

Teaching Missiology in and for World Christianity Content and Method

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Allow me first of all to extend my sincere thanks to Professor Angel Santiago-Vendrell for his kind invitation to address the Association of Professors of Mission at its annual convention on June 16, 2016. Not being a missiologist by academic training and by professional guild, it was with fear and trembling that I accepted to speak on the assigned topic of “Teaching Mission in an Age of World Christianity.”

With a clear awareness of my scholarly limitations in the field of missiology, and from the etic perspective as it were, I will organize my reflections around three theses. The first will, I suspect, please you enormously as professors of mission. By contrast, the second will most likely raise a few eyebrows. The third attempts to resolve the apparent antinomy between the first and the second theses by proposing a way of understanding mission, and correlatively, the teaching of mission in and for World Christianity.

Briefly, my three theses run as follows: First, in World Christianity without missiology there can be no adequate theology. Secondly, the recent method of teaching missiology is ineffective for World Christianity. Thirdly, the future of theological education, including the teaching of mission, lies in the happy marriage between missiology and history of Christianity. However, before expounding these three theses, since their validity depends on the concept of World Christianity, I will begin with a brief exposition of what is meant by it as the context for our reflections on the teaching of missiology, with respect to both method and content. Throughout my paper my perspective is that of a Roman Catholic, but I hope that it is not provincial---though it certainly *is* that---but sufficiently open so that it may find resonances in other church traditions.

What Is “World Christianity”?

In the last couple of decades the expression “World Christianity,” first used by Francis John McDonnell in his 1929 book *Human Needs and World Christianity*, together with its lexical cousin “Global Christianity,” has appeared in the titles of a plethora of publications and study centers, especially in the fields of church history and missiology. Whether the expression is merely a trendy buzzword manufactured by clever publishers to peddle their books with a catchy title, or by desperate academic administrators to attract new enrollments to their dying institutions, or on the contrary, whether it signals a methodological and substantive shift in the study of Christianity as such, the answer depends on what is meant by “world” and “Christianity,” taken separately or in conjunction, with “world” used adjectivally to qualify “Christianity.”

If by “world” is meant that Christianity is by nature “global” or “catholic” (with the lower-case c), then the expression “World Christianity” is theologically trite, since Christianity, by intent and design, and from its very beginning, has been open to the whole world, whether by “world” is meant the created order (*kosmos*), or the inhabited earth (*oikumene*), or the present age (*aion*). Again, if “Christianity” refers to the religion or church that has its origins in Jesus of Nazareth and is professed to be one, holy, catholic, and apostolic as a transcendent reality apart from its manifold historical embodiments, the expression would not acquire any significantly new and earth-shaking meaning, even if qualified by “world.”

What then is the new meaning of the expression “World Christianity” when “world” and “Christianity” are conjoined together? Wherein lies its novelty? As Dale Irvin has argued, the current concept of “World Christianity” emerged in the confluence of three disciplines, namely, missiology, ecumenical theology, and the study of world religions: “It continues to pursue a threefold conversation, across borders of culture (historically the domain of mission studies), across borders of confession or communion (the domain of ecumenics), and across borders with other religious faiths (historically the domain of world religions.”¹ To these three fields I would add church history. How these four academic disciplines have conspired to produce the concept of “World Christianity,” with the notion of “border” as its operative key, will be made clear in the course of my essay.

Out of the wide-ranging and profound permutations in the methods and subject-matters of these four fields, especially under the pressure of postmodern thought and postcolonial studies, both “world” and “Christianity” as historical and theological concepts, have acquired radically new connotations. First of all, “world” in “World Christianity” denotes much more than the so-called First World, namely, the West or the Global North, comprised of Europe and North America. From the geopolitical, economic and military perspectives, worldwide globalization has produced an ineluctable network of interlocking interdependence and reciprocal influence between the dominant First World and the so-called Third World, or Majority World that is comprised of Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Our contemporary world has become polycentric, with no one center, not even the United States as the remaining sole superpower, able to control and dominate, and not for lack of trying, the politics, economies and cultures of the other states. It goes without saying that this polycentricity has a deep impact on Christianity whose day-to-day existence is intimately interwoven with its host countries, especially on churches, such as the Roman Catholic Church, that have a strong central organization and therefore feel a heavy pressure for total decentralization. A transnational, transcultural, polycentric, and centrifugal Christianity has been rapidly emerging as a result.

1 Jonathan Y. Tan & Anh Q. Tran (eds), *World Christianity: Perspectives and Insights: Essays in Honor of Peter C. Phan* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2016), 4.

As for “Christianity,” the changes that have occurred within it since the end of the fifteenth century are even more radical. Demographically, there has been a steady movement of the Christian population, and with it the shift in the ecclesiastical center of gravity, from the Global North to the Global South. It is projected that by the middle of the 21st century four out of five Christians will live in the Global South. Of course, this shift in the ecclesiastical center of gravity does not necessarily bring about an immediate reduction in the power of Christianity of the Global North. But there is no doubt that Christianity of the Global South, with its vastly different and diverse doctrinal, liturgical, ethical, and organizational traditions, is radically changing the face and nature of Christianity itself, producing what is now called “World Christianity.” This fact has been highlighted by mission studies which examine in detail the “younger churches” or churches in “mission lands”---to use the highly problematic nomenclature of the recent past---and call for a new methodological approach that rejects the old imperialistic dichotomy between “Christian lands/mission lands” and “historic churches/younger churches.”

On its part, church history has undergone a thorough overhaul. Shedding colonialist and Western-centric blinders, church historians have come to recognize that there is not, nor has there ever been, *one* Christianity (read: Western); rather there exist Christianities (in the plural!), all over the world and all the time. As a result, a radically different methodology is advocated for church history; now even the nomenclature is changed from “church history” to “history of Christianity” to mark this paradigm shift.

Finally, two more aspects of World Christianity should be mentioned. Firstly, as the number of Independent Christians (such as Evangelicals, Pentecostals, and Charismatics) and the so-called Marginal Christians explodes in the Global South, the question of ecumenical unity becomes much more complex, challenging the model of church unity long advocated by the World Council of Churches and the Roman Catholic Church. Which model for ecumenical unity is appropriate for this new ecclesial reality is too soon to say, but no doubt it will be determined by the new features of World Christianity. Secondly, as Christianity is still a minority religion in Asia, Christians will live cheek by jowl with believers of other religions, and the nature and purpose of Christian mission, especially the question of conversion, will come in for close scrutiny.

In sum, then, by “World Christianity” is meant the kind of Christianity as a world religion that has always been but is becoming more than ever diverse, multiple, transnational, transcultural, and polycentric in all aspects of its life, due to demographic shifts, globalization, and migration. Thomas Thangaraj has drawn out three corollaries from this conception of World Christianity. First, it recognizes all local forms of Christianity as forms of the Christian faith, however limited and partial they might be. Second, it relativizes all local expressions of Christianity,

ruling out the use of any of them as the benchmark of Christianity. Third, it enables the revitalization of Christianity through the interaction among the diverse local Christianities.²

Outside Missiology There Is No Theology

In this World Christianity, does missiology still have a role to play? Not so long ago Christian theologians, especially Roman Catholic, used to proclaim with great confidence the axiom: “Outside the church there is no salvation” (in the crisp Latin formula: *Extra ecclesiam nulla salus*). My deep admiration for missiology notwithstanding, I am not, at least not yet, prepared to pronounce: “Outside missiology there is no salvation” (*Extra missiologiam nulla salus*). However, I can affirm with self-assurance my conviction: “Outside missiology there is no theology” (*Extra missiologiam nulla theologia*). Since I am preaching to the choir, there is no need to mount an extensive defense for my quasi-infallible pronouncement. But there are at least three reasons to substantiate it, especially in light of World Christianity.

First, missiology keeps theology honest to its *raison d'être* and purpose. A classical definition of theology that goes back to Anselm of Canterbury, and further back, to Augustine, asserts that it is faith in search of understanding (*fides quaerens intellectum*). Informative as this characterization of theology is, it runs the risk of obscuring the real nature and *telos* of theology, which is not merely understanding but love, love that overflows and is shared with others. This joyful-sharing-of-love, which is brought forth by the Good News, is what Christian mission is all about. Pope Francis’s two recent writings express well this intimate connection between faith and theology on the one hand and mission-in-joy on the other: *The Joy of the Gospel* (*Evangelii Gaudium*) and *The Joy of Love* (*Amoris Laetitia*). Without this innate orientation to mission-in-love, theology is often nothing more than a system of thought (“systematic theology”), not rarely formulated in complex philosophical categories and couched in impenetrable neologisms---preferably in German---but having little relevance for Christian living. In short, theology exists for mission.

The second reason why without mission theology is ineffective is that mission opens new vistas and perspectives for theology. Without mission, theology is bound to become a tribal, provincial, sclerotic in-house shop talk, often in air-conditioned university and seminary smart classrooms. By contrast, mission operates on the open and unfamiliar borders of countries, classes, ethnicities, genders, cultures, Christian denominations, and religions. Missionaries, as the etymology implies, are people-being-sent-out. By vocation they are border-crossers, and border-crossers

2 See Thomas. Thangaraj, “An Overview: Asian and Oceanic Christianity in an Age of World Christianity,” in: Heup Young Kim, Fumitaka, and Anri Morimoto, eds., *Asian and Oceanic Christianities in Conversation* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2011), 15-17.

have the best opportunities to discover new and strange things. Without mission, contemporary would not have developed such trends as liberation, contextualization (inculturation), interreligious, and feminist, theologies, just to cite a few. In fact, it is missionaries who alerted theologians of the emergence of World Christianity occurring under their very own noses.

Thirdly, mission introduces theology to new partners-in-dialogue. The traditional conversation partner of theology is philosophy. Important as this discipline is, a theology that is limited to it is bound to be abstract, highbrow, and elitist. Again, it is mission that broke up the philosophy-theology exclusive club and brought to the dialogue table new disciplines such as literature, history, social psychology, cultural anthropology, sociology, ethnography, gender studies, cartography, linguistics, art and architecture, and even statistics, again only to cite a few. No systematic theology, theological ethics, and pastoral theology worthy of their names, can afford ignoring the contributions of mission in these fields today. In brief, *extra missiologiam nulla theologia*.

But Which Missiology?

I have been singing a full-throated hymn to missiology in the company of missiologists, which is not a hard thing to do. But which missiology? That is the million-dollar question. Since, I am not, as I have confessed earlier, a professional missiologist, the following observations are little more than impressions gathered from a reading of some textbooks on missiology written before “World Christianity” became a popular concept. If my critique is beside the point and does not apply to how you yourself teach missiology, more power to you, and my apologies. My following remarks then can be taken as simply a cautionary tale about the changes that must be made to the discipline of missiology and the teaching of mission in light of the new reality of World Christianity.

The first pitfall I would like to draw your attention to is the well-entrenched division in the seminary curriculum and academic scholarship between church history and missiology. While a division of labor and scholarly specialization are unavoidable, the division, and eventual separation, between church history and missiology is not dictated by merely practical considerations and jealous defense of disciplinary turf but is deeply ideological. In fact it can be traced back to the very missionary enterprise, first in the Roman Catholic Church in the sixteenth century, and then among the Protestant Churches, especially since the nineteenth century. There is no need to belabor the point about the intimate and intricate connections between Christian mission and the imperialistic, capitalistic, and colonialist activities of the West in Latin America, Asia, and Africa. Of course, I am referring to the institutional ties and official arrangements between the Cross and the Sword, and not to individual missionaries, among whom we find a cloud of heroic

and saintly witnesses to the Gospel. While eternally grateful to the missionaries for their self-sacrificing work to bring the Good News to these continents and in the process uplifting the standards of education, healthcare, and social services, and in some cases, even contributing to the struggle for national independence against colonial powers, still we must in all truth and humility acknowledge and repent of the past alliance between church and empire.

Implicit in the subsequent separation between church history and missiology is the colonialist understanding of Christianity/Church as the West and mission as the Rest. Church history then deals with the Western churches, dubbed “historic churches,” and missiology with “mission lands” with their presumably immature “younger churches,” beholden in every way, not least financially, to the “historic churches.” As a consequence, mission is understood exclusively as the activities of the Western “historic churches” *overseas* to plant churches in their own images. Thus the ideological divide between “modern” and “colonial” in secular history is replicated in the divide between the churches in the West (“modern”) and the churches in the Rest (“Colonial”).

Unfortunately, in this ecclesiological framework, both church history and missiology have paid a dear price. If you look at the older textbooks on church history, this is what you most probably find. The bulk of the historical narrative in church history deals with the West, and the lion’s share of attention is given to the doctrinal, mainly Trinitarian and Christological, disputes and their settlement by various councils in the early church, then to the rise of the medieval church with the tug of war between the papacy and the Holy Roman Empire, next to the Reformation and its aftermath, and finally to the church’s struggle against modernity. Little attention is given to the church’s mission, and when it is, the focus is on the achievements of Western missionaries, especially church leaders, in founding churches, with nary a word about how local Christians, especially lay, contributed to the formation of local communities. Fortunately, more recent church history books have attempted, as I have alluded to above, a new approach by taking “World History” into consideration, but old patterns of thought die hard.

Not only is this version of church history Eurocentric but it also gives short shrift to mission, and as a result, skews the picture of Western Christianity. For example, the most momentous event in the modern life of Western Christianity is not the Enlightenment and the rise of deism and atheism and the consequent separation of Church and State but the extensive and lively missionary enterprise in the Roman Catholic Church, the Anglican Church, and the Protestant Churches. Without this missionary movement Western Christianity would have remained tribal and provincial and would have experienced a much worse decline that it is now.

The second pitfall in missiology is its inadvertent adoption of the narrow approach and tendentious narrative of “church history.” Missionary practice has not yet caught up with the perspective of World Christianity. To put it briefly, it has not yet made the paradigm shift from “Church History” to “History of Christianity.” Take, for instance, the Reformation. For fully understandable reasons, post-Reformation missionaries took the Catholic-Protestant divide for granted and carried out their evangelistic activities along denominational line. It was not until the 1910 World Missionary Conference at Edinburgh that church unity was made an imperative for the success of mission. As a result, many Protestant missionary societies were founded along interdenominational or nondenominational lines. Unfortunately, Christian mission in Asia was and is still being performed at best in comity but not in unity, especially between the Roman Catholic Church and the Protestant Churches. This division is being exacerbated by the presence of Pentecostals and Pentecostal-like church groups with their aggressive evangelistic style, often against Catholics and mainline Protestants. This has given rise to the strange but historically justified classification by the secular governments of several Asian countries of Roman Catholicism and Protestantism as two distinct “religions.” (So far there is no legal classification of Pentecostalism as a separate religion, though when Pentecostal Churches have accepted to register with the State, they did so separately.) The Christian churches in Asia have de facto accepted this legal categorization without protest and without taking the initiative to clarify the theological issue. Mission history, and missionary practice, by and large still organize its narrative and organization along the denominational demarcation, thus making the Reformation, which was at bottom a family quarrel among the Western churches, into a dividing issue for World Christianity. This is all the more unfortunate as many recent bilateral ecumenical statements have declared that the key issues that divided the Reformation and the Roman Catholic Church are no longer church-dividing.

The third pitfall of missiology is, at least in some circles, its narrow focus on conversion/baptism and church-planting as the twofold goal of Christian mission. While it is possible to defend this view on the basis of selected biblical texts such as Matthew 28:18-20, dubbed the “Great Commission,” a full-scale study of the *missio Dei* as narrated in the Old and New Testament would commend a more comprehensive conception of mission. The Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences speaks of a threefold dialogue constituting Christian mission in Asia, namely, dialogue with the poor and marginalized Asians (liberation), with Asian cultures (inculturation or contextualization), and dialogue with Asian religions (interreligious dialogue). Mission in Asia is not only mission done *to* the pagan or unreached people (*missio ad gentes*) but also mission *among* the people (*missio inter gentes*) and mission *with* the people (*missio cum gentibus*). Thus, the church in mission is the People of God working for, among, and with the Peoples of God, not for the church itself, but for the Kingdom of God. Teaching missiology in this

way responds to the challenges of World Christianity, in which all churches are local churches, with none at the center and the others at the periphery, with none as the historic church and the rest younger churches, with no part of the world as Christian territory and the rest mission lands. The modern/colonial divide does not run between the West and the Rest, but cuts through every single church, East West North South, in all the six continents, because the church as a whole and as such is by nature missionary.

Missiology in and for World Christianity

Where do we go from here in World Christianity? In his account of Christianity in South-central Asia, 1910-2010 Paul Josua Bhakiaraj begins with two vignettes. The first tells the story of a group of people, mostly men, from poor backgrounds in Dhaka, Bangladesh, who gather on Friday in a small room for worship. They are called the “Fellowship of the Ones Faithful to Jesus” (*Jama’at Isa imandars*). They begin their worship with enthusiastic singing of *bau gan* or folk songs, followed by the reading of Bengali scriptures and by the preaching of their leader who urges them to live devoutly in a society that is predominantly Islamic. They are not Christians but Muslims, but they maintain that they are Muslims who follow Jesus the Son of God because Jesus is a “Muslim,” in the sense of one who surrenders to God.

The second vignette depicts the scene of thousands of people in Allahabad, Uttar Pradesh, India on a Sunday morning, who travel to *Yesu Mandir* [Temple of Jesus] in the *Yesu Darbar* [Court of Jesus]. At about half past eight, the service begins with a thunderous congregational shout: *Yesu Masih ki Jai* [Hail Jesus Christ!]. For about four hours the crowd of thousands sit listening in rapt attention to the gospel of *Yesu Masih* and singing hymns. The vast majority of the crowd are non-Christians and are poor. They are the new breed of *Yesu Bhaktas* [Jesus devotees] who come to the Court of Jesus to experience the power of Jesus to liberate them from their poverty, oppression, and battles against evil spirits, and to share with others how the peace, healing, and freedom that *Yesu Masih* gives them have transformed their lives.³

Let’s travel from India eastward into China and meet a large group of new and bewilderingly varied religious movements that are inspired by or connected to Protestantism, especially of the Pentecostal type, and which are usually categorized as “Marginal Christians.” These movements, with colorful and biblical-sounding names, can pop up anywhere with charismatic founders, quickly attract a large following, and are not officially registered. These include the Local Church (also known as the Shouters), the Established King Sect, the Lightning from the East,

3 See Paul Joshua Bhakiaraj, “Christianity in South-central Asia, 1910-2010,” in Todd M. Johnson and Kenneth R. Ross, eds., *Atlas of Global Christianity* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 142.

the Lord God Sect, the All Scope Church, the South China Church, the Disciples Sect (also known the Narrow Gate in the Wilderness), the Three Ranks of Servants, the Cold Water Sect, the Commune Sect, the New Testament Church (also known as the Apostolic Faith Sect), the Resurrection Sect, the Dami Evangelization Association, and the World Elijah Evangelism Association.⁴

The Chinese government criminalizes these as “evil cults” and arrests, fines, and imprisons their leaders and followers, especially those of the Local Church and its offshoot, the Lightning from the East. Ostensible reasons for this suppression are their heterodox beliefs (end-time predictions and deification of leaders), superstitious practices (derived from folk religion and Pentecostal healing practices) and threat to public order (large-scale activities and meetings), but their large size, rapid growth, and avoidance of government control also play a key role. The Chinese “house-churches” assiduously distinguish themselves from these groups, which they themselves condemn as heretical, partly because they do not want to be lumped with them as “evil cults,” a deadly legal categorization, partly because these groups try to recruit members from them. India and China are but two examples that offer a dazzling variety of churches constituting World Christianity. To these may be added a long, dizzying list of no less perplexing and confusing independent or indigenous churches in other Asian countries, Africa, and Latin America.

How can missiology deal with these new ecclesial phenomena, which are part and parcel of World Christianity, alongside with other more traditional, so-called mainline churches? In no way do I claim to offer a solution to this missiological conundrum; nor do I think that a satisfactory proposal able to command a universal consensus is in the offing, given the fact that, as pointed out above, there is, nor has there ever been, one Christianity but rather that there exists a diversity and multiplicity of Christianities, and dramatically so in World Christianity. In light of this, I suggest that a happy marriage between missiology and history of Christianity (note: not church history!) is a good place to start.⁵

1. The church historian Justo González has suggested a new way of reading and writing the history of Christianity in and for World Christianity. For this purpose he suggests that we need a new cartography and a new topography. First, a new map. The demographic shift of the Christian population from the Global North to the Global South spoken of earlier requires a radical redrawing of the map of Christianity. A new cartography is needed to reflect this shift of the center of gravity of Christianity. There have been of course shifts of the centers of Christianity in the

4 See Fenggeng Yang, *Religion in China: Survival and Revival under Communist Rule* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

5 The one analogous phenomenon is found in some early Jewish-Christian communities where a number of Jews accepted Jesus’ teaching and even followed some Christian practices and still remained within Judaism. See Oskar Skarsaune and Reidar Hvalvik, eds., *The Jewish Believers in Jesus Peabody*, MA: Hendrickson, 2007). Unfortunately, soon the two faith communities parted their ways and became mutually exclusive.

past---from Jerusalem to Antioch, to Constantinople, to Western Europe, and to the North Atlantic---each time the map of Christianity got bigger. But this time the shift is radically different. In the previous shifts, one center was largely replaced, politically, economically, and ecclesiastically by the next; by contrast, today, world Christianity is *polycentric*, that is, it has many concurrent centers, so that there are Christianities, each being a local/regional/national Christianity, with none capable of claiming superiority over and normative for the others. In other words, it is not simply a geographically larger Christianity but a qualitatively *different* Christianity.

In addition to a new cartography, Justo González suggests, World Christianity requires a new topography. Maps are flat and do not represent the terrain accurately. Hence, the saying: “The map is not the territory.” However, what is badly needed is not the familiar church topography, but a new topography, one that represents the systemic changes brought about by World Christianity. The old topography of church history is basically orography; it focuses on mountains and mountain chains. To shift the metaphor, the old topography of church history gives prominence almost exclusively to ecclesiastical leaders such as popes, bishops, and ecumenical councils. It is the ecclesiastical counterpart of the ancient secular historical genre *De viris illustribus* [note *viris*---males], as practiced by the Father of church history Eusebius of Caesarea in his *Church History*. In this genre, church history is the narrative of the achievements of ecclesiastical elites and intellectual virtuosi; it is the equivalent of the contemporary idol and celebrity talk and television shows. It is from these church elites and virtuosi---popes, bishops, councils, the Roman Curia, academic theologians---that systematic theology and missiology are constructed.⁶

While such a narrative can be informative and useful, it tends to lead to distortions and misrepresentations, as if these people were the only ones that constitute the church and the magisterium. By contrast, what is needed today in world Christianities is a new topography that highlights the valleys out of which mountains arise, a *koiladology* ---to coin a new word---which shows the beliefs and practices of ordinary Christians. Without them, church leaders could not have achieved the feats celebrated in past church history textbooks. Without their contributions, theology could not have been produced and transmitted. Consequently, the new *koiladology* will privilege the voices of the poor and the marginalized, including women, the colonized, the dalits, the people of color, the migrants and refugees, the young, and the people of the so-called Third World, where nearly four out of five Christians will live in 2050.

6 See Justo González, *The Changing Shape of Church History* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2002).

2. With this new approach and methodology for the history of Christianity in mind, how would one write a textbook on missiology? Where should we begin the history of Christian mission? Orthodox missiologists would begin perhaps with Constantine's moving the center of the Roman Empire from Rome to Byzantium in the fourth century; Roman Catholic missiologists with the so-called discovery of the New World in 1492 and the missions of the religious orders in the sixteenth century; and Protestant missiologists with the Pietists' mission in the eighteenth century.

But why not begin at the beginning, and more specifically, with the mission of the Apostle Thomas to India in 57 AD, when there was not yet even a Roman Christianity? Historical purists may object that there is no solid historical evidence that Thomas ever went to Kerala, and that the stories about his mission there belong to the genre of legend. It may be retorted that the number of historical references to Thomas' presence in India is greater than that of references to Peter's presence in Rome.⁷ Be that as it may, beginning the history of mission with Thomas's evangelization of India has at least the virtue of adding another narrative to the hallowed Eurocentric history of mission, of introducing students to an unfamiliar culture, of acquainting them to another church tradition, namely, the Syriac, in addition to the Greek and Latin traditions, and thus inviting them to rethink Christianity in terms of World Christianity?

If one is reluctant to anchor the history of mission in an allegedly improbable event, then start with something that is incontrovertibly historical, as testified by the Xian Stele erected in 781, namely, the missionaries of the Church of the East, misnamed Nestorian, led by the monk Alopen, (Aluōbēn), who came to Chang'an (modern Xi'an) in 635 during the Tang dynasty. Again, this alternative history of mission, like the one that begins with St. Thomas's mission to India, has the advantage of introducing our often historically and culturally challenged students to a different non-Western land, language, culture, people, and church tradition. This will disabuse them of the common notion that Christian mission began from Rome, or Canterbury, or Geneva, or the United States. Furthermore, the text inscribed on the Xi'an Stele offers an unparalleled example of contextualizing the Christian faith into a non-Semitic and non-Western context, with an extraordinarily bold employment of Buddhist, Confucian, and Daoist concepts and terms to express the Christian beliefs.⁸

In summary: We have seen how the rise of World Christianity, which highlights the diverse and multiple forms of Christianities, especially in the Global South, and their polycentricity, has vast implications for the study of the history

7 On St. Thomas in India, see George Menachery, ed., *The Thomapedia* (Ollur, Kerala: St. Joseph's Press, 2000).

8 For an introduction to the early Chinese Church, see Martin Palmer, *The Jesus Sutras: Rediscovering the Lost Scrolls of Taoist Christianity* (New York: Ballantine Wellspring, 2001).

of Christianity and missiology. But what about the future of World Christianity itself? Will it survive and prosper? More importantly, what are the tasks it should carry out in order to survive? And how should it do so?

Prognosticating the future of religions, especially of Christianity, is an extremely hazardous business. Their obituaries, like that of Mark Twain, have been vastly premature, and the intrepid forecasters of the death of God—and of religion—from Nietzsche to Marx to the “New Atheists,” have been buried if not by God, certainly by religion, whose “return” has been loudly rumored in recent decades. But if out of modesty we should refrain from prognosticating the future of World Christianity, we can at least reflect on what Christians must do—and how well—to respond to the new challenges facing World Christianity.

In concluding their book *World Christianity in the 20th Century*, Noel Davies and Martin Conway suggest six ways to ensure the health and flourishing of World Christianity. First, to emphasize less quantity of growth and more quality of witness, to increase not number but Christian commitment and discipleship. Second, to practice mission not as sending missionaries from North to South, West to East but as mutual witnessing for the transformation of the whole person and the whole of society, each in one’s own location. Third, to be Christian in a locally rooted and globally aware way. To use a neologism, to be Christian “glocally.” Fourth, to be firmly rooted in the Christian Tradition and to be open to creative change; in other words, to be dynamically faithful. Fifth, to promote worship in a way that is both contextual (or local) and universal; its vibrancy derives from the combination of both of these elements. Sixth, to build up the church and to act for justice and peace. These two activities do not exclude each other, rather the efficacy of one depends on that of the other.⁹

It is not difficult to add another list of tasks to these. But the important thing for Christians to remember is that the future of World Christianity is not in Christians’ hands, though of course they do have a part to play. Rather its future lies in the faithfulness and loving mercy of God—God’s *emet* and *hesed*—to use two descriptions of God in the Hebrew Bible, which Jesus himself embodies in his promise: “I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:20).¹⁰

9 See Noel Davies and Martin Conway, *World Christianity in the 20th Century* (London: SCM Press, 2008), 288-293.

10 Some of the ideas in this essay can be found in an earlier piece, “World Christianity: Its Implications for History, Religious Studies, and Theology,” *Horizons* 39/2 (2012), 171-188, which contains a large bibliography pertinent to the theme of “World Christianity,” not listed here for lack of space.

