biweeklies, and other

periodicals] stood at 30,214 compared to 28,491 in 1990, showing an increase of 6% during the year" (Sachdeva, 1995, p. 773).

While the missions have sat back and have not produced a single Christian magazine, the secular press has presented the public with an astonishing array of innovative literature. Most of the books produced for the non-Christian masses are not well understood by the public. Many Indians read Christian devotional literature along with other religious books, but a punch line to help them decide to follow Christ is often missing!

In this present challenge, very little effort has been made to place quality Christian literature in the hands of the educated. Most evangelistic books translated from non-Indian writers come with funds for printing, but they are often culturally irrelevant. Very little has been done to encourage Indian writers of evangelistic literature. One exception is the Centre for Communication Skills (CCS),¹⁶ which has worked hard to encourage Christian journalism. More encouragement is needed for Christian Indian writers, and funds need to be made available to print their works. There are a few professional Christian journalists in the press. They also need to be encouraged and need to have their skills tapped. The reading, globalising, information-hunting, educated masses certainly need to be targeted in communication. This is a challenge for both the missions and the churches.

5. The illiterates

Despite 50 years of reforms, approximately 50% of the total population in India is still illiterate. Of this group who can neither read nor write, 35% are men and 65% are women. Half of the 200 million

¹⁶ Contact information: Mrs. and Mr. Pamela and George Ninan, Centre for Communication Skills: Equipping and Empowering Witnesses in the Market Place, 9, Ashoka Road, Ashville Apts., St. Thomas Town, Bangalore, India 560084. Phone: 5476998.

children in India do not attend school (Prayer Concerns, 1997). Paul J. Koola (1979, p. 104) maintains, "Illiteracy accounts for many a superstitious belief that makes man nothing more than a two-legged beast.... Intellectual poverty is more dreadful than the economic poverty." Taking the gospel meaningfully to the illiterates still lingers as a challenge.

6. The expansive geography: PIN codes

Because India is so vast geographically, the country is officially divided into small sections designated Postal Index Numbers (PIN) code areas, each having about 30,000 people. Out of 28,000 PIN code areas, nearly 20,000 do not have a single pastor, evangelist, missionary, or Christian development worker residing among them (Prayer Resources, 1997, p. 24).

7. People groups

There are about 920 people groups in India, each with a population of over 10,000. At present, only about 300 of these groups have any Christian witness or congregation. An IMA report (IMA, 1997) indicates that 204 peoples with populations of over 50,000 are yet to be reached. These groups have no known witnesses among them.

8. Multiplicity of languages

There are 219 language groups in India, each with more than 10,000 speakers. Eighty-five of these language groups do not have even a single verse of Scripture in their language. The Bible is available in only 46 of the Indian languages,

and the *Jesus* film has been dubbed into only 47 languages (*Indian Missions*, 1997, p. 24). Jacob George (1997), coordinator of the Indian Institute of Cross-Cultural Communications (IICCC),¹⁷ reports that 170 Bible translators have been trained, and translation of Scripture is being attempted in 34 languages. Much more needs to be done to get the Word into the local languages of the people.

9. Islam

There are 140 million Muslims in India. This is one of the world's largest and most accessible Muslim communities (AD 2000 & Beyond, 1997, p. 11). Based on the size of the Muslim population, at least 14% of India's missionary force should be working among this group. Ironically, only about 80 Christian workers are serving here. The missions have not been making any concerted efforts to strengthen this force. Among the 125 member missions of IMA, only two or three agencies have had anything exclusively to do with Muslims.

The reasons cited for this lack of ministry among Muslims are that the mainstream missions and the churches do not understand the work among the Muslims, nor are they burdened to work among them (Abubakker, 1996). In addition, the missions have felt that the Muslims are hard to reach and are unresponsive to the gospel. Thus, missions bypass the Muslims to "win the winnables" who are ready to respond.¹⁸ Many missions and churches do not even recognise the various Muslim groups existing in different parts of India (*Reaching*, p. 1).

¹⁷ The IICCC is the Bible translation wing of the India Missions Association. It sponsors translation work through the missionaries who work among people who do not have the Scriptures in their languages. The number of Indian missionaries thus trained is slowly increasing. These translators are starting to bear the fruit of Scripture portions in the languages where they work.

¹⁸ The usual debate by many missions is, "Why work among the hard peoples while there are many 'winnables' among whom much has to be done?"

There is a need for creative approaches to reach Muslims. One such effort is a new English New Testament that is being published for a Muslim audience. *Pulse* (News, 1996) reported, "Missionaries are nearing completion of an English-language New Testament for Muslims. The volume uses familiar names such as Ibrahim for Abraham and Yakub for Jacob. It will have a culturally appropriate cover and illustrations. An estimated 5% to 25% of Muslims worldwide speak English." Such attempts have been made in Urdu, Hindi, and other languages, but this is one of the first attempts to produce an English Bible to fill the need.

There is a need not only to reach Muslims with the gospel, but also to acknowledge those who work with Muslims. We need to encourage these Christian workers, train them, stand with them, and send more people to reach out into the neighbourhoods of Muslims with the gospel. Abubakker (1996) points out, "Even in the Bible seminaries, studying comparative religions should result in leading at least one or two Muslims to Christ."

The fault of not reaching out to Muslims must be taken seriously and must be remedied in the future, or else unreached Muslims will continue to be the foremost failure of missions in India.

10. Marginalised Dalits and tribals

In the Indian population, 20% are Dalits, and 8% are scheduled tribes (IMA, 1996, p. 3). Henry Thiagaraj (1997, based on 1981 statistics) comments, "The Dalits have a very low literacy. For instance, the Dalit women have only about 11% literacy, whereas women from the other communities have about 20% literacy." With some

controversy, Dalits have been classified as Hindus. Many Dalits struggle to accept themselves as Hindus, because of the kind of treatment they encounter from the upper caste Hindus. Tribals are not Hindus, since they are actually animists (spirit worshippers).

As Dalits and tribals become Christians, they are discriminated against and are denied government scholarships and reservations given to other Dalits and tribals. More than anything else, bringing justice from the oppression of the caste system will free the nation to enjoy greater economic and spiritual growth. Dalits and tribals have actually not realised the true independence which is supposedly enjoyed by all Indians.

11. The neglect of the handicapped

According to the 1981 census, there were 9 million visually handicapped individuals in India. Every seventh Indian was a blind person.¹⁹ Apart from the blind, 10% of all Indians are handicapped in other ways (Prabhu Rayan, 1999). Chinnasamy Sekar (1997), the director of Living Light, has adamantly refused to move to any other ministry and has committed himself to work among the handicapped. He and his wife strongly feel that God has kept them among these people to serve them. They are involved in leading many to Christ. Sekar reasons that there are very few churches in Bangalore which are able to receive and accommodate handicapped people. He runs a hostel for the blind and personally looks after them and feeds them for a small cost. He feels that running a hostel and feeding the blind keep him close to the reality of his call, so it is not just theory for him.

¹⁹ A person is classified as blind if his visual acuity is 20/200. This means that what he sees with difficulty at a distance of 20 feet can be seen clearly from a distance of 200 feet by someone with normal vision.

R. Z. Prabhu Rayan (1990, p. 30) feels that two main hindrances for this ministry are the ignorance and the attitude of Christians. Christians have to be made aware of this need. Prabhu Rayan suggests that in the future every church and mission could plan to work among the blind and could also integrate them into church life. Sam Danaseelan (1999) of Mission to the Blind continues to work with all the blind. He is especially concerned for over 400 blind individuals working in various jobs in Chennai, as they need ongoing help in other areas of life to continue working.

Sue Stillman (1990), from the *Nambikkai* Foundation and working among the deaf, shares that it takes a lot of patience, perseverance, love, and encouragement to reach out to the deaf. To communicate the gospel, all types of tools and methods have to be employed. Stillman indicates that it would be better to train Christians who are deaf themselves so they can share Christ with others. She says that the deaf have a very low self-image. Sekar (1997) says that this is true of most handicapped persons. Thus he himself spends much time counselling and encouraging these people. Special efforts must be made to impact the 10% of the Indian population who are handicapped.

12. Global Indian missionaries

Secular Indians have felt the need to stick together in spite of their diaspora to other countries around the world. Ramyata Limbu (1997) notes, "At Katmandu more than 400 people of Indian origin gathered ... to discuss and deliberate on the challenges faced in their respective countries of adoption and in the world."

In fulfilling the Great Commission of the Lord Jesus Christ, Indian Christians have two responsibilities. One is to reach their own diaspora fellow Indians. Second,

they need to reach others for Christ around the world. In the efforts to send Indian missionaries to other countries, money has been a deterring and limiting factor, especially when sending missionaries to countries that are economically well off, where the cost of living is higher. The North African countries, the newly opened CIS countries, and South Asia have become the focus in recent years.

"Indian missionaries abroad? Will it work? Why not? If Indian textile businessmen can flourish in Central Asia, if MARUTI and TATA can run in Central Asian roads, why can't we send missionaries there?" (OM India News, 1997). Many missions such as CCC, SISWA, OM, IEHC, GFA, KEF, BCM, EUSI, IEM, and others are already progressing in this direction.

Conclusion

Even though the numbers of missions and missionaries have spiralled upward, they are only a drop in the bucket in meeting the ocean of Indian challenges. The unchanging gospel has to be presented to the people of India against this backdrop. Whether the churches and missions are up to these new challenges or not will only be known in the future as they respond. Over 60% of India's missionaries are still concentrated among about 20% of India's population. Missions executives need to plan afresh with a new perspective if the gospel is to affect the whole of India. Unless a new strategy is administered, India will continue to be the greatest challenge for the gospel. The work can only be done with a core belief that the gospel is the only way to bring about a change for the better of human behaviours and to create an improved society. Only then will missions echo the Apostle Paul, saying, "I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes" (Rom. 1:16).

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FLYING HIGH OVER the Sahara, I could see only a stark landscape, with rocks emerging from the sand and upstart hills giving way to the rugged mountains farther north. Later, driving in the same region with my family in our trusty Peugeot 505, we discovered many surprises. To the delight of my children, the rocky ground was littered with fossils indicating a long-disappeared but once verdant region. Then we spotted the little flowers, tiny dots of beauty responding to the recent sprinkling of rain. Driving further, we were overwhelmed by a rich band of green. Date trees and other fruits flourished, their roots digging deep to find the ancient underground springs, and the oasis dwellers and their camels were refreshed by the water bubbling to the surface.

Reflecting on Middle East missiology has reminded me of that oasis. The first, but false, impression as an Evangelical looking in from the outside may be that there is little to be found except a few fossils from the ancient past. The second impression, giving yet another partial view, is that there are only a few flowers, beautiful but very fragile. The fullness, though, is that in a hostile environment, sweet fruit springs to life, nourishing those who live there and providing delight to the fortunate ones who, though living far away, are yet privileged to eat these dates of the desert.

An Overview of the Current Setting

The Middle East provides a rich diversity of peoples, geography, and religious expression. Stretching from Mauritania and Morocco on the Atlantic to Iran on the Caspian Sea, the region is inhabited by some 414 million people. Perhaps 17 million Middle Easterners are part of one of the many Christian communities of the region, with about 1.5

Ancient springs and sweet fruit: missiological contributions from the Middle East

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million who identify themselves as Protestant or Anglican (Wasiim, 1993.)

Ethnicity and economics

Arabic, of course, is the principal language of the region, binding together the diverse ethnic groups collectively known as the Arabs. But Arabic, in its many dialects, is not the only language, and Arabs are not the only ethnic groups of the Middle East.¹ Millions of North Africans prefer to speak one of a number of Berber languages, tracing their ethnic heritage to a time long before the Arab Muslim armies advanced. Persian Iranians speak Farsi, and Turks speak Turkish, but in these countries large but minority ethnic groups speak Kurdish, Azeri, Armenian, and other languages. And, of course, Jews speak Hebrew.

Economically we can divide the region into three strata (Myers, 1998). A privileged few, including those with Gulf oil wealth, other business elite, and royalty, make up the rich. Some countries, such as Tunisia, have done well at producing an economic middle class, people who are able to live above the level of basic necessities. But throughout this region, there are large numbers of the very poor. Unemployment and underemployment are at a critical stage in many countries of the Middle East.

Christian presence in the Middle East

Another important division of the Middle East is in terms of Christian presence. We can somewhat loosely consider three regions:

Region 1: Egypt, Sudan, Jordan, Israel, Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, Turkey, and Iran. In these countries, there is an existing Christian presence made up of communities

and churches that trace their roots back to pre-Islamic times. These churches are recognized by the government, although newer churches and especially converts from Islam may not have legal recognition.

Region 2: Kuwait, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Yemen, and Libya. The ancient Christian communities have disappeared in these countries. There are very few, if any, national Christians today, but there are large numbers of expatriate Christians.

Region 3: Mauritania, Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia. The ancient Christian communities have disappeared. There are very few national Christians and only small numbers of expatriate Christians.

The differences in these regions should not be underestimated in reflecting on Christian presence and witness. In Region 1, even if Arab Christians are viewed as a distinct community, there is at least a recognition of the existence of this group. But in Morocco, secondary school students of several major cities in 1989 perceived no distinction between Arabs and Muslims, nor did they even give recognition to another possibility, since “Arabic-speaking people are, *ipso facto*, viewed as Muslims” (Suleiman, 1989, p. 20). While Jordan’s king includes senior church leaders among his circle of advisors, Morocco’s King Hassan II told the representative of Pope John Paul II, “*Monseigneur, il n’existe pas de population marocaine chrétienne*” (“Monseigneur, there are no Moroccan Christians”) (Laurent, 1993, p. 235)—even while his police had frequently detained and at times abused those who had turned to Christ.

Christians in the Middle East can be broadly grouped into four categories. For a fuller review of the subject, consider, on

¹ Unless otherwise noted, I will use “Middle East” hereafter to refer to the broader region including North Africa, Sudan, Iran, and Turkey.

an introductory level, Myers (1998). Napper (1992) provides a more complete treatment by an Evangelical missionary, and for a detailed treatment of the subject, read Horner (1989) or the excellent overview of the Middle East Council of Churches (1986).

In Region 1 we find the ancient churches which trace a continuous presence over hundreds of years. These churches can be grouped into four categories (Napper, 1992, pp. 15-16):

- The Assyrian Church of the East, sometimes called the Nestorians, separated from others in the 5th century over the doctrine of the nature of Christ.
- The Oriental Orthodox churches, including the Armenian, Ethiopian, Syrian, and Coptic (Egyptian), separated from Constantinople by the year 500 in disagreement with the conclusions of the Council of Chalcedon.
- The Eastern Orthodox churches include those with patriarchs in Alexandria, Cyprus, Jerusalem, Antioch, and Constantinople (now Istanbul).
- The Uniate churches, or Eastern Catholic, include the Armenian Catholics, Coptic Catholics, Syrian Catholics, Chaldeans, and Maronites. In large part, these churches were formed from those who turned in theology and allegiance from their traditional head to Rome.

A second group, also principally in Region 1, are those Protestant² churches which trace their roots to missions from America and Europe which began in the 1800s. Most of their members came from the ancient churches.

A third group are the Muslim background believers (MBBs), “people from

Muslim families who have turned to Christ. They are found in Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant churches, and in none” (Myers, 1998). And, of course, they are found in churches and cell groups made up entirely of MBBs.

Finally, a fourth group are the expatriate Christians.³ Their presence is of particular significance in Region 2. The national origin of these expatriates is global, from India to the Philippines to North America, across Europe and including several countries of Region 1. Their various host country governments often allow a degree of freedom for public worship within the confines of the expatriate, non-Islamic community.

Muslim attitudes toward Christians

Finally, we must briefly consider the Muslim attitude toward Christians in their midst. Bishop Kenneth Cragg (1979, p. 274), respected by Muslims and Christians alike for his intimate knowledge of Islam and Islamic culture, reminds us: “Here we need to remember that Islam is far other than a religious option of opinions, freely chosen or freely abandoned. It is a totality which includes a dimension very like nationality, as well as belief. There is no more tenacious community than Islam. The traditional concept of apostasy is the negative side of this. Islam, at least in Arab and most Asian lands, is hardly yet a faith one is free to leave. Its tolerance, historically, has meant a freedom of continuing what one may have been, if born outside it, e.g., Jewish or Christian. Or it meant a freedom to migrate into Islam. There was no liberty for the born Muslim to migrate

² Although “Evangelical” is often used to describe these churches, since they do not all adhere to “Evangelical theology” in WEF terminology, I will refer to these churches as “Protestant.”

³ Here I refer to the general expatriate population, not to those small numbers who have intentionally gone as missionaries to a number of Middle Eastern countries.

out of it. It was never supposed that a Muslim would desire to become anything else, and were he to do so it would be indicative of the utmost perversity.... The role of minorities is notoriously difficult in many cultures. Islam has a better record than some, in letting 'others' be. But they have to be 'others.' ... It does not envisage that minorities can, should, or may expect to recruit from its own ranks. They may persist by dint of their own natal fertility and their spiritual survival power."

This comment about survival leads us into a consideration of the missiological contribution of the Middle East by looking to the region's rich past.

Missiological Contributions From the Past

The Bible is a Middle Eastern book. Until Acts 16, the human events recorded took place on Middle Eastern soil. Drawing on a childhood and career rooted in Middle Eastern lands, Kenneth Bailey (1983, 1992) aptly illustrates that the Bible is best understood when we also understand its original setting. Although we recognize that God speaks to all humanity through the Bible and that even Middle Eastern culture does not alone unlock all its truth, insights from the historical past as well as the modern Middle Eastern milieu will aid us in our missiology, wherever we are.

Where did missiology begin? Andrew Walls (1999) suggests that Origen, born about 185 A.D. in Alexandria, deserves the title "Father of Mission Studies." "He saw the need for Egyptian gold and Egyptian cloth to furnish the tabernacle in the wilderness, and he turned the learning of the Greek world to the worship and glorification of God." But Origen also saw that

"spoiling the Egyptians" was no easy matter. Far more followed the paths of Jeroboam, who brought from Egypt the idea of the golden calves set up at Bethel and Dan, than those who took what is useful to make objects for divine worship (Walls, 1999, p. 104).

Space allows us to touch on only a few of the significant missiological insights from this era. Issues such as persecution, the priesthood of all believers, the link between social action and evangelism, and the Christian's public role and apologetics in a hostile society are not merely 20th century issues.

Tertullian, born about 160 A.D. to a Roman centurion, observed from Carthage (modern Tunis) that "the blood of the martyrs," blood which he had too often seen spilled before and after his conversion, "is the seed of the church." Among his many writings are his later views maintaining the priesthood of all believers. "He maintained the right of any Christian man, if far from an existing church, to baptize, administer the Lord's Supper, and undertake any task normally reserved to the recognized leaders" (Daniel, 1992, pp. 190-191).

As the plague brought death to Carthage, Cyprian urged the Christians not to leave the city, but to care for the sick and bury the dead. Although he himself was martyred short years later, these acts of love did much to win the hearts of the people (Daniel, 1992, pp. 174-179).

Although the Islamic armies quickly took political power throughout much of the Middle East, religious conversion tended to spread over many decades, even centuries.⁴ Born some 30 years after Muhammad, John of Damascus was the son of a government official in the Umayyad capital. After becoming the victim of

⁴ See Ira Lapidus' (1988) comprehensive history for a readable but detailed study, especially pp. 242ff.

political intrigues, he became a monk. The miraculous restoration of his hand, severed by order of the caliph, was a sign of his innocence. The caliph, seeking to make amends, offered John great wealth and honors, but John refused everything (University of Balamand, n.d.). Known for his systematic formulation of Orthodox doctrines, he was also active in responding to Islamic theology during the middle of the 8th century. He referred to Islam as a Christian heresy. Some of his arguments, such as using Quranic titles for Jesus to argue for his divinity, are still used by Christians (Chapman, 1995, pp. 205-206; Nazir-Ali, 1983, p. 145).

Timothy, the Nestorian patriarch in Baghdad, had a similar level of dialogue with the Abassid court late in the 8th century. The anonymous correspondence between al-Hashimi and al-Kindi, written about 820 A.D., provides over 200 pages of Christian response to Islam, apologetic arguments which are still valid (Chapman, 1995, pp. 207-208; Nazir-Ali, 1983, p. 145).

In Cordoba, at the far end of the Arab world of the day, early in the 9th century a different approach was taken. In contrast to the accommodation of Islam afforded by many Christians, St. Eulogius' eschatology linked the Antichrist to Islam. His writings openly challenged the bases of Islamic faith. A martyrs' movement arose with at least 50 Christians beheaded over a decade. Only the Emir's threat that all Christians would be put to death caused moderate Christians to pressure the more radical to silence (Wolf, 1996).

The Crusades severely damaged the ancient churches of the East, contributing to the ascendancy of Islam and the eventual capture of Constantinople. Muslim minds were poisoned against Christianity. In the ensuing years, rather than creating initiatives to reach out to Islam, the ancient churches settled into something of a steady state in relationship with the po-

litical rulers, whose attitudes toward the minority Christians varied over time. Attempts were made to minimize defections not only to Islam but also to missionary efforts from Rome. As Napper (1992, p. 12) observes, "Innovation was out. Community solidarity, religious and social, was all important." But Nazir-Ali (1983, p. 145) insists that "their tremendously important achievement in coming to terms with Islam and maintaining a Christian presence (however emasculated) in Muslim countries is often ignored when Muslim-Christian dialogue is discussed."

Western Protestant missionaries of the 1800s entered a setting dominated by Islam, in which the Orthodox patriarchates were weakened by the political power of the Ottoman rulers, although the Maronite and other Catholic churches displayed more vitality (Sabra, 1998). No simple explanation describes the motivations and strategies of these dedicated workers and the various agencies which sent them. One desired result, the conversion of numerous Muslims, was not achieved. However, two other results do affect mission in the Middle East today. Most obvious is the formation of the new Protestant churches, made up in large part of converts from the ancient churches. Less tangible yet significant are the challenges to trust and mutual understanding between the Protestants (including those who arrived in recent years) and other churches.

Contemporary Missiological Contributions of the Middle East Churches

Missiological contributions from the Middle East come in various forms. One contribution is found, and at times unfortunately lost, in the rich history of the region. More questions than answers are available concerning the early missionary successes of the Nestorians and Egyptian

Christians, the interaction of Christians with Muhammad in Arabia, and the failure of North African Christians to extend further south.

Today, freedom exists for public discussion of issues of importance to the legally established Christian communities. The websites of the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC), <http://www.mecchurches.org/>, and the Orthodox University of Balamand, <http://www.balamand.edu.lb/> (including a link to their Center for Christian-Muslim Studies), demonstrate this freedom and provide a sampling of some of their missiological contributions.

However, once the focus switches from theology or internal affairs of the Christian community and from coexistence with the majority Muslims to intentional evangelistic outreach among Muslims and integration of Muslim converts into the churches, then, if anything is being said or done, there is no freedom for discussion in public forums. Some Middle Easterners do write on these themes, ranging from evangelistic websites and radio broadcasts to books and doctoral dissertations. But these expressions tend to be made only by those who live outside the region. Indeed, the very real security constraints which limit our brothers and sisters from openly disseminating their thoughts also limit the scope of this paper, lest we harm others through our incessant desire to know details which perhaps we do not need to know.

Having said this, among those involved in outreach among Muslims in the Middle East, there is a very significant missiology. Unlike what we might call the “formal missiology” associated with centers of formal education, I suggest that it is a “non-formal missiology” which fits in with the nonformal mode of training so vital to the growth of the church beyond its current perimeters.

Frieda Haddad (1987), from Lebanon, helps us see the importance of such a nonformal missiology in the Middle Eastern setting: “It has too often been forgotten in the past that for the Arab Middle East, the spoken word, not the written one, is the main cultural carrier.... Moreover, while speaking about the future of mission in such a culture, we have to bear in mind that the Arab culture, having been born in the desert, bears its stamp. In a desert the landscape is not cluttered with too many objects and therefore the eye is able to encompass vast expanses with great clarity. An object stands silhouetted against the barren land as well as the sky and is distinguishable from other objects so that the eye is able to take it in at one time in its entirety. It thus is in the habit of looking at the totality of the object rather than becoming entangled with details. The mind develops an approach to knowledge that has a tendency to emphasize the whole, not the part, of direct life experience rather than discursive knowledge, and therefore stresses faith-as-experience rather than as propagation of a body of doctrine. To the importance of what is ‘heard,’ we would also therefore stress what is ‘seen.’”

What, then, are some of the issues of importance and key contributions from the Middle East?

Christian unity

Several streams have come together in the move toward formal unity among the churches of the Middle East (Middle East Council of Churches, 1998). As early as 1902, the Ecumenical (Orthodox) Patriarch of Constantinople issued an encyclical regarding relationships with Catholics and Protestants, while even before the 1910 Edinburgh conference Protestants had been seeking ways to work together.

Writing in 1955, the Iranian Anglican (now retired bishop) H. B. Dehqani-Taft (1955, p. 322) declared: “Inter-church cooperation and friendship are good, but they are not enough for a country like Iran. If the missionaries were certain to stay in the country indefinitely, and if there were no sense of urgency, church union might not have seemed so pressing. Things being as they are in the world today, at least the younger churches in Iran must unite in one organized church or, if one may dare to say so, face the possibility of extinction when the darkness comes.”

Spiritual life, not formal unity, has doubtless been the key factor in preserving the Iranian churches since 1979. But such pressures on the churches helped lead to the formation of the Near East Christian Council in 1956 and, by 1974, the formation of the Middle East Council of Churches. With the inclusion approved in 1995 of the Ancient (Assyrian) Church of the East, all of the major conciliar churches of the region were linked.

Relationships between several Evangelical churches—and especially those scattered congregations of MBBs—and the churches of the MECC, however, have not reached such a degree of formal unity. Gabriel Habib, an Orthodox theologian and then Executive Secretary of the MECC, wrote an open letter to Evangelicals worldwide as they prepared for the 1989 Lausanne II congress (Habib, 1990). The theme of the congress, “Proclaim Christ Until He Comes: The Whole Church Taking the Whole Gospel to the Whole World,” expressed an aim which, Habib stated, “Middle Eastern churches would support.” Decrying the lack of knowledge and effort among expatriate missionaries to learn about Middle Eastern Christianity, Habib highlighted a need for the recognition of the work of the Holy Spirit in all the church—Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant.

Some Evangelicals have attempted to overcome the divisions. The group Evangelicals for Middle East Understanding provides one avenue, in particular linking Western Evangelicals with the ancient Middle Eastern churches. An Iranian Evangelical leader affirmed to me the importance of relating to the historic churches and of recognizing what God is doing among them. But he also stressed the importance of unity within the Evangelical churches themselves. He noted that publication of some arrangements between the churches, especially regarding outreach among Muslims, could prove harmful.

One of the major obstacles to unity in the Middle East is the issue of proselytism. David Kerr, with the commendation of Gabriel Habib (1996), deals with proselytism from a Middle Eastern perspective. Kerr (1996, p. 13) refers to a 1989 MECC study document which looks at proselytism in terms of the historical approach of the Catholic missions of medieval times and later Protestants, as well as contemporary “sects” (MECC’s word), by which “... the MECC means millenarian or messianic groups, independent ‘neo-missionary’ groups of fundamentalist persuasions, groups that represent syncretistic forms of religious universalism, charismatic renewal movements within established churches, and new religious movements that claim to draw upon Asian forms of religious spirituality. While proselytism in West Asia/North Africa occurs unconsciously as well as consciously, its underlying presupposition is that a missionary ‘vacuum’ exists throughout the region, where indigenous churches are considered to be lacking missionary motivation and resources.”

It is evident that, even with good intentions, a great gap of understanding remains. What one group might define as seeking spiritual renewal, another group

calls proselytism. As Cecil Robeck (1996, p. 7) points out, "Those who use the term [proselytism] have defined it *for* Evangelicals rather than *with* Evangelicals." George Sabra (1998), a Lebanese Protestant theologian, provides a challenge which may help point the way ahead:

"To bring about a change, Evangelicals must learn not only to respect their Orthodox sisters and brothers in their different traditions, but also to work with them in witnessing to the gospel and speaking the truth to the world. Evangelicals must come to recognize that not all non-Evangelicals are 'nominal' Christians. For their part, the Orthodox must make a place for non-Eastern Christianity, i.e., Evangelical Christianity, as an expression of world-wide Christianity, and not simply as a foreign transplant in their 'territories.' Some Orthodox in positions of intellectual and ecclesiastical leadership should abandon the notion that individuals born in a certain religious community are the exclusive property of that community."

These concepts of formal unity meet their test in the crucible of opposition and isolation. I have followed with great interest the missiological struggles of a North African colleague as he has appreciated the warm friendship and hospitality of a Catholic priest, now martyred, yet has wanted to maintain a protective distance between the church which meets in his home and the theological failings he perceives in the Roman confession. This man trusted his martyred Catholic friend; trusting the Catholic Church is another thing.

Dialogue and relating to other religions

Middle Eastern church history is a vital source in developing a theology of religions. Perhaps only southern India provides a setting of equal length of interaction between Christianity and other faiths.

In the contemporary setting, dialogue with Islam in the Middle East is principally carried out, on a formal level, by the legally established churches. The MECC has engaged in various conferences, such as the 1998 "Abrahamic Heritage" gathering of Muslims and Christians, which was favorably described as "an illustration of how civil society in the Arab world is a viable option" (Makari, 1998).

Darius Panaphour (1996) is not so optimistic about such gatherings: "There is a tendency to become cynical about the possibility of any good coming out of formal dialogues on Muslim-Christian relations. They are usually attended by those who are eager to see differences eliminated or at least discarded as far as possible. Indeed, for the World Council of Churches, the mission is not the conversion of non-believers but dialogue itself."

Dialogue between Muslims and Evangelicals, including MBBs, does take place but normally in the sphere of private witness. One MBB who has found a public arena in the streetside coffee shop is Hasan al-Ghazali (1989): "Following initial discussions, we invite people to our home for deeper talks. But it is very important to speak the kernel of our message in the coffee shop. We must have the same language in private as in public."

Another MBB who has dared to venture into the public sphere wrote a letter published anonymously in a North African newspaper some two or three years ago. Responding to an editorial attack on those who had turned to Christ from Islam, the writer declared that he and his friends had not betrayed their homeland nor broken any civil laws. His appeal was that they could be recognized for what they were and granted at least the rights normally allotted in Islamic culture to Christians and Jews.

Reconciliation, justice, and peacemaking

There is an increasing awareness that God's people must be involved in issues of reconciliation, justice, and peacemaking. Elias Chacour's widely circulated biography (Chacour & Hazard, 1987) passionately demonstrates one response from a Palestinian Christian perspective to issues of injustice and ethnic divisions. Another Palestinian, the Anglican Naem Ateek (1986) of Jerusalem, commends the numerous schools, hospitals, and programs to care for the aged and handicapped—services provided by Christians. But he argues that we must move beyond service to peacemaking.

A program run by Palestinian Evangelicals takes Arab and Jewish youth on trips into the desert. There they find unity in the hardship of the desert and their common Christian faith, the program itself stressing the centrality of Christ's atonement in any effort for reconciliation.

Tuvya Zaretsky (1995) gives another vital Middle Eastern perspective on these themes. A Jewish Christian (his term), he rejects both the extreme which "takes the form of Christian Zionism and ... a 'Christianized' version of human rights." Avoiding what he considers a low view of eschatology, Zaretsky looks to the day when political strife will be ended, when Jesus sets up his throne on earth. In the meantime, though, "he brings peace ... to the Middle East and wherever he reigns as Lord and Savior in the hearts of individuals."

Suffering, persecution, and perseverance

One cannot think of the Middle East without thinking of the suffering of Christians. The 20th century began with the massacre of over one million Armenian Christians at the hands of the Turks; it

ended with the ongoing murder of tens of thousands of Sudanese Christians.

One response to suffering is conversion. Far too many Christians, over the centuries, succumbed to the many pressures they faced and converted to Islam.

Another response to suffering is emigration. Speaking of the Middle Eastern churches, David Zeidan (1996) states: "Once large, relatively powerful and missionary minded, [the Middle Eastern churches] have gradually dwindled due to devastating wars, massacres, conversion to Islam under long-term Muslim pressure, second rate status, expulsion, emigration, and ever lower birth rates compared to their Muslim neighbours."

Only the Coptic Church, Zeidan says, has bucked this trend, whereas, "Evangelicals, because of their good contacts to the West, have been in the forefront of emigration in this century. Whilst their numbers in the Middle East have been constantly replenished by conversion from the older churches, their emigration accelerated the general tendency to an ever smaller percentage of Christians in the total population."

Sudanese Christians have set an example for the world in their response to suffering. Many northern Sudanese believers have paid a great personal price for their bold witness, while God has blessed them with a vibrant, growing church. Sudan bears the reputation as a hotbed for Islamic fundamentalism. Perhaps it will not be long until it is also known as a source of great Evangelical missionary passion.

How should we respond to persecution? An Iranian Christian leader believes that: "We need to stand for our brothers who are being persecuted, we need more prayer for them. But the church needs to realize that when Paul could have appealed to his Roman citizenship in Philippi

in the first instance he didn't do it. There are times when God uses persecution for his purposes.... We want the Christian church to be safe, but safety is not the only goal. The goal is to preach the gospel at the cost of death if necessary. If our only approach is to bail out the Christian church at the cost of not leaving a witness in the area, then something is wrong."

Churches around the world should learn from the Middle East important lessons in perseverance, not just through one lifetime but across long generations.

Contextualization

Two years ago I was asking my leader and mentor, a Sudanese Arab, for advice on an issue involving Christian family life and witness in an Islamic setting. One family was facing incredible pressures due to the incessant stream of visitors at their door. "What," I asked, "was the culturally appropriate response to these visitors?"

"Sometimes our culture tells us to do one thing," he replied, "but if the Bible tells us to do something else, we have to do what the Bible says." This godly Sudanese man, deeply committed to personal relationships, would not hide behind "culture" to support an unbiblical practice.

Frieda Haddad (1987, pp. 73-74) refers to a "print-made split between head and heart that never quite made its way into the Arab world." Mission strategy will fail, she says, if it fails to see the Bible not just as a book for private devotion but as "a word to be heard and interpreted in community." Commending the increased use by Christians of electronic media, she points out that Muslim teachers never distribute "copies of the Koran and other educational printed material ... without cassettes and video-recordings of celebrations and major feasts, thus underlining and strengthening the global village's collective unconscious so necessary to the spread of the faith."

Middle Eastern Christians do make a significant contribution to the way the Christian message is presented. Several of the major Christian radio and television broadcasting agencies are staffed by Middle Easterners, not just in the "on camera" roles but in positions where content and production decisions are made.

In terms of Christian lifestyle, Middle Easterners are increasingly taking a significant role in coaching missionaries from other regions. One example of this is the insightful book of Christine Mallouhi (1994), long-term resident of the Middle East and wife of an Arab. She helps see many cultural issues, at least partially, through Middle Eastern eyes. As Elias Chacour says in the foreword, "... reading the mentality, tradition, and rules of decency ... is far more important than the hopeless attempt to learn Arabic or any other African or Asian language. The language that communicates the best is the one that needs no words, but regards attitudes and inspires respect of one's own self and of the host country."

Another very positive insight from the Middle East is in the contextual understanding of the Scriptures. Kenneth Bailey (1983, 1992), who has spent much of his life in the Middle East, draws from the parables of Jesus rich meaning on a popular level and deep theological insights which would be hidden to those who do not understand the Middle Eastern cultural setting.

Sobhi Malek (1989, pp. 212-213) presents the case that we must meet Muslims "at their level in two major areas: theology and culture." Regarding theology, in his witness Malek first presents Christianity as an encounter with Christ, not as theological dogma. Regarding culture, the gospel must be presented "in a form that appeals to them culturally and attracts their attention.... Muslims can ... become

authentically Christian and yet retain their Islamic culture.”

However, several Middle Eastern Evangelical leaders are concerned that some issues of contextualization are being pushed too far (e.g., Madany, 1997, and related papers linked to that web page).

A Lebanese missions leader, intimately involved with the *Jesus* film project, told me that in one major Middle Eastern country Muslims are beginning to accept the name “Yesua” for Jesus rather than the Quranic “Isa.” His source, a respected national leader in the country, believes this is due to the use of “Yesua” in the *Jesus* film translation. By comparison, there has been some difficulty in relationship to church leaders in two North African countries. There, the missions leader told me, “Messiah of God” was used rather than “Son of God” in the local Arabic dialect version. Evidently the North Africans had, all along, preferred to use “Son of God,” but expatriate workers, on the grounds of contextualization, had argued for the less confrontational but also less biblical phrase.

Elsewhere, some expatriates would suggest that MBBs refer to themselves in Islamic terms as people who are “submitted to God” and who style their worship and community around a “Jesus mosque.” Although some MBBs have doubtless gone along with this, many others reject it completely. Kabyle Christians of Algeria and the Turkish believers who have legally registered their churches want to be known as Christians, not in the pejorative sense linked with Western culture but, as at Antioch, as true followers of Christ.

Summarizing this position, an Iranian leader told me: “When it comes to Islam, the issue of contextualization is sometimes taken too far. What is important is that we need to share the love of Christ openly, and the Word of God says, ‘You shall know the truth and the truth shall liberate.’

There is so much deceit in Islam that you don’t want to keep somebody in that situation. People would go to the extent to say, ‘Let them stay in an Islamic setting, Islamic churches.’ That is out of the question for us, because historically the way the church has approached Islam has not been a successful one. In the beginning we fought with them, then we ignored them, and now there is a tendency to appease them.... In evangelism we contextualize to the point you want to understand the culture, become a ‘Jew to the Jew and Greek to Greeks.’ Yes. But you don’t want to compromise to the extent that there is continuity and discontinuity.”

Ethnicity

An understanding of ethnicity in the Middle East unlocks not all but at least several important doors in understanding church history as well as the contemporary challenge to the churches.

The church of ancient Carthage (Tunis) was strong. Why did it die out? One contributing factor lies along ethnic lines. Church leadership structures tended to be Roman, as was the language of the Scriptures (Daniel, 1992, p. 231). Only in these days are the Scriptures being provided in the language of the native Berber populations. Studies of the Councils of Nicea and Chalcedon and of controversies involving groups such as the Donatists and Montanists are often limited to the theological content alone. What more can be learned when we also consider the possible ethnic divisions between the various camps, difficulties for those who did not speak Latin or Greek fluently, or perhaps had “visa problems” and could not attend the great councils due to national origin?

In the Arab world today, Arabization is a major threat to minority populations, including Christian groups. In the Middle East this opens new challenges in helping the youth avoid succumbing to the

dominant culture. Kabyle Berbers of Algeria resent the imposition of Arabic by the national government and proudly, at times defiantly, insist on using their own tongue. Many Kabyle Christians share these feelings of ethnic identity, and when they are with Algerian Arab Christians they may settle for French as a common language of worship.

On the other hand, in another North African country, a Christian leader of a Berber ethnic group leads worship in Arabic and insists that there should be no division based on ethnicity. His preoccupation is for the formation and maintenance of a united national church. An Iranian Christian leader recognizes that there should be evangelistic witness in the various languages of his country. But he fears that too much emphasis in the church on ethnic origins will create “a division that is not there.”

Ethnic issues also compound the problems of incorporating MBBs into churches of openly Christian communities. In a limited number of churches, it appears to be working. But the long-term test perhaps lies not in whether the existing churches say such converts are welcome, but whether those MBBs actually feel welcome.

Missionary outreach

There was tremendous missionary vitality in the first centuries of the church. The Church of the East followed the Silk Road to China, Egyptians sailed far down the Nile, and Mediterranean Christians marched—and witnessed—in the Roman legions occupying Britain.

Little can be freely said about contemporary missionary outreach by Middle Eastern Christians, especially when it deals with Muslims and the other religious groups of the region. New signs of vitality and missionary zeal, however, are a cause

for rejoicing and encouragement to God’s people worldwide.

Conclusion

Recently, a brother in Christ brought me dates from the desert of Algeria. If you were to sit at my kitchen table we could share some of this sweet fruit. Far better, though, would be to travel together to the desert and, with the warm evening wind in our faces and a cup of sweet tea in one hand, enjoy the fruit in its natural environment.

My writing has been a feeble attempt, from an outsider who is very much still a learner, to share some of the fruit of Middle Eastern missiology. To enjoy its full savor, we must go together to a place where springs gush forth in the desert, where our Christian brothers and sisters of the Middle East work out in daily life a missiology whose flavor can only be captured in part when print and cyberspace separate it from daily life.

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David Greenlee's years in Colombia (where his parents were missionaries) and at high school in Ecuador helped to shape his perspective on missions. After training in electrical engineering, David joined Operation Mobilization, serving first in a technical capacity on the ship "Logos" and then in various leadership roles for the "Logos," "Doulos," and "Logos II." After 14 years serving around the world with OM's ship ministry, David obtained his Ph.D. in intercultural studies from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Illinois. Several years leading OM's teams in one part of the Muslim world led into his current role for the mission as International Research and Strategy Associate. David met his wife Vreni, from Switzerland, on the "Logos." Their daughter Rebekka was 16 months old at the time they experienced the shipwreck of that vessel. Shortly after that experience, Jonathan was born in the U.S., and three years later, while the ship "Logos II" toured West Africa, Sarah was born in Côte d'Ivoire.



Further contributions to missiology from an Arab perspective

RAED
ABDUL MASIH

TWO THOUSAND YEARS after the establishment of the church, at the threshold of a new era and the beginning of a new millennium, we notice that the church worldwide is still facing many challenges in the area of missions. Nevertheless, many contributions have been made to the area of missiology, as better methods of reaching out to others in their different social and cultural living conditions are found.

After 2,000 years of preaching and mission work, the number of Christians today is only 33% of the total world population. Moslems number about 18%. This means that Christians and Moslems together comprise more than half of humanity. Moreover, these two religions are the most widespread geographically of all the world's religions.

Islam,¹ the only major faith younger than Christianity, has rapidly become a world religion. It is second only to Christianity in its missionary zeal and worldwide outreach. In some parts of the world (both East and West), it is making converts faster than is Christianity.

What kind of relations do Moslems and Christians want in the 21st century? What are some of the obstacles and challenges to be reckoned with? What steps can be taken to overcome the obstacles and meet the challenges? How can the church better reach out to the Moslem world?

The book of Acts and the Epistles document the missionary enterprises of the church of the first century. The history of the church can be viewed as a history of its expansion by missionary work. In the 19th and 20th centuries, this has become a vast Christian enterprise, the size of which is

¹ The term "Islam," as Jamal Badawi (1989, p. 187) talks about his faith, "is derived from the word that means *peace* or *submission ... to Allah*."

not easily perceived because it is so scattered. Almost every European nation has its missionary patron who brought the faith to the region—Augustine of England, Patrick of Ireland, Boniface of Germany, and many others. The church has always been conscious of the mandate to make disciples of all nations (Matt. 28:19), and both Catholic and Protestant churches have undertaken extensive missionary operations.

The sudden rise and rapid spread of Islam in the 7th century marked a turning point in history and created a particular challenge to Christianity that is still noticed today. Will Durant (1950, p. 155; quoted in Kane, 1971, p. 49) observed, “The explosion of the Arabian Peninsula into the conquest and conversion of half the Mediterranean world is the most extraordinary phenomenon in medieval history.” With lightning speed, the Arabs conquered Damascus (635 A.D.), Antioch (636 A.D.), Jerusalem (638 A.D.), Caesarea (640 A.D.), and Alexandria (642 A.D.). To consolidate their power, they established the Umayyad Caliphate in Damascus (661–750 A.D.) and the Abbasid Caliphate in Baghdad (750–1058 A.D.).

A second tide of Moslem invasion took place in the 13th and 14th centuries. The Ottoman Turks and the Mongols of Central Asia became fierce and fanatical followers of the prophet Muhammad and

went on the rampage, pillaging and destroying everything in their path. Seljuk Turks, who had earlier been evangelized by the Nestorians, became Muslims and occupied large areas of Asia Minor. It was against these intruders that the Crusades were launched. Certain areas of Syria and the Holy Land were regained, but on the whole the Crusades were a failure.

By the 15th century, the Ottoman Turks had invaded Greece and the Balkans. Constantinople fell in 1453 A.D. At this time, the Arabs were retreating in Spain, giving up Alhambra (Granada), their last stronghold, in 1492 (Kane, 1971, pp. 49–52).

The Meaning of Missions

When we talk about missions and missionaries, the first thing that comes to mind is something *foreign*, something that comes from *outside* one’s own country. As a matter of fact, the work of missions is not the work of the West or the East or any specific nation. Rather, it is God’s plan to reach out to humanity (John 3:16).

Missions² means the ministry of the gospel, and all evangelists³ are bringers of good news. Since for our purposes the Bible is the source of these words, it would be good to make a quick summary of the biblical background of evangelism and missions.⁴ This study is closely connected to the theological basis of evangelism.⁵

² The word “mission” is derived from the Latin word *mitto* (“send”), denoting a task that a person or group has been assigned and sent out to perform. The New Testament uses the word in a specific way, denoting the ministry of the gospel in both word and deed. The Greek word *diakonia* is also translated “mission” in Acts 12:25. *Apostello* is used to denote sending on service or with a commission, and *apostolos* (“apostle”) is one sent forth.

³ Greek *euangelistes* (“a bringer of good news”) (Acts 21:8; Eph. 4:11; 2 Tim. 4:5). Also *euangelizomai* (“to announce good news”).

⁴ There are many good books on the biblical background and basis for missions, such as Senior & Stuhlmüller (1983). (This book is written from a Catholic perspective.)

⁵ Many books have been written on the theology of Christian missions, such as Anderson (1961) and Bosch (1991).

Theological Basis of Evangelism

Theology and evangelism are relevant. The heart of the gospel is theological. Sadly, some theologians look with suspicion upon evangelism, considering it shallow and overly emotional, and many evangelists avoid theology. The time may come when many will study theology without evangelism, but there can be no effective and permanent evangelism without theology.

Evangelism and theology complement each other

The leading evangelists of each generation have considered theology a help rather than a hindrance. There are many examples, including the Apostle Paul, Augustine, Jonathan Edwards, and Charles Finney. These men were all mighty theologians as well as great evangelists.

Theology often produces revival, and revival greatly strengthens theology (see Finney, 1964). Historically, an overlooked or otherwise dormant theological truth has been used to give biblical weight and drive to every great revival. In the Reformation, it was “salvation by grace.” In the Wesleyan revival, it was the “new birth.” In the Western revival, the conscience was awakened to the great theological truth that all men are accountable before God and are responsible to co-operate with God in repentance and faith to receive salvation.

Evangelism depends upon theology

The evangelist confronts the lost world with Evangelical truth and urges this truth upon those who hear. Evangelism is the living expression of doctrinal theology. It is founded upon the total meaning of the Christian faith. It must draw upon the very truth by which the church lives and moves and has its being (Kantonen, 1954, p. 3).

Theology is to evangelism what the skeleton is to the body. The great system of theological truths forms the skeleton which enables our revealed religion to stand. But what theology—whether Protestant, Orthodox, or Catholic—that is another question altogether!

We need to keep in mind that inadequate theology curbs evangelism. For example, an inadequate theology based on humanism and naturalistic psychology undermines the main thrust of evangelism. Humanistic theology is inadequate because it neglects the evidence of God’s self-revelation. Humanism depersonalized God and robbed us of the power of God. And naturalistic psychology has subtly poisoned the currents of theological thought by explaining all human action in psychological terms. It distorts the modern conception of conversion.

A vital theology of evangelism

Two of theology’s most vital points are the issues of sin and salvation and repentance and faith.

Regarding the former, Fisher (1951, p. 53) states, “Salvation is not a matter of laws and regulations, ceremonies and institutions ... it is a redemptive fellowship between a personal God and a personal man.” Salvation is God’s answer to the sin problem. Through the cross, God provides forgiveness, which has to be through a personal contact with God.

Hebrews 11:1 reminds us that faith is confidence in God. Fisher (1951, p. 55) observes, “The necessary response may be described as a complete change of allegiance on man’s part from sin to God and a trusting committal of self to God.” Repentance, like faith, is a work of grace. Man responds to the goodness of God (Rom. 2:4). When the goodness of God leads to repentance, then God forgives sins.

Biblical Background

In the New Testament, we find that Jesus used both mass evangelism and personal evangelism.

What evangelism is

Evangelism is bearing witness to the gospel with soul aflame and teaching and preaching with the express purpose of making disciples of those who hear. The inner drive which we call *passion* is basic in evangelism (Whitesell, 1949, p. 22). Jesus was moved with compassion towards the crowds (Matt. 9:36).

Since evangelism includes a confrontation, there can be no adequate definition of evangelism apart from the Evangel, the directions given the sinner when he is confronted with Christ. The proclamation calls the sinner to repent—to turn back to God, salvation, and eternal life.

A positive spirit in evangelism is also important (Phil. 4:13). One important underlying principle that is deep-seated in the spirit of evangelism is sacrifice. And we need to remember that the spirit of evangelism which is basic in soul-winning cannot endure apart from the presence and power of the Holy Spirit.

What evangelism is not

Some people think that evangelism is everything we do (Sweazey, 1953, p. 19). But many times we do everything except evangelism. So evangelism is *not* everything we do. Evangelism is *not* leading people to unite with the church. On the other hand, a healthy New Testament evangelism will add great numbers to our churches. Evangelism is *not* merely enlisting people in a new kind of activity. And evangelism is *not* syncretism. Syncretism would ignore the very heart of the gospel of Christ.

Inculturation and Syncretism

It is worth saying a word on syncretism here in relation to the Christian faith and evangelism. In the Bangkok Assembly of 1973, which had the theme “Culture and Identity,” the World Council of Churches affirmed that “culture shapes the human voice that answers the voice of Christ.” In 1983, the Vancouver Assembly reminded us that “culture is what holds a community together.” In 1991, the Canberra Assembly, reflecting on the theme “Spirit of Unity – Reconcile Your People,” stated, “The diversity of cultures is of immediate relevance ... for it affects both the relationships within churches and also the relationship with people of other faiths.” Today we face the challenge of bringing the gospel into the Arabic culture, which is influenced and dominated by the Muslim religion.

The church, being aware of the cultural challenges relating to faith and syncretism, has developed methods of dealing with the various cultures in a way most suited to the cultural context. We are facing a global culture, and we talk about a “global village,” but it is still important to apply evangelism and mission work in a way that adapts to the geographical, ethnic, and religious identities.

Christianity has been present in the Middle East and the Arab world since the first century A.D. The Bible is one source of information regarding the way of life, cultural identity, social life, and traditions of ancient Israel. Roland de Vaux (1997, p. 3) notes that other sources include “texts about the Arabs in pre-Islamic times and ethnographical studies about the Arabs of today. These nomad Arabs, by race and country, are closely related to the Israelites, and what we know of pre-Islamic, modern, and contemporary Arab life can

help us to understand more clearly the primitive organization of Israel.”

The fact that the Arab culture is very close to the culture of biblical times in many ways is both an advantage and a challenge for missionaries. Workers must get to know the language, culture, and history of the Arabs in a way that makes a clear presentation of the gospel possible. But in spite of the common ground, there may still be a barrier to the gospel message, due to the existence of the Muslim faith in the region from the 7th century on.

Contribution to Missiology From the Middle East/ Arab World Perspective

From the experiences of the church in the Middle East/Arab world, many lessons have been learned about how to evangelize the Arab world today. Some of the lessons have been positive, while others have been negative. In both cases, the experiences have contributed much to the field of missions and to missiology in general.

It is good to remember that this region of the world has supplied many missionaries to many parts of the world, as well as martyrs. We need to keep in mind also that Christianity reached the Arabs on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:11). Arab Christians have a history and heritage, according to the following timeline:

- Pre-Islamic era (1st – 7th centuries)
- Islamic rule (7th century on), which can be divided into three periods:

- 7th century until the 15th century
- Ottoman rule (15th century to the beginning of the 20th century)
- Modern era

Arab Christians contributed in many ways to the culture and community in the pre-Islamic era. They also made a contribution to the Islamic state when it came to power in the 7th century and during its golden era in the 9th – 13th centuries. Many Arab Christian poets, scientists, architects, physicians, and theologians were famous in their works and contributions to the community and the church. The Arabic worldview is seen in the many manuscripts that exist today from monasteries in the Middle East. These writings by Arab Christians fit the culture of the Middle East in all its aspects and forms.⁶

Being under Islamic rule, Middle East theologians presented mostly issues such as the cross, the Word of God, the Trinity, the Virgin Mary, the deity of Christ, and the icons in an effort to defend the Christian faith from the attacks of Islam.⁷ They approached mission work in a very clear, apologetic manner.

Today, many people are praying for the Arab Christians, for the local church, and for the work of missions in the Middle East. The term “10/40 window” has been given to the region from 10° to 40° north of the equator, stretching from West Africa to Japan (see Otis, 1995; Johnstone, 1993). The area of the Arab lands of North Africa (as

⁶ One manuscript that has received some attention is found in the British Library in London under the number *Or 4950*. It goes back to the year 877 A.D. and contains writings to an Arab theologian called Abu Qurrah, defending the crucifixion of Christ.

⁷ See, for example, *Entretien d'Elie de Nisibe avec le vizir Ibn 'Ali al-Magrabi, sur l'Unité et la Trinité*. Introduction, édition critique du texte arabe et traduction annotée (Rome, 1979). Also *Une correspondance islamo-chrétienne entre Ibn al-Munaggim, Hunayn Ibn Isbaq et Qusta Ibn Luga*. Introduction, édition, divisions, notes et index par Khalil Samir, traduction et notes par Paul Nwyia, in *Patrologia Orientalis*, N° 185 (Turnhout, 1981).

the region is sometimes defined)⁸ is 15,654,000 sq.km. Only 5% of the land in the Middle East has sufficient water to support cultivation. Johnstone (1993, pp. 69-70) speculated in 1993 that in the year 2000, the total population of the region would be 430,057,000. He estimated that Christians would constitute 5.2% of the population (17.1 million), with a growth rate of 2.4%. Protestants would comprise 0.77% (2.5 million), Catholics 1.7% (5.6 million), and Orthodox 2.7% (9 million).

Unknown minority

There are two important contributions that can be made to mission work among Arabs. One is to take away the many stereotypes that affect the work of missions. The other is to spread the news that there are Arab Christians and that they go back to the first century A.D. When I tell people I meet in the U.S. and Europe that I am a Christian, I always face the question, "And when did you convert from Islam?" Lack of knowledge of the Arabic language keeps people from recognizing that my family name "Abdul Masih" means "Servant of the Messiah," which is a typical Christian name that reflects the faith of a person.

It is true that the Christian presence dwindled to a minority due to the spread of Islam. Yet this minority has accomplished great deeds among the community at all levels. One significant example of the work of Christians in a Muslim surrounding is the ministry of the Bethlehem Bible College among the Palestinian people. Indeed, the local church is lifting up its voice to make it clear to the body of Christ around the world that it is still witnessing for Christ and doing its mission as the Lord commanded.

Minority in a Muslim majority

During the period of Ottoman rule (which was ushered in by the fall of Constantinople to the conquering Turks in 1453 and lasted until the end of World War I), all Christians were regarded as forming a single nation and were treated differently from the Moslems. Later, at the end of the 19th century, great massacres took place. Many Christians, lay people as well as religious, were slaughtered, and many monasteries were destroyed. Many people fled from their home towns, leaving everything behind. Such actions minimized the Christian presence in the region and greatly affected evangelization and the spread of the gospel.

Despite all that the Middle East has gone through and all that has happened to Christians in the region, the Christian presence of faith and prayer is still significant. However, as a minority group living among a Muslim majority, Christians are still treated differently in many ways. For example, they are viewed as infidels because some Christians drink alcohol, which is forbidden in the Quran. Christians are believed to have changed and twisted the words of the real Gospels. According to Islamic teaching, it is lawful to steal from a Christian. Moslems are also taught that they should do acts of mercy and charity only to other Moslems and never to Christians.

Arab Christians: Bridges to the Moslem world

Because Arab Christians existed long before the coming of Islam, they welcomed Islam as part of Middle East culture and history. Today, they share the

⁸ The countries included here are Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iran, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Palestine (West Bank and Gaza), Qatar, Sahara, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, and Yemen.

traditions and cultural heritage of the Moslem Arabs. But a far more important element is the Arabic language.

Alber Hourani (1991, pp. 54, 57) writes, "By the 3rd and 4th Islamic centuries (9th or 10th century A.D.), something which was recognizably an 'Islamic world' had emerged.... Men and women in the Near East and the Magrib lived in a universe which was defined in terms of Islam." The defining terms were the Arabic verses of the Quran, which by the 8th century were to be found not only in the pages of the Quran and in the hearts of men, but also on the road signs of Palestine (Sharon, 1966) and on the caliph's coinage (Walker, 1956; Bates, 1988). They were also publicly proclaimed from minarets across the land and were artfully displayed for all to see on monuments of incomparable beauty, such as the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem, which is a supreme monument of Arabicization (Grabar, 1973).

Such Arabicization (the spread of Arabic as the public language of business in the caliphate) brought about the circumstance by the end of the first Islamic century that members of the Christian community living within the *dar al-Islam* ("house of Islam") adopted Arabic not only as their daily language but as their ecclesiastical language as well. This move happened first in the Melkite communities, whose patristic and liturgical tradition was Greek. It is not surprising that members of the monastic communities in the Holy Land took the lead in this enterprise, for the most active centre of Greek culture in the 8th century lay in Palestine, notably in Jerusalem and the neighbouring monasteries. Beginning well into the Greek period and coming into its own in the 9th century, there was a determined undertaking on the part of monastic scholars to present the Christian tradition in the Arabic language, which was the primary bearer of religious culture in the world of

Islam (Griffith, 1988). Surprisingly, some modern writers view this phenomenon as the major stumbling block for Christianity in the Arab world. Bishop Kenneth Cragg (1991, p. 31) writes, "The crux of Arab Christianity might be linguistically expressed; it is bound over to a language that is bound over to Islam." But the new circumstances also provided a new context for Christian theology, as the monks of Palestine were quick to grasp. They seized the opportunity to inculturate their faith into the Islamic, Arabic milieu of the caliphate and to express it in the language of the Quran.

Major efforts were expended in the 9th century to translate the Scriptures and numerous liturgical books into Arabic (Griffith, 1985). In addition, translations were made of patristic and monastic classics that the communities of monks in the Holy Land required in order to function as the intellectual centres of Melkite life in the caliphate (Griffith, 1989). In fact, the majority of the Christian Arabic manuscripts which have survived from this period are just such texts: translations of church books required for religious services or versions of spiritual classics which monks and others might have used for spiritual reading. Nevertheless, among these texts there is a small percentage which are original compositions in Arabic. The writers are the first ones known to us who took advantage of the new opportunity to compose Christian theology in the Palestinian context of the late Umayyad and early Abbasid eras.

Today, many writings are made by Arab Christians on many similar issues, as at the dawn of Islam and during the early centuries of its establishment. The Arab Christian church and Arab Christians are truly the bridges to reach to the Muslim heart. Because they have shared in the language, culture, common history, tradition, and heritage of the Arabs, Arab Christians have

in many ways developed better strategies to reach out to Moslems than Western missionaries have. One example is a greater sensitivity on the part of Arab Christians to the political issues of the Middle East.

Presence of faith and prayer

Mention should be made of some of the characteristics of our faith and mission as Arab Christians. The word “presence” has been chosen as a fact of faith which accompanies our reflection, gives unity to its different aspects, and defines its overall orientation. Presence means that in the midst of the society in which we live, we are a sign of God’s presence in our world. That presence invites us to be with, in, and for, and not against, outside, or on the margin of the society in which we live. This is an essential demand of our faith, our vocation, and our mission.

Presence is situated between two opposing pitfalls: marginalization and dissolution. Marginalization nullifies our mission, and dissolution produces the same effect as regards our identity. Authentic presence is a guarantee of both mission and identity. Presence deepens our faithfulness as a local church to God, to ourselves, and to the society God has given us as the theatre of our earthly progress.

As churches in the Arab world, our Christian presence is not a presence for our own sake alone. Christ did not found his church to serve itself, but that it might be a confessing church with a mission—the same mission as that of the founder and Master.

In the past, Christian communities in the East turned in on themselves because of the constraints of the historical conditions. They lost their sense of mission and witness, content merely with the effort to survive. Today, they are called to free themselves from the after-effects of the past. They are called to incorporate a sense of mission into their lives, to open themselves

up to the world which surrounds them, and to bear witness to the buried treasure that brings joy to their hearts, as it brings joy to the heart of every person (cf. Matt. 13:44-46).

Incarnation in Arab civilization

Christians in the Middle East do not limit themselves to using the Arabic language as a means of expression for their rites, their particular culture, and their daily relations. They have gone beyond this to concern themselves with the future of the whole of culture and civilization. Christians have played an active part through the work of translation and the production of original works. They have thus created an outstanding means of cooperation among Muslims, Jews, and various Christian denominations; it is a model of coexistence. Mutual assistance and cohesion among these three groups have thus become a reality engraved on the fidelity of each side to its own faith and beliefs. We invite Christians, Muslims, and Jews to a creative dialogue in our countries—a dialogue which they can pursue in the new historic conditions which are opening up to the future.

Presence and service

Christ served the disciples and the people around him. He also called his disciples to follow in his footsteps and to be a sign of his presence among men by their service to one another (John 13:13-15). The church has always seen in the example of Christ an urgent call to serve all people, whoever they might be, particularly those who suffer the different forms of human wretchedness. The church is called to serve the whole person, both body and soul.

There are different fields of service—education, health, and many others—and through these fields the good news is also presented. In serving every person in

need, our churches are not acting out of self-interest, and most certainly have no hidden agenda.

Continuing challenges

Due to the political and economic conditions of the Middle East region, the contribution by Arab Christians to the field of missions has been limited. Middle East churches are very limited in both funds and leadership. Nevertheless, many changes have taken place in the last decade or so. A few churches and some individuals are taking the initiative and are pioneering short-term missions. These endeavors are influenced by Western approaches and are ruled by Western methodologies, but they are a beginning. We anticipate further contributions in the future.

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Mission and missiology from Latin America

NORBERTO
SARACCO

MISSION IS INTRINSIC to the very life of the church. There is no other church than a missionary church. To be the church is, therefore, to live in a crossroads situation; to be constantly encountering the world; to be challenged by it and to be impelled by the Spirit of Christ to witness in and to it of the gospel of the kingdom of God” (Costas, 1976, p. 7).

Both the fulfilment of the divine commandment (mission) and the critical reflection on this praxis (missiology) take place in the midst of the ideological, political, economic, social, and religious tensions of a given time. This “external context” (Costas, 1976, p. 7) of missions affects the missionary practice at the same time that it helps shape a certain mission profile.

In this brief presentation, we will approach what are, for us, the distinctive elements, though not the only ones, of mission in and from Latin America. Our interest will focus mainly on the Protestant/Evangelical field; however, we cannot ignore the Catholic side in a continent where this persuasion reaches almost 85% of the population.

Mission in a Context of Christianity

More than 500 years ago (1492 A.D.), Christianity reached Latin America through Spanish Catholicism. The discovery of the American continent was both a political and a religious undertaking. For more than seven centuries (718–1492), Spain had been occupied by the Muslims, until the Moor kingdom fell in April, 1492. The *Reconquista* was for Spain not only a military and political victory, but also the victory of Christianity over Islam, in that the identity of the Spanish nation was intimately linked to the Catholic persua-

sion. The monarchs of Spain were for the Catholic Church the missionary tool for the conservation and expansion of the Christian faith both in Europe and overseas. Columbus' discovery of the American continent (October, 1492) was not only an epic enterprise naturally resulting from the Spanish predominance in that period, but also a missionary undertaking.

The presence of priests in expeditions was customary as with Columbus' second trip to the American continent. At the same time, the Spanish *Conquistadores* (conquerors) saw themselves as Christian crusaders. There was a unanimous conviction that both conquerors and priests were responsible for the conversion of the natives of these lands. They sought to submit the natives of the American continent as they had done with Muslims and Jews in Spain. The New World offered them the possibility of a land where Catholic hegemony could be practised without competition from Jews, Muslims, or Reformers.

This concept of missionary work made use of both the sword and the cross to achieve its goal. Massive killings of natives took place at the same time as truly humanitarian and civilising practices. Compulsive and massive baptism of natives and the forced exclusion from society of anything that was not Catholic were some of the predominant evangelising methodologies that made the New World a Christian and Catholic land. The religious practices of the natives were not taken as objects of evangelisation. Mostly they were ignored or integrated into a syncretism that had no scruples in mixing the sacred and the profane. A people's religiousness was born full of syncretism. Forced evangelisation of natives destroyed their sanctuaries but could not wipe out their faith. Native religious symbols were replaced by Christian symbols, but in the minds and hearts of

the people, the same old gods were still being worshipped.

The Catholic Church has not only failed in the evangelisation of the ancient gods, but also in the confrontation with the new non-Christian cults. In a survey taken in 1996 at a Catholic church, 38% of the members had visited a quack doctor or a fortune teller and were, at the same time, devoted to a saint; another 35% had seen a quack doctor or a fortune teller and were not devoted to a saint. This means that 73% of the people who attended that church were seeing quack doctors or fortune tellers regularly (Carozzi & Frigerio, 1992).

From this perspective of Christianity, it was thought that the evangelisation of Latin America had already taken place. At the beginning of the 20th century, Catholics did not see the need for evangelising Latin America. But as time passed, they realised that they had been mistaken.

At Puebla, Mexico, in February 1979, the Third General Conference of the Latin American Episcopate met under the theme, "Evangelisation in the Present and the Future of Latin America." The second part of the final document includes a summary of the contents of evangelisation. It then focuses on the evangelisation work in Latin America, the missionary dimension of the church, and the church's preferential option for the poor. This last aspect had already been emphasised at the previous Episcopate Conference in Medellín, Colombia (1968), and it was one of the significant contributions made from Latin America to the understanding of mission.

We must also note that one of the contributions of Catholic missiology is the special interest in culture evangelisation. The Puebla document says about this, "The church thus calls for a new conversion on the level of cultural values, so that

the structures of societal life may then be imbued with the spirit of the gospel. For by their very nature, these structures are supposed to exert a restraining influence on the evil that arises in the human heart and manifests itself socially..." (Document, p. 438).

Now, and in spite of still considering Latin America as a Christian continent, the Catholic Church has made evangelisation a priority in its mission. Whether as a result of the uneasiness caused by the flow of members to Evangelical churches or because of a conviction that many Catholics are living a Christianity that is only nominal, this church is adapting its message and methodology in search of a more effective evangelistic work.

Mission as Incarnation

Only in the 19th century did Protestantism start to take roots in Latin America. Beyond some isolated cases, it was at the end of the second decade that the first congregations settled. In the beginning, the priority was spiritually assisting the European immigrants who had come to these lands, so much so that the first services were held in English. The traditional Protestant churches shared the vision that the American continent had already been evangelised, and they did not want to create an area of conflict with the Catholic Church in this respect. Diego Thompson's (1822) and Penzotti's (1890 and following) pioneer work was evangelisation through Scripture distribution, but it did not ultimately modify the general concept. This situation started to change only with the start of faith missions and the rise of denominations with a missionary outlook. It is important to note here that the lack of evangelistic emphasis in Protestant missions prompted the insertion and development of these communities and their priorities in mission.

In July, 1969, the III CELA (Third Latin American Congress on Evangelisation) was held in Buenos Aires, Argentina. The conference was marked by the social and political effervescence of the '60s, and although it tried to reach the whole Evangelical spectrum, its dynamics and subjects were influenced by traditional Protestantism. The III CELA is important because it shows us how this segment of the church understood mission at the time. The congress theme was suggestive: "Debtors to the World." Part of the "debt" was the way in which the church had inserted itself into the lives of Latin American peoples. They said, "We as churches are responsible for having tolerated oppressive systems that have exerted control and power over the life of our societies" (CELA, 1969, p. 23). Within this context, they considered that the mission of the church includes:

"a. To proclaim God's sovereignty over all human life and relationships....

"b. To point out the precariousness and relativity of all human institutions.

"c. To offer an interpretation of the historical moment the continent is living.

"d. To act as spokesperson and defender of all victims of social injustice, pointing out the causes and those who are responsible for that injustice" (CELA, 1969, p. 25).

Thus, the three main lines of thought of the III CELA were established: the recognition of a conflictive and revolutionary situation, an affirmation that the redeeming work of God affects more than personal life, and the acceptance of the possibility of political involvement for Christians.

The basic concept behind this model of mission is incarnation. This was an inescapable point of reference in the missiology of the 1960s and '70s. In the report of one of the III CELA commissions, we read: "Christ in the Incarnation identifies

with humanity in its misery in order to reconcile all with God through his sacrifice on the cross and to give them ... the power and the hope of a new life" (CELA, 1969, p. 22). As Orlando Costas (1976, p. 94) said, "The evangelisation, identification, committed efficacious service and a paradigmatic witness—this is the mission which, modelled on the life and work of Christ, Protestants owe to the continent."

We must note here that the contribution to missiology was related to a concept of incarnation that included ideological and political components. It was not incarnation as commonly understood in missionary circles, where the emphasis is on understanding the culture of those whom we want to evangelise and being willing to renounce our own culture to reach our goal. Here, incarnation was to take an option—to take sides with the ones that suffer most. Naturally, not all those who attended the III CELA supported this view, to the point that there is a report in the official documents of a minority group that expressed their disagreement.¹ But the challenge had been given, and over time, many Evangelical groups, in one way or another, incorporated this understanding of incarnation as they developed a concept of holistic evangelisation.

The Inescapable Call: Evangelisation in Depth

In the spring of 1964, Dr. Kenneth Strachan gave a series of lectures on missions at the Fuller Seminary, under the title, "The Inescapable Call: Missionary Work of the Church in the Light of the Urgent Needs and Opportunities of Today's World." These addresses were to be his legacy, since he died the next year. The

content of the speeches was not a theoretical proposal of work, nor some abstract reflection on the mission of the church. The lectures were a summary of the experience and the theological foundation of the Evangelism in Depth Movement, which arose in the midst of the Latin American Mission under Dr. Strachan. Evangelism in Depth's basic postulates were applied almost universally and were decades ahead of what is now commonly accepted by churches around the earth.

The extraordinary population growth, the post-war social and technological revolution, and some successful experiences in massive evangelisation spoke to the church of a time of opportunities. But these opportunities turned to frustration as Evangelical churches were only an imperceptible minority that had not yet found the key to growth. In Strachan's (1969, pp. 126-128) view, there were several reasons for this. On one side, "a sense of discontent with the structure of foreign missionary societies. Some years of participation in evangelistic enterprises that were inspired, financed, and carried out by foreigners had produced the sensation that such campaigns ... did not represent the true solution." Secondly, it seemed that church life was an important cause of the failure of its witness. It was a static, self-centred structure depending upon professionals for ministry. Another side of the problem was the great number of Protestant organisations working unconnected and with no sense of co-operation or fellowship.

From this reality, and after observing the factors that influenced the expansion and growth of certain movements in Latin America, the research reached a basic postulate: "*The expansion of a movement is*

¹ C. Peter Wagner, *Confidential Report*, p. 4, quoted in Costas (1978).

in direct proportion to its success in mobilising all of its members in a constant propagation of their beliefs.”

Based on this postulate and aiming at modifying the inertia of evangelisation failure, Evangelism in Depth developed four statements that proved their worth in practice:

1. An abundant harvest depends on abundant sowing.
2. Christians can and must work together.
3. When Christians share their resources, God multiplies them.
4. A consecrated minority may make a strong impact on a whole nation (Strachan, 1969, p. 10).

The contribution of Strachan and Evangelism in Depth was revolutionary for its time and may be summarised in three main emphases:

1. Total mobilisation for total evangelisation. This concept opposed evangelisation “only by evangelists” and gave each member a share in the responsibility.
2. The role of the local congregation in evangelisation. It took the priority of the evangelisation work out of the hands of structures and missionary organisations, to put it back in the congregation’s hands.
3. The essential quality of unity in mission. Thus, it attempted to counter fragmentation and division caused by the very missionary structures.

Evangelism in Depth’s ideology was a new dimension in evangelisation, born in Latin America but with a world reach. Arthur Glasser (1961) said about it, “I see nothing comparable to its vision and dynamic force in present missionary thinking.... This marks an encouraging breakthrough in the sinful confusion that has stopped for so long the progress of the gospel both here and overseas.”

Evangelisation and Mobilisation

The I Latin American Congress on Evangelisation (CLADE I) was held in Bogotá, Colombia, at the same time that the III CELA was meeting (1969). CLADE I gathered a significant number of delegates (920), mostly representing the Evangelical wing of Latin American Protestantism. CLADE I was strongly conditioned by missionary structures; however, some prophetic voices could be heard through it, and there was an attempt for a national leadership that, from the evangelistic militancy, tried to be sensitive to fast social changes. CLADE I had a fundamentally evangelistic orientation, imbued with the mobilising drive of Evangelism in Depth. We could say there was an internal tension between activism and reflection there. The theme of the congress is significant: “Action in Christ for a Continent in Crisis.” It clearly summarises the two main concerns: what actions should be taken for evangelisation and how to evangelise in a continent in crisis. The final document of this congress shows that:

1. Evangelisation is the church’s supreme task.
2. It is important to mobilise the whole church for the evangelistic task.
3. The process of evangelisation takes place in concrete human situations. Social structures influence the church and those who receive the gospel.
4. The time has come for us Evangelicals to be aware of our social responsibilities.
5. Men will not build God’s kingdom on earth, but Evangelical social work will contribute to the creation of a better world.

In this declaration, we may see a first attempt to go beyond the traditional model of evangelisation, but still the remnants can be seen of an Evangelical mind-

set that considered social work as a “manifestation of evangelisation” and not a companion to it (Stott, 1977, p. 34).

An interesting aspect to mention is the fact that a plan was presented here for the evangelisation of Latin America. Both the author of this plan, Carlos Lastra, and the final document of the congress admit that a proposal of such magnitude, considering the autonomous character of Evangelical churches, may only serve as a thought-provoking motivation on lines of action. The objective of this plan was “to evangelise, proclaim the word of the gospel, convert Latin American people to the gospel, and make disciples of huge multitudes” (CLADE I, 1970, p. 73). Seven objectives were proposed in order to accomplish the task:

1. Use the mass media.
2. Concentrate efforts on children, teenagers, and youth.
3. Give a new vitality to the local church.
4. Help train lay leaders.
5. Help reach classes that were left aside by the church: high class, intellectuals, government officials, university professors, union workers, etc.
6. Clearly define the social and economic responsibility of the church.
7. Work towards the unity of the church in a co-ordinated effort.

We must note here that both the reflections and the proposed lines of action were limited to Latin America. The central and excluding concern was how to evangelise in the context where the churches were. To say it in the language of the book of Acts, we would say that the mission was to Jerusalem and Judea. The idea of reaching the ends of the earth was totally absent.

One of the subjects dealt with at CLADE I was the relation with the Catho-

lic Church. This area was addressed in a theological dissertation by Dr. Emilio A. Núñez and was later included in the final document. The space devoted to the subject and the seriousness of the approach would be unthinkable in an event of this magnitude in Latin America today. At that time, the emphasis was understandable, since the winds of the II Vatican Council were being felt in full strength. The subject was dealt with very seriously, showing the limits and possibilities of a relation with Catholicism. Section 9 of the CLADE I final document says: “In a continent with such a Catholic majority, we cannot close our eyes.... The connection presents us with both risk and opportunity. Our confidence in the Word of God, which is becoming more and more spread within Catholicism ... offers us an opportunity for dialogue at a personal level. This dialogue must be intelligent ... in order to avoid the risks of a naive, misunderstood ecumenism” (CLADE I, 1970, p. 135).

It was also within the context of CLADE I that a prophetic voice was heard through the Bible studies by Rubén Lores. He said then, “The moment has come for the Spirit to be poured on all flesh.” Making his words those of Ernest Wright, he said, “Both leaders and people will be filled with the Spirit and filled with the Spirit’s power to a level yet unknown” (CLADE I, 1970, p. 11).

The contribution made by CLADE I to mission was its emphasis on the importance of a church that is mobilised to evangelise, the attempt to include social and political tensions in the Evangelical missionary agenda, the need to start a serious and mature dialogue with the Catholic Church, and the fact that an outpouring of the Spirit on the South American continent was foreseen, which has been taking place since the mid-1980s.

Holistic Mission

The International Conference on World Evangelisation held in Lausanne, Switzerland, in 1974 was, in Leighton Ford's words, "the moment of history in which Evangelicals caught up with their time." The profound social changes that were taking place all around the world and the political tensions they generated opened to the church an agenda that could not be ignored. It was necessary to re-think mission to make it faithful to the gospel and relevant to the world. In order to do that, just as Jeremiah had to do, it was necessary to uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow, to be able to build and to plant. Latin American theologians had a central role to play in such a crucial task. They had forged their theology firmly rooted in the Word and facing the world. They had an understanding of the world and the role of Christians in it.

In his paper on the gospel and evangelisation, René Padilla (1986, p. 1) said, "The lack of appreciation of the wider dimensions of the gospel will lead, inevitably, to a distortion of the church's mission." From an eminently missionary concern, Padilla confronted the theological and ethical assumptions of the most accepted models for evangelisation and mission. His objections were included in the Lausanne Commitment, where it speaks about the "worldliness that can be detected in the adulteration of the message, the manipulation of the audience through pressure techniques, and an exaggerated concern for evangelisation statistics" (Padilla, 1986, p. ix).

This search for an evangelisation and a mission that fulfil its purpose (the redemption of persons and the transformation of the world), while at the same time taking care that the methodology is not worldly in itself, has been a constant concern for many Latin American theologians.

However, we must accept that even today in Latin America, faithfulness to the gospel is still being sacrificed on the altar of numbers. It is not a question of being "the faithful few," because God wants all to be saved; the matter is that "when the gospel is manipulated in order to make it easier for all to be Christians, the foundation is being laid from the very beginning to have an unfaithful church. Such as the seed is, the tree will be, and such as the tree is, the fruit will be. What really matters about church growth is not having a successful increase in numbers ... but faithfulness to the gospel, that will undoubtedly move us to pray and work so that more people will know Christ" (Padilla, 1986, p. 33).

Since Lausanne—and due to the development that the implications of the Lausanne Commitment had on Latin America through the Theological Fellowship—the concern for whole mission has been present in all reflections on missiology. Both at the Second Latin American Congress on Evangelisation (CLADE II) and the Third (CLADE III), reports, discussions, and proposals were made within this wide frame.

The theme of CLADE II (Lima, Peru, 1979) was, "Let Latin America Hear the Voice of God," and the introductory statement says clearly, "We reaffirm our allegiance to the CLADE I Affirmation and the Commitment of the World Congress on Evangelisation held in Lausanne, Switzerland, July 1974" (CLADE II, 1979, p. xix). An effort to relate the theology of mission to the context was both the greatest contribution of this congress and at the same time its greatest limitation. On speaking of sin, the subject was, "Sin and Salvation in Latin America." On speaking of hope, it was, "Hope and Hopelessness in the Continental Crisis." The congress was not merely an attempt to contextualise the message, but also a way to affirm the Latin

American churches' right to their identity and their model of mission. But in this emphasis, the global dimension of mission—the peoples beyond Latin America—was totally absent. The lack of mobilising proposals was also to be noted. It is very interesting to observe that in the Projections and Strategies Document, which churches were encouraged to implement, the segment on evangelisation and mission recommends, as lines of action:

“1. That churches and their leaders have a contextual and whole view of mission.

“2. Develop our own research tools.

“3. Encourage the exchange of personnel.

“4. Detect investigation candidates.

“5. Develop documentation centres” (CLADE II, 1979, p. 347).

The 1970s were, socially and religiously, a time of much ideological struggle. It was necessary to affirm beliefs, to clarify methodologies, to take a stand. CLADE II showed that from an Evangelical perspective, progress could be made in that direction. It also revealed that different Evangelical groups were struggling to articulate their own identity in church and mission.

Mission to the World

The social and political context changed completely in the 1980s. The Communist bloc disintegrated, Latin American dictatorships weakened and started to disappear, and the church in the continent was strengthened and growing with unusual energy. The time had come to lift our eyes and look to the world. In an anarchic way, lacking organisation but full of enthusiasm, churches started to send missionaries. Thus, the necessity appeared to have a continental meeting that would help churches in their missions development. In 1987, sponsored by

CONELA and other organisations, COMIBAM (Latin American Missionary Congress/Cooperation) was born. Its aim was to be a catalyst of missionary enthusiasm and a motivator for transcultural mission. Since COMIBAM, new indigenous missionary movements have been started, missionary training programs established, and initiatives promoted, such as “Adopt a People,” whose goal is that Latin American churches take the responsibility of adopting 3,000 unreached peoples by the year 2000.

The Third Latin American Congress on Evangelisation (CLADE III, 1992) echoed this tendency, and its theme was, “All the Gospel, for All Peoples, from Latin America.” The concept of holistic mission was present in theological and contextual reflection. Though the number of theological reports (8) doubled that of missiological reports (4), the final document stressed the sense of mission. On thinking about a gospel for “all peoples,” it said:

“a. The universal character of the Christian faith and the confession of the Lordship of Christ give its missionary dimension to the church.

“b. All the church is responsible for evangelising all peoples, races, and tongues.

“c. The missionary vision, action, and reflection of the church must be founded on the gospel, which, when understood in its entirety, is proclaimed in word and deed and is directed to every human being.

“d. The Holy Spirit has developed a new missionary awareness in Latin America.

“e. Incarnation is the model for the mission of the church... This demands the crossing of geographical, cultural, social, linguistic, and spiritual frontiers.

“f. The church in Latin America must assume its responsibility in world evangelisation fully and without delay” (CLADE III, p. 861).

The number of missionaries sent from Latin America increases day by day. Even small congregations strive to send a missionary. Comparing the relationship between income level and contribution for missions of Latin American churches with those of the U.S. and Europe, we might find that the former are giving, proportionally, more than the latter. However, in many of these missionary undertakings the important contributions made from Latin America to the theology of mission are not visible. In general, missions are undertaken with an alarmingly naive spirit. In many cases, Latin American missionaries are repeating mistakes that the missionary movement had in its beginnings, as if the experiences gathered over centuries were not of any use. It seems as if enthusiasm obliterated the fact that crossing a geographical frontier is not enough to do missions. As Samuel Escobar said in *CLADE III* (pp. 379-385), there are other frontiers to cross: cultural, social, urban, spiritual power, religious, etc., and it is not enough to show a passport to cross them.

Mission and Missiology: Concerns and Hopes

As in any pending task—and mission always is such a task—expectations in view of the future are a mixture of concern and hope. Each time and each context must re-elaborate their missionary agenda, not only in search of whom to reach, but how, and using which tools.

Thoughtless activism is one of the characteristics of the contemporary Latin American church. The search for success for success's sake has plunged the church into a frenzied race after experiences and activities that keep it always entertained. Our concern is that the answer to the missionary call may have the marks of a great

movement that is in perpetual motion, without actually getting anywhere.

So many years of preaching against theological reflection as if it were, by itself, opposed to church growth, have left their mark. Today, we have a growing church that is, at the same time, quite hollow. It is a church that waits for the latest best-seller book to know what to believe. That is why we are living a contradiction: as the church grows, so do injustice, corruption, and immorality. It is no wonder when this happens in the world, but it is alarming when it happens within the church. That is just what mission is all about: making all persons live under the Lordship of Christ.

Prioritising unity is one of the most important contributions of the Latin American church. In spite of the flood of business models where church growth is mistaken for the success of “my own business,” we still believe and defend the value of unity as something inherent to mission. We need to be one, so that the world may believe. However, our concern is that when it comes to mission, Latin American missionaries work under the spirit of free enterprise, duplicating efforts, wasting energy, and reproducing on the mission field a church model that denies one of the essential values of the kingdom: being one in Christ.

Incarnation and contextualisation, not only cultural but also social and political, have been ongoing subjects in missiological discussion in Latin America for the last 30 years. But the world has changed so much that the reality of globalisation forces us to redefine these terms. Our concern is that missiological thinking in Latin America be trapped in a localism that no longer makes any sense.

In summary, our concerns have to do with sharing a relevant message, being faithful to the gospel, and understanding

the world. But at the same time, there is also hope. The strength and forward push of the Latin American church are among the most visible manifestations of the move of the Spirit. It is a church that has learned to depend on the Lord's grace and his resources for mission.

There is hope, because this church is alive and seeking. We believe that the new generations of Christians will be able to take advantage of such a rich legacy of experience and reflection.

There is hope, because in spite of multiple limitations, this is a church that has lifted its eyes to see the fields that are white, and it wants to work sacrificially in the harvest.

Finally, there is hope, because beyond all else we still believe that the One who is building up his church all around the world will help us, equip us, and use us.

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25

Younger generations and the gospel in Western culture

STUART
McALISTER

ROMANS 1:16-17 has always been an inspiring part of Scripture to me, and I firmly believe in its contemporary relevance. As a young convert, I quickly took to the streets to share my encounter with the gospel, and within a year I was involved in taking literature and materials to the church in Communist Europe.

My vision was stirred as I saw the vast numbers of people who were unreached and, from what I could tell, were unlikely to be reached. As OM, we organized outreaches and various efforts to share the message, and we saw some degree of success. It wasn't long, however, before I encountered the entrenched beliefs that seemed to build walls of resistance to the gospel. The legacy of history, the two world wars, and the seeming irrelevance of the message all served to raise serious questions to any gospel presentation.

With many years of reflection on the European situation and context, and with some exposure to other Western nations, I began to see some patterns. I'd like to mention three to begin:

The Legacy and Effects of Christendom and Modernity

The assumption that Europe is Christian and evangelized has been and (for some) remains a stumbling block. The Parish system, with its territorial approach to identifying the people of an area as a part of the national church, is entrenched in European minds. To be Polish is to be Catholic, to be Greek or Russian is to be Orthodox, to be German or Danish is to be Lutheran, and so on, even though many people are rapidly departing from their heritage or never desired it in the first place. Christendom's apparent mission

was to pastor the faithful, not reach the lost. A deep nominalism often resulted amongst those reared in the approach, which is quite resistant to evangelism.

Modernity's secularizing project was profoundly effective, as the beliefs in autonomous and good human beings using reason and science to build a better world by their own efforts captured imaginations. Progress was the goal, and rational means the way. The works of Darwin, Freud, Marx, and the prophets of the market came to expose old "myths" and offer a better, more satisfying vision. A new story had eclipsed the gospel and was spreading the news that happiness was the goal, money the means, and "stuff" the end.

The European context became quite gospel-resistant, and the general feeling was one of contentment and basic security. The developments in the economy and the overall sense of well-being in society have removed any sense of need or concern at one level, while generating new challenges in the process.

The challenge facing many of us today is double. First, how will we find an audience or access to one; and second, how can we demonstrate why the gospel is even an issue?

The dualistic inheritance

Much has been written on the subject of dualism, and we know its chief architects, but the fact versus value divide in society or the public versus private debate is compounded by an equally dualistic church that further divides everything into sacred and secular issues. The result has been that many well-trained believers do not know how to relate their faith to their everyday lives. They feel divided between private interests (church, spirituality, etc.) and public concerns (economics, politics, environment, etc.). This type of Christianity that is prevalent in the West is, in the words of Os Guinness, "privately engag-

ing but socially irrelevant." At root, I believe, is a misunderstanding of the nature and applicability of truth.

The growing consciousness of interdependence, of ecological balance, and of the spiritual and unseen dimensions of life—things which were ignored or repressed by the rationalism that dominated Western culture for many decades—have gained enormous ground and acceptance in Western culture. The more holistic view of life and experience raises a significant challenge to many Christians whose thought processes and more dualistic orientations increasingly serve to widen the gap between the church and the world.

Centuries of reflection on the nature of truth led to the Enlightenment and the quest for certainty. Within Western culture, a pervasive belief (often unexamined) shapes how we perceive reality and how we define what truth is. Paul Hiebert describes the approach that sees the individual's understanding of what is as "naive realism."

The Evangelical church has been deeply influenced not only by the impact of Scripture, but also by the particular philosophical views at various points in history which were often uncritically embraced and adopted, bringing with them their own set of problems.

The post-modern critique has challenged both the nature of truth and how we ground any belief. Increasingly, critical thinking and a de-constructive orientation are penetrating the life and work of the church with significant implications.

First, the very definition of truth itself and of who decides what is true seems to be up for grabs. Younger people are not willing to accept blindly views of truth or assertions simply because they are stated, but they feel compelled to check things out. Second, there are the issues of authority, power, and dominance. Truth has often been used as a justification for mis-

treatment, abuse, and many of the other problems of the 20th century, both in society and in the church. Red flags are raised when the word “truth” is used, unless the baggage that often comes with it is explicitly acknowledged and addressed. This leads to potential problems with generational differences within the church. The younger people could be perceived as asking illegitimate questions, challenging tradition and fixed realities, while often seeking a more faithful expression of what is meant by truth. Third, we must consider the centrality and primacy of truth as relational. The genuine and helpful insights raised by post-modern thought have revealed the inadequacy of many 19th and 20th century views of truth, yet they have also shown the depth of scriptural resources which can and do speak to our context, needs, and hopes. A theology and practice is needed that speaks to humanity in the totality of our experience and that is simultaneously lived as well as declared.

A conversation is urgently needed that will facilitate a rethinking about mission and recruiting, if many in the West are still to participate in the global task.

The privatization of faith

I shudder every time I read another of the popular Evangelical books that serve to reinforce individualism, privatism, and the inward life as if these are the sum and goal of the gospel. The reduction of faith to personal piety and privatistic belief is a tragedy of major proportion. The results for mission have been a loss of the scope of the gospel and the neutralizing of creative and imaginative energy for exploring fresh applications of God’s Word in everyday situations.

In conversations with younger people about society and the future of mission, what often stands out is the breadth of concern and interest. Young people have

grown up with a sense of interdependence. They see the relationship of one thing to another, and they are hungry for involvement in a diversity and range of areas all subsumed in the word “mission.” The more holistic approach to theology and life is exposing many areas and arenas as potentials for mission—areas which all too often are neglected or rejected by traditional efforts. Environmental degradation, massive unemployment, racism, and ethnic cleansing are all seen as manifestations of sin and sinfulness. It is increasingly hoped that mission efforts will be broad enough to engage the existential crisis of our times.

The leaven of bad ideas and of cultural pressure has taken its toll on the churches of Europe and of the West. It is one thing to seek fresh inspiration for proclamation, but it is another to deal with the kind of churches needed to support a fresh communication of the gospel. We cannot think seriously about reaching afresh unless we give equal and adequate thought to discipleship and community. This throws us back to the message—its meaning and its application to daily life.

The message can only be authenticated by a people who truly and honestly seek to live it out and who struggle to embody it in every area of life. The church cannot simply be a place where we gather or which we visit. It must become a relational community which struggles together for faithfulness, love, and God’s work in this world.

As we begin the 21st century, many of us have been seeking inspiration from the biblical vision of hope, which is articulated in Romans 15:13. The realities of globalization are only beginning to be felt, yet in Europe, the new realities of permanent unemployment and of old certainties being removed are raising questions. The post-modern prophets of despair are appealing to the collapse of certainty, the

sense of fragmentation, and the desire to find “something” in the midst of it all. We hear multiple voices, all telling us that we simply need to find whatever is good for us, whatever works for us. Lost in a sea of relativism, where can one turn for coherence, harmony, peace, and making sense of it all?

Gurus, therapists, and counselors abound to offer diverse strategies or solutions to problems encountered. Some Evangelicals rush to join the latest trend in debunking modernism, only to end up embracing or adopting versions of post-modernism in a desire for relevance. Others retreat in fear and anxiety, building bigger walls of separation and issuing dark condemnations about the end times.

Times of transition are difficult, because old ways of doing things and of looking at things are seen to be inadequate or are up for examination. I have often experienced the tension, as sides are taken, lines are drawn, and positions defined. In my attempts to map the territory or frame the discussion, I have been described as a modernist or an analyst. I won’t deny the likelihood that these labels are partially true; I only highlight that all views are situated somewhere. I have not consciously chosen a modern orientation; rather, I seek explanatory power wherever it can be found.

The danger at present is an unnecessary polarization, rather than a much-needed process of dialogue. As God’s people, we all need to be willing to hear, to learn, to question, and to defer judgment as we are doing our thinking and reflecting.

The necessity of a clear vision

The Apostle Peter (1 Pet. 2:9-10) seems to grapple with two critical issues of our time: identity and mission. Globalization is being recognized as a major force in our

modern world. In the West, the effect is fueling multiculturalism and all too often moral and ethical relativism, which is not a necessary outcome of the process, but which is propagated in the media and in the educational systems. Young people find themselves in the supermarket of multiple lifestyle choices. In terms of meaning, the message seems to be, “Define your own reality.” The resulting frustration is compounded by the sheer range of choices and often leads to a feeling of being lost in the midst of so many options.

A culture of despair begins to arise, with deep expressions of suspicion, fear, cynicism, and anger, which can be seen inside the church as well as without. The need for vision is not simply for programs and activities, but for what kind of people we can be and how to live as God’s people in this world under these conditions. Although many consultations have addressed key issues and needs, many at the grassroots level have never heard the results or substance of those discussions, and few strategies were employed to alert and equip local churches. We all believe that central to real change is a compelling vision; what vision is gripping hearts and minds in our churches? I appeal to hope, because it captures the imagination, can unleash creativity, and inspires courageous action, even in the face of severe difficulties.

Lesslie Newbigin did some excellent work in raising the issue of the church as the “plausibility structure” of the gospel. This is clearly defined in John 13:34-35. The embodiment of love is not seen as peripheral, but as central to being disciples. The way we live, the way we treat people, and the way we handle conflict or difficulties all speak to the vibrancy and reality of our message. The quality and substance of our lives and relationships are major components of the gospel and must be emphasized for fidelity to the

truth and effectiveness in witness. However, a failure to take the message seriously or to consider it strategically has all too often led to sheer neglect. If missions in the Western context do not consciously shift to a more holistic theology and practice, then I cannot see how we can reach people. Practical models and demonstrated community are essentials in the post-modern era. The churches need help and resources to be able to move back and forth between Scripture and culture as they frame redemptive agendas. Few tools or models seem readily available to the Western church.

The Primacy of Scripture

At times, one feels that much of Evangelicalism is defined or shaped by reaction. Our reaction to liberalism led us to abandon serious societal engagement for a long time. Our reaction to the many trends appears to drive much of what is produced in popular Christian literature. Instead of reacting and copying models or ideas from the latest cultural analyst or “hot” critic, can we not be creatively imaginative in seeking metaphors, strategies, and innovations that derive from Scripture?

The same tendency to react may well limit us as we reflect on the modern/post-modern shift. It is real, and I believe it will not pass away, but we must avoid two extremes: first, hunkering down in bunkers and seeking to preserve the status quo at all costs or, second, throwing out centuries of insight, tradition, and wisdom as if everyone before us got it all wrong.

God’s resources

A nuanced and careful approach is needed, one that is confident of the sovereignty of God, resting in the guidance of the Holy Spirit, yet open to honest evaluation and change. We can be deeply encouraged as we look at the Bible and

the resources God has given as being more than adequate for our needs:

1. The personalism and dynamic implications of the relational God in Trinity. The work of writers such as Colin Gunton and Kevin VanHoozer is opening up untapped potential in the nature of relationships and the way things work in a created order. Much of this material can serve both to motivate and to mobilize the younger generation and to reach those outside the church.

2. The implications for an ecologically concerned world from a good creation theology. This generation is far more sensitive to the effects of unrestrained consumption and careless or non-existent environmental policies. Sharing God’s good news includes teaching others how to live in this world and helping them grasp the nature of stewardship.

3. The tremendous resources for interpersonal relationships and reconciliation in the gospel and Scripture. Within the church, the desire is for greater mutuality, openness, and dialogues. During our recent discussions in Brazil, the nature of relationships and the conditions surrounding healthy interaction were openly discussed. The issues of power, of being willing to listen, and of truly showing that we care were seen as essential and as having been severely neglected. A gospel that encourages us to be real and to live truthfully was seen as very compelling.

4. The explanatory power and existential scope of the gospel narrative. When the gospel is carefully unpacked and then sensitively applied, it speaks to the deepest needs of all cultures. The church must do more to teach believers what the message is in order to inspire a greater confidence in what God has given and in what will change lives.

The action orientation of many of our churches is one of our great strengths, yet

I believe time spent in prayer and critical reflection should precede a rush to engage.

The church between gospel and culture

Lesslie Newbigin in the U.K. and George Hunsberger in the U.S. have been very helpful in framing vital issues for the contemporary church. As I have the privilege to travel constantly and have lived in continental Europe for 20 years and the U.S. for the last 1½ years, I have had first-hand opportunity to observe several things:

First, there is an assumption that hermeneutics is largely unnecessary to a better understanding of Scripture. Here I do not refer to pastors per se. Rather, I refer to the experience of the average churchgoer, who operates according to what has been termed “naive realism” or “what I see is what is there.” The general influence of post-modernism has been to highlight bias and to encourage uncritical acceptance of truth claims. A more discerning and dialogical approach is needed, both to foster confidence in God’s Word and to address legitimate questions and concerns in a safe environment. The democratization of knowledge means that questions ignored or stifled in the church will be taken elsewhere and may end up with answers that bring more challenges in their wake.

Second, I have observed a blindness to the cultural and local beliefs that influence and shape what we see and how we see. Whether in the U.K. or Greece, India or the U.S., I have constantly run into a general lack of any concern or awareness as to how we may pollute interpretations through cultural preference, bias, or superiority. This I believe is a critical and urgent concern. We are all situated somewhere. Our cultures and traditions are not problems per se, but they require us to examine the accretions or subversions of

the gospel that are bound to occur as we seek to exegete God’s Word and apply it. The tendency not ever to be aware of the possibility that we have adapted the gospel to our comfort zones is one that needs to be addressed.

Third, a concentration on information transfer versus transformation of values and lifestyle generates an absence of serious discipleship. The model being perpetuated is one that focuses almost entirely on correct beliefs and a general set of morals rather than on a personal relationship and spiritual formation. Little thought or effort is given to the actual means and methods of being a disciple. The issue of “how should we then live” is largely unaddressed, except by general moral exhortations. I cannot stress enough how much this issue lies at the heart of an inadequate approach to church and mission. The pressures of daily life, the constant bombardment by media and the market, and the saturation of time and space with images and demands compel us to find new ways to build the church and to facilitate the kind of character and qualities essential to life under post-modern conditions.

Agents of hope, images of exile, and the gospel of the kingdom

I believe we must give equal time to re-examining our message and re-envisioning what it means to be the church. The issue of strategy and means should flow from a deep engagement with the gospel, our context, and our moment. Faith must express itself in a faithful and faith-filled people. Hope must also be visible in those that model hope, offer hope, and work for hope. Love implies being loving, sacrificial, and compassionate. The need is to embody and demonstrate our theological and ethical commitments in everyday situations and contexts. Rather

than withdrawing into end-times pessimism or its opposite, triumphalism, we need to explore the ongoing challenge of Christian subversion and the leavening of all cultures, tribes, and peoples with the good news and with good examples of God's new way of being. Rather than a "one size fits all" approach, we need multiple and diverse strategies that are situation specific, scripturally defined, and redemptively applied.

The following components should be present in our strategies:

- Listening carefully to Scripture to hear God's priorities and looking for specific "connections" that may bear particular relevance in this place and this time.
- Looking at our cultural context, interpreting its many voices and pursuits, and looking for the points of contact in it.
- Making a creative effort to cultivate people-friendly and situation-specific strategies that offer a real alternative and true contrast to what is.

These considerations are important when we attempt to motivate younger people to mission. Some of the suggestions given to me in this regard include the following: First, mission mobilizers need to move from need-driven or target-driven efforts to a focus on mission as an expression of our being as new creations. Second, there is a desire for greater flexibility and for less dependency on programs. Rapid response teams, serendipity, and more fluid approaches are called for. Third, a theology of creation is seen as essential to undergird the basic appeal, particularly seeing redemption in its restorative dimensions.

The only caution I express is the danger of repackaging mission strategies to meet consumer demands or to see mission as a means of existential validation, i.e., "I do this because it makes me feel good about myself." A church that takes seriously the message as well as the his-

torical moment will give careful thought to what is needed to live faithfully in these circumstances.

The Challenge of Effective Communication

Living in an information age, we see the multiplication of data and voices, yet we struggle for understanding and comprehension. So much effort today goes into advertising strategies, slogans, and campaigns, and we get the message that large companies are serious about selling their products and communicating the value and relevance of what they have to offer. It strikes me that as Evangelicals we have too often been more interested in the "what" of the gospel (its content) rather than in its faithful communication. We cannot separate one from the other, and a clarity about the first concern should lead to improvements in the second.

John 1:14 and 1 Corinthians 9:19-23 are crucial passages for an incarnational approach, yet despite the many vital consultations dealing with this subject, they seem to be largely ignored in many congregations.

The lessons learned by effective pastors and missionaries around the world often boil down to the same general ingredients carefully and sensitively applied in the specifics of a local context. It is sad that many people continue to search for the latest technique or the newest strategy to somehow supply that "missing" component, where the basic elements seem to apply across time and cultures.

In conversations with friends who are pastors, I have often sensed that we would have a revolution in the church if many of our churchgoers simply knew how to be friendly to unbelievers. The distance and separation are such that little meaningful exchange takes place. A shift to a more relational versus a technique approach

would be both more biblical and also more effective and true.

Can we learn from our contemporary approaches to communication? Can we invest effort, people, and time in understanding communication theories? Surely, for people with such a vital concern to share truth, this must be high on our agenda. The equal and opposite problem lies in placing relevance in such a high place that an indiscriminate or biblically shallow approach is employed to justify the use of the latest technique for reaching Gen-X or whatever. A serious dialogue needs to take place between biblical goals and means and the ends we seek.

The church in mission

The need for training, equipping, and ongoing dialogue and experiment should by now be clear. The twin issues are, first, our identity as we live out biblical holiness and consecration and, second, incarnational mission, where we live as effective communicators of the gospel in and to specific cultural contexts. Both of these need some serious time and effort. In every culture, we have issues relating to worldliness or compromise. In other words, how close can we come? How far is an essential distance? It seems to me that either the individual is left to decide, or a general conformity is required that is not grounded in good reasons. The issues of age, generations, and tastes are ignored or repressed with great cost. Styles and preferences do play a part in our decisions and choices, yet how do we find the common good in a “negotiated community” if there is little or no actual dialogue or conversation?

The massive changes in culture and society are not yet reflected in the mission community. Issues of style and approach take on new dimensions and importance for many of the younger generation. Words such as commitment, surrender,

and flexibility still count, but they may have a different sense when used by believers in their 20s versus those in their 50s. We cannot assume a particular understanding, nor should we ignore or simply declare the intent. Healthy discussion can take place, and learning can happen if we are all ready to listen, learn, and adjust.

I think we must reconsider how we do church and then remodel what we are doing. Allowing space for good exposition, we then need to wrestle with implications and application. The methods of Bible study must be such that the clear demands of the text are being grappled with. It is crucial that the Word be deeply explored, not only to grasp the basic meaning of the passages, but also to locate the necessary changes implied and any obstacles against them. We live in a time when authenticity is in high demand. Facing our weaknesses and failures honestly and openly is seen as essential by many younger people, and the feeling is that Scripture speaks clearly to this practice (see the Psalms, for example). As the life worlds of our churches are often diverse, we need to allow time and space for specific discussions relating to the different contexts, demands, and needs in order to facilitate effective applications. Should not World Evangelical Fellowship and the different Evangelical alliances be the catalyst to such essential dialogues? Again, the more effort that is made to produce resources and practical assistance, the better.

Relationships, networking, and information sharing

The top-down, leader-limited approach to addressing issues and challenges must change and be led by a vision of interdependence, strategic value, and practical outcomes. The abundance of analysis and reflections does not help if it never reaches those who can most ben-

efit from it. It is essential, therefore, that for every missions consultation that takes place, serious time and effort are invested to insure the ideas, strategies, and resources are both widely distributed and carefully applied. As so many of us are seriously busy and often distracted, good consultations of the right kind are essential, but equally important is a serious effort to reduce the duplication, specialization, and fragmentation that mirror our time.

Considerations need to be made for financial limitations, as well as geographical and other hurdles. Many people need resources, yet for various reasons they do not have the technology, finances, or possibility of attending crucial events or of accessing them electronically. Getting resources to those who need them means demonstrating our shared relationships and commitment. The various networks can use their channels as vehicles of communication and connection. The rapidly changing world alerts us to the increasing levels of communication both by travel and by media such as the Internet. The free exchange of information, ideas, and influence has enormous potential for both good and ill. The church is a unique body and has both a universal element and a local face.

The insights gained from serious prayer, study, and effort can help others who are facing similar hurdles or challenges, if we can find the will and a way to express our common life and to explore our shared treasures. The dangers of the post-modern influence lie partly, I believe, in wrong attitudes. The world, cultures, and mission are all changing, and we must wrestle with the implications and learn to see both the possibilities and the threats. Our confidence must lie in the One who calls, who leads, and who will guide us safely to our final rest.

Conclusion

I have often longed for a series of books or materials that would integrate the various viewpoints and aspects essential to an effective missiology. These would include the role of Scripture, the need for good biblical and cultural hermeneutics, the role of the principalities and powers and how to address these entities, anthropological and sociological insights, philosophical and comparative religions, and how to critique the insights of others.

As with so many other things, leadership and vision are the key issues. Someone needs to sound the trumpet, expose the inadequacies of current ways of doing things, and offer a better direction and another way. I believe World Evangelical Fellowship is strategically placed to consider this need, but they will need to take some creative and courageous steps if they are to seriously offer what is so urgently needed. My prayer is that just such a resolution will be grasped and owned by the WEF leadership.

Some final questions

1. What role does the reflection of God as Trinity have in your thoughts regarding mission?
2. How do you present the gospel in your culture, and specifically what do you mean when you say it is the truth?
3. To what degree is the gospel proclamation limited by a failure of embodied discipleship in your context?
4. How do cultural realities, beliefs, or values influence or undermine the effective communication or living of the gospel?
5. To what resources would you like to have access to enhance your effectiveness in mission?
6. What aspect of the gospel message is most appealing in your geographical or cultural context? Why is this so?

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DO YOU KNOW what it is like to work with you Americans? Let me tell you a story.”

The speaker was Daniel Coulibaly. I was in Mali, West Africa, doing some consulting work for World Vision.

The elephant and the mouse were best friends, according to Daniel. One day Elephant said, “Mouse, let’s have a party!” So they did. Animals came from far and near. They ate and drank and sang and danced. And no one partied more exuberantly than the elephant.

When it was over, Elephant exclaimed, “What a party, Mouse! Did you ever see a more wonderful celebration?” But there was silence. “Mouse?” Elephant called. “Where are you, Mouse?” Then to his horror Elephant discovered Mouse—crushed on the floor, stomped into the dirt, trampled to death by the enthusiasm of his friend the elephant.

“Sometimes that is what it is like to work with you Americans,” said Daniel. “It is like dancing with an elephant.”

Why Listen to a Mouse?

In the face of great world need, dare American missiologists take time for mice? People are going to hell. People are perishing for lack of vision. For lack of teaching, Christianity in many places is “a mile wide and an inch deep.” Physically, too, people are hungry. People need health care, schooling, and clean water. They need legal aid, title to land, job training, and secure child care. They need houses and churches built, marital counseling, drug and alcohol treatment, and special help for the marginalized. In some places, this is a *kairos* moment, a window of opportunity. If we have the resources and power to tackle such problems, why should we stop to listen to mice?

Telling stories: contextualization and American missiology

MIRIAM
ADENEY

Why bother with diversity? Because—moving to another metaphor—each body part plays a crucial role. Ephesians speaks of God’s great plan for unity in his universe, “the mystery of his will . . . to bring *all* things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ” (Eph. 1:9, 10). In chapter 4, this unity-in-diversity is applied to the church, capping a passage on Christian maturity: “From (Christ) the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as *each* part does its work” (Eph. 4:16). Every part has a role. A parallel passage, 1 Corinthians 12, says plainly that a hand must be a hand. An eye must be an eye. An ear must be an ear. Only then will a body be healthy.

Because such differences in the body of Christ are precious, we must—returning to our first metaphor—listen to the mouse and the hippo and the crocodile. A Brazilian church is not American. Brazilian evangelism, discipling, theologizing, teaching, administration, counseling, financial management, youth work, church discipline, leadership training, and publishing must be Brazilian. Thai ministry must be Thai. Nigerian ministry must be Nigerian.

Christian unity is prized throughout the book of Ephesians. Even in chapter 4, the word “one” is repeated seven times: one Spirit, one Lord, one God and Father of us all, one body, one hope, one faith, one baptism. Yet this unity is not colorless or uniform. Like a complex textile, it is woven of many hues. Like a dynamic ecosystem, it pulsates with amazing species.

American Missiology: Social Science

Although Americans often crash through the world like elephants, American missiologists have led the way in studying the crashes, applying anthropology, sociology, and psychology.

A pivotal figure in missiological anthropology is Eugene Nida of the American Bible Society (ABS). After World War II, many Christian ex-GIs wanted to go back overseas as missionaries. Preparing in college, they were drawn to the social sciences. These disciplines became recognized as training grounds for ministry. Both Jim Elliot and Billy Graham studied anthropology at Wheaton College, for example. An early textbook was Nida’s (1954) *Customs and Cultures*.

As an ABS consultant, Nida worked closely with a relatively new mission, Wycliffe Bible Translators. This agency integrated linguistic theory with mission practice. Nida expanded that to anthropology. In the 1960s and 1970s, the American Bible Society published a journal, *Practical Anthropology*. Frequent contributors were Nida, William Smalley, William Reyburn, Jacob Loewen, and Louis Luzbetak, a Catholic.

In 1965, Donald McGavran became founding dean of the Fuller Theological Seminary School of World Mission. A former missionary to India, McGavran emphasized the study of church growth. Out of the Church Growth Movement, many book-length case studies applying the social sciences were written in the 1960s and 1970s.

In time, psychologists, too, began researching missionary care. “Psychology and Missions” is the topic of the Summer 1999 special issue of the *Journal of Psychology and Theology*.

Histories of American missiology will give a more complete picture.¹ One significant component is social science, the study of the encounter between “elephants and friends.”

American Missiology: Foundations

“What a limited horizontal view!” some from other countries may protest. “Socially engineered success (church growth, cultural adaptation) isn’t the goal of mission. Even the devil has successes. In all this emphasis on social science, where is the-ology? Where is the Holy Spirit? Where is suffering? Where is mystery?”

“It is not worth while to go round the world to count the cats in Zanzibar,” observed Henry Thoreau, American essayist (1817–1862). Some would ask, “Is American missiological emphasis on social science unbalanced? Are Americans too busy ‘counting cats?’” In the current volume, Samuel Escobar criticizes American “managerial missiology,” for example.

Worship and piety

Throughout history, there have been many motives for mission in the U.S. and elsewhere. These include a personal call, obedience to scriptural command, rescuing the hell-bound, compassion for the hurting, eschatology, God’s kingdom, civilization, the glory of God, the propulsion of God’s love, a desire to be useful, and, for women (who constitute the majority of missionaries), empathy with women. We continue to be propelled into mission by a variety of motives. Yet in principle American missiologists would affirm the core of mission to be God’s greatness over all the peoples, God’s grace, and God’s glory.

In this light, even “counting cats” may be done worshipfully. Management skill may be seen as a gift of God, just like medical skill. Management means stewardship and accountability, fulfilling the charge given in the “creation mandate” recorded in Genesis 1:26. Management is by no means the mother of mission, nor its base. It is subordinate to the Word and the Spirit. It is a tool. We must repent of the human tendency to idolize tools and of the tendency of some American missionaries to idolize management. But we need not see management as antithetical to the Holy Spirit, any more than we view medicine that way. We need not fear management. We need not call for muddling mediocrity in management. We call for excellence, as it is used in its own subordinate sphere.

Mission begins in worship. Therefore, American missiologists affirm the primacy of spiritual disciplines such as prayer, Bible study, fellowship, love, holiness, and perseverance. We admit a struggle with Christian workers’ perpetual temptation to emphasize the kingdom more than the king. We resonate with the lines of T. S. Eliot’s (1935, p. 45) play, *Murder in the Cathedral*:

“Servant of God has chance of
greater sin
And sorrow, than the man who
serves a king.
For those who serve the greater
cause may make the cause
serve them,
Still doing right; and striving with
political men
May make that cause political, not
by what they do
But by what they are.”

¹ Two useful references are Shenk & Hunsberger (1998) and Shenk (1990).

We keep in mind also the words of a mission-minded American, A. W. Tozer (1969, p. 15), who said, “We are called to an everlasting preoccupation with God, to be worshippers first and workers only second. The work of a worshipper will have eternity in it.”

Scholarship

Beyond worship, American missiologists are not satisfied merely with applied social science. We are also concerned for theory. What is the value of theory? In brief, theory adds historical depth, comparative breadth, ordered system, critical sharpening, and elegance. Theory protects people. Without theory, practitioners tend to shoot first and aim later. Sometimes they hit the target. Often they wound people. Always they waste bullets. Theoretical reflections help us avoid scandalous, laughingstock mission projects that dishonor the Lord.²

When doing scholarly work, we must also pay attention to research methods and resources. Pragmatic Americans excel here. “Tools of the Trade” is the theme of the January 1999 issue of *Missiology*. This detailed report of the 1998 American Society of Missiology annual meeting describes many impressive reference works-in-progress.

In sum, American missiology affirms the primacy of worship and scholarship, not just applied social science. Yet we struggle here. Some reasons for this will emerge in the next section.

Do Westerners Only Support Success? American Values Underlying Missiology

“Have you ever noticed that Westerners only support success?”

Two Asians at an international Christian conference were walking around a

lake. One had supervised a highly praised socio-economic program. Western Christians had lionized him. Publications had described his work glowingly. But as he gazed across the lake, he mused to his friend—who reported it to me—“Have you ever noticed that Westerners only support successes? I wonder, would anybody be interested in me if I were to fail?”

Americans do expect success. And such expectations creep into missions. But who are Americans? There are striking differences between the G.I. generation, the Boomers, the Busters, and the Millennials. Economically, an abyss yawns between Bill Gates at Microsoft and an employee at McDonald’s, and this gap is growing. Women and men value different things to some extent and respond differently to situations. Ethnicity intersects America: salsa now outsells catsup.

However, there are common concerns. Most Americans emphasize self-reliance, pragmatic problem-solving, and choice. Most have a strong sense of entitlement. Most have compartmentalized worldviews. And many are embarked on active spiritual journeys. To understand Americans in mission, it is worthwhile to explore these values.

Self-reliance

Americans admire active, assertive, ambitious achievers—self-starters. Many of us dream of leaving the big company and striking out on our own. A surprising number do so. Internet technology, in particular, has made it easier for one person to run an independent consulting business.

Whatever our jobs, we are raised to “do it my way.” We are not antisocial. Far from it. Self-reliance doesn’t mean ignoring people. What it means is that *I choose* my people. Often my choice will not be my

² See Hiebert (1999) for a helpful exploration of theoretical foundations.

kin. To compensate for weak kin ties, we are a “nation of joiners,” forming all sorts of voluntary groupings. Some of these are essential for knitting the fabric of the community together, like the Parent Teachers’ Association attached to every public school, the auxiliary assistants who help at hospitals, and the volunteer fire departments in small towns. It is easy to form new missions and ministries in America.

Many American individuals are philanthropic, giving money and time to causes ranging from ecology to the arts to Christian missions. Americans like to give, but they want to feel a sense of participation in deciding how the donation will be used.

Americans don’t know much history or geography, and they have little appreciation for raconteurs who transmit the heritage orally. We live here and now. Although many of us cannot afford to buy a house or maintain health insurance, and although we are disillusioned with our national leaders, still we take charge of our own destinies where we can. For example, we take responsibility for our own emotional well-being. We seek counseling when necessary. To simply suffer our fate would be unthinkable. And on weekends we go to building supply stores or computer stores to buy materials so we can do our own home repairs or computer upgrades. That’s the American way.

Problem-solving

Americans admire pragmatic, efficient problem-solving. We do not admire leisurely contemplation of the eternal mysteries. Even in theology, according to historian Mark Noll (1985), we have emphasized “methodological common sense,” drawing on Scottish common sense philosophy. We value efficiency, statistics, and technology. We also value change. We expect new consumer goods, new amusements, new ways to get work done better. And we prefer frankness to

nuanced courtesy and informality to hierarchy, because these enable us to get right down to business. In mission there is “a practical, activity-directed style of argument of American advocates of mission that runs through A. T. Pierson and John R. Mott to Ralph Winter” (Walls, 1990, p. 5).

We view much of life in measurable terms. Intelligence can be measured. Compatibility or adjustment can be measured. A girl’s attractiveness can be measured on a scale of 1 to 10. Even faith: “If you do not commodify your religion yourself, someone else will do it for you,” comments R. L. Moore (1994, p. 11) on the Amish.

Doing mission, we like to tackle pragmatic problems with quick, measurable solutions. Ten houses built. Ten dramas performed. Ten sermons preached. One hundred people won to Christ. We approach mission through systems management, diagramming strategy concepts such as tentmakers, nonresident missionaries, multi-individual decision-making units, or criteria to distinguish unreached peoples. Because we are goal oriented, we screen out imponderables that do not fit our planning procedures. Uncertainty and paradoxes are shoved aside. We avoid long discussions fraught with ambiguity, especially in another language. After all, we remind ourselves, our donors deserve results.

Money is valuable not only for its intrinsic usefulness, but also because it serves to measure intangibles. Can our ministry afford air conditioning? This year’s software in all our computers? Travel budgets? Glossy paper in our promotional magazine? If so, we must be doing something right.

As a rule, Americans pay little attention to the rest of the world. Every so often, however, something propels us into the international arena. Then our pragmatic, problem-solving outlook shapes the way

we connect. Looking at people in need, for example, Americans who care enough to get involved may ask, “What can we do to fix them?”

Choices

Americans expect choice. Supermarket aisles demonstrate this. Choosing starts early: Toddlers are urged to choose among breakfast cereals. In so doing, they are practicing assertiveness and self-reliance, which they will need as adults. Americans expect choices, from their doctors to their specialized magazines.

Ironically, the result is overchoice. It is exhausting to juggle all the options a well-balanced American considers necessary. With so many possibilities, Americans tend to work too hard and play too hard. There is little time left to think or simply to be.

Entitlement

Americans expect comfort, good health, happiness in marriage, and good grades in school. People have a right to these benefits, many feel. If things don’t work out, they want to sue somebody. Youth, in particular, expect instant achievements and are impatient with time-consuming processes.

Even in the post-modern world, this sense of entitlement continues. A survey of U.S. high school seniors asked, “Do you think the world will be better or worse 10 years from now?”

“Worse,” most answered.

Later in the survey, another question asked, “Do you think your own life will be better or worse 10 years from now?”

“Better,” most answered.

The article reporting this was titled, “First Class on the Titanic.” Wherever they may be, Americans feel entitled to good seats.

Fragmented worldviews

Paradoxically, in view of their sense of entitlement, many of the Buster generation lack hope for a coherent worldview. Politicians have betrayed them, they feel. Religious leaders have betrayed them. Families have betrayed them through divorce or busyness. They would like marriage, a vocation, a cause, but they are afraid to commit. They would like to end world hunger and promote world peace, but they don’t see how. They don’t see any overall purpose to history or pattern for the world.

Yes, they see technological progress. Some of them are Microsoft geniuses, after all. And they make existential discoveries. They fall in love. But these “truths” vibrate in separate worlds. They live split lives, half mechanist and half mystic.

The generation now coming of age is called the Millennials. Extensive consumer research on these young people born after 1983 finds that they respect authority; build large, strong friendship networks; accept diversity; live in an online global village; think iconically, learning through story and metaphor; are spiritually open, seeking the “whys” of life, not out of anger or alienation but out of curiosity; value their parents and siblings, although this is not always apparent; want to work for a better world and community; and want to *do* things that make a difference—mission trips, feeding the homeless, community service.³ Some data suggest the Millennials also do drugs and sex earlier and more casually.

Increasingly, coherence and identity are constructed rather than organic. “The fragmentation of American identities and worldviews causes us to construct our personal identity, tribal ‘community,’ and

³ Personal conversation with the Rev. Dr. Randy Rowland, generation researcher, Seattle, Washington, October 1999.

worldview,” says Paula Harris, Urbana Convention coordinator. “We live in a constant and daily tension between the global (CNN, McDonald’s, Target, GAP, Microsoft) and the local, between the image (grieving Kennedy’s death, the TV sitcom groups we connect with, our Internet relationships) and the real. So we constantly construct identities, tell stories, and create new tribes.” Other peoples face the same global/local tensions, but most have stronger ethnic heritages on which to draw. Many American ethnic foundations are flimsy.

Self-designed spirituality

On our mystic side, Americans recognize that spirituality is a legitimate area of need. So, for example, between the Starbucks coffee kiosk and the Thomas Cook money exchange in the Seattle airport, a shop space has been reserved for spirituality. Members of any religion may sign up to occupy part of this area. Here they offer spiritual counsel to travelers who ask for it.

This counsel need not be Christian. For many Americans, Christianity is suspect. They think it has contributed to patriarchal sexism, ecological rape of the earth’s resources, racism, the fostering of low self-esteem because of an emphasis on people being sinners, and repression of emotions. Politically, they identify Christianity with right-wing extremists.

Young Americans prefer “designer religions.” Individuals select the components that appeal to them, even if they draw from several religions. If they commit to one, they tend to emphasize those parts that they like. “I’m comfortable with that,” is a common phrase. A conversion may be profoundly felt but transient. Since religion is individual, it is poor form to intrude one’s religion on others unless they ask about it. A person may share his

story but should not push others to follow.

While statistics serve the mechanistic part of a person, they will not serve this spiritual side. The mystic wants stories—testimonies, experiences, and personal encounters. He wants songs and dance, drum-beating and incense, ritual and drama, tears and joy.

Like all human beings, Americans are limited, as this somewhat tongue-in-cheek survey of values has shown. Still, when practiced wisely and humbly, American qualities such as activism and sense of individual responsibility can be seen as gifts from God and potential blessings to the nations.

Born Again in the USA: Challenges to American Missiology

What, then, are the challenges facing American missiology today?

- One-third of the world’s population is under the age of 15, often listening to the same music, watching the same videos, wearing the same clothes, and sharing many of the same fears as American teenagers.
- Catastrophic disasters slam the earth. Even without unusual crises, routine economic structures oppress millions. People whom God loves struggle to survive.
- Pastors and laity long for theological education. For some, interactive web-based courses might deliver these globally.

We would be foolish stewards if we ignored American organization and resources available to serve such populations. Americans bring to these needs “vigorous expansionism; readiness of invention; a willingness to make the fullest use of contemporary technology, finance, organization, and business methods ...; and an approach to theology, evangelism,

and church life that emphasizes addressing problems and finding solutions,” according to Scottish missiologist Andrew Walls (1990, p. 18).

Americans in mission today also bring a knowledge of the theory of contextualization. Knowledge is not enough, however. It takes time to learn a language, to adapt to a culture, and to be a friend. It requires openness to ambiguity and even to failure. This is true for individuals and for large projects. Yet because our activist values propel us, and because we have the resources to do so, we often jump into mission projects like elephants.

How we need to learn to dance lightly! How we need to learn to emulate the God who took on local form, talked the everyday language, and listened seriously to ordinary human neighbors.

In this context, let us consider four issues that challenge American missiology:

Compartmentalization

Often a missiologist is trained in a specific discipline: theology, Old or New Testament, a social science, management, pastoral ministry, communications, etc. He comes to the broad subject of missiology incomplete, struggling toward wholeness. Rarely do seminaries help. The major seminaries perpetuate deep cleavages between a “school of Bible and theology” and a “school of world mission.” A student who enrolls in one division has little time to take courses in the other.

Admittedly, there are integrative networks that eddy against this fissioning stream. Missiological research journals include *Missiology*, *International Bulletin of Mission Research*, and *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*. Growing out of *Practical Anthropology*, the journal *Missiology* is published by the American Society of Missiology. This body cultivates equal representation from Catholics, conciliar Protestants, and independent Protestants.

The Evangelical Missiological Society, which meets concurrently with the Evangelical Theological Society, publishes an annual thematic compendium. These volumes have included *The Holy Spirit and Mission Dynamics*, *Reaching the Resistant*, *Missiology and the Social Sciences*, and *Christianity and the Religions*.

There are many parachurch movements which unite people of various denominations, such as the AD 2000 Movement, the InterVarsity Urbana Mission Convention, and mission agencies themselves. The “Perspectives” course, offered widely across North America, baptizes laity in mission theology, history, and strategy. This course is produced by the U.S. Center for World Mission, founded by Ralph and Roberta Winter.

In spite of these networks, American mission thinking suffers from compartmentalization. This happens even at the congregational level. Many Americans live in their own circle of friends, walled off from people who are different. This is called “cocooning.” They don’t want to think about the rest of the world. If they are Christians, they avoid thinking about mission. One hundred years ago mission may have been an adventure. Today it is often an annoyance. The masses of data pouring out of the media are overwhelming. An ordinary Christian feels he doesn’t know enough to make intelligent decisions. He knows some missionaries have made mistakes in the past. Yes, sometimes he feels vaguely guilty. “But I know God doesn’t want me to be upset. So I’ve decided not to think about that any more,” one person told me. He has decided that mission is no longer his responsibility: “I have other priorities.”

Most pastors graduate from seminary without being required to take a single world mission course. They have little breadth of missiological wisdom to offer their people. As a result, many church

mission projects are done in spurts—uncontextualized, unsystematic, short term.

Since compartmentalization characterizes American life, it is not surprising that it also fractures missiology at every level. The challenge is to see the gaps, to plan for wholeness, and to build adequately comprehensive paradigms. This may be painful. Truly integrated thinking does not come naturally. It requires practice, energy, and time—the thing Americans lack most.

Uniqueness and unity

To cultivate both unity and diversity, in the spirit of Ephesians 4, is a prime challenge for missiology. This global issue appears in microcosm in the U.S.

How shall we reach Americans? Myriad books explore Americans' spiritual odysseys.⁴ Most of these books focus on a certain segment of the population. Americans are not all the same. In worship, some belt out loud praise songs, while others praise more reflectively. Some lift up their hearts through country music. Others express heartfelt worship through traditional liturgy and Bach organ fugues. Some come to God in hymns. Often a large church will nurture two or three of these subcultures in different worship services.

Is this segmented worship to the glory of God? "No," says René Padilla (1983) in his classic essay, "The Unity of the Church and the Homogenous Unit Principle." Such segregation fosters classism and racism. It rips apart the unity for which Jesus prayed.

On the other hand, we may answer "Yes" if we see these subcultures as gifts of God, enriching his world, flowing out of his creative image which he has be-

stowed upon humans, providing local families, local worlds, where people can feel at home. The challenge, then, is to foster deep unity as well as particularity. This means teaching unity at every opportunity, developing exchange and interactive service programs, celebrating together, responding to crises together, doing mission together, empowering leaders from all congregations, and continually condemning racism and classism.

Today millions of Americans are Hispanic and Asian. Among them are spiritually vibrant, biblically knowledgeable believers. Repeatedly throughout history the American nation and church have been re-energized by immigrants. In the 21st century, the vitality of Hispanic and Asian believers could revitalize Anglo churches. Unfortunately, there is little traffic across the polite chasm that separates these family members.

The worldwide challenge to nurture unity in diversity is faced in microcosm in America.

Money and power

The first conference of Evangelical Mission Theologians From the Two-Thirds World subtitled their published papers, "Evangelical Christologies from the Contexts of Poverty, Powerlessness, and Religious Pluralism." How far removed from American missiology this is. While poverty and oppression are major realities for many peoples, these do not shape the categories and paradigms of white male theologians. Nor do missiological anthropologists offer better categories. Their preferred models (structural-functional, symbolic, cognitive, etc.) do not adequately accommodate painful power im-

⁴ Some recent works include Dyrness (1989), Schultze et al. (1991), Roozen & Hadaway (1993), Bell (1993), Barna (1998), Lippy (1994), Moore (1994), Guder et al. (1998), Roof (1999), and Housden (1999). Two books that continue to serve as baselines are Kelley (1972) and Hauerwas (1989).

balances. Yet if conspicuous consumerism, poverty, economic and political injustice, and suffering are deep human realities, these cannot be peripheral in missiology.

A huge issue is how to transfer resources without fostering dependency or corruption. Andrew Walls (1990, pp. 22-23) paints one picture: "In some broken-backed nations, those marked out by poverty of resources, technological breakdown, political instability, or economic disaster, the missionary bodies, often working in concert (Missions Incorporated, as one may say), now have the most flexible, powerful, and efficient organization in the country. They can fly people around the country and in and out of it; they can bring in machinery and service ailing plants; they have radio telephones that work; they can arrange currency, get foreign exchange, and send an international message quickly. They can sometimes do things that the government itself cannot do. And the local church, however independent or indigenous, can do none of these things, except insofar as it can act as a link to an outside mission. In the end, what will be the implications of all this power held by Missions Incorporated?"

In the political dimension, American citizenship carries connotations which a relevant missiology must address. No matter how loudly we separate church and state, simply being an American in the world is a political statement that shapes the way our witness and service are received. Being white in multiracial America is a statement too.

The void of missiological attention in this area is not absolute. Jonathan Bonk (1991) has made a fine contribution, as have a number of urban missiologists (Conn, Greenway, Perkins, Tiersma, etc.). These perspectives need to leaven the whole loaf of missiology.

Post-modern Jesus

All scholarship today is affected by a post-modern ethos. We can no longer rest in the clear categories of the Enlightenment. Reality is seen to be much more multi-dimensional. Facts are not value-free. Objects are not known apart from the subjects who know them. Cause-effect explanations cannot answer the question, "Why?" Logic must be supplemented by metaphor. Western progress is not the only path. Optimism is chastened: Not all problems are solvable. The clear worldview of the Enlightenment no longer holds. Paradox and ambiguity loom large. We have lost our "metanarrative," academicians say. We live with fragments, compartments, bits and pieces of truth. There is no longer any single story that holds it all together.

The virtual realities of media abet this split. Media present us with fantasy worlds and "sound bites" where great tragedies and beer ads are juxtaposed. By contrast, in the world of nature and the world of society, there are sustained rhythms. Seed time and harvest. Friendship, courtship, marriage, parenting, aging, dying. Creation, use, maintenance, repair. Knowing these rhythms helps us know ourselves, our potential and our limits, and the sequences that support happy choices. But how many young adults know the grand rhythms of nature and community as well as they know the limited rhythms of their favorite computer games? They exist among *non sequiturs* rather than contextualized connections.

Here clear witness to Christ erodes. In his book on post-modernism and missiology, Paul Hiebert (1999) observes, "Most Western Christians have yet to develop epistemological foundations that enable them to affirm the uniqueness of Christ as the only way to salvation and life eternal, and to boldly witness to the truth in winsome ways.... Today Western Chris-

tians ride to work with Muslims and Hindus who are good people, often better than some Christians they know. How can they declare that these people are lost? The easy solution is to stress tolerance, to live our own lives and let others live theirs, and to hope that communities can somehow coexist in peace in the same nation and world. One of the greatest challenges to the Western church is to lay again the theological foundations of the uniqueness of Christ, and to train its members how to proclaim this with humility and love.”

Hiebert recommends “critical realism” and “critical contextualization,” drawing from both modern and post-modern reservoirs. While mystery, subjectivity, and symbol are essential parts of knowing, while “approximate knowledge may not be complete or exact, that does not make it relative or arbitrary.... Theology and science are not different ways of knowing. True, they ask different questions and use different methods of analysis.... But both begin with belief in premises, and draw on historical experiences to help them understand the order and meaning in reality. Both assume a real world characterized by an order that is continuous over time. Both assume the ability of human reason to understand the world, at least in part.... This has profound implications for us as Christians, for it means we must proclaim theological truth as public truth—true for everyone, not just those who believe it.”

The Big Story

In the story of the mouse and the elephant, we have seen ourselves. Many post-modernists think that this is *all* we can know—single stories. We have lost our overarching metanarrative, our integrating story, they say.

But Christians share a metanarrative older than the Enlightenment. Ephesians

outlines that story, in which God in Christ brings together all things in creation (chaps. 1 and 3), ethnic groups (ch. 2), members of the church (ch. 4), and members of the family (ch. 5). Here our American compartments, our diversities, our money and power, and our conflicting generations find their place in Christ and his kingdom.

We can tell that story, and surely the time for telling is now. When philosophers tinker with bits and pieces of the shattered edifice of truth, how blessed we are to be able to resonate the great themes of creation, stewardship of the earth, incarnation, substitutionary life-giving, resurrection, regeneration, spiritual empowering, community, heaven, and a God both powerful and personal. When evil is strong, it is time to tell about grace. When crucifixion takes place, it is time to tell about resurrection. Surely one of the resources most needed for the 21st century will be people of every nation—including Americans—who can tell the story.

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Part 5

Responding to the challenges

IN THIS CENTURY, the challenge of world evangelization and full obedience to the Great Commission is vast and will require all the creativity and resources of the global church of Christ. All seven of these chapters were commissioned after Iguassu, though in a few cases they are partially based on reports that came from regional discussions during the Consultation. But as we evaluated the future book, there was need to release new and qualified writers to research, write, and speak from their heart and perspective. Thus, this section parallels the previous one in that it comes primarily from a regional perspective. We have two complementary analyses from vast India (D'Souza and Howell) and one from East Asia (Prescott). A weakness on the Iguassu program was the absence of any serious analysis of the Islamic reality around the world, and we are grateful to Engqvist's careful chapter. Readers will discover a most creative approach on the re-evangelization of the West by Dowsett and will be stimulated by Tiplady's piquant Generation X missiological voice.

The final chapter by Brynjolfson reports on nine working groups that met during the Consultation. The reader will find recommendations related to sending (the church and mission, national missionary movements, and missionary



training); recommendations related to strategy (partnership and strategic cooperation, intentional bi-vocational cross-cultural service, media and technology); recommendations related to “staying” in mission service (relief and development and member care); and concluding with recommendations related to global missiology.

Brynjolfson’s nine topics emerged from the discussion and reflection of the 160 participants. The topics were then presented to the leadership of the WEF Missions Commission as suggestions and recommendations that would contribute to the process flowing out of the Iguassu Consultation. They also become substantive food for mission-minded churches, training programmes, missionary sending organizations, and reflective practitioners around the world.



FOUR SETS OF MEDIA images have been forged into the Indian psyche in the last few years by current events. These images, in both electronic and print media, tell us the multifaceted story of India. It is the story of a nation in the midst of tumultuous changes—a nation of paradoxes that is churning at many levels. It is a story that does not fit the stereotype of the India of the British Raj or of an ancient nation where things are eternal.

Today's India is a turbulent place where globalization, religions, traditions, peoples, and politics have come to the fore and are in tension with each other. It is a place of turmoil which is rapidly developing into a culture of violence. Underneath the seeming calm on the exterior, you will find a society that is experiencing changes it has never known before.

The Indian church and missions are confronted with these changes along with everyone else, and they are bewildered at the fast developments. Until recently, the church and missions went about doing their good work with relative peace, and the number of indigenous Christian movements mushroomed in the era after independence.

India's church and mission leaders have been caught by surprise at the viciousness of the attacks of Hindutva forces against them. These attacks have both a religious and a political motive behind them, as a Human Rights Watch (1999b) report titled *Politics by Any Means* points out. The violent attacks have forced Christians to rally together to meet the challenge of the hostile Hindutva forces. It is a challenge that must be met with love, firmness, and courage, knowing

The Indian church and missions face the saffronization* challenge

JOSEPH
D'SOUZA

* Saffronization is the process of making India a Hindu nation, excluding Christians and Muslims from a core identity as Indians.

well the history of extremist movements in Europe. Future generations of Indians will judge us by our stand and actions in the present crisis.

The Hindutva movement by no means represents the majority of the Hindu population; nevertheless, their hold on social institutions and the institutions of democracy is growing stronger. Backed by the political party in the central government that supports this ideology, a major effort and movement are taking place to co-opt as many of the castes and religious groups as possible into the Hindutva movement, whose present targeted enemies are Christians and Muslims.

India well echoes the prophetic words of David Bosch (1991, pp. 188-189): "The point is simply that the Christian church in general and Christian mission in particular are today confronted with issues they have never even dreamt of and which are crying out for responses that are relevant to the times and in harmony with the essence of the Christian faith.... The new situation challenges us, across the board, to an appropriate response. No longer dare we, as we have often done, respond only piecemeal and ad hoc to single issues as they confront us. The contemporary world challenges us to practice a 'transformational hermeneutics' ..., a theological response which transforms us first before we involve ourselves in mission to the world."

Let us look at the four media images that capture the present realities of India and that affect the church and missions in the nation.

Growth of the New Middle Classes

The first image and the most recent took place during American President William Clinton's visit to India in March 2000. The media recorded the scene in the In-

dian House of Parliament of the President being swarmed by Indian MPs (many of them belonging to the ruling alliance), after Clinton's historic speech to both houses of Parliament. For once, a President of the United States had talked "with" Indian leaders and not just "to" them. He praised India and talked of a new vision for the relationship between the two nations. The ruling political leaders lapped it up.

The images that flickered on the TV screens showed members of Parliament scrambling over each other to shake the hand of the American President. India had come full circle. The nation had come to terms with the superpower of capitalism. She had come to acknowledge economic power and the accompanying deity of the modernized world—materialism. A land known for its spirituality and gurus had dramatically changed its image in the last few decades.

The Clinton visit to India was not primarily designed to bring peace to the sub-continent. In fact, the U.S. President achieved very little in this area. The visit was about economics. The U.S. had accepted the fact that India's middle class of over 250-300 million was set to become a major global economic bloc offering a new source of cutting-edge workers to the world in the field of information technology (IT). The President acknowledged that, along with the United States, India leads the world in global IT. India's large sector of educated professionals is thus a huge asset, and these workers are wanted in many places.

In the last two decades, the U.S. has become a happy hunting ground for Indian scientists, businessmen, and professionals. The sheer numerical strength of professionally trained Indians has given India an enormous advantage in the new economy built around knowledge and information. The present U.S./India eco-

conomic alliance is the result of the massive globalization process that has swept over the Indian middle classes in the last decade or so. India's cities and towns, colleges and universities, cinemas and video parlors, hotels and restaurants, print media and television are in the throes of a huge cultural invasion by and interaction with the West. Future shock has hit India. It is too early, however, to predict the long-term consequences.

The upper middle classes, the rich, those who run the businesses, and those who manage the economy are not grumbling about the globalization process; after all, it is making them wealthy. The new middle class is not complaining either. Very happily, mammon is worshiped, and the new India is a rich and fertile ground for the great global god of the 21st century—materialism. The unabashed worship of materialism in the First World resonates and connects with the new middle class in India.

Members of this new Indian economic bloc of the largely literate middle classes are capable of conversing and doing work in English—over 150 million of them are reported to know English. This gives the Indian professionals a distinct advantage over other nationalities in the global marketplace. Despite harsh attacks on the English language by Indian politicians in the past, including those belonging to the present ruling party, English has now become a major asset and is an integral part of Indian culture. Notwithstanding their pronouncements, politicians who attack the English language have their children educated in English-medium schools and colleges. The poor masses now know this and are not fooled anymore. The knowledge of English is an economic asset in today's India.

This reality also opens up a huge new door of opportunity for India's English-speaking "global Christians" who want to

share the love of Jesus wherever Indians are based in the global marketplace, whether in India or abroad. This witness, however, has to be done by first grasping the whole context of today's India.

Regionally, South India and the states of Maharashtra and Gujarat are experiencing a large percentage of the economic boom. The reason for the rise of the new middle classes is education. There are now huge numbers of business entrepreneurs and scientific research opportunities. Opportunities are also provided to many through reservation (affirmative action) policies, which have been incorporated into India's Constitution through the efforts of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, the champion and hero of the backward castes. India has made immense progress in the post-independence period and has proved that the talent and enterprise of her people are second to none.

However, upper caste Hindus and the upper castes of other religious groups continue to own and control the economy. Here, nothing has really changed for thousands of years. The upper castes have been the first to cash in on the fruits of political freedom and economic liberalization, since they have had the prior social, economic, and educational advantages.

P. N. Chopra (1997, p. 130) states, "Despite modernisation, intellectual growth, and development, the Indian society still follows much of the old distinctions based on varna, i.e., caste and karma, the doctrine of accepting our distinctions as unalterable in our lifetime. It is on this basis that Brahminic leadership still functions in this country. Nowadays a leader is not necessarily a Brahmin, but the power he seeks is a Brahminical one with all the prerequisites that go with it, including, where necessary, being above the law."

The upper castes have become more powerful in the aftermath of globalization, with access to the media, travel, educa-

tion, and vast assets. Paradoxically, many of these people who have migrated to the West and who enjoy the freedom and opportunities there are now supporting the extreme right wing forces in India. Their money, intelligence, politics, and diplomacy from abroad feed the Hindutva movement in India, which presses for a nation built on a monolithic ideology of one faith, one culture, and one people.

According to Kancha Ilaiah (1998, p. 131), "As of today, the non-resident Indians, NRIs [Indians who live abroad and with whom Westerners are most likely to come in contact] belong mostly to the upper castes. The post-capitalist markets into which these NRIs are integrated did not de-caste them. This is very clear from forces that financed Hindutva with dollars. The categorical shift of the Delhi 'intelligentsia' towards Hindutva, as against the Uttar Pradesh illiterate Dalitbahujan castes who preferred the Bahujan Samaj and the Samajwadi party, shows the direction of the future."

At the same time, globalization is eroding the religious values and traditions that have managed to hold Indian society together. The family structure is under attack. Sexual promiscuity, drugs, and the like are on the rise among the affluent.¹ Divorce among the middle classes is increasing, although the divorce rate is still much lower than in the West. Alienation, loneliness, and the breakdown of relationships—diseases bred by materialistic societies—are common in the major cities of India. Violence, rape, and crime have increased all over the country. New Delhi, the capital, has the distinction of being the

most crime-prone city of India. Added to this is the rampant corruption that was prevalent even before globalization hit India.

The golden cow or Jesus?

Christian missions among the middle and upper classes have their work cut out—a complex work that will challenge both the attitudes and the lifestyle of the largely middle and upper class church in the urban areas. Sadly, this church is concerned primarily with getting on in life at the expense of costly devotion to Christ. It is marked by an ignorance of larger social developments and a lack of understanding of Indian culture. Often this sector is concerned only about itself. In this, Indian Christians are no different from other Indians.

What Chopra (1997, p. 124) says in a scathing criticism of certain Indians could be applied to a section of urban Christians as well, even though there are always many wonderful exceptions: "Indians ... are self-centered ... and inwardly. Self-aggrandisement and promotion of personal interests even at the cost of the community and the nation have marked their character.... They have not bothered if a neighbour's house is on fire or burgled as long as their home is safe. They have never been farsighted enough to realise that a fire in the neighbour's house will engulf their own. The same attitude explains their total indifference to come to the rescue of a person involved in an accident; they would prefer to leave him alone."

The Indian leaders of both the church and missions will have to address several

¹ The *Deccan Chronicle* (1999) describes the scene in Mumbai: "Rave parties are generally characterised by carnal orgies. Techno music, drugs, and a heady atmosphere are usually followed by unabated sex at rave parties ... this seems to be another light on the ways of our rich and famous; the extent to which money can permit an individual to subvert all norms of decency and humanity and to pervert all social codes. This thrusts a question in the general direction of the Indian upper classes, a question about the limits of self-indulgence that money can buy."

issues in dealing with the new middle classes:

1. There needs to be a fresh critique of materialism as an ideology and way of life within the Indian context. How will the materialistic assumptions about the nature of man affect and further damage a wounded civilization? We know that materialism is no different from materialistic anthropologies which “absolutize the physical side of man while denying the reality of what we might call his or her ‘mental’ or spiritual side” (Hoekema, 1986, p. 3).

2. The gospel message will need to talk about the alienation, loneliness, broken relationships, and social destruction that materialism produces. It will state that the human race is made in the image of God, and therefore each individual is far more valuable than all material possessions. It will pronounce that man does not live by bread alone and that all of us need the Word of God to save and speak to our soul. All persons need the Holy Spirit to live in them. Thus the gospel will speak prophetically into a context and bring the good news of salvation in Christ.

3. Though there has been much writing and discussion in the past about a Christian counter-culture to deal with materialism and modernity, this has not come into being in the First World. Is it because the church there reacted too late to developments in society and had already lost the war against secularism and materialism? The Indian church is historically placed to counter this trend at the beginning stage. By and large, the church is still concentrated in the towns and villages and is comparatively poor. A biblical and balanced approach to legitimate prosperity needs to be articulated and taught in the churches. This instruction needs to be buttressed by teaching on stewardship in both the owning and sharing of wealth. In addition, the stewardship of God’s creation must be taught. A stand against the

wastage of resources and the culture of over-abundance will help build a counter-culture that can speak prophetically into the life of society.

4. The Indian Christian diaspora in North America, which is an affluent group even by U.S. standards, must consider their responsibility for bringing the love of Christ to their fellow Indians abroad. Indian Christians have tended to congregate abroad according to their community and denominational lines back home. The Indian Christian community abroad will need to deal with some of the issues raised in this paper for their own context. Indians are searching for the love of Christ in all locations. The larger Evangelical community in North America and Europe will need to address their responsibility towards Indian immigrants who are slowly becoming an influential and powerful economic bloc within these Western nations.

India’s Poor Majority

The second set of images impressed on the Indian mind includes the images of poverty, illness, human suffering, and environmental waste. The recent cyclone in Orissa highlighted the plight of India’s majority population, with millions of people rendered homeless (actually, the homes were not really homes, but merely places of shelter in extreme poverty). People wept openly in television interviews because they had lost all, even their human dignity. Soon urban Indians would hear tales of women and young girls being sold into prostitution in order to survive.

This tragedy is now compounded by the devastating drought that has hit over 50 million people in Gujarat, Rajasthan, and Orissa in the summer of 2000. *India Today* (2000) reports that, overall, close to 100 million people are affected in 12 states. The magazine notes, “As state after

state falls prey to the great dry, government apathy only heightens the misery. It is a suffering so endless that it defies being catalogued.” Environmentalists are pointing out that this is a man-made drought. Utter neglect and damage of the environment are the major causes. Government apathy in not taking action, despite warnings since last October, has resulted in a tragedy of immense proportions.

Some 300 million people learn to guzzle Coke, even as 700 million struggle to find clean drinking water. These are India’s poor. Absolute poverty has grown in the midst of globalization and the emergence of the new middle class. Most of the poor belong to the lower castes. A large percentage of the Muslim population is also poor. Because of the pressure of economics and the age-old feudal systems that operate in the rural areas, most of the poor are illiterate. If India has over 25 million children involved in child labour and over 50 million people who live in dark and degrading holes called slums, it is because of grinding poverty. There is no respite for the poor in India.

Arundathi Roy (1999, pp. 11, 15), author of the award-winning best-seller, *The God of Small Things*, points out, “Thanks to us, Independence came (and went), elections come and go, but there has been no shuffling of the deck. On the contrary, the old order has been consecrated, the rift fortified. We, the Rulers, won’t pause to look up from our heaving table. We don’t seem to know that the resources we are feasting on are finite and rapidly depleting. There’s cash in the bank, but soon there will be nothing left to buy with it. The food is running out in the kitchen. And the servants haven’t eaten yet. Actually, the servants stopped eating a long time ago.

“It’s like having an expense account. Someone else pays the bills. People from another country. Another world. India’s

poorest people are subsidising the lifestyles of the richest. Did I hear someone say something about the world’s largest democracy?”

“... India lives in her villages, we’re told, in every other sanctimonious public speech. That’s ... just another fig leaf from the government’s bulging wardrobe. India doesn’t live in her villages. It dies in her villages. India’s villages live only to serve her cities. Her villagers are her citizens’ vassals and for that reason must be controlled and kept alive, but only just.”

The “trickle-down theory of economics” does not work in India. It may work in a more egalitarian society, where everyone has the same apparent opportunity regardless of where one is born. Political and social factors run Indian life, not what is guaranteed by the Constitution.

In his Republic Day speech on January 26, 2000, the President of India warned about full-scale rebellion from these masses if political and societal leaders did not take immediate action to alleviate the suffering of the poor masses. The President knows what he is talking about. Ominous signs are on the horizon. The violent Naxalite movements among the young and unemployed, which result in the destruction of lives and property, are causing havoc in different parts of the nation. Poverty and the inability to change one’s condition in life drive these groups. Suicides among farmers because of poverty have become common in various states. Large-scale migration of the poor to the cities is giving rise to more and more slums. India’s cities are already crumbling under the pressure of oversized populations and the lack of infrastructure to support the millions that are moving in. In the cities, underworld criminal gangs are prevalent, and blackmail and kidnapping of the rich are becoming increasingly common.

A violent revolution or the love of Jesus?

How do the Indian church and missions leaders now deal with this second major dimension of their Indian reality?

1. It is in this context that, first of all, the model of Mother Teresa's life and work towers above all. Her life said something to the Indian people about the love of Christ that motivated and drove her to the poorest of the poor. She did not do much about social structures, but she did what individual Christians can do, and she made a difference in the lives of the poor. The cry of India's poor goes out to God, and a Christian demonstration of holistic² mission of immense proportion is the need of the hour. The other person who has stood out as an example in this realm is the martyred Graham Staines, who touched the lives of lepers—outcasts of society. The sight of the poor and the lepers crying out at the funerals of Mother Teresa and Graham Staines will not be forgotten for a long time. More people have been drawn to Christ through the witness of these saints than we can imagine. The Indian church and missions need to give birth to more such individuals by the tens of thousands.

2. Indian missions need to be in the forefront in identifying, serving, and being involved with the poor because of the love of Christ. This is not the time to sit back and boast of our past efforts among the poor. Only the love of Christ can bring about the sacrificial service required at this time. Indian missions need not be embarrassed by the fact that the message and love of Jesus drive them in their holistic

mission. Indian missions must not be intimidated by the propaganda of the Hindutva forces that constantly accuse them of being involved in compassionate work in order to convert people. There is a proper and bold defense against this accusation.

3. The Indian church must reject the notion that the poor and the illiterate do not have the capacity to decide on spiritual matters and matters of conscience. This idea goes against fundamental human dignity and denies basic individual freedom to people. The poor and the illiterate, in fact, have more capacity than the rest to imbibe faith and spiritual truths. The move to give the State legislative powers in deciding on matters of conscience is one of the worst forms of human rights abuse.³

4. Indian Christian leaders cannot escape from dealing with societal sin along with personal sin. The social conscience of the Indian Christian needs to be further awakened and activated. For too long the churches have talked only about personal sin. They need to talk about both personal and social sin. This will mean that in many places the church will itself have to go through transformation before she enters mission. Bringing the love and salvation that are in Christ to the poor will mean deep personal transformation (see Sider, 1984, pp. 120, 122). There are no shortcuts here. The gospel of Jesus will deal with sin in the church as much as sin in society. It will also confront issues of structural sin and will teach us not to participate in the fruits of unjust structures.

² Holistic is defined here as addressing the physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual needs of the people.

³ The government of Orissa has further amended the anti-conversion bill, giving sweeping powers to the police to question and authenticate decisions in matters of conscience. This bill has now gone to the High Court as Christians and other minorities have challenged it.

Liberation of the Dalitbahujan Castes

The images of the 1990 caste riots and of students immolating themselves are still imprinted on Indian minds. India was then in the midst of caste turmoil, and the backward castes and the Dalits were forming strategic alliances.⁴ The most significant social movement in present-day India was taking place—the churning among the so-called backward and Dalit castes, for which we shall use the term “Dalitbahujan,” meaning the oppressed castes who make up the majority peoples. Together, they and the tribals make up over 70% of the Indian people.

If the forces of Hindutva do not have a stranglehold on the Indian State today, it is because of the major stirrings among these oppressed peoples all over the nation. The Dalitbahujan castes have seen Hindutva for what it is: “In fact post, post-colonial Hindutva is a Brahminical modernity which works strategically in the interests of Brahmin, Baniya, and neo-Kshatriya forces” (Ilaiah, 1998, p. 43).

The Dalitbahujan castes’ social and political activism is keeping a religiously pluralistic democracy alive at the present time. Without their rejection of the Hindutva doctrine, the nation would be in trouble today, plagued by enormous reli-

gious conflicts. Joining the Dalitbahujan castes are many from the upper castes who are also not comfortable with the caste system.

In his seminal work, *Why I Am Not a Hindu*, Kancha Ilaiah, a Sudra by caste, a professor at Osmania University, and a Fellow at Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, tells us how Hindutva represents the Brahminization of India. It is the last-ditch, well-organized attempt by many of the upper castes and the neo-Kshatriyas to maintain their hegemony over Indian society and to co-opt those groups of people who have never been in their “Hindu” fold. Hindutva proponents are busy claiming that even Buddhists, Jains, and Sikhs are also Hindus. But the majority of the Dalitbahujan peoples have not agreed to this co-option and are asserting themselves more and more in every sphere of life. It is only a matter of time before the Dalitbahujan peoples increasingly take over the reigns of political and societal leadership in most parts of India, just as they have done in Tamil Nadu, Bihar, and other places.⁵

Is Indian society going through a process of fragmentation? By all the symptoms in society, it appears so. Is Hinduism as a religion vulnerable to fragmentation? Yes. It is not Christianity or some outside force

⁴ The decision of the Indian Prime Minister V. P. Singh in 1990 to accept the recommendations of the Mandal Commission report of 1984 and grant 27% reservations in federal government and education for the 3,743 backward sub-castes throughout the nation was an historical event which changed the face of Indian society and politics. In 1993, the Supreme Court ruled in the *Indra Sawhney vs. Union of India* case that the Mandal scheme was constitutional. Earlier, the Constitution at its inception had provided reservations for the Dalits and tribals.

⁵ See Ilaiah (1998) for an account of the stirrings in the Dalitbahujan communities. The fragmentation of the age-old, all-encompassing Hindu society is obvious. Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, according to Ilaiah, was the first thinker in 3,000 years from the lowly Mahar caste. Rejecting casteized slavery and influenced by the philosophy of Buddha, Dr. Ambedkar broke away from Hinduism and also decided not to join any political party led by a Brahmin, Baniya, or neo-Kshatriya. It would be appropriate to point out that Dalits venerate and adulate Dr. Ambedkar. His thinking and reformation were heavily influenced by liberal Western education. To the end, he remained a nationalist liberator of the Dalits.

that is causing this to happen. Rather, pushing the Hindutva doctrine on all Indians is producing this fragmentation.

Despite the best attempts of those who have defended the caste system and despite the motive originally behind the system, the fact remains that the caste system brought in racism.⁶ What happens even in the present time to the Dalits of India is unbelievable in terms of atrocities, killings, rapes, and structured abuse of their human rights. These things are done despite the laws of the land and the Constitution that safeguards their rights (Human Rights Watch, 1999a). Racism must be the second original sin—man sinning against man—after man sinned against God. Racism has been found everywhere in India in one form or another.

The failure of Jesus or of Indian Christians?

The problem is that the Christianity that emerged through the missionary effort during the colonial rule ended up taking on a caste identity. Even though Indian social reformers like Ambedkar, Phule, and Periyar were rejecting both the caste system and the religion that perpetuated it, some sections of South Indian Christianity continued practicing the caste system and thus were not able to provide an alternative to this oppressive social system. These sections of the Indian church have been Brahminized. This stands as a major stumbling block for the Dalitbahujan commu-

nity in India and for a growing number of liberal upper caste people who reject the evil in the system.

Advocacy of the missiological “homogeneous unit principle” has not helped. Our reform-minded Dalitbahujan friends do not understand this emphasis. Why have the mass movements not had much impact on Indian society? How is it that so many of these movements have come to a dead-end and dissipated? Is it because the expected human dignity and reconciliation were never realized?

Christian communities from the Dalitbahujan castes have their own caste-driven prejudices among themselves. At a time when the nation needs an integrated Indian church model, there is very little to show. Missions too are seldom models of reconciled communities. This is an affront to the very gospel that is supposed to break down all barriers and provide for alternatives in fragmenting societies. Recently, when Naga Christians and Kuki Christians killed and slaughtered each other, one wondered what dimensions of the gospel have impacted our fellow Christians in the northeast?

Yet it is still not too late.

The church in India is being driven to the heart of the Dalitbahujan communities, who are proving to be the protectors of Christians under attack in a number of places. This is because, despite the caste system prevalent in the church, a lot of social work has been done by Christians

⁶ Küng (1993, p. 151) comments, “One has to imagine the situation of the Aryan tribes in order to grasp what purity (caste) meant for them. The more some of them penetrated the Ganges plains and went east and south, the more distinctly they found themselves in the minority vis-à-vis the original population. If they wished to hold on to their special position, they had to maintain their racial and cultural identity. They had to avoid blending into subject peoples. This was possible only through isolation—an interesting example of apartheid in antiquity. (It led, by the way, to continually increasing tensions, even back then.) To the Aryans, ‘purity’ applied to race and, even more strictly, to religion. For this reason, non-Aryans were excluded from both active and passive participation in the Vedic religion. Simultaneously, their special religious position consolidated the Aryan upper castes.”

among the lower castes, resulting in their education and knowledge of the broader world. Without doubt, this has empowered the lower castes to assert themselves as human beings in society. This is one of the reasons the Hindutva elements are bent on bringing a halt to Christian social involvement among the backward and low castes. They foresee a direct threat to their own power over these people. The Dalit-bahujan castes see Christians as their natural allies. If only Christians would deal with the caste system within the churches themselves!

It is quite obvious that Indian missions will have to chart their own course and come out of the shadow of imported ideas and ways of working. We need to think for our own context, and we need to think long-term. We need to stay true to the foundational gospel principles of regeneration, reconciliation, and redemption. Our own Christian communities need transformation first. We must not be pressurized by the “hurry up” mentality of our day and go in for short-term results, statistics, and decisions, of which we have had many millions!

We now need to hold on for real, long-term change. We have a glorious gospel to share—a gospel of the kingdom that not only brings salvation, but one that also promises (a) an end to violence, (b) com-

plete social justice, (c) the reclaiming of social “wastes” in human lives, (d) that everything worthwhile in human lives will be tenderly fostered, and (e) that every legitimate interest of human life will receive its due (McClain, 1974, pp. 224-227). It is to this holistic gospel that we bear witness with greater boldness and integrity.

Missions as Both the Proclamation and Defense of the Gospel

Our last image comes from the lion-hearted Pope John Paul II, old and bent because of his years, wounds, and illnesses. Speaking to the Christian church and the Indian nation through the media on the uniqueness of Jesus Christ, he courageously called for open evangelization and the freedom of conscience in early December 1999, at the Asian Catholic Bishops Synod in New Delhi.⁷ Those speeches cleared some of the fog around some of the accusations of the Hindutva brigade and compelled Christians to take a clear stand with regards to their faith in the uniqueness of Christ.⁸ Indian Christians sitting on the pluralism fence were forced to make their stand known. The church becomes irrelevant in any land when it does not hold onto the salvation that is

⁷ See *Ecclesia* (1999, pp. 39, 54). The Pope’s visit was preceded by calls of protest from right wing Hindu groups who demanded that the Pope apologize for conversions to Christianity and state that Christ was equal to any other gods. The Pope did not oblige. He proclaimed the uniqueness of Christ as Saviour and Lord and pointed out that the church is called to evangelize. A few of the Catholic commentators felt that the Pope’s position was a retrograde step in light of the liberal developments in the Catholic church since Vatican II.

⁸ Communicating and holding to the uniqueness of Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord are among the major challenges before Indian missions, which live and serve in the midst of many major world religions. An attitude of arrogance towards other people’s faith is not the way forward, nor is ignorance about people’s beliefs and traditions. Our message of salvation in Jesus Christ alone because of his finished work on the cross needs patient explanation. This will need to be done in the established context of friendly and long-term relationships. For further reading, see Gnanankan (1992).

available in Christ alone because of his finished work on the cross.

The attacks on Christians, churches, and their institutions have increased since the Pope left.⁹ The cardinal doctrines of the Christian faith have been maligned. The Person of Jesus is targeted. Verbal abuse has been poured on our Lord (see Banerjee, 1998, p. 6). The miracles of Christ are ridiculed. Christian institutions and workers face more violence, and recent mission publications and reports have been ripped apart in the media. Christians are accused of engaging in fraudulent conversions. Further State legislation is being enacted which, if passed, which will force Christians to break the law in order to follow their conscience and the faith. After the demonizing of Muslims for decades, it is now the turn of the Christians to be demonized. The liberal and tolerant Indian society is being fed a daily quota of lies about the Christians. To their credit, many Hindus are not buying these lies.

It would be correct to say that the Indian church is where the early church was contextually, except that the Indian church has to contend with Christian history, a multiplicity of religions, the accompanying tensions, and a borderless world due to the impact of information technology in India. An insensitive statement or report in America can have overnight impact on Indian Christians, as demonstrated in the release of the prayer guide on India in October 1999 by the Southern Baptists in their U.S. congregations. Jerry Rankin tendered an apology to the Indian people, which was then released to the press and helped calm down the situation.

Regeneration in Jesus or proselytization to Christianity?

The Indian church now has the job of both proclaiming and defending the gospel in bewildering situations, and she has to contend with and evaluate major issues from various sides. Below are possible positions the Indian Christian leaders can take:

1. There needs to be an open admission of the sins and failures of the church through history, including the Crusades, the destruction of the native cultures of South America, the church's role in colonialism, the decline of faith in Europe and America, and anti-Semitism. The open state of confession must be followed by actual change of attitudes towards nations, peoples, cultures, and religions. A vigorous process of self-critique of the church is in order. This is the glory of the gospel. It teaches us to be broken and contrite and to pursue righteousness.

2. The church will have to repent of the caste system, of her inward-looking tendencies (which result in maintaining the status quo in society), and of her lack of involvement at the heart of Indian society. Repentance will need to be followed by giving the Dalitbahujan castes their due leadership and influence in the life of the church. After all, even within the churches, these castes represent the majority. They have an enormous amount to contribute to the growth and development of the churches. Their cultures, social experience, and insights can greatly strengthen the churches. Including these castes will enable the church to speak prophetically into the life of the nation, as well as to point people to Christ.

⁹ See *The Statesman* (2000). Another series of attacks this time in the state of UP left a number of priests and nuns in several places wounded and badly injured after being beaten with iron rods. This was followed by physically attacking local evangelists in Agra and burning Bibles and Scripture portions. These attacks follow the familiar pattern: Hate literature and speeches result in violence against the peaceful community of Christians who are just trying to live out their faith.

3. Further, Christians will have to revisit and study India's vast and ancient philosophical ideas and learn from them wherever possible. The Christian captivity to Greek philosophical systems must end. In our opinion, it has gone on for too long. Indian philosophical thought has many strands that will shed further light and understanding under the guidance of the Holy Spirit on much truth in Scripture.

4. Now that Hindutva ideologues have attacked contextualization as a means that Christians employ in deceiving innocent Hindus, much care and thought must go into this whole area. For a start, there must be curbs on the use of Hindu religious symbols in the present atmosphere. Next, contextualization must stop when it transgresses in areas of social justice. Further, much work should go into understanding and developing a genuine Indian identity. This is the need for both the church and the larger society in the light of the Hindutva attempt to develop an extremist religious identity for the nation. The future for our great nation lies in the acceptance and development of a pan-Indian identity.

5. Indian mission workers need to develop a deep spiritual identity in Christ that is not afraid to draw on some of the spiritual traditions of India. Khushwant Singh, the well-known journalist, was right when he remarked that Indian Christianity has not produced enough saints; rather, it has produced bureaucrats, officers, managers, and the like. How can we expect to impact people who come out of traditions of intense spiritual quest and discipline if we follow shallow and instant spirituality?

6. Christ came to reconcile us to God and also to each other as humans—men and women. How does this reconciliation translate in a communal and caste-infested society that is being driven by evil forces to hate each other?¹⁰ How can we affirm and appreciate the liberal upper caste Hindus who want to move away from the oppression of the caste system? How do we encourage and build up the Dalitbahujan caste people, many of whom are freely turning to faith in Christ all over the nation? Without any doubt, they see and experience Christ as the Saviour. Further, how do we, like Paul, challenge the forces that oppose equality before God and equality as humans? How do we witness for the gospel and get a listening, when people get into vicious conflict with each other because of religion?

7. How do we deal with the accusation that the Christian faith only makes slaves more docile under their oppressors and does not deal with the issue of basic human justice? How do we convince people that God is the God of justice, mercy, and compassion? How do we show people that at the human level Christ was nailed to the cross because he stood for justice, compassion, and mercy and that he was a real threat to the religious and political order of his day? How do we show that at the personal level he died for our sins and came to establish a new eternal kingdom with a new set of values and standards?

8. The forces of Hindutva ridicule the present power of Jesus to heal and deliver people from sin, sicknesses, and other problems. But the masses that are turning to Christ know that this power is true in their lives. Christ is meeting the majority of our people—the poor, the oppressed, the rich, and many in the upper castes—

¹⁰ Marty (2000) notes, "If being reconciled to God is a finished work that the believer gets to experience, being reconciled to humans is never finished and hard to experience."

at the point of their need, and he responds to their simple, childlike faith. This does not mean he always answers all their prayers or that they see miracles all the time. It does mean that there is sufficient experience of the power of God in their daily lives and needs. This is a far cry from the health, wealth, prosperity, and instant victory fad in certain sections of the church. A proper articulation of the theology of forgiveness, healing, and deliverance that is balanced and real is essential for our times. Prayer for people in need has become a powerful catalyst in their turning to Christ.

9. Among all the issues for which Christians are attacked, conversion is the biggest. There are several reasons for this. Today, conversion is seen as a political activity and not just a religious decision. Then there is the lie that when people become Christians, they become anti-national. Most Indians do not believe this lie, as Christians are among the most patriotic and law-abiding communities in the nation. When people do turn to the Christian faith out of their own free will, they become what human beings are meant to be—the crown of God’s creation.¹¹ Conversion is also seen as a means of social engineering—that is, a deliberate attempt to bring about change in the social structure. Social change for the good is a fruit of following Christ. Authentic Christian communities always threaten the powerful. The Christian ethos will mean educa-

tion and liberation for the people. To keep people illiterate is to deny them the use of their mind, an integral part of what it means to be made in the image of God. Education will also mean that every man and woman is able to realize his or her full potential.

10. Christians will have to work out and articulate a theology of tolerance and respect for the free will of individuals to choose the life and religion they want to follow. This is crucial as we seek to obey the Lord and communicate the uniqueness of Christ and how salvation is possible only in him because of the finished work on the cross. Our freedom to preach the gospel is limited by another person’s free will in choosing not to follow the gospel. There is a time for preaching, and there is a time for demonstrating the gospel through our lives when the audience has made the choice. The best witness to the gospel ultimately is the power of a Christ-like life.

11. To be ethically pure, Christian charity cannot have an ulterior motive, other than responding to people’s need in compassion and love. This is what drives Christian love—the nature of Christ’s love. It does not expect anything in return. It gives love freely. Christian missions do not hide the fact that Christ and his love drive them. Whether people accept or reject Christ is not in our hands. If in the past missionaries proselytized en masse for questionable motives, then we need to re-

¹¹ Hoekema (1986, p. 105) observes, “The fall resulted in two evil effects on our self-image. The first was pride. The second was the sense of utter worthlessness. These two problems have plagued the human race. Within the missions context, the tendency has always been to focus on the pride issue. The majority of India’s oppressed have the reverse problem. Centuries of collective experience have damaged their sense of worth to unknown degrees. This leads to all kinds of personal and social malfunctioning and harmful behaviour. These people know too well the kind of life they live. The gospel of Jesus to them will be that he will not break a bruised reed, that he will forgive their sins and heal their wounds and strengthen and comfort them through their struggles and life. Instead, what they receive is an alien message designed for another audience where pride is the primary issue, etc. Churches that have brought the above message of the healing, love, goodness, and completeness in Christ are growing fast and strong.”

pent of this practice. Proselytization is simply not acceptable in today's world. The emphasis today must be on the spiritual regeneration of people and not on numbers. Regeneration is divine and not in the hands of man. The other point is that many upper caste and rich Indians have turned to Christ all across India. They need to articulate the reason for their faith to their appropriate audiences to counter the accusation of proselytization.

12. Christian missions in the West must know that in the borderless world of the media and information technology, we have a wide-awake, watching world following our lives, words, actions, attitudes, and press releases, whether in print or on the Internet. Unless Western Christians learn to refer their mission concerns and intentions to the Indian church and missions, Christians in India will continue to face more problems. This does not mean that the Christians in India are not willing to face persecution. We are learning that, "However important programmes of formation and strategies of evangelization may be, in the end it is martyrdom which reveals to the world the very essence of the Christian message. The word itself, 'martyr,' means witness, and those who have shed their blood for Christ have borne the ultimate witness to the true value of the gospel" (*Ecclesia*, 1999).

Drawing to a Conclusion

I have attempted to present some of the challenges before us as Indian Christians and leaders. A religiously pluralistic nation watches us. A divided society watches us. Spiritually searching millions are examining us. The cry of the poor and oppressed reaches out to us. A developing nation looks for substantial spiritual realities that address the deep hungers that cannot be satisfied by any new materialism.

We are inheritors of an ancient civilization. Our strengths and weaknesses are unique. Our collective experience and consciousness are different from those of other societies. We take pride in our Indianness. On that basis, we want to forge ahead as Indians and as those who believe in Christ.

We Indian Christians are at a crucial and complex juncture in our history. Old categories of missiology and the latest fads from abroad won't do any good anymore. Any methodology that is one step removed from incarnational involvement in the life of our people just won't work. We will have to work through the loving and patient sharing of our faith in our complex context. We will need to focus on the prophetic dimensions of the gospel. We do not have the luxury of spending endless time in debates over definitions of mission. Rather, we are faced with hard realities. We have to carry on bearing witness to our faith and respond to the cry of our nation. In this we need the prayers and support of all God's people.

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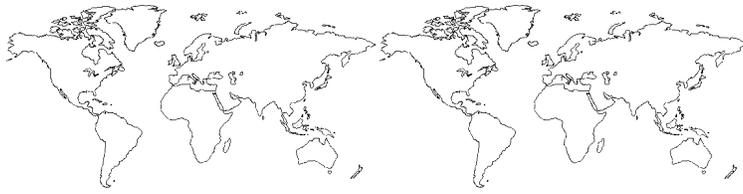
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Their ministry takes them across India, challenging the church for missions as well as training mission workers with various groups. Joseph has been overseeing OM's varied ministries run by nationals (over 800 alone with OM) in India and has been the Chairman of OM Books for the past 10 years. Under Joseph's leadership, a training programme for on-the-field mission workers was developed under the Asian College of Cultural Studies, Hyderabad, which now offers accredited bachelor's and master's degrees in missions and leadership. Since 1998, Joseph has been the Chairman of the All India Christian Council—a broad Christian front of over 2,000 groups, associations, churches, and denominations—that is proactively responding in many different ways to the persecution of Indian Christians and the attack on their fundamental liberties. He has a B.A. in chemistry from Karnataka University and an M.A. in Christian communication from Asia Theological Seminary, Manila. Joseph and Mariam have two children aged 21 years, Josh and Beryl.



28

The Hindu missionary movements and Christian missions in India

RICHARD
HOWELL

RELIGION TODAY PLAYS a crucial role in characterizing the nations of the world. The nationalist movements since the 1970s, based on the assertion that one majority ethnic or religious group defines a nation, have emerged with new force and creativity. Many countries have crumbled since Iran's 1978 Islamic Revolution. In 1992, the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia—two large, multi-ethnic states much like India—were torn into conflicting parts. In India, “communalism” does not refer to people getting together in warm community; to the contrary, the term is associated with hatred, hostility, and suspicion of the other party, and it is symptomatic of new trends emerging in the world order.

The centralized Indian State built on socialist lines by Jawaharlal Nehru is being vehemently challenged. Realizing the powers of the free market and religious nationalism, Indian businesses and some political parties are now confronting the weakening socialist state in India. Religion has become a natural populist force articulating people's cultural and national identities at a level of emotional meaning, more basic and fundamental than other kinds of political affiliations. Today “India” and “Hindu” are often equated when defining Indian culture. The core characteristics of the culture are taken to be Hindu. Indian Islam is thus portrayed as being foreign and derivative, alien to India. Christianity, in a similar strain, is depicted as the religion of the colonizers and is seen to be alien as well. In order to understand India today, it is important, first, to consider the Hindu missionary movements and, second, to give a brief account of the Christian missions so we can learn valuable lessons from history.

Hindu Missionary Movements

Some foundational issues

Aryanization

Hindu¹ mission is as old as ancient Aryanism. The missionary nature of Vedic and Brahmanical Hinduism may be summarized as "Aryanization." *Rig Veda*. 9:63:5 reads, "*Krinvanto visvamaryan,*" "Let us make the whole world Aryan." This verse apparently unfolds the missionary nature of ancient Hinduism. The political supremacy of Aryans and their culture played an important role in the expansion of Brahmanical religion. The Aryans attempted to accomplish this by establishing their supremacy over the dark-skinned *mlecchas* or the *dasyus* or barbarians.²

Absorption into caste infrastructure

Despite their political supremacy, the Aryans had to accept the reality of the continued presence of non-Aryans in their midst and elsewhere. This led to the Aryanization of the non-Aryans. This process meant bringing the *mlecchas* under the influence and acceptance of the Aryan customs and beliefs and absorbing the non-Aryans into the caste infrastructure. S. Radhakrishnan (n.d., p. 17) makes reference to the early Aryans' employment of caste infrastructure in the Aryanization of the natives. Bipin Chandra Pal states that Hinduism has always been a missionary religion. It differs from other missionary religions in its methodology. Pal (1913) explains, "Hinduism has propagated itself not through preaching a particular creed

but through promulgating its special culture. Hinduism in its missionary work required the non-Hindus to subscribe to a set of Hindu psycho-physical disciplines and regulations, with special emphasis on particular food and drink. The outer orderings of life were first Hinduized, and this was followed by a natural mental and spiritual evolution. By adopting the mode of life peculiar to the Hindus, the non-Hindus became Hinduized." This "Hinduization" process through an altered psycho-physical life is the work of the caste system.

The *shuddhi* program, which was largely employed during the Muslim period in India and is now again employed for Christians under the name of *Gbar Vapasi*, "Returning Home," has the same goal of "purifying the defiled" and providing them with a place in the *dharm*a or caste hierarchy. However, the Dalit liberation movements continue their fight against the caste system. Bhagwan Das (1994, p. 75) writes, "Upper caste Hindus have a vested interest in maintaining and perpetuating caste. If caste goes, Hinduism will die. With the Dalits, it is just the opposite. Caste is the greatest obstacle in the way of their unity and progress. If they do not destroy caste, caste will destroy them. They need them only to do the dirty work and to render them friendless by pitting them against Muslims one day, against the Sikhs the next day, and may be against the Christians very soon. In the eradication of caste and adoption of the right code of conduct based on equality, compassion, loving kindness, and justice lies their salvation."

¹ The term "Hinduism" is a useful label for studying different indigenous religious expressions. However, Hinduism is made up of a diversity of religious sects. We have put all these sects together under a uniform name, even though the religious reference points of such groups might be quite distinct. Hindu identity is multiple by definition.

² See Matthew (1999); Tambimuttu (n.d.); Clemen (1930); Gray (1965).

Theory of accommodation and dharma

The Hindu missionary movement's "theory of accommodation" can only be understood against the backdrop of *dharmā*, caste hierarchy. The disadvantaged communities in Indian society consented to their low status and the resulting exploitation, and they accepted their position as the *varnasamādharmā*, order of things. Given the complexity of *dharmā* understanding and the hierarchical society that *varnasamādharmā* produced, the necessity arose to stress both the need for general accommodation as well as a degree of tolerance for local practices, specific demands, and proposals for change. These things were possible as long as the terms of upper caste *dharmā* were not questioned. The Hindu understanding of toleration and accommodation must therefore be understood within the *varnasamādharmā* context, which circumscribes and contains them, and not as independent qualities divorced from the context.

Indian society advocates toleration while maintaining an otherwise intolerant and cruel society. Who can leave the caste hierarchy and claim the benefits of toleration? Who can vertically challenge and aspire for the higher caste in the hierarchy and expect accommodation? The characteristics of "accommodation" to be found in a holistically conceived hierarchical society are not the same as those which will bring about a liberal egalitarian society (see Galanter, 1997).

British Raj and Brahmanism

A South Indian writer, S. D. Theeratha (1992, pp. 227, 235-236), maintains that Brahmanical Hindu leaders of the 19th

century used the British Raj for their own advantage. Under British rule, in fact, Brahmanism acquired a constitutional status and the force of law. The colonial government failed to check inter-religious intolerance, hostility, caste, priestcraft, and increase of idolatry. At times, anarchy prevailed as two imperialisms, Brahmanical and British, placed one above the other, crushed freedom of the masses. "The Raj, as an imperial system of rule," writes Robert Frykenberg (1997), "was genuinely indigenous rather than a foreign [or colonial construct], ... in terms of religious institutions, indigenous elites and local forces of all kinds were able to receive recognition and protection, as well as special protection from the State. ... It is in the sphere of religious establishments, however, that the Raj became especially 'Hindu.' It is in this sphere that, by yielding to special interests, the government of Madras itself became instrumental in facilitating the rise of a centralizing and modern and syndicated Hinduism."

Modern syndicated Hindu missionary movements

The modern, aggressive, syndicated³ Hindu missionary movement is headed by the Hindutva forces of the Sangh Parivar, who define "nation" both ethnically and culturally. Their clear slogan is, "One nation, one culture, one people." This means that those who belong to the Hindu *dharmā* are ethnically and culturally part of the nation. The "others" (Christians and Muslims) are to be hated and rejected, for they do not belong to the nation. As noted earlier, Christianity is viewed as the religion of the colonizers and Islam as the religion of the invaders; both are of alien origin and therefore must be rejected. The

³ Romila Thapar (1985) first used the term "syndicated" to describe Hindu missionary movements.

move of the Sangh Parivar is to make India into a Hindu nation.

Syndicated Hinduism

Many who were attracted to neo-Hindu groups had at some point in their lives experienced Christian education and were thereafter familiar with Christian ideas. They attempted to defend, redefine, and create Hinduism on the model of Semitic religions. They sought for the equivalent of a monotheistic God, a Book, a Prophet or a founder, and congregational worship with an institutional organization supporting it (Thapar, 1997).

Missionary agencies and scheduled castes and tribes

Hindu missionary organizations, such as those attached to the Ramakrishna Mission, the Arya Samaj, the RSS,⁴ and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, are active among the *adivasis*, mainly scheduled castes and tribes. They are converting these latter groups to Hinduism as defined by the upper caste movements of the last two centuries. What is important for Hindu missionaries is that these communities declare their support for the *dharmā* and are ready to be labeled as Hindu for the sake of either a census or support to a political party. That this conversion does little or nothing to change their actual status and that they continue to be looked down upon by upper caste Hindus is of little consequence. Thapar (1997, p. 76) comments, "The call to unite under Hinduism as a political identity is, if anything, anachronistic. Social and economic inequality, whether one disapproves of it or condones it, was foundational to Brahmanism."

Emergence of the middle class

A powerful middle class with urban moorings has emerged and is reaching to the rural rich of India. This group would find it useful to bring into politics a uniform, monolithic Hinduism. Under the guise of Hindutva, claiming to be a revival of an ancient, traditional form but in effect being a new creation, an effort is being made to draw a large following and to speak with the voice of numbers. This voice has been created to support the claims of majoritarianism based on a religious identity in the functioning of democracy. The appeal of such Hinduism to the middle class is obvious, since it becomes a mechanism for forging a new identity aimed at protecting the interests of the middle class. Those lower down in society would be attracted to upward mobility through a new religious movement. Such groups would have to accept the *dharmā* of the powerful but remain subordinate.

Use of media

Equally important to Hindutva is the means of its propagation. It uses a variety of existing organizations, from the rather secretive RSS to the harsh-sounding Bajrang Dal. There is an impressive exploitation of modern communication media, both audio-visual and print, with a substantial dose of spectacle, drama, and hysteria. Information is power, and as Frykenberg (1997, p. 89) notes, "The Brahmins have always controlled information."

Hindu diaspora

Another factor of increasing importance for Hindutva is the Hindu diaspora—the dispersal of Hindus in various parts of the globe. The importance of this diaspora

⁴ For a detailed study, see Andersen & Damle (1987).

is reflected not only in the social links between those in India and those abroad supporting Hindutva, but also in the growing frequency with which the Sanghs and Parishads hold their meetings abroad and seek the support and conversion of the affluent to their ideology. A convention was organized by Vishwa Hindu Parishad in Washington, DC, in 1993, to commemorate the anniversary of Vivekananda's visit to America. The commemoration was an intentional, aggressive drive for a religious identity with strong political aspirations.

Religious intolerance and violence

History bears witness to many religious conflicts in Indian society. "Religious intolerance is not alien to Hinduism," states Thapar (1997), "despite the 19th century myth that the Hindus are by instinct and religion a non-violent people. The genesis of this myth was partly in the romantic image of the Indian past projected, for example, by scholars such as Max Muller" (see Muller, 1892, p. 101ff.).

Thapar (1997; see also Thapar, n.d., p. 19ff.) continues, "Non-violence as a central tenet of behavior and morality was first enunciated and developed in the Sramanic tradition of Buddhism and Jainism. These were the religions which not only declined at various times in various regions in India, but also were persecuted in some parts of the sub-continent. Huan Tsang and Kalhana record the persecution of Buddhists by Saivas, and Karnataka witnessed the destruction of Jaina temples in a conflict with the Saivas. One is often struck by how different the message of the Gita would have been and how very much closer to non-violence if Gautama Buddha had been the charioteer of Arjuna instead of Krsna." Writing about "The Mahabharata Legacy and the Gita's Intent," Rajmohan Gandhi (1999, p. 34) says, "Proud as we are of the epic's codes of chivalry, we can-

not be proud, I suggest in all humility, of the story, or history, it reveals. In particular, we cannot be proud of the epic's acquiescence in triumph of revenge over reconciliation. I suggest, further, that we cannot be glad that the epic is reproduced in varied forms in our history."

In 1984, Mrs. Indira Gandhi, the Prime Minister of India, was killed by some of her guards in revenge for "Operation Blue-star." To avenge Mrs. Gandhi's death, within days thousands of Sikhs were killed, in many cases burned alive.

On December 6, 1992, the Ayodhya's Babri Masjid mosque, built in 1528 by Mir Baqi under the authority of Babar, the first Mughal emperor of India, was demolished in revenge by a mob of more than 300,000 Hindus, most of whom wore the saffron color of Hindu nationalism. In the excitement of successful, even if long delayed revenge, a number of poor Muslims in Ayodhya were also killed. In the following weeks, hundreds perished in riots or in police firing in Mumbai; a large majority were Muslims. The serial bomb blasts set off in Mumbai in revenge also took the lives of several hundred, mostly Hindus. By this time, a number of Hindu temples in Pakistan and Bangladesh had been destroyed. The supporters of Ayodhya justify the action as the liberation of a Hindu sacred space to unify the Indian nation. Critics call it violence against Muslims—an attack on Indian civil society. David Ludden (1996, p. 2) writes, "Ayodhya symbolises Hindu-Muslim conflict in South Asia but also conjures the nightmare of nuclear war between India and Pakistan.... The men who destroyed the Babri mosque marched to a cultural movement whose ideas, images, media, organisations, and resources are transnational in form, scope, and influence. Ayodhya is a refraction of 'ethnic cleansing' in Serbia, the 'moral majority' in the United States, and other

movements that define nations by ethnicity and religion.”

Now Christians are being persecuted—their priests killed, churches burned, institutions attacked, nuns raped, and Bibles burned. Australian missionary Graham Staines and his two innocent children, Phillip and Timothy, were burned alive in the jeep they were sleeping in on the night of January 23, 1999. Mrs. Gladys Staines, the widow of Graham, and Esther, the couple’s 13-year-old daughter, publicly forgave the perpetrators of the crime. Gladys’ testimony, “I have no hatred; I forgive,” was a living demonstration of the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ, who died to reconcile people to God and to one another. The mission of the church in India is to be a reconciling community.

Islam in India

Islam is as old in India as in Turkey. Indian Islam is older than European Protestantism or American Christianity. Islam found its entrance into India initially through Muslim Arab traders who had trade links with the kingdoms along the west coast of India. From A.D. 712 onwards, Muslims began to settle permanently in the Indus Valley and to make converts among low caste Hindus. R. C. Majumdar (1966, p. 478) highlights the significance of the reality of Islam in India: “The advent of Islam constituted the first great rift in the solidarity of the Indian community since the incorporation of the aboriginal peoples into the Aryan society.” Indian society then came to be divided into two major communities—Hindu and Muslim. Islam wholeheartedly welcomed Hindus to its fold. Majumdar (1966, pp. 499-500) comments, “The position of the Hindus under the Muslim rule during the first two or three centuries was most unenviable, and the temptation to secure liberty, privilege, and higher status

by a change of creed proved irresistible to many. Through peaceful missionary propaganda and acts of terrorism and violence, Islam swelled its ranks at the expense of the Hindu community.” The Muslims treated the Hindus with contempt as *kafirs*, infidels. Conversely, the Hindus with “injured pride” developed deep resentment against the *mlecchas*, the polluted people. Thapar (1997) observes, “The definition of the Hindu today has its roots more in the period of Muslim rule than in the earlier period, and many of the facets which are regarded today as essential to Hinduism belong to more recent times. The establishment of sects which accompanied these developments often derived from wealthy patronage, including that of both Hindu and Muslim rulers, which accounted for the prosperity of temples and institutions associated with these sects. The more innovative sects were in part the result of extensive dialogue between *gurus*, *sadhus*, *pirs*, and Sufis, a dialogue which was sometimes confrontational and sometimes conciliatory” (see Roy, 1983; Skyhawk, n.d.). In India’s historical culture and civilization, Islam has very deep roots. Yet the idea that Islam is foreign in India is axiomatic among the Hindu nationalists. Ludden (1996, p. 5) points out, “Making Islam appear foreign to India is part of making India Hindu, pursued by the Hindu nationalist group.”

Christian Missions in India

The church in India has a very ancient tradition and heritage, as it is believed that St. Thomas, one of the 12 disciples of Christ, came to South India and established a church around 52 A.D. But the church remained localized and did not engage in missions, reaching out to its neighbors with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Robert de Nobili (1577–1656) and the Jesuit method of adaptation did not evoke a positive response from the Hindus. For de Nobili, the difference between Christianity and Hinduism was the difference between true and false religion. De Nobili (quoted in Chethimattam, 1969) asserts, “When we consider what is going on in these [Hindu] temples, the nude idols on the *gopurams*, and the dance, fun, and frivolity of the *devadasis*, and the many opportunities for the worshippers to sin with them, ... we can say there is no chance of leaving sin and doing good.”

With the coming of Western missionaries Bartolomaeus Ziegenbalg and Henry Pluetschau (sent by King Fredrick IV of Denmark, in 1706) and William Carey (of the Baptist Missionary Society, in 1793), the era of modern missions began. The Western colonial period saw a new era of Hindu-Christian relationship. The Christian mission under the Portuguese rule was extremely confrontational and insensitive. According to John Chethimattam (1969, p. 134), they employed “all kinds of rash and imprudent acts.”

As Western colonial power increased, there was also an increase in missionary activity. Samuel Jayakumar (1999, p. xvi) maintains that Christian missions contributed to the awakening of the consciousness of the depressed classes, which resulted in their socio-economic transformation.⁵

Use of the vernacular

For the Protestant missionaries, the Bible was central to the Christian faith. Consequently, from the beginning they gave themselves to the translation of the Scriptures into the vernacular.

Tamil was the first Indian language into which the Bible was translated (Victor, 1984). As a result, the Protestant Christians

of Tirunelveli, who were predominantly from the outcastes, began to regard themselves as *Vetbakaramga*, the people of the Scripture. It had always been the Brahmans and the caste Hindus who had possession of the Vedas, the Hindu scriptures, written in the Sanskrit language. For centuries, the outcastes were not only prohibited from possessing the Vedas, but also banned from hearing the Vedas being read. The Christian Scriptures thus gave these believers a particular identity.

Missionaries saw the practice of preaching in the vernacular as the means of awakening self-awareness. This often led to repentance and conversion as the people heard the gospel in their own language (Ragland, 1858; Hindu conversion, 1982).

Some Dalit liberation movements have rejected the Sanskrit language, which was used as a Brahmanical ideological tool to oppress the Dalits. The church must now play a conciliatory role. Many reformers who are involved in Brahman bashing are propagating a “spirituality” of caste hatred, which probably will not bring about much reform; rather, it may endanger the fragile unity of Indian society.

A dual mission

Early missionaries in India conducted a dual mission, going amongst the poor, the oppressed, and the outcastes and also amongst the caste Hindus (Seller, 1857). They found the former responsive to the gospel, while the latter group remained critical of Christianity (Caemmerer, 1855).

The American United Presbyterian Mission started its work in Sialkot in 1855 through Rev. Andrew Gordon. In 1857, two people were baptized—one a high caste Hindu and the other an elderly Dalit. The mission concentrated on working among high caste Hindus and Muslims. In the first 19 years of work, only 19 people

⁵ We have made use of Jayakumar’s research in this article.

turned to Christ. In 1870, a high caste Hindu named Nattu, who belonged to the landlord family and who was the son of a village head, decided to follow Christ. The missionaries had high expectations for him. They hoped he would succeed his father in becoming the next village head, but Nattu lost his right to that position. The missionaries considered him a “weak brother.” But in 1873, Nattu came to the mission compound in Sialkot, along with a man named Ditt, who was short in stature, black, lame, and illiterate. Nattu asked Rev. S. Martin to baptize Ditt. That event marked the beginning of a mass movement to Christ among the Dalits in Punjab (Pickett, 1933, pp. 42-45).

The gospel of self-worth and dignity

The poor and the oppressed responded to the gospel, for it promised them self-worth and dignity (Hoole, 1996). The message that was communicated to them from the Scriptures was one of awakening and confidence. Texts such as the following were commonly used for preaching: “The night is nearly over; the day is almost here” (Rom. 13:12); “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest” (Matt. 11:28); “Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God” (Col. 3:1); “There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28); “It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age, if they fall away, to be brought back to repentance, because to their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace” (Heb. 6:4-6).

The use of biblical images

The more recent imagery of spiritual warfare was not much in use during the 19th century missionary movement. Rather, the biblical images used were those of the wisdom of God, light, children of God, new creation, and members. These images symbolized the transformation that was taking place in the lives of the converted Dalits. Their use by the missionaries was an important strategy intended to quicken the converts’ self-understanding. These images provided the Dalits with a self-worth and dignity which they had never had before.

Although the missionaries and their Indian priests did not use technical terms such as conscientization or awareness building, they did use other terms—enlightenment, awakening, spiritual formation, character formation, and disciplining—to denote the change they were promoting among the newly formed Christian communities. A new consciousness and identity were evident among the Dalits due to the Christian impact.

As we look to the future of the Christian church and missions in India, we must avoid any careless use of militant language that confuses and alienates non-Christians and that provokes persecution of believers. Terms that are military in nature include target, conquer, army, crusade, mobilize, beachhead, advance, enemy, and battle. We trust that our Christian colleagues around the world will refrain from using this language in reference to the church around the world as well.

Personal and social transformation of Dalits

The identity crisis and the aspirations for a new identity were obvious when the Dalits fully or partially revealed their motives at the time of their conversion. There is no question that the Dalits were influ-

enced by a variety of reasons, such as spiritual, material, psychological, and social well-being. Awakening of consciousness was the singular reason behind the social transformation of the Dalits. Their conversion to Christ enlarged their thinking, sharpened their minds, and gave them self-respect.

While the Dalit liberation theologians have reduced the problems of the poor and the oppressed to socio-economic issues, the missionaries and the Indian priests maintained that the problems of the Dalits were not just economic or social but especially spiritual. Hence, the missionaries worked on the spiritual formation in the lives of the people, not merely on the change of customs and behavior. A biblical vision of society was and must be presented as the answer to the desperate communal tensions, economic disparity, and lack of human freedoms which continue to ravage the nation.

Cultural practice and the gospel

The missionaries did not intend to destroy the culture. They attempted to remove those cultural practices that they judged were incompatible and irreconcilable with the demands of the gospel, as also needed for the well-being of the community. As F. S. Downs (1993) contends, "From the time of their arrival on the scene, missionaries have called into question certain social practices of the indigenous culture on the ground that they were irreconcilable with the gospel." This included especially the ills such as child marriage, *Sati* (burning of widows), infanticide, and caste. Since social injustice was against God's will, the missionaries were called upon to fight it, irrespective of whether or not by so doing people would become Christians. Cultural sensitivity and contextualization of the gospel are of ut-

most importance as the gospel relates to the diverse cultures of India.

Enlightenment values: liberty, equality, and fraternity

Supported by the intellectual assumptions of the Enlightenment and influenced as they were by their Judeo-Christian background, the Anglicans serving in India were eager to achieve liberty, equality, and fraternity, which for centuries had been missing among the natives. According to James Alter (1974), these biblical and revolutionary principles were of fundamental importance to the British missionary movement in India. He writes, "Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity are, of course, not only political slogans. They are, first of all, religious terms deeply rooted in the biblical account of God's dealings with men."

Reasons for conversion

The reasons for conversion among the Indian people included an aversion to the "folly of idol worship," a desire to revenge the Hindu religion ("take our temples and dumb idols, which have ruined us thus far"), and a longing for a new life and change in social status (*SPG-MLR*, 1844, pp. 367-368). The converts were from the poor and oppressed community. It is important to note that the Nadars of Tamil Nadu converted not only to gain spiritual blessings, but also to enjoy the advantages that Christians had, including a church for worship and a school established in their own village for the advancement of their children.

Oneness in Christ

Both outcastes and upper-castes became Christians in groups. Thus Christian conversion to a great extent produced harmony between castes. At times, however, the converts to Christ also carried (and still carry) their caste baggage with them into the church. This highlights the

need for in-depth discipleship. The Christian community must live out the biblical image of “one new man.”

The Bible affirms, “For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility” (Eph. 2:14-16).

The power of the Christian gospel to break down the dividing wall of hostility between alien groups is amazing. The old man is the humanity in which divisions of race, sex, culture, citizenship, and class are important and cannot be forgotten or neglected. In the new man, these divisions cannot be primary. Fellowship of the local church must reflect the truth, which is highlighted by the corporate and relational image of the “one new man.”

Persecution by the upper caste

Not all those who committed to the initial teaching of the Bible continued to the point of baptism. At times, a whole village withdrew because of the violent persecution by upper caste Hindu communities, in whose service the Dalits and other outcastes then worked. The reason behind the persecution was that the gospel of Christ came on the one hand as a message of liberation to the poor and the oppressed but on the other hand as a threat to the Brahmans and caste Hindus. During the 1820s, Brahmans and the Vellalas, frightened by the ever-increasing number of Christians, formed a society called *Vibbuti Sangham*, “Sacred Ash Society,” in Tiruchendur to oppose the spread of the Christian gospel. Frykenberg (1997, p. 97) explains, “It advocated forc-

ible reconversions and subordination of radicalized Shanar Christians to the agrarian order from which they were seeking to extricate themselves.” They resisted change with their rigid adherence to *varnasamadharma*. Later movements grew up in the north and west of India. Movements such as Arya Samaj, the Nagari Pracharini Sabha, the Hindu Mahasabha, and the RSS have been radical reactions to what were perceived as threats to the status quo.

The persecution of Christians continued for many decades. In 1891, native minister V. Abraham provided examples of persecution by the Brahmans and caste Hindus, which prevented other Dalit communities from becoming Christians. When some of the Edayers (shepherds) and Maravars of Thenthirupathi expressed their desire to become Christians, their Brahman landlords started persecuting them and refused to employ those who had converted, with the consequence that except for a few individual families, group conversions did not take place (Abraham, 1890). J. F. Kearns (1854, p. 639), who worked in different parts of the district, reports that persecution became a strong deterrent to the conversion of the low caste communities.

More recently, movements that seem to be even more extremist and revivalistic have arisen. Chief among these are such militant and revivalist *jagarans* as the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, with its Dharma Sansad and Bajarang Dal, or youth wing; the Virat Hindu Sammelan, Hindu Samajotsav; and the Shiv Sena, Hindu Jagaran Manch.

Commitment to mission

Dialogue with people

The church must engage in dialogue with people of other faiths or no faiths. In the spirit of Isaiah 1:18 (“Come now, let us reason together”), Christian leaders in

India sustained a formal dialogue with the BJP and RSS leaders in December 1998. Both Catholic and Protestant church leaders participated in this dialogue, in which I had the privilege of representing the Evangelical wing of the church in India. It was an open exchange, and we had a free and frank discussion which led to a greater understanding of each other's position. But the claims of Jesus Christ were the main issue, as we answered questions such as, "Why do you say Jesus is the only way?" and, "Why do you convert?"

To us, the central cause of and issue in the persecution of Christians is the essential gospel of Jesus Christ. How can a Bible-believing Christian ignore the offense of the gospel? This is not rhetoric but pure gospel. In some cases, persecution has helped the church take a stand for Jesus. In other instances, church leaders have indicated that we should not preach that Jesus is the only way. During the course of the 1998 dialogue, it was stated that Christians should adopt Indian culture, which is Hindu culture, and they should be called Hindu Christians. As noted earlier, this practice is an effort to define the nation of India ethnically and culturally; it may imply including Christianity under the *dharmā* of the Hindu religion.

A newspaper article written by a Hindu clearly stated that even those churches which have adopted the Indian culture continue to bring in converts; hence, they must be opposed. The problem is not the Christian rhetoric; it is the Christian gospel which calls people to follow Jesus Christ that is opposed. The communal forces find ways to justify their persecution of Christians. On the other hand, we should be careful not to provide them with previously-listed warfare vocabulary which can be distorted by being interpreted out of context.

Proclamation of the gospel

The Christian church in India is the steward of the gospel of Jesus Christ. During his visit to India in November 1999, the Pope made a remarkable public declaration in New Delhi. In his Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation (2000, p. 10), he reflected, "This was not a celebration motivated by pride in human achievements, but one conscious of what the Almighty has done for the church in Asia (cf. Luke 1:49). In recalling the Catholic community's humble condition, as well as the weaknesses of its members, the Synod was also a call to conversion, so that the church in Asia might become ever more worthy of the graces continually being offered by God.... As well as a remembrance and a celebration, the Synod was an ardent affirmation of faith in Jesus Christ the Savior." Furthermore, the Pope affirmed, "The church went forth to make disciples of all nations (Matt. 28:19). With the church throughout the world, the church in Asia will cross the threshold of the Third Christian Millennium marveling at all that God has worked from those beginnings until now, and strong in the knowledge that just as in the first millennium the cross was planted on the soil of Europe, and in the second on that of the Americas and Africa, we can pray that in the Third Christian Millennium, a great harvest of faith will be reaped in this vast and vital continent" (Post-Synodal, 2000, p. 4).

We Indian Evangelicals are encouraged by this unashamed invitation to Christians to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ. God's saving revelation in Jesus Christ is unique and authoritative. In Christ, God has provided the only way for human salvation.

Embracing the alien

The mission of the church in India must also emphasize that God's people are to be the voice of the voiceless and

the champion of the powerless. The equality of human beings is expressed in the Bible in familiar phrases, and we must show no partiality in our attitude to other people, nor give special deference to some because they are rich, famous, or influential. Moses declared, "For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes. He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the alien, giving him food and clothing. And you are to love those who are aliens, for you yourselves were aliens in Egypt" (Deut. 10:17-19). The love of God has been constantly displayed throughout history in his providential care for the widows, orphans, and aliens. He is especially concerned for those who are easily forgotten, the despised minorities.

The same emphasis occurs in the New Testament, for God is the impartial Judge. He does not regard external appearances or circumstances. He shows no favoritism, whatever our racial or social background may be. Peter speaks in Acts 10:34, "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism." Note also Romans 2:11 and 1 Peter 1:17. The Pharisees said to Jesus once, "Teacher, we know you are a man of integrity. You aren't swayed by men, because you pay no attention to who they are; but you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth" (Mark 12:14). Our Lord neither deferred to the rich and powerful, nor despised the poor and weak, but gave equal respect to all, regardless of their social status. This biblical image of God defending the cause of the fatherless and the widow and loving the alien must be an integral part of the church's mission. The heart of the gospel is communicated by the loving Father embracing the prodigal and by the outstretched arms of the crucified Savior

embracing and forgiving the ones who crucified him.

Drawing to a Close

These are the challenges before us in India:

First, the Indian Christian community must set an example to all other social and religious communities. The life of the local church is meant to be a sign of God's rule. The church should be the one community in the world in which human dignity and equality are invariably recognized; in which people's responsibility for one another is accepted; in which there is no partiality, favoritism, or discrimination; in which the poor and the weak are defended; and in which human beings are free to be human as God made them and meant them to be. These characteristics are brought about only through the Word of God, which makes us capable of perceiving ourselves as sinners and calls us to be God's partners in history. The spiritual formation of our congregations must take absolute priority, for we cannot survive with an over-simplified gospel and a minimalist Great Commission.

Second, the church in India has the duty of proclaiming the truth of Christ to all people everywhere, since that truth is of universal application. All human beings have the right to know of the One in whom the full salvation of humanity has been revealed. The local church is the primary place for the Great Commission to be realized. Our focus should be on equipping congregations for the task of holistic mission. By definition, mission involves moving beyond ourselves and telling others about our faith in Jesus Christ. We must equip congregations, theological institutions, and other Christian organizations to become centers of mission which can help broken people find wholeness in Jesus Christ. Christian witness must be

borne with a deep regard for the feelings of those who have not accepted the Christian faith. There are men and women who in all sincerity and humility search for the ultimate light of God.

Third, the church in India can no longer remain fragmented. Neither can the church remain apathetic or distant from civil society. We must be alive to the reality of the day and must strengthen civil society, which in turn must defend the constitutional rights of Christians and speak against the persecution of Christians. Christians must participate more proactively in the life of the nation by engaging in the political process in order to develop national leadership. We must increase our social commitment with the poor and the marginalized. The church in India needs an entrepreneurial and a middle class, so that an indigenous church can sustain itself.

Finally, the church in India even in the midst of persecution must continue its God-given ministry of reconciliation. Compassion, not adversarial communalism, flows from the heart of the mission of the church. Compassion expresses an attitude of complete willingness to use all means, time, and strength to help others. It transcends all national, racial, and caste barriers. Compassion brought Jesus from heaven to the humble manger to be with his rebel creation and to love and care for them. The unclean he made clean; the defenseless he empowered; the exhausted he fed; for the human life he died. He is the exemplar of servanthood, the Lord divine. It is his mission we follow.

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