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# A Learning Missional Church Reflections from Young Missiologists

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REGNUM EDINBURGH CENTENARY SERIES

A Learning Missional Church  
Reflections from Young Missiologists

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## REGNUM EDINBURGH CENTENARY SERIES

The Centenary of the World Missionary Conference of 1910, held in Edinburgh, was a suggestive moment for many people seeking direction for Christian mission in the twenty-first century. Several different constituencies within world Christianity held significant events around 2010. From 2005, an international group worked collaboratively to develop an intercontinental and multi-denominational project, known as Edinburgh 2010, and based at New College, University of Edinburgh. This initiative brought together representatives of twenty different global Christian bodies, representing all major Christian denominations and confessions, and many different strands of mission and church life, to mark the Centenary.

Essential to the work of the Edinburgh 1910 Conference, and of abiding value, were the findings of the eight think-tanks or ‘commissions’. These inspired the idea of a new round of collaborative reflection on Christian mission – but now focused on nine themes identified as being key to mission in the twenty-first century. The study process was polycentric, open-ended, and as inclusive as possible of the different genders, regions of the world, and theological and confessional perspectives in today’s church. It was overseen by the Study Process Monitoring Group: Miss Maria Aranzazu Aguado (Spain, The Vatican), Dr Daryl Balia (South Africa, Edinburgh 2010), Mrs Rosemary Dowsett (UK, World Evangelical Alliance), Dr Knud Jørgensen (Norway, Areopagos), Rev. John Kafwanka (Zambia, Anglican Communion), Rev. Dr Jooseop Keum (Korea, World Council of Churches), Dr Wonsuk Ma (Korea, Oxford Centre for Mission Studies), Rev. Dr Kenneth R. Ross (UK, Church of Scotland), Dr Petros Vassiliadis (Greece, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki), and coordinated by Dr Kirsteen Kim (UK, Edinburgh 2010).

These publications reflect the ethos of Edinburgh 2010 and will make a significant contribution to ongoing studies in mission. It should be clear that material published in this series will inevitably reflect a diverse range of views and positions. These will not necessarily represent those of the series’ editors or of the Edinburgh 2010 General Council, but in publishing them the leadership of Edinburgh 2010 hopes to encourage conversation between Christians and collaboration in mission. All the series’ volumes are commended for study and reflection in both church and academy.

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REGNUM EDINBURGH CENTENARY SERIES

**A Learning Missional Church**  
Reflections from Young Missiologists

Edited by Beate Fagerli, Knud Jørgensen,  
Rolv Olsen, Kari Storstein Haug and Knut Tveitereid.

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# CONTENTS

<b>Foreword</b>	
Olav Fykse Tveit	1
<b>Introduction</b>	
Knud Jørgensen	3
<b>MISSIONAL CHURCH</b>	
<b>Missional Church – Problem or Possibility for Global Mission? Thoughts from a Norwegian perspective</b>	
Ragnhild Kristensen	15
<b>Theological Education for a Missional Church – A Perspective From a Theological Training Institution in Brazil</b>	
Mona Dysjeland	33
<b>Building up the Missional Fellowship of Love: A Review of T.C. Chao’s Mission Theology. The Evangelical Tradition</b>	
Wen Ge	49
<b>Learnings from the Missional Church in India</b>	
John Amalraj	68
<b>ENCOUNTER BETWEEN RELIGIONS</b>	
<b>Biblical and Quranic reflections on ‘obedience’</b>	
Steinar Sødal	85
<b>The Oslo Coalition for Freedom of Religion or Belief: Ground Rules for Missionary Activities</b>	
Ingunn Folkestad Breistein	99
<b>MIGRANT PERSPECTIVES</b>	
<b>Christian Communities in Contemporary Contexts: A Cross-cultural Church and Mission Experience</b>	
Adèle Djomo Ngomedje	115
<b>God’s Transforming Mission and Norwegian Churches and Mission Organizations: Some Observations from a Migrant Perspective</b>	
Destå Lemma	132

**MISSIONAL CHALLENGES**

<b>The Church in Mission: Contextual Bible Study and Liberation</b>	
Marit Breen	149
<b>Mission and Three South African Metropolitan Megachurches: Middle-Class Masses in search of Mammon?</b>	
Genevieve Lerina James	171
<b>Challenges Facing the Ethiopian Evangelical Church</b>	
<b>Mekane Yesus (EECMY): A Growing Charismatic Church in the Global South</b>	
Dawit Oliko Terfassa	185
<b>Bibliography</b>	201
<b>Index</b>	211
<b>List of Contributors</b>	215

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## FOREWORD

### Olav Fykse Tveit

This book paints the picture of ‘A Learning Missional Church’ and contains reflections from young missiologists. The idea to collect material for such a book came into being as churches and organizations were planning the celebration of the centenary for Edinburgh 1910 in Norway. From the beginning they realized that a celebration in 2010 should provide much space for input from youth. “We need their dreams and hopes for mission today and tomorrow. Edinburgh 2010 must provide a voice for a new generation”, the organizers said. As a result they set in motion a study process for young missiologists and students about themes related to mission in our new century.

It was the South African missiologist David Bosch who in 1991 taught us the concept ‘transforming mission’ to call our attention to what he described as ‘paradigm shifts in theology of mission’. Since the 1980ies churches and missions worldwide have become increasingly aware of these shifts, in terms of the geography of world Christianity, the acute challenges from political conflict, globalization, the environmental crisis and the drastic changes within churches in all parts of the world.

Without the challenge to mission from Edinburgh 1910 the role of the Christian faith as a world religion would have looked very different from what it does today, particularly after the church in the West has declined. Today we find vital and numerous expressions of the Christian faith on all six continents. To a large degree this is a fruit of the missionary activities. At the same time Edinburgh 1910 painted a Western, Protestant view of mission and designed plans for the Global South, largely without the participation of the Global South.

The paradigm shifts challenge us to do things differently and to let a fresh generation of leaders and thinkers take new initiatives. That is what the following chapters do – present the voices of young missiologists from different corners of the church universal, to explore and to learn – and to give us new eyes to see so that we may join in with the Spirit. To give us bold humility and humble boldness, as David Bosch often said, as we follow the Lord on the dusty roads of today.

I welcome these new voices and I congratulate the Norwegian originators of this project, the Christian Council of Norway, the Church of Norway Council on Ecumenical and International Relations, the Norwegian Council on Mission and Evangelism, the Cooperative Committee on



Congregation and Mission, the Egede Institute and the mission foundation Areopagos.

May this contribution from my home country Norway be of inspiration for all of us to share how God of life is leading us forward in God's mission, in all contexts and all continents.

Revd Dr Olav Fykse Tveit  
General Secretary of the World Council of Churches  
December 2011

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# INTRODUCTION: MISSION AS LEARNING

**Knud Jørgensen**

This book is compiled by contributions from young missiologists from different parts of the world. It is therefore written from the perspective of youth to be a fresh breath of air into more traditional mission thinking and mission paradigms. The basic flavour of this fresh breath of air, coming from the younger generation, is “learning from others and from one another”: How may traditional sending churches and organizations see themselves as receivers? How may we bring experiences from outside into our own context? What may we learn across geographical borders – North learning from South, South learning from North, South learning from South, etc? What can we learn from one another in a process of reciprocity?

The Englishman David Smith has written an inspiring book about *Mission after Christendom*.<sup>1</sup> In the midst of the global shift it is important, he claims, that we remember that the many big and small events of the history of mission always were meant to be teaching tools which might lead us to a deeper knowledge about the grace of God in Jesus Christ. And this process continues in the sense that where the Gospel crosses cultural boundaries new dimensions of the divine grace may be disclosed; when the Gospel becomes flesh and blood in new contexts, these new contexts contribute towards revealing new and so far ignored dimensions of the Gospel.

True cross-cultural mission thus widens our perspectives and involves the renunciation of all forms of ethnocentrism. It creates the possibility of ... “theological cross-fertilization among different cultures” since, through the work of the Holy Spirit, each culture has something to contribute in connection with the understanding of the gospel and its implications for the life and mission of the church.<sup>2</sup>

Contemporary illustrations are what migrant Christians learn and contribute in their new contexts (see the contributions by Adele Djomo Ngomedje and Lemma Desta to this volume). Illustrations from the history of mission could be cited from the Early Church and until today. Paul learning from a Hellenistic culture, Augustine listening to a Neo-Platonic

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<sup>1</sup> David Smith, *Mission after Christendom* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2003).

<sup>2</sup> Smith, *Mission after Christendom*, 56-57.

philosophy, Anselm of Canterbury in dialogue with Muslims (resulting in his *Cur Deus Homo (Why God Became Man)*), Bartholome de Las Casas rediscovering a biblical model of mission which made him criticize his own culture and defend the victims of colonization, the Saxon work entitled *Heliand* ('saviour') illustrating the translatability of the Gospel and affirming the validity of local expressions of Christian faith and discipleship.<sup>3</sup> In fact, cross-cultural mission has always been and will continue to be the primary learning experience of the church, particularly because it pulls us out of a mono-cultural understanding and helps us discover a legitimate theological pluralism which actually opens up for new perspectives in the Gospel. Translating the Gospel into new languages and cultures has always been a human and divine means of making us learn new "incarnations" of the Good News. How often I have praised the Lord for having become flesh and blood, and not a book.

Since my youth I have been fascinated with the many examples of how cross-cultural mission implied learning experiences for church and mission; or could have become learning impulses if the church in the West had not so very often been part of an imperial missionary practice in which the crucifix and the sword had joined hands. Even today we suffer from such unhappy linkages between church and state, preventing the church from learning what it means to be a genuine counter-culture. Where that happens, it becomes next to impossible for the encounter between the Gospel and culture to be a schoolmaster that leads us to a deeper knowledge of God's acts in history. "Mission as learning" is therefore not just a welcome addendum to mission, but a necessity if we want God's Spirit to reveal to us some new dimensions of Jesus as he comes to be known and loved in 'every nation, tribe, people and language.'

Some of us (both older and younger) can give testimonies about "mission as learning" and often also as "mutual learning". In retrospect I have a long time ago realized that my first three-four years as a missionary and radio producer in Ethiopia in the seventies were primarily a time of learning. I recall a missionary colleague talking about his first years as a missionary in Japan as "a second conversion". In fact, most Christians who have worked cross-culturally, can tell about the change of views they have had from what they had at home.

The phenomenon testifies to a broad cross-fertilization among various cultures. Today, however, mission as learning is for us in the North and West in a particular way a matter of learning from the church in the Global South what it means to be church, a missional church, in a local sense, but certainly also in a global sense. The same David Smith says:

...with the decline of the churches in Europe and the growth of Christianity virtually everywhere else, the realization grows that the Western phase of Christianity was precisely that – a phase involving a more or less successful

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<sup>3</sup> Smith, *Mission after Christendom*, 52-53.

translation of the Gospel among the peoples of the Western world. This phase has now clearly come to an end and we are witnesses to the emergence of new centres of spiritual and theological vitality as Christians from the southern continents add their insights to the church's total knowledge of the incomparable Christ.<sup>4</sup>

### **Experiencing the Global South as a Spring and a Power**

I am a Westerner from the North. Allow me therefore to illustrate how the wind blowing from south and east may be like a spring and a power. This does not imply an uncritical sentimental attitude to everything that comes from the South. Neither should the words be interpreted only in a Christian sense. Rather this has to do with a broader perspective of being neighbour: In the South there are values, a humanizing potential as the Latin-American liberation theologian Jon Sobrino calls it, contrasting the destructive and dominating values of the North. The values of the South in contrast to the values of the North include: Fellowship over against individualism, modesty over against indulgence, a will to serve over against egoism, creativity over against a copy-cat culture. The claim of the liberation theology that this potential particularly is found among the poor, in the liberating practice of the poor, is probably a little exaggerated, but my own African and partly Asian experience confirm that we are looking in the right direction. It is among my poor, uneducated and often unemployed friends in Addis Ababa that I especially have experienced that these basic values for neighbourliness and respect for life shine in a darkness of misery and hopelessness.

These values are fading in more and more places in the South, under pressure from the invading globalisation. This is clearly the case in major parts of Southeast Asia – in the same way as in many of the megacities in the South, like Shanghai, Beijing, Buenos Aires, Johannesburg and similar places. Nevertheless I still believe that the cultural, moral and spiritual strength of the South may become a spring and a power for a world that is being seduced and that is amusing itself to death in a dance with the ghosts of modernity and post-modernity.<sup>5</sup> My former Ethiopian students have taught me to view ethics with *life* at the center – an ethics that confronts the militaristic, materialistic, individualistic culture of the Western world. In my own life this has become a baggage of experiences, images and strong emotions which daily battle with the world view of the North – experiences of Ethiopian concern and intercession during a period of sickness some years ago, hospitality and table fellowship filled with laughter and joy in

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<sup>4</sup> Smith, *Mission after Christendom*, 61.

<sup>5</sup> This critique of some of the destructive features of post-modernity should be balanced with a readiness to live in and learn from the prevailing culture. One the young contributors, Adele Djomo Ngomedje, speaks in favour of such a learning attitude, from a diaspora perspective.

the midst of misery, and experiences of faithfulness and friendship.

Or I could mention experiences from South Africa of concrete reconciliation and forgiveness, after the downfall of the Apartheid regime in 1994 and in relation to the work of the Truth Commission some years later. Bishop Desmond Tutu used to say: "It is a miracle!", and then he told about concrete examples and illustrations of ancient Biblical truths – illustrations that carry power for others and which transform my often theoretical attitudes to basic human values and truths into something tangible, almost sacramental – a word that one may touch and hold.

Viewing the global South in this way also touches on the longing among Christians in the West for inspiration and renewal. There is, I believe, a strong need in Scandinavia – that the Word may return, that the dead bones may live again. There is among us a deep longing for a life in discipleship and service. Some of our mission societies have taken the consequence of this and changed their focus so that it also includes the task of bringing back inspiration and renewal to the church and the congregations in Scandinavia from the churches they serve in the South and the East. Often one finds a strong emphasis on such mutuality and accompaniment in missional circles in the North, for the sake of learning and sharing.

I believe that theology in the Global South will dominate the next Christianity. It may take on some strange forms (e.g. within African Instituted Churches), but it is from this part of the world that renewal of theology and church life may come.

This focus on the Global South as a source of inspiration and renewal is not merely a matter of rhythmic dancing, hand-clapping or refreshing cultural expressions. Roar Fotland has in his dissertation on the African theologian Kwame Bediako<sup>6</sup> focused on five areas where the African church, in the opinion of Bediako, may contribute to the church universal:

The first is to give a wider perspective on Christianity than being a Western religion, the second is to recover the significance of the primal religiosity in Christianity, and the third is to regain the missionary sense of theology. Fourthly Bediako suggests that the African sense of wholeness and finally the experience of religious pluralism, might contribute to a renewal of European Christianity.<sup>7</sup>

My life and my faith were challenged and drastically changed in the encounter of a young missionary with Ethiopia and East Africa. The experience of this transformation is often what I have communicated to Christians and churches in the North. And the experience has been real and

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<sup>6</sup> Roar G. Fotland, *Ancestor Christology in Context: Theological Perspectives by Kwame Bediako* (Bergen: Universitetet i Bergen, 2004). See also Roar Fotland, 'The Southern Phase of Christianity: The Contribution of the Global South to the Church in the Global North', in Tormod Engelsviken, Ernst Harbakk, Rolv Olsen and Thor Strandenæs (eds), *Mission in the World. Communicating the Gospel in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Oxford: Regnum, 2008), 215-229.

<sup>7</sup> Fotland 2008, 216.

existential. Over time and as I have grown older I have, however – like many “missionaries” in my generation – become aware, and often been told by friends in the South, that this picture of the North learning from the South can be lop-sided. Church leaders in the Global South tell me that they are leaders and members of rapidly growing churches that may be many miles broad, but only one inch thick. Both in the North and the South, society and church struggle with misuse of power, idolatry of success, wrong use of resources and lack of faithfulness. We share a common problem concerning Christian leadership. In the church universal, discipleship calls for being a counter culture in the midst of the challenges from secular worldviews spreading everywhere. The number of nominal believers is growing within all the major religions and in all parts of the world, and many do no longer reckon with a spiritual reality. Evidence of this is found in weak churches, but also in churches with seemingly strong vitality in the Global South where biblical teaching is lacking. Learning from one another is therefore relevant both ways: What does it mean to be church in a global and a local world? How do we communicate in the market place, in the media and vis-à-vis governments?

### Contextualization as a Key Concern

*Contextualization* is a key concern in contemporary missiology, and the inspiration towards this concern has largely come from scholars in the Global South (e.g. John Mbiti, Kwame Bediako, Hwa Yung, Kosuke Koyama, Latin-American liberation theologians etc). One of several reasons for this concern among scholars in the Global South has been, as already indicated, the fact that numerical growth has not always been matched by a concurrent discipleship. In addition the emphasis on Christian values in society, culture and politics has often been lacking behind the growth in numbers. Sometimes churches have been compromised when they have taken part in corrupt politics and supported military coups which promoted ethnic separation (e.g. Rwanda, Burundi, and DR Congo). This has challenged the credibility of the witness of the churches but also encouraged them to uphold basic Christian values in their struggle for justice and peace.<sup>8</sup>

Contextualization and its focus on context and society have taken us a major step further than indigenization and enculturation. Contextualization is not just a question of relevance in terms of culture, but also of being salt and light in a broken world.

David Bosch calls contextual theology ‘a theology “from below”’, from the underside of history; its main source (apart from Scripture and tradition)

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<sup>8</sup> Fohle Lygunda, ‘Christianity in Middle Africa, 1910-2010’, in Todd M. Johnson and Kenneth R. Ross (eds), *Atlas of Global Christianity 1910-2010* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 119.

is the *social sciences*, and its main interlocutor the *poor* or the *culturally marginalized*.<sup>9</sup> The strong focus on contextual theology marks a decisive difference between 1910 and 2010. In the course of the century mission has struggled with how, on the one hand, to be relevant to and involved in the world and, on the other hand, how to maintain its identity in Christ. This has involved the construction of a variety of ‘local theologies’. 1910 still believed that Western theology was universally valid and based on the ecclesiastical confessions. Contextualization implies learning through the experimental nature of all theology and through an ongoing dialogue between text and context, and therefore a theology which always will be provisional, at the same time as it is part of a universal dimension of theology.<sup>10</sup>

There are several areas where we need to learn from one another across cultures, regions and confessions, but contextualization is in my view the most important. This calls, as an illustration, for theological institutions in the West to offer courses on theological developments in the Global South and not just the other way round. In some of our Lutheran seminaries in the North we handle theology as if we were still walking the streets of Wittenberg in Germany in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. The same applies unfortunately also to those seminaries in the South where curriculum and education of teachers have been based on Western models.

### Listening to Voices from the South

A central component in the Norwegian centenary celebration of Edinburgh 1910 in 2010 was the visit of a team with members from Madagascar, Hong Kong, Korea and Greece. The idea was a turning of the tables: While Edinburgh 1910 was the West making strategies for the South, we wanted the team from the South to challenge church and mission in Norway – to inspire, to help us reflect and to share insights. The topic was “Transforming Mission”. At the conclusion of the visit, the team shared their findings with about 300 Christian leaders in Norway. Let me mention some examples from their sharing, under the perspective of “mission as learning”:

- Much is done for children and youth within church and mission in Norway. A major project deals with Christian education (“faith education”) where the role of the family is emphasized. But how much are families allowing themselves to be involved and engaged? How are they equipped for practicing faith in the home? Or is there an acute need for regaining the family as an arena for Christian faith? Most families seem to have lost the habit of

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<sup>9</sup> David Bosch, *Transforming Mission. Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (New York: Orbis Books, 1991), 423.

<sup>10</sup> Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 427.

praying together. Being shy plays a role: we shy away from sharing faith in the family. In consequence the young people also lack the courage to do so.

- No learning takes place in value free surroundings. Do we take seriously influence from context, friends and media? And how do we think about role models? Many youngsters have a strong desire to become change agents. They want change, but lack role models among parents and youth leaders. From role models we should expect a life in the light. Is the real problem, not the youth, but the adults, the teachers and youth leaders?
- Why do many youngsters not remain with the church? They often leave the church when they start their studies. What do we do to get them back? Are our traditional programmes, and here particularly the communication of the gospel, too shallow and without substance, without vigour and challenge? When youth leaves the traditional worship, it does not necessarily imply that they have left behind church and faith. How develop relevant activities and how equip and involve youngsters in the planning and execution?
- A united church in Norway ought to have ambitions about impacting the Norwegian government to become an even stronger actor contributing to reconciliation and forgiveness for the atrocities of former colonial powers. Memories of such atrocities against the Global South need healing and forgiveness. Also in relation to Norwegian mission there are memories and wounds (e.g. vis-à-vis missionary kids) in need of healing. This picture is not black and white: Often missionaries stood up in support of the colonized, confronting the colonial powers.

### **Learning from Others and from One Another**

The following chapters in this collection of contributions from young missiologists illustrate in various ways that “mission is learning”, in a practical sense and at a deeper conceptual level. This may be a prerogative of a younger generation that can afford to remain learners. Many of us in older generations seem sometimes to have “arrived” and to have become a bit fossilised within our boundaries of traditions and own experiences. We therefore sorely need to have the windows and doors opened, particularly as we live through a time of transition, of paradigm shifts – a time of liminality like the Israelites in the desert.

The book contains four thematic sections: *Missional Church, Encounter between Religions, Migrant Perspectives*, and *Missional Challenges*. The aim of the first chapter (Ragnhild Kristensen “Missional Church – Problem or Possibility for Global Mission?”) is to draw attention to the risk that the “missional church” may develop an increasingly local perspective resulting



in a decreasing focus on the global perspective of mission. The learning aspect is here on how “local” and “global” may listen to and complement one another. The biblical model of “church” is to witness both in Jerusalem and to the ends of world, at one and the same time.

Mona Dysjeland’s contribution on “Theological Education for a Missional Church” is a classical case study on mission as learning: A new Brazilian model of theological training (The Evangelical Theological Seminary in Curitiba (FATEV)) is presented as a model for theological training institutions in Norway to learn from when educating pastors for a missional church. The challenge to the Norwegian model is that it may be tied to either a university or an academic college, leading the institutions to prioritise the academic study of theology, at the expense of the professional dimension. The three institutions in Norway are challenged to particularly model FATEV in the areas of contextualisation and spiritual formation.

In John Amalraj’s paper on “Learnings from the Missional Church in India” a perspective from the Global South is presented – a large canvass describing the development from colonial missions to emerging churches in today’s India. The growth of mission awareness and involvement by the Indians in mission locally and globally over the last fifty years has increased enormously. India is today one of the major missionary sending nations, a reflection of the geographical change in global mission. This development has to do with awakenings, with viewing signs and wonders as part of the missional expression of the church, with holistic mission, with a strong focus on contextualisation and with a new and active role for the laity – issues from which churches in the rest of the world may learn. An essential component is, however, structures: the growth of ecumenical structures, the decline of denominational structures, the emergence of new models of sodalities (go-structures) and of a new missional paradigm. There is no doubt that the Indian missional church will impact the world at large and give leadership to the global church in its missional role.

In the fourth chapter Chinese Wen Ge paints a picture of Tsu Chen Chao (1888-1979), one of the leading theologians of the Chinese church in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, who exerted great influence on both the Chinese and ecumenical churches. He was one of the key leaders, striving to build up an indigenous church when the churches were challenged by intellectuals’ anti-Christian movement in the 1920s and when China was suffering national humiliations from imperialism, colonialism and civil wars. He was also actively involved in the ecumenical movement and became a well-known spokesperson for the Chinese churches. In the sixties his theological enterprise was, however, suspended when China’s religious situation became more and more difficult. He was gradually forgotten by the Chinese and ecumenical churches until he was justified again by the government shortly before his death in 1979. Wen Ge’s essay aims to rediscover Chao’s significant contribution to world mission theology in light of his understanding of the relationship between the western churches

and the southern younger churches in China, so that the contemporary mission enterprises in different parts of the world might benefit from what the Chinese churches learned through their own difficult experiences. The present-day younger churches in different countries may have different challenges, but Chao's theological deliberations and efforts to construct an indigenous church can still remind us how the socio-economic-political elements matter when we carry on contemporary mission.

The second section on *Encounter between Religions* includes two interesting and quite different perspectives. Steinar Sødal shows how Islam and Christianity may learn from one another in their perception of "obedience". The holy scriptures of both faiths view obedience as a central concept of faith and practise, but in western theology little attention has been paid to obedience and discipleship in the last two centuries. Therefore it is particularly Christianity that may learn from Islam. Ingunn Folkestad Breistein's article on "Ground Rules for Missionary Activities" is the story about a learning process over a period of four years, working with a document on ethical guidelines for missionary activities: What were the main issues discussed in the process? And what were the guidelines for the work? Who was involved in the discussions and in the editing process? Which issues were controversial? What is the content of the final Ground Rules? How has the reception of the document been? These questions signal a process which in some ways was just as important, as a learning experience, as the actual end result (the Ground Rules). In addition, the Ground Rules are a fresh contribution to all living faiths towards a more balanced and disciplined manner of carrying out mission in a pluralist world.

Section three (*Migrant Perspectives*) features contributions from Adèle D. Ngomedje (Cameroun) and Lemma Desta (Ethiopia). Their perspective reflects the cross-fertilisation between their African background and Western Europe (England and Norway). Ngomedje shares reflections as an African Christian in Europe, through a personal cross-cultural, church and mission narrative. This experience or learning, from being away from home and from having worked in a cross-cultural church and mission context as a migrant in Europe, is essentially about *hospitality, vulnerability and love*. For Ngomedje these words encapsulate the opportunities related to migration but also the challenges of finding oneself in a completely new environment. Lemma Desta looks critically at church and mission in Norway. He has a twofold entry-point: his Ethiopian background and the paradigm shift in mission since Edinburgh 1910. In this way Desta turns the tables from 1910: In 1910 the paradigm was the classical Western view of mission, and at the 1910 conference there were very few participants from the Global South (one of them probably came from Africa, but actually lived in the UK at the time). One hundred years later the world has changed wherefore a migrant perspective on church and mission in a Western context is highly relevant.

The book concludes with three *Missiological Challenges*. The learning perspective in the article by Genevieve James grows out of her studies on mega churches in Southern Africa. "Mega church" is today a global phenomenon, for good or for worse. It is therefore of great relevance to learn across boundaries and continental divides how this phenomenon takes shape and mirrors the biblical understanding of *ecclesia* in different local contexts. In Marit Breen's article ("The Church in Mission: Contextual Bible Study and Liberation") we are introduced to a contextual Bible study method developed and used among marginalised women in South Africa. Also here the perspective is twofold: How may this method be a tool in the liberating call for the church in mission in the African context? And how may something similar happen when and where the method is practised in Norway? A key commitment in the Bible study is that the Bible reading takes place in the community, underlining the importance of learning from one another through listening and sharing. When this commitment is respected the study method processes of transformation and liberation may be traced in both the South African and Norwegian contexts. In the final chapter Dawit Oliko writes about the understanding and practise of charismatic gifts within the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY). The emphasis is on the gift of prophecy and the danger of syncretism as a result of retained attitudes and beliefs from traditional religion. Oliko's critical analysis concludes with a set of recommendations which will be a useful resource for not only the EECMY, but also for other churches in similar situations. The use of charismatic gifts within one church may in this way help other charismatic denominations and churches in Ethiopia and in the Global South by providing them with the chance to learn from the mistakes and struggles of the EECMY. The recommendations may also prove valuable for Western churches when confronted with increasing influence from Diaspora churches and with a growing interest in the spiritual world through mediums and magicians, in a search for new worldviews and explanations of crisis in life.

A church that aims at being *A Learning Missional Church* sorely needs *Reflections from young missiologists*, as this book is entitled. The reflections are valuable because of the content and substance, because they deal with relevant issues; they are valuable because they depict the church as a "learning organisation" cross-culturally; and they are valuable because they raise signs of youthful willingness to challenge and change. Thus these reflections may show the way towards Edinburgh 2110.

# MISSIONAL CHURCH

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# MISSIONAL CHURCH – PROBLEM OR POSSIBILITY FOR GLOBAL MISSION? THOUGHTS FROM A NORWEGIAN PERSPECTIVE

**Ragnhild Kristensen**

In my bookshelf I have a copy of a World Missionary Atlas from 1925. In its preface John R. Mott states: “What then is the status of the Christian missionary enterprise in the post-war period? So far as the geographical extent of the Protestant phases of the movement, and the quantitative facts pertaining to these, are concerned, nowhere else is so clear and trustworthy an answer to be had as here.”<sup>1</sup> But, in time – things change, also what once was clear and trustworthy answers. In the atlas’ listing of means of traffic these are the alternatives: Railway, horse and mule, dog and reindeer sledges, camel and horse, ox, llama, yak and human carriage.<sup>2</sup> In the directory of missionary societies all non-western countries fill 13 pages (included South Africa), and UK alone 11 pages, of a total 40.<sup>3</sup> The definition of mission is changing. Both the definition of who is doing mission, where it is done, and what doing mission is, are changing. Now the atlas is kept mostly for nostalgic reasons (I love old maps), and partly as a curiosity.

One of the areas where this change has had a major impact is the Church. There has been a growing awareness of the importance of mission in the churches in general, mostly through the concept of *Missio Dei*: mission is increasingly being understood as part of the church’s essence. Also the challenge of a postmodern, secularized western culture has made the western churches focus increasingly on their local culture and their need for mission there. Out of these changes a question rises: Are churches becoming more self-centered as a by-effect of the missional thinking, due to its increasing focus on the local perspective?

Seeing what seems to be a tendency of decreasing focus on the global aspect of mission, as the concept of missional church increasing, I wish to find out if this is the case.

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<sup>1</sup> Harlan P. Beach and Charles H. Fahs (eds), *World Missionary Atlas* (New York: Institute of Social and Religious Research, 1925), 9.

<sup>2</sup> Beach, *World Missionary Atlas*, Plate 29.

<sup>3</sup> Beach, *World Missionary Atlas*, 17-67.

Therefore in this essay I will try to see how the concept of missional church has been adapted in the Church of Norway, by taking a closer look at how mission is expressed in documents produced by her, and about her. My focus will be on the balance between the global and the local perspective. Then I will take a closer look at some of the major contributors (from both Norway and abroad) to this thinking in Norway, and discuss how the global perspective is expressed there. Then, I will discuss what has been found to see if this can give some answers to the question proposed in the title: Is the missional church a problem, or a possibility for global mission?

### The Church of Norway Going Missional

The last decades there has been a growing awareness around the local church's part in mission. This is found both among post-Vatican II Catholics, Ecumenicals (through a study process initiated by The World Council of Churches), and Evangelicals (especially through Fuller Theological Seminary).<sup>4</sup> Out of this, the concept of missional church developed. *Missional church* can be defined in many ways, and the meaning also differs somewhat with the use.<sup>5</sup> The term originated within the "The Gospel and Our Culture" network, of which Guder was a part. He sums up their definition of *missional* as: "*The essential nature and vocation of the church as Gods called and sent people.*"<sup>6</sup> Here we can see how the concept of missional church brings mission into the essence of being church. This has consequences, not only for our understanding of the church, but also for how the church is shaped. In this essay I will keep to a broad definition, as the main purpose here is researching the ways it is used and how the global perspective is included in it. Being a missional church<sup>7</sup>, will here be understood as being a church sent to the world, searching to see what Gods mission is, and letting the church be shaped by this. This way of thinking about the church has also reached the Church of Norway; it

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<sup>4</sup> For more on this see Knut Jørgensen in Tormod Engelsviken and K.O. Sannes (eds), *Hva vil det si å være kirke? Kirkens vesen og oppdrag* (Trondheim: Tapir, 2004), 53-54.

<sup>5</sup> For those interested in a more detailed definition see: T. Engelsviken, 'Misjonal kirke – en utfordring fra kirken i sør', *Ung Teologi* 36:4 (2003), 27-28, Jørgensen in Engelsviken, *Hva vil det si å være kirke?*, 60-64, M. Frost and A. Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things To Come. Innovation and Mission for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Church* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2003), 11-12.

<sup>6</sup> Darrell L. Guder (ed.), *Missional Church. A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 11.

<sup>7</sup> I have chosen to keep the phrase *church* instead of *congregation*. *Congregation* might be more fitting to the Norwegian reality, however, *church* is more in line with the wording of the concept and is therefore preferred.

has even become a part of her vision: “A confessing, missionary, serving and open folk church.”<sup>8 9</sup>

In the following I will focus on the church’s own understanding of being a missional and a missionary church, how this is understood, and what perspectives are included within the use of the concept. While doing this I will mainly focus on the global perspective to see in what ways it seems to be included (or not). After that I will continue with other contributors to see how they understand it.<sup>10</sup>

*“A confessional, missionary, serving and open folk church”*<sup>11</sup>

The above quotation is the vision statement of the Church of Norway from 2004, also renewed in at the General Synod of 2008. The concept of missional church has been an almost non-existing perspective within the northern European Lutheran state churches since the reformation. During the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century there was an increasing awareness around mission; this however was not as much as an integrated part of the church, rather as an optional, voluntary engagement. This resulted in the mission organisations and other para-church organisations we still find existing today, in varying degrees of connection to the local churches.<sup>12</sup> In Norway the organisations and the Church of Norway have been fulfilling the mission of the local church together. The organisations have been given mandates to carry out mission work, social work and others on behalf of the local church. But, especially when it comes to mission the organisations have been doing most of the work.<sup>13</sup> However, in the last decades the

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<sup>8</sup> Church of Norway, *the Church of Norway’s vision statement 2009-2014*, available at [www.kirken.no/?event=doLink&famID=3200](http://www.kirken.no/?event=doLink&famID=3200), author’s translation.

<sup>9</sup> In Norwegian both missional and missionary were early translated into the term *misjonerende* similar to the English missionary. Later also the term *misjonal* – similar to the English missional, has been used. But it seems that in Norwegian both terms have mixed in use, although there seems to be developing an increasing awareness of the difference; where *misjonerende* has a more active connotation, while *misjonal* describes a part of the essence of the Church. However the term missionary is still used in the Church of Norway, both in her vision and other documents. Whether or not this is the right term might be discussed, perhaps the use of missional would have been better.

<sup>10</sup> Getting a full and good overview of all the parts of the processes has been difficult, not all documents are available at [www.kirken.no](http://www.kirken.no), also due to limitations of this essay I have not been able to do a full study of this.

<sup>11</sup> Church of Norway, *the Church of Norway’s vision statement 2009-2014*, available at [www.kirken.no/?event=doLink&famID=3200](http://www.kirken.no/?event=doLink&famID=3200), author’s translation.

<sup>12</sup> Harald Hegstad, *Den virkelige kirke, Bidrag til ekklesiologien* (Trondheim: Tapir, 2009), 25-27.

<sup>13</sup> Knut Andresen, ‘Kirken og dens organisasjoner. Kirkelig samhold’, *Kirke og Kultur* 2 (1993), 127.



church has increasingly been discussing her own role in mission, and her self-understanding as missionary.

In 1978 a project was initiated called *Menighetenes misjonsengasjement* (the churches commitment to mission<sup>14</sup>). The aim of the project was to strengthen the co-operation between the church and the mission organisations. In the early 90s this was further developed to *Samarbeidsråd for Menighet og Misjon: SMM* (the Joint Council of Congregations in Mission).<sup>15</sup> An evaluation of this council was done at the Church of Norway General Synod in 2000, and in many ways this evaluation started the process towards a missionary understanding of the Church of Norway. At this General Synod SMM was established as a permanent institution within the church, starting from 2001.<sup>16</sup> It is difficult to find any significant loss of the global perspective this early in the developing discussion. As a cooperative between the mission organisations and the church, SMM is likely to focus on the global perspective, as the mission organisations have been doing.<sup>17</sup> This same tendency is also shown when taking a closer look at the documents from that same General Synod. The wording then used propose that there was no differentiation yet between local and global, but rather one seemed to differentiate between the national and international aspects.<sup>18</sup>

In 2002 a process was begun within the Church of Norway, taking a deeper look into, and rethinking, her mission and identity. This resulted in a vision statement made by the General Synod in 2004. The following General Synods were given the task of treating the specific statement topics further. In this general statement from 2004, the global perspective is present, as it states the following: “*For the church it is therefore an obligation to share the gospel of Jesus Christ with all people, both in our own country and across the whole world, in different cultures and settings.*”<sup>19</sup> and then continues to point to the Church of Norway’s responsibility towards the international fellowship of the world wide Church.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Author’s translation.

<sup>15</sup> Lied, in Engelsviken, *Hva vil det si å være kirke?*, 97.

<sup>16</sup> Church of Norway, *General Synod 2000 Decision 12* ‘Joint council for congregations in mission’ available at [www.kirken.no/?event=downloadFile&FileID=9312](http://www.kirken.no/?event=downloadFile&FileID=9312), and Lied in Engelsviken, *Hva vil det si å være kirke?*, 93.

<sup>17</sup> Those especially interested can compare the foundational document from 1993 and the strategic document from 2007, to see how the understanding of mission has broadened within those years.

<sup>18</sup> Church of Norway, *General Synod 2000 Decision 12*, 1-3.

<sup>19</sup> Church of Norway, *The Church of Norway’s Identity and Mission (Kirkens identitet og oppdrag)*, available at mission [www.kirken.no/?event=doLink&famID=31971](http://www.kirken.no/?event=doLink&famID=31971), Pt 4, author’s translation.

<sup>20</sup> Church of Norway, *The Church of Norway’s Identity and Mission*, 7, pt 29.

“A missionary church” was the topic for the General Synod of 2005 which treated this aspect of the Church of Norway’s identity and mission more deeply. As part of the process towards this General Synod, SMM initiated the project *Menighet i bevegelse* (Church in Motion<sup>21</sup>) in 2003. The Church in Motion project focused mainly on understanding and discussing what missional churches are; gathering experiences from being missional churches, understanding the churches’ challenges, and trying to discover God’s presence in a changing society. It also worked with renewing and developing missionary attitudes and praxis within the church.<sup>22</sup> The results of this project were presented in a leaflet for local churches and parochial church councils, together with a group study plan. These were both issued after the General Synod of 2005, as help for the local churches in discovering how to be a missional church. As earlier mentioned, SMM; through its partakers, normally and naturally includes the global perspective. But even so, the global perspective in these contributions is somewhat vague and varying, as it mainly focuses on the local church. The documents discuss secularization and religious pluralism and the major shifts taking place on these arenas. The global perspective is also mostly approached through these topics. However the global perspective is not lost, even though the main focus is on the local church.<sup>23</sup> The group study also gives many examples of how to include the global perspective in Norwegian church life, as well as giving examples from churches all around the world.<sup>24</sup>

The topic of the General Synod of 2005 was also treated at the Church of Norway Youth Synod, earlier the same year. The documents from the discussion there express the need for a redefinition of mission<sup>25</sup>, and attempt to do this by defining mission through the terms; *deling, dialog og nærvær* (sharing, dialogue and presence<sup>26</sup>). Here, the local perspective is given the main emphasis, the examples given in the documents focusing on the missional aspect of being individuals among family and friends, and the missional aspect of societies when attracting other youth. The worldwide church is mentioned, as well as cross-cultural spreading of the gospel, but mostly through the perspective of exchanging knowledge and experiences, and not as an integrated focus. The documents do not seem to be expressing a very conscious loss of perspective one-way or the other, they rather seem

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<sup>21</sup> Author’s translation.

<sup>22</sup> Jørgensen in Engelsviken, *Hva vil det si å være kirke?*, 67.

<sup>23</sup> Church of Norway, *Menighet I bevegelse – prosjektpresentasjon, utfordring til deltagelse* (Oslo: Kirkerådets matriellekspedisjon, 2003), 11, 15.

<sup>24</sup> Church of Norway, *Hva I himmel og på jord må til for å sette en menighet i bevegelse* (Oslo: Kirkerådets matriellekspedisjon, 2005), 11, 14, 15, 19, 22-25.

<sup>25</sup> Church of Norway, *Youth Synod 2005 Decision ‘Missionary Church’*, available at [www.kirken.no//?event=downloadFile&famID=18448, 1-2, pt. 1 and 4](http://www.kirken.no//?event=downloadFile&famID=18448, 1-2, pt. 1 and 4).

<sup>26</sup> Author’s translation.

to be reflecting some of the confusion around the perspectives, which seems to be developing.

As mentioned earlier, connected to the preparations for the General Synod of 2005 the Church in Motion project was initiated. The project influenced the treatment of the subject in many ways, and this can also be seen in the documents for the synod. The documents beforehand seem to be including both the local and the global perspective in a good and balanced presentation. Instead of presuming the global perspective, it is mentioned alongside the local throughout the documents. The global perspective is also particularly emphasised in the part “World Wide Joy”. Here the importance of exchanging knowledge, impulses and missionaries is emphasised, and also the importance of involving the local churches in cross-cultural mission.<sup>27</sup> However, in the comments given by the committee working with the subject at the synod, the global perspective is not given much notice; it is merely offered two paragraphs at the end of a three-page long brief. The decision taken by the General Synod seems somewhat influenced by the committee, yet more nuanced. The expression *global* is not mentioned once, *the world* only twice, and *countries* just three times. Mostly the decision focuses on the local perspective, and in part the national. However, considering that the main focus was to discuss how being a missional church would shape the folk church, it is understandable that the main focus is on the folk church and the local churches.

After the General Synod 2005 a leaflet<sup>28</sup> was issued to the local churches, to explain the understanding of the Church of Norway as a missional church, and what consequences that may have for the shaping of local churches within her. This leaflet contained much of the same aspects as the documents beforehand of the General Synod, also using parts of the lecture given at the synod by Kjetil Aano<sup>29</sup> on the subject, both balancing well the global and the local perspective, as well as challenging existing views and understandings of mission. In the following years after the General Synod of 2005 there was little focus on the topic within the Church structures. The church continued to work with other aspects of her vision,

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<sup>27</sup> Church of Norway, *General Synod 2005 Document 5.1* ‘Documents beforehand on Missionary Church’, available at [www.kirken.no//?event=downloadFile&famID=18445](http://www.kirken.no//?event=downloadFile&famID=18445), 17-18.

<sup>28</sup> Church of Norway, *General Synod 2005 leaflet* ‘A Missionary Church’, available at [www.kirken.no/index.cfm?event=downloadFile&nodeid=22984](http://www.kirken.no/index.cfm?event=downloadFile&nodeid=22984).

<sup>29</sup> Kjetil Aano is former general secretary of Norwegian Mission Society, now Dean in Stavanger Diocese and leader of the Church of Norway Council on Ecumenical and International Relations. Aano, Kjetil ‘Ei misjonerande kyrkje’ lecture presented at the Church of Norway General Synod 2005, Lillehammer, 14 November 2005, available at [www.kirken.no/index.cfm?event=downloadFile&nodeid=22975](http://www.kirken.no/index.cfm?event=downloadFile&nodeid=22975), his lecture will be treated in the second part as a contribution to the Church of Norway’s understanding of missional church, as it is not an official document of the Church of Norway.

such as *servicing* and *open*, and the awareness of the missionary aspect seemed to diminish during the course of events.

In recent years, the Church of Norway has been reforming her programme for Christian education, starting the process in 2003. Before Christian education was part of the public school system, but this has been reformed to fit an increasingly multi-religious society, and the Christian part has been reduced significantly. The reform has therefore been aiming to achieve a more comprehensive program within the church, to try to make up for what the school system has reduced. After many trial projects the draft for the general program was presented in 2009, this contained hardly anything on mission, which the mission organisations protested to when it was circulated for comments. It contained some missional perspectives in a broad definition of mission, even though the words mission, missionary and missional were not used. In example the title of the draft was: *vi deler* (we share). The local perspective could be found several times, but the global perspective was lacking.<sup>30</sup> However this was improved within the final programme issued in 2010. This includes a section on mission and the global perspective, and also the global perspective is mentioned along with the local several places.<sup>31</sup> But the process around this makes one question how it can be possible to “forget” aspects, which in the same period have been focused on as part of the essence of being church, as it was in the draft? Mostly it seems that the church has been busy with other projects, and left the global perspective to SMM and other especially interested. This, in some degree also seems to be the case for the aspect of being missionary.

In 2010 the focus on mission has been increasing, perhaps due to the international two big mission conferences taking place: the Centenary of the 1910 World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh 2010 and Cape Town 2010 – the Third Lausanne Conference on World Evangelization. In the Church of Norway mission was the topic for the Youth Church Synod of 2010. The documents for this were mostly concerned about the foundations for mission, as well as focusing on ecumenical and spiritual aspects. The global perspective is present, especially in the resolution, and expressed e.g. here: “*Through our baptism we do not only become a part of our local church, or the Church of Norway, but a worldwide fellowship, where Jesus Christ is the one uniting us.*”<sup>32</sup> In general there seems to be a balanced approach not stressing neither the global nor the local perspective too much.

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<sup>30</sup> Church of Norway, *Vi deler. Plan for trosopplæring i Den norske kirke. Høringutkast 2009* (Oslo: Kirkerådets matriellekspedisjon, 2009).

<sup>31</sup> Church of Norway, *Gud gir – Vi deler. Plan for trosopplæring i Den norske kirke*. (Oslo: Kirkerådets matriellekspedisjon, 2010), 11, 17, 21, 31-32.

<sup>32</sup> Church of Norway, *Youth Synod 2010 Decision 3 ‘Come, – and go!’*, available at [kirken.no/?event=showMeetingPlan&famID=8468](http://kirken.no/?event=showMeetingPlan&famID=8468), 2, author’s translation.

Focusing only on products and documents by the church herself gives no full picture of what is going on concerning this topic in Norway. Along with the process within the church, there has also been processes involving other institutes and movements. These institutes and movements are again, in different ways, connected to the Church of Norway; therefore their contributions are also an important source here. I will in the next section have a brief look at some of these and what has been said about this topic the last decade.

### Missional Ecclesiology in Norwegian

In the early contributions, when Norwegian writers at first started showing interest for the concept of missional church, they seemed to approach it mainly through the paradigm shift in taking place within missiology. Influenced mostly by: Bosch with *Transforming Mission. Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, along with Jenkins: *the Next Christendom. The Coming of Global Christianity*, one of their main concerns seemed to be to convince the readers that this tremendous shift in culture and in mission had taken place. And that along with this a new understanding of mission was emerging, and besides introducing these thoughts, efforts were made to convince the reader of the need to be thinking missional to be able to face the new situation. They were in many ways inspired by the Church and our Culture-networks in both England and North America.<sup>33</sup> Most of these early Norwegian contributors were working with missiology and had an integrated global perspective.<sup>34</sup>

After the General Synod in 2005, and after these first contributions the topic seemed to establish within the church, and the need for convincing decreased. Developing the church had by then become a popular theme for Norwegian theologians, and the concept of missional church also had a great influence on these movements, both with and without connection to the missiological movements. The material and resources on the topic available are reflecting this, as well as the institutions and movements that produce them. After 2005 there seems to be three different tendencies on how this is approached, which will be presented below:

First there is the missiological approach, where the global perspective is present, and emphasised in different ways. This approach forms a continuing line with the way the concept was introduced to Norway, which was mentioned above. These contributors within this tendency mostly seem

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<sup>33</sup> Jørgensen in Engelsviken, *Hva vil det si å være kirke?*, 54, Sannes in Engelsviken, *Hva vil det si å være kirke?*, 36-37.

<sup>34</sup> Engelsviken and Jørgensen in Engelsviken, *Hva vil det si å være kirke?*, Engelsviken, 'Misjonale kirke – en utfordring fra kirken i sør', Rasmussen, Rune, *Misjonerende menigheter* (Oslo: Verbum, 2004).

to be former missionaries.<sup>35</sup> With their background, interests and experiences, they seem to have an integrated emphasis on the global perspective. Two of these early contributors are Engelsviken<sup>36</sup> and Rasmussen<sup>37</sup>. Does their emphasis seem to be influencing others reading and using their contributions? However emphasised with them, outside the missiological approach, the global perspective does not seem to have been kept among those who have used them.<sup>38</sup>

The second tendency I will call the ecclesiological approach, as its contributors mostly seem to be concerned with church development<sup>39</sup> and other ecclesiological aspects. The approach to the concept is concerned mostly with it at a structural level towards the church, rather than the missiological aspect of it. Therefore, the local perspective is dominating in this approach. The global perspective is mentioned some places, and some places not; however if it is mentioned it is not emphasised.<sup>40</sup> Also with some of the contributors, it seems that the global perspective is taken for granted; assuming one automatically thinks of mission in the global aspect, the local perspective becomes the perspective demanding focus. This is also because they think that the local perspective has been neglected earlier.<sup>41</sup> It should added that one of the latest contributions within this tendency; Hegstad's<sup>42</sup> *Den virkelige kirke*, seem to have a more balanced perspective,

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<sup>35</sup> Rasmussen, *Misjonerende menigheter*, Engelsviken, Misjonale kirke – en utfordring fra kirken i sør', Aano, 'Ei misjonerande kyrkje', Kjetil Aano, "“Going global”: Reflections on being a Western Christian in a Global Church', Engelsviken, T.E. Harbakk, R. Olsen, T. Strandenaes; (eds) *Mission to the world: communicating the Gospel in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, Essays in Honour of Knud Jørgensen* (Oxford: Regnum, 2008), 92-102; Jørgensen in Engelsviken, *Hva vil det si å være kirke?* Stangeland, Oddbjørn; *Edderkopp og sjøstjerne, en fortelling om å krysse grenser i misjonale menighetsutvikling* (Oslo: Luther, 2008).

<sup>36</sup> Dr. Tormod Engelsviken is Professor of Missiology at the Norwegian School of Theology.

<sup>37</sup> Rasmussen is former leader of a churchplanting network initiated by Norwegian Mission Society, and now pastor in Bogafjell, a congregation in the Church of Norway. Rasmussen, *Misjonerende menigheter*, Engelsviken, 'Misjonale kirke – en utfordring fra kirken i sør'.

<sup>38</sup> E.g. Hansen, Ove Conrad, *Et godt tre bærer god frukt. Visjoner og strategier for utvikling og vekst i lokale menigheter* (Oslo: Luther, 2007).

<sup>39</sup> *Church development* is here selected as a translation of the Norwegian *menighetsutvikling*.

<sup>40</sup> Sannes in Engelsviken, *Hva vil det si å være kirke?*, Hesselberg, Thore (ed.). *Kirkens framtid – framtidens kirke, den missiologiske utfordring i de nordiske folkekirker* (Oslo: Luther, 2006); Hansen, *Et godt tre bærer god frukt*, Mosdøl, Hallvard O. *Hiawatha av Kragerø, Menighetsutvikling i folkekirken – impulser fra Sjømannskirken* (Oslo: Verbum, 2008) (In Hesselberg, *Kirkens framtid* the contribution of Engelsviken would be an exception).

<sup>41</sup> Sannes in Engelsviken, *Hva vil det si å være kirke?*, 36-37.

<sup>42</sup> Dr. Harald Hegstad is Professor of Dogmatics and Practical Ecclesiology at the Norwegian School of Theology.

and succeeds with including the global perspective in a good way.<sup>43</sup> In general these sources are not particularly negative towards mission, neither local nor global, they simply have their focus on building the local church.

At the other side of the scale there seems to be a tendency more or less connected to the folk-church thinking. Here mission in general has been thought of as a negative thing, perhaps also an outdated matter.<sup>44</sup> But this tendency seems to be weakening as the new definition of mission is gaining. Even though the contributors here seem to think it hard to combine with the understanding of the Church of Norway as a folk church the development seems to be towards a more positive approach to the concept.<sup>45</sup>

As shown above there seems to be some tendencies in how the concept of missional church is approached. But, are these tendencies a result of the Norwegian adaption of the concept? Or can we also find a loss of the global perspective elsewhere in important influences on missional ecclesiology outside of Norway? To find out if these tendencies are found outside of Norway I will briefly take a look at some of the main influences on the Norwegian thinking to see what can be found there.

### Results of the Norwegian Adaption – Or a More General Issue?

The concept of missional church came to Norway through several different sources of influence. In the following I will take a brief look at some of the most important sources of influence to compare the tendencies found in the Norwegian adaption with their sources in order to see if this lack of global perspective is a found also in the sources. I have made a fairly small selection out of the names most frequently occurring in the bibliographies of the Norwegian authors above. The authors selected were: Guder<sup>46</sup>, Hirsch<sup>47</sup>, Frost<sup>48</sup>, Gibbs<sup>49</sup>, and the report from Church of England: Mission-

<sup>43</sup> Hegstad, *Den virkelige kirke*, 61-86 esp. 73-77.

<sup>44</sup> This can be found expressed in the documents of the Church of Norway, *General Synod in 2005 Decision 5 'A Missionary Church'* [www.kirken.no/?event=downloadFile&FileID=10211](http://www.kirken.no/?event=downloadFile&FileID=10211), and *Youth Synod 2005 Decision 'Missionary Church'*.

<sup>45</sup> Traces of this can be found in Hegstad and Hesselberg, *Kirkens framtid*, 63-67. Also for a similar Danish perspective on it see: Hans R Iversen, 'How can a Folk Church be a Missional Church?', in T. Engelsviken, E. Harbakk, R. Olsen, T. Strandenæs (eds), *Mission to the World: Communicating the Gospel in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Essays in Honour of Knud Jørgensen* (Oxford: Regnum, 2008), 51-66. Besides these, little is found of this tendency in the texts researched for this essay.

<sup>46</sup> Darrell L Guder, *The Continuing Conversion of the Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000).

<sup>47</sup> Frost and Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things To Come*.

<sup>48</sup> Frost and Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things To Come*.

<sup>49</sup> Eddie Gibbs, *Church Next: Quantum Changes in How We Do Ministry* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press), 2000.

shaped Church<sup>50</sup>. The books have quite different approaches, as Guder's book lays the theological foundations for a new way of thinking church, Hirsh and Frost's book is a more "how-to"-book, not going deeply into the theological foundations. Gibbs' book falls somewhere in-between the two former, and the report is a report of the movement that is taking place within the Church of England.

They all have a similar approach to the concept: critiquing the existing churches and their methods used for reaching the western culture (or absence of them), and presenting the concept of the missional church as a solution to this. And in general it seems that none of them give much emphasis to the global perspective of the missional church. Mission is first and foremost aimed at the local communities, and if the cross-cultural aspect is given focus, this also is with a local perspective: to the different kinds of cultures within the local community. Their centre of attention is being incarnated communities, and translating the gospel into the present culture, rather than moving beyond one's own culture. It seems that the global perspective is more or less put on hold until the local community has been reached. In many ways the following quote from Mission-shaped Church sums up the attitude:

We need to find expressions of church that communicate with post-Christian people, and which enable them to become committed communities of followers of Jesus Christ. Then they, in turn, can continue to engage in mission with and beyond their own culture.<sup>51</sup>

Of the authors selected, Gibbs seems to be the one who includes the global perspective of being a missional church most. In his overview of the biblical foundation of being missional he refers to Jesus commandments to the disciples and their actions in the church in a clearly global way.<sup>52</sup> He also questions our motivation for mission, and wonders if we still care whether or not people not get saved. This he does by giving several examples of old missionaries and their zeal for their work. While asking for the motivation behind things, and here also promoting the *Missio Dei*-thinking, he seems to keep the global perspective included.<sup>53</sup> Also Guder gives some focus to the global perspective, at least at the part of his book where he is discussing the theological and biblical foundations of mission<sup>54</sup>, however it seems to get somewhat lost when he turns to focus on the implications this might have for the church.<sup>55</sup>

After having taken a closer look at this selection of books it seems that the lack of the global perspective is not mainly a result of the Norwegian

<sup>50</sup> *Mission-Shaped Church: Church Planting and Fresh Expressions of Church in a Changing Context* (London: Church House Publishing, 2004).

<sup>51</sup> *Mission-Shaped Church*, 12.

<sup>52</sup> Gibbs, *Church Next*, 53-58, 222-223.

<sup>53</sup> Gibbs, *Church Next*, 60-62.

<sup>54</sup> Guder, *The Continuing Conversion of the Church*, 68-70, 79-82.

<sup>55</sup> Guder, *The Continuing Conversion of the Church*, 145-149.



adaption of the concept. Moreover it is surprisingly more present among many of the Norwegians than it is with their sources. In particular the report 'Mission-shaped Church' has been an important influence in Norway, and this hardly mentions the global perspective at all. This tendency has also been commented on in the Norwegian project *Menighet i bevegelse*: "Many places internationally the commitment to the concept of missionary congregations has focused on the post Christian west as a mission challenge in such a way that the global missional perspective has been kept in the shadows."<sup>56</sup> The concept of missional church might in this way be danger of contributing to self-centring of the church, however probably not intentionally. But if something is not talked about for long enough time, then at some point it becomes forgotten. And if the concept of missional church keeps leaving out the global perspective this might happen.

### **"...till the ends of the earth": Global Perspective in Today's Missional Churches?**

Missiology has traditionally been the theological branch maintaining a global perspective. Also, having to repeatedly face new frontiers and challenges new theological ideas and methods have often emerged within missiology, missiology in this way is often representing the cutting edge of theology. Even the main concept discussed in this essay: missional church started to develop, not within ecclesiology, but within missiology. But, as seen above, the concept tends to focus mainly on the local perspective of being a missional church, both in the Norwegian adaption of the concept, and especially in the sources of influence to the Norwegian adaption. This I will propose potentially is a problem for global mission. But, the missional church, with its integrated emphasis on mission as an essential part of being church, also holds a great possibility for mission in general if it is able to also include the global perspective.

Why is the global perspective so important? To answer this I will use a quote from Gibbs: "We may ask the Lord 'Why do I have to engage in witness, and why does the church have to become involved in global mission?' 'Because I have told you to,' the Lord replies. The Great Commission cannot be reduced to a voluntary activity engaged in by a few enthusiasts."<sup>57</sup> God has called us to bring his Gospel to the ends of the earth. This is a task, a mission for the whole church together. Escobar also points to this: "..., despite the present shift of Christianity to the South, in

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<sup>56</sup> Church of Norway, *Menighet i bevegelse*, 23, author's translation.

<sup>57</sup> Gibbs, *Church Next*, 55.

coming decades Christian mission to all parts of the globe will require resources from both the North and the South to be successful.”<sup>58</sup>

The global perspective is important in mission, but it is also important for the church, as shown above, and we must not lose it. The concept of missional church has made the church aware that mission is a part of the church’s essence, but mostly in a local sense, and in danger of losing the global perspective. That this seems to be a western problem in the adaptation of the concept of missional churches is also pointed to by Aano:

However since its focus – and rightfully so – is the problem-ridden churches of the west, it risks an expression of western self-centeredness. The western notion of missional church, therefore, needs to be reconciled with a missionary attitude that has a global perspective. Global mission and missional church belong together.<sup>59</sup>

With a global perspective the local church sees herself as part of a worldwide church, of a universal church. By this she partakes in a global mission: the great commandment for the whole church to reach the whole world with the gospel. Also, by being aware that it is a part of the global church, this leads to a sense of solidarity with others elsewhere in the world. In a global perspective being a missional church will always involve some sense of movement geographically, with crossing of borders and cross-cultural exchange. This exchange can be of many kinds: of people (missionaries), money, knowledge, prayer, inspiration or simply friendship.

With a local perspective the local church will have a primary focus on being church for the local community. It might have some of the aspect of crossing borders, but then mostly of generational, social or cultural borders within a limited geographical space (the local). In this perspective missional and mission seem to be used to express how the church has shifted focus from expecting people to come to them, to moving out into its community, or as Gibbs puts this: being mission-oriented rather than market-driven.<sup>60</sup>

For the missional church, these two perspectives are both important perspectives, and both should be present in the discussion around how to be a missional church. The global perspective, ideally and normally also involves the local perspective, although exceptions can be found. The local perspective, on the other hand, does not automatically include the global, as we have seen above several times. Somehow it seems easier to derive the local perspective from the global, and much more challenging the other way – deriving the global from the local. This means that a loss of the global perspective becomes more crucial than a loss of the local perspective.

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<sup>58</sup> Samuel Escobar, *The New Global Mission: The Gospel from Everywhere to Everyone* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 18.

<sup>59</sup> Aano, ‘Going Global’, 102.

<sup>60</sup> Gibbs, *Church Next*, 36-41.

In many ways it seems to me that these discussions have a Hegelian, dialectic mark on it. Going completely global, forgetting her local concerns the modern European church expanded greatly across the world in the last century – then that was what mission was about. Turning postmodern she suddenly realized, while coming home from abroad that the situation at home was no less challenging than abroad. Out of this the postmodern anti-thesis to modern ecclesiology and missiology developed, of which the concept of missional church is a product – and this becomes what mission is about. Now we seem to be in need of a synthesis, something focusing on and combining both the local and the global perspective of ecclesiology and mission, and including them both in the definition of mission, so that both these perspectives can be what mission is about. But what will become the synthesis?

### Glocal Missional Churches

Several have been arguing that it is important that the church has a bifocal attitude towards the world; at the same time being able to keeping in focus both the local and the global.<sup>61</sup> Another way of expressing this is by using the term *glocal*. *Glocal* is an expression recently emerged to express the interaction between the local communities we live in and the increasing globalization of the world.<sup>62</sup> Van Engen is one of those how have been using the term glocal about the church's role in mission, arguing that this approach can help us overcome and move beyond earlier discussions of global versus local, modernity versus postmodernity, as well as controversies and questions of postcolonial mission and globalization.<sup>63</sup> So what is a glocal church? – Van Engen describes it in this way:

...a healthy congregation of disciples of Jesus lives out its catholicity by intentionally and actively participating in Christ's mission in a glocal fashion; that is, it is active simultaneously in global and local mission that dynamically fosters the glocal interaction between the global and the local.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Wilbert R Shenk, 'Foreword', Ott, Craig and Netland (eds), *Globalizing Theology: Belief and Practice in an Era of World Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 11; T. Engelsviken, 'The Church as both local and global – a missiological perspective.' Lecture presented at Fjellhaug Symposium 14 April 2010, available at [misjonshogskolen.fjellhaug.no/assets/PDF-filer/Symposium-Fjellhaug-2010/Engelsviken-Churchlocalandglobal.pdf](http://misjonshogskolen.fjellhaug.no/assets/PDF-filer/Symposium-Fjellhaug-2010/Engelsviken-Churchlocalandglobal.pdf), 1; Charles E Van Engen, 'The Glocal Church: Locality and Catholicity in a Globalizing World'. Craig and Netland, *Globalizing Theology*, 157; Tizon, *Transformation after Lausanne: Radical Evangelical Mission in Global-Local Perspective* (Oxford: Regnum, 2008), 230.

<sup>62</sup> Tizon, *Transformation after Lausanne*, 207; Van Engen, 'The Glocal Church', 159-160.

<sup>63</sup> Van Engen, 'The Glocal Church', 159-160.

<sup>64</sup> Van Engen, 'The Glocal Church', 157.

This interaction can take different forms. In a local sense this can be called the churches dual orientation, where the church *gathers* for fellowship and worship (come), and *disperses* to serve God with their lives (go).<sup>65</sup> This same dual orientation can be found in the global sense, where one at the same time as sending missionaries (go), also invite missionaries from other parts of the world to us (come).<sup>66</sup> But this becomes even more interesting when it takes place in a glocal setting: Escobar points to the effects of “mission in reverse”; when missionaries from abroad (go) return (come) and bring back new insights and in this way enrich the life of their sending churches.<sup>67</sup> Van Engen also refers to Saayman calling this the “boomerang effect” of Christian mission, and explains it as:

...the movement is from Jerusalem to Judea and back to Jerusalem, to Samaria and back to Jerusalem, to the ends of the earth and back to Jerusalem, etc. Such an understanding (...) better expresses the role of mutuality and interdependence as essential preconditions for the churches to carry out their missionary responsibility.<sup>68</sup>

And through this interaction – the coming and going – both locally and globally, I believe the missional church, with its integrated emphasis on mission as an essential part of being church, can become a huge possibility not only for local mission, but also for global mission. As long as it stays bifocal the church can avoid becoming a self-centred, locally focused missional church; but a glocal missional church with both perspectives integrated in its missionary activities. Summing up his discussion of the global, local and glocal dimensions of “Mission as Transformation” in a Filipino context Tizon emphasises the importance of all three dimensions for the church in mission, or as we here should rather say; the missional church:

..., its global dimensions keep the big picture of God’s universal kingdom for the whole world; its local dimensions ensure contextual relevance with a local appropriation of the whole Gospel; and its glocal dimensions urge the whole Church to work together in the missionary task.<sup>69</sup>

Then, as this essay has approached this topic from a Norwegian perspective, coming to the end some words should be said about how this could take form within a Norwegian context. Other places we find that both perspectives are integrated as natural parts of being a missional church – as Engelsviken shows in his presentation of Malaysian missiological

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<sup>65</sup> Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 386.

<sup>66</sup> H.T. Løvaas, ‘Misjon fra, “i og til Europa”, og litt om “inside” og “outside”-bevegelser i global mission’, *Norsk Tidsskrift for Misjon* 59:4 (2005), 249.

<sup>67</sup> Escobar, *The New Global Mission*, 162.

<sup>68</sup> Saayman in Van Engen, ‘The Glocal Church’, 160.

<sup>69</sup> Tizon, *Transformation after Lausanne*, 230.

churches.<sup>70</sup> Perhaps we may have something to learn from them? Stangeland<sup>71</sup> also has proposed to use some of his experiences from the Thai Evangelical Lutheran Church in planting a local missional church within the Church of Norway, without losing the global perspective.<sup>72</sup> These are two examples of how it *is* possible to be a missional church with focus on *both* the local and the global perspective.

### Glocal Missional Church – A Norwegian Perspective

Much of the material researched for this essay reflects the traditional divide we find here in Norway; the divide between the church and the para-church organisations. Traditionally mission has been done by the organisations, while the church has been facilitating services, funerals, weddings, baptism etc. Much of the other Christian activities such as; Christian education, Sunday schools, women's groups, and fundraising have had their primary belonging within an organisation, and secondarily to the local church (however this is a generalization and there are big geographical differences). So what happens then when the church goes missional – will it still be needing its mission organisations?

As the texts researched for this essay indicate, I believe it somewhat optimistic on behalf of the missional church, to think it could manage without the organizations.<sup>73</sup> But perhaps their role will become different from what it has been?<sup>74</sup> What seems clear is that, while missional ecclesiology is making the local churches increasingly aware of their role in mission, the need for further emphasis on the global perspective is still present. Rather than juxtaposing, we need to combine. We need a glocal missional church – with glocal mission organisations. Because mission should be both local and global – both having a local emphasis along with the global involvement. Because we are called to be churches in our neighbourhoods, but also called to be part of the global church, sharing the gospel with those who have not yet heard, and caring for one-another throughout the world. And even though we are living in a postmodern, secularized culture here in Norway, there are things we can contribute to the global church. We have a lot of money, we have a lot of resources, and we have a lot of competence, skilled people, and good educational institutes. We still have things to share, but we must not forget that we also have things to learn. We might have a lot to learn, and to be inspired from

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<sup>70</sup> Engelsviken, 'Misjonale kirke – en utfordring fra kirken i sør', 36-38, Engelsviken in Engelsviken, *Hva vil det si å være kirke?*, 80-92.

<sup>71</sup> Oddbjørn Stangeland is pastor in Ålgård congregation, Church of Norway, former missionary to Thailand with the Norwegian Mission Society.

<sup>72</sup> Stangeland, *Edderkopp og sjøstjerne*.

<sup>73</sup> Jørgensen in Engelsviken, *Hva vil det si å være kirke?*, 58.

<sup>74</sup> Knud Jørgensen, 'Trens misjonsorganisasjoner?', *Vårt Land* (4.10.2010), 22-23.

by churches from other cultures. Giving and receiving – coming and going – sharing both ways is an important aspect of being part of a glocal church.

The responsibility for mission lies with the local church. The concept of missional church has proved a great tool for making the local churches aware of this, however primarily in a local perspective. As part of a global church, the responsibility is bifocal; it is a glocal responsibility. When it comes to the global aspect of this, local churches might need to cooperate; and for this they might need other structures that what the Church of Norway is providing within herself. In his study of Malaysian missiological churches Engelsviken comments on their attitude towards mission organisations and other para-church organisations: “*One did not consider the mission organisations as competitors or something parallel to the church. They were seen as useful tools when several churches were cooperating in mission, as well as when the practical mission work was to be done.*”<sup>75</sup> In other words, it seems possible to be a missional church with mission organisations. In many cases this already is a reality in the Church of Norway. Perhaps it should be seen as an advantage, which could be developed further in the process towards a glocal missional church. Mogens Mogensen points to four areas where the mission organisations still can contribute, what he calls the Newbiggin-factor (earlier here referred to as the boomerang effect): pastoral field trips – showing the clergy new and other possible expressions of being church other places in the world, the gift of the stranger – where fresh eyes from e.g. Africa, Asia or Latin America can help us understand our churches own situation, companionship in the task of local mission, and the trying out being a missional church.<sup>76</sup> Perhaps also the mission organisations will have to go through changes towards becoming more glocal, as well as redefining their relationship towards the church for further cooperation.

Probably the issue commented on in this essay are matters the church, theologians in general and missiologists especially will be concerned about for still a long time ahead. As I have mentioned; in general I think the concept of missional church has an opportunity to become a great possibility for mission in general, also global mission, if the perspective is not lost. I also believe this to be the case for the Church of Norway. The church must emphasise its missional dimension – in a glocal way; in preaching, teaching, and sharing. Furthermore this should lead to missionary activities of different kind, with both local and global objectives. Perhaps the para-church organisations could, in cooperation with the church, take part in the missionary activities – as it traditionally has been done, but maybe strive to be even more in cooperation with the church, and involving the whole church in it to a larger degree?

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<sup>75</sup> Engelsviken in Engelsviken, *Hva vil det si å være kirke?*, 87, author’s translation.

<sup>76</sup> Mogensen, Mogens, ‘Fra en kirke uden mission, over en kirke med mission, til en kirke, der er mission’, *Norsk Tidsskrift for Misjon* 58:3 (2004), 170-171.

### **Missional Church – Problem or Possibility for Global Mission?**

I started this essay by posing this question. And in many ways it seems to remain unanswered. The answer depends on how the concept will develop further. But, in attempt to find an answer to it I have been looking on how the global perspective partly is present within the Church of Norway, then mostly in the preparations of the General Synod in 2005 with the missionary church as the main topic. And also how it after this mainly seems to be left as an area of concern for SMM. To see if the situation was different among other contributors to the Norwegian understanding of the concept I have been looking at a selection of these, finding a tendency where the global perspective mostly is present among missiologists and former missionaries and their writings on the topic, and not so much otherwise. And then, in an attempt to see if this tendency was caused by the Norwegian adaption of the concept I had a look at a selection of important contributors to the topic from abroad. Here as, mostly elsewhere, the focus was mainly on the local perspective of being a missional church.

Summing this up, it seems that the tendency in large is on the local perspective of being a missional church, both in the Norwegian adaption of the concept, and especially in the sources of influence to the Norwegian adaption, also it seems that the definition of mission is broadening. This could potentially become a problem for global mission, if the global perspective is lost. The responsibility for mission lies with the local church. The concept of missional church has proved a great tool for making the local churches aware of this primarily in a local perspective. But, as part of a global church, the responsibility is bifocal. It is a glocal responsibility where the global and the local perspective can be kept together in focus with a glocal interaction between the global and the local. Through this interaction, the coming and going, both locally and globally I believe the missional church, with its integrated emphasis on mission, as an essential part of being church, can become a huge possibility not only for local mission, but also for glocal and global mission.

For the Church of Norway, I don't believe becoming a missional church is becoming a missional church without the mission organisations, but I believe that in working together, church and organisations it is possible to become glocal missional churches, with glocal mission organisations, although this might involve a great deal of change on both sides.

Then, I believe, that also for the Church of Norway the concept of missional church can create many possibilities for greater involvement in not only global mission, but also glocal mission.

**THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION  
FOR A MISSIONAL CHURCH:  
A PERSPECTIVE FROM A THEOLOGICAL  
TRAINING INSTITUTION IN BRAZIL**

**Mona Dysjeland**

**The Church of Norway's Missional Challenge**

The Church of Norway sees itself as a missional church. *Mission* is supposed to be an expression that sums up what all congregations in Norway are, as well as a dimension that should be visible in all they do.<sup>1</sup> The term 'missional' refers both to the *church's being* – that is, its missional identity – and to the *church's implementation* of its missional identity in practice. In the past years Norway has become more and more secularised, and an increasing number of people are growing up without education about Christianity or close contact with the church. The church's place in the public arena is discussed in the media, and increasing globalisation means that we today need to relate to a multicultural and multi-religious reality. This poses a great challenge to the broad 'people's church' of Norway: we need to open our eyes to the reality that the mission field has arrived at our doorstep. The Church of Norway is experiencing a steady decline both in the percentage of the population who are members, and in the number of people who attend church services. The fact that a growing number of Norwegians say they do not believe in God is a challenge that calls the Church of Norway to mission.

The church's pastors are central in responding to this challenge. A congregation will not be able to take on its missional identity unless the entire congregation takes up the task, but much of the responsibility lies with the pastors who can lead the church towards this goal. The key question then is: do pastors today receive the education that they need? They need a theological education that is relevant and that equips them to take on leadership responsibility for the church's missional task. The Danish theologian Mogens S. Mogensen claims that 'the missional church

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<sup>1</sup> The Church of Norway, 'En misjonerende kirke' ['A missional church'], proceedings from the Annual Meeting of the Church of Norway (Lillehammer, 2005). Available at [www.kirken.no/index.cfm?event=downloadFile&nodeid=22984](http://www.kirken.no/index.cfm?event=downloadFile&nodeid=22984) (accessed 26 May 2011).



does not, however, simply need an academic theological education, but also a spiritual theological formation of its pastors and (other) leaders and co-workers'.<sup>2</sup> The Danish-Norwegian theologian Knud Jørgensen gives expression to a similar line of thought when he says that missional leadership must especially 'emphasise the credibility that grows out of personal discipleship, a fully formed life of faith, and a personality that is whole'.<sup>3</sup> This does not contradict the need for academic study, but raises questions around whether the current theological education at the theological training institutions is satisfactory and meets the needs of the pastors and the church.

### The Lutheran Church in Norway and in Brazil

We might look to some of our sister churches in other countries to see if they have anything to teach us regarding theological education for a missional church. There are great differences between the Church of Norway and the Evangelical Church of the Lutheran Confession in Brazil (IECLB). The former is a state-sponsored 'people's church' or national church, with a long-standing presence in the country. The Lutheran church in Norway represents a thousand-year long unity between the church and the people, which has left deep impressions in Norwegian history, culture and traditions. IECLB is an ethnic immigrant and minority church, which arrived in the country with the German immigration at the beginning of the nineteenth century. But the two churches share their Reformation heritage and their connection to German tradition and theology. It is not difficult for a Norwegian churchgoer to recognise the church service liturgy that is used in IECLB, and even though the language is different, it is possible to hum along to the melody of many of the hymns. Similarly, there are several common trends in the traditional theological education for pastors.

Both Norway and Brazil might be defined as countries in which Christianity maintains a strong presence, yet there are great changes taking place in the religious landscape of both countries. Brazil has more Catholics than any other country, but the Catholic church is losing people. Many of its members are switching to Pentecostal churches. One of the characteristics of Brazilian religious life is the significant degree of syncretism, which is also present in many of the churches. The group of atheists is still small, but it is growing. As opposed to the Church of

<sup>2</sup> Mogens S. Mogensen, 'Forord' ['Preface'], *Ny Mission [New Mission]* 14 (2008), 4-6, on 5.

<sup>3</sup> Knud Jørgensen, 'Trenger kirken omvendelse? På vei mot en misjonale ekklesiologi' ['Does the church need conversion? Towards a missional ecclesiology'], in Tormod Engelsen and Kjell Olav Sannes (eds), *Hva vil det si å være kirke? Kirkens vesen og oppdrag [What Does it Mean to be a Church? The Church's Being and Task]* (Trondheim: Tapir Akademiske Forlag, 2004), 51-68, on 65.

Norway, which exists in one of the most homogenous societies in the world, IECLB must relate to the enormous cultural and religious pluralism of Brazilian society. But Norwegians too notice how their country is changing, especially the Norwegian capital, where other religions are clearly represented and there is a growing number of immigrant churches.

In the Church of Norway there is a great imbalance between the number of people who attend Sunday services and the number of people who make use of church rituals for special occasions. Many people are only nominal members and seldom attend services, but still wish for key transitional phases in life to be framed by church rituals. We see how the Church of Norway is significant for Norwegian identity, and as such it has something in common with the ethnically marked Lutheran church in Brazil. Both churches are closely bound up to a culture and function as important bearers of tradition. IECLB also has many nominal members, but it plays an important role in bestowing identity and representing a cultural heritage.

When it comes to strategic thinking about mission, and mission engagement in one's own country, we also see similarities between the two churches. While the Church of Norway for a long time seemed to define mission as an activity that was carried out by mission organisations in faraway places, IECLB has been criticized for only serving those people who are of German heritage, without taking the rest of the Brazilian population into account. For many years, 95% of the Norwegian population were members of the Church of Norway – and those who were not members attended independent churches. This situation might have contributed to the church's relative lack of concern for mission work in its own country, since virtually everyone was a baptised church member already. In Brazil, most of the descendants of the German immigrants maintained a close connection to the church, and the church's mission engagement became marked by its *ethnic* character. It might seem like IECLB's mission activity for a long time consisted in following Germans and their descendants as they moved and spread throughout Brazil. In other words, the Lutheran churches in both Norway and Brazil have displayed a limited understanding of mission in one's own country, and do not seem to have had any clear missional vision for their congregations. Our question then is whether this has influenced the education offered to the pastors. The pastors have been expected to be able to lead church services, administer the sacraments and interpret Biblical passages, but there has perhaps been less focus on reaching new people with the gospel and equipping the congregation for missional service.

Much of the mission enthusiasm that exists in Norway has been sustained by the large lay movements that emerged towards the end of the eighteenth century. Both 'home' and 'foreign' mission organisations have provided possibilities for active mission engagement for many of the church's members, even though this has not directly been a part of the established work of the church. IECLB is familiar with such renewal and

revival movements too. While these cannot be compared to the large popular movements in Norway, they might perhaps be seen as parallels to, for example, the Norwegian spiritual renewal movement 'OASE' which was formed in the 1970s. Movimento Encontro (ME), which means the Large Meeting Movement, is a spiritual renewal and revival movement within IECLB. It was formed at the same time as the spiritual awakening that spread throughout Brazil in the years 1960-70. ME's aim is to promote renewal within the church through evangelising, calling disciples and equipping them. The mission organisation Missão Zero (MZ) was formed as a part of ME in the late 1980s. From the start, MZ has wished to help the church as a whole become a missional church, and has established many new congregations for IECLB in parts of Brazil where the church was not previously represented. Shortly after MZ was formed, several people in the church felt that there was a need for a new theological seminary. The Evangelical Theological Seminary (FATEV) in Curitiba was set up with the backing of ME, in order to meet the concrete need to train pastors and missionaries who could contribute to realizing IECLB's missional identity to an even greater degree, and to help the church become more relevant within the Brazilian context.

### **The Evangelical Theological Seminary in Curitiba (FATEV)**

Like the Church of Norway, IECLB has three theological training institutions that offer an approved professional education for those wishing to become pastors or missionaries in the church.<sup>4</sup> Each of these training institutions has its own profile and represents a different theological line of thought. The youngest training institution is FATEV, located in Curitiba in southern Brazil. FATEV was established in 1992 and primarily educates missionaries. It is not uncommon for congregations in IECLB to choose to hire a missionary instead of a pastor. Today, the congregations themselves decide which type of positions to fill. In theory there are differences between the work activities of a missionary and a pastor, but in practice the missionaries' tasks are often primarily pastoral.

It has been claimed that IECLB did not strictly speaking need another theological training institution, and some have expressed concern that FATEV might become a competitor to the church's traditional seminary. But the theological education offered at FATEV was forced to emerge because of differences in people's views of the church and mission.

In Norway we have something to learn from FATEV when it comes to educating pastors for a missional church. FATEV's goal is to offer a contextualised education that will enable students to meet Brazilian culture and contemporary society. The degree is called a *Bachelor in Theology*

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<sup>4</sup> Escola de Teologia Superior (São Leopoldo-RS), Faculdade Luterana de Teologia (São Bento do Sul-SC), and Faculdade de Teologia Evangélica (Curitiba-PR).

with *Emphasis on Urban Mission*, since the great majority of Brazil's population now lives in urban areas, and because there is a particular need for new missional thinking and practice in the church. In Norway too the education of pastors ought to be organised in a way that makes it contemporary and relevant to one's context and society. The Church of Norway faces many of the same challenges that the founders of FATEV identified for IECLB. In both countries the students who wish to become pastors need an education that will enable them to serve in a church that has many nominal members, many strong cultural and traditional ties, and that increasingly needs to relate to people with other views and religious convictions. The church needs pastors who can stand up as spiritual leaders – pastors who can hold up a vision of a church that expresses its missional identity both in its local context and in society at large. These challenges are faced both by pastors in Norway and by pastors who will serve in the Lutheran church in Brazil. FATEV offers an education that aims to be missional and contextual, and precisely therefore it might provide a useful contribution to other theological training institutions.

### **Degrees that Emphasise Professional Training**

FATEV is a publicly approved educational institution in Brazil, with the right to confer bachelor degrees in theology. But the school has taken a clear stand that academic requirements should not be upheld at the expense of the professional training. The school's primary task is to train pastors and missionaries. This is the ruling principle that guides the choice of subjects, curriculum, and teaching methods.

#### *Mission theology as academic cornerstone*

Historically, the place of mission theology among the classic theological subjects has been under discussion. At FATEV, students are not just specifically taught mission theology, but this subject is also the inter-disciplinary and foundational basis of the entire degree. This is in accordance with what the Lausanne movement says concerning mission's place in theological education: 'A missional framework for theological education means that mission should form the framework of everything that happens in the school'.<sup>5</sup> Surveys among the students show that the great majority of them consider the school's clear emphasis on mission as a decisive reason to study theology at FATEV. At times, congregations in IECLB will also request a candidate from FATEV precisely because they

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<sup>5</sup> Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, 'Effective Theological Education for World Evangelization', *Lausanne Occasional Paper 57* (2005), on 5. Available at [www.lausanne.org/documents/2004forum/LOP57\\_IG28.pdf](http://www.lausanne.org/documents/2004forum/LOP57_IG28.pdf) (accessed 26.5.2011).

wish to hire somebody with a theological education that emphasises mission. Many of the course modules in mission theology are characterised by their practicality and external focus.

### *Professional course modules*

Teaching in all the subjects is clearly aimed at training pastors and missionaries. In the Biblical subjects, another important discipline, a broad selection of Biblical books is studied. It is emphasised that the students need to gain solid and detailed knowledge of the Bible. In exegetical exercises the students are expected to work thoroughly on the final section, which concerns the text's application. The practical theological subjects contain a range of modules that address concrete topics that a pastor will find useful in her or his service. Prayer is studied in several modules, and there are also separate modules for topics such as sexuality, family relations, Christian leadership, music and worship, public speaking, children and youth work, group dynamics and congregational pedagogy, to name a few. At FATEV it is typical that the classical theological subjects are combined with more general disciplines, and that inspiration and knowledge are sought from other subject areas. This helps the students to enter their service with tools that are as useful as possible, and they have gained a broad field of competence.

### *Teaching methods*

FATEV does not wish to develop any form of 'academism' among the students. Each module must keep the subject's practical application in view. In order to facilitate this dimension it is expected that the teachers draw on a range of teaching methods, such as group work, practical exercises, seminars, information gathering, debates, presentations, etc. The students are encouraged to participate actively in class, and the teaching is dynamic and open to comments and questions. There is not much evidence of the traditional teaching method in which the teacher presents a one-way lecture and the students study on their own. There is a great diversity of methods, and although the deductive teaching method is used with a teacher's instructions and explanations, the inductive method is just as prevalent. The students are presented with problems to be solved, the learning process is emphasised, and the teacher becomes a guide throughout the process. This teaching method gives the students a sense of ownership of what they learn, and stimulates their engagement and creativity.

## **Contextualisation**

Some of FATEV's strength lies in the school's ability to take the context seriously. It is the task of the church in Brazil to apply the Bible's message to the Brazilian context in an understandable and relevant way. In order to succeed in this endeavour, the church needs pastors who are able to understand both the gospel and the cultural context. FATEV's view is that theological education also needs to be contextualised. The teaching methods, subjects, curriculum and organisation of the degree must be adapted to local conditions and must be appropriate in the Brazilian context.

### *A diverse group of teachers*

The degree at FATEV is divided into teaching modules that last one week each. This arrangement makes it possible to invite pastors and other professionals to teach at the school. FATEV wishes to make use of a diverse range of contributors to the training, and many teachers are invited from outside. Each module is focused on a specific topic, which enables the school to invite people who are specialists on that particular topic. The students at FATEV say that they find it very rewarding to be taught by people who usually work in a different context, who can speak based on their personal experience, and who represent other subject areas and traditions.

### *Students included in professional life*

Classes at FATEV are held in the evenings, so that it is possible for the students to work during the day. The school views it as an important part of the learning process for the students to be integrated in normal professional life. FATEV wants to avoid having the students spend their time at an isolated and protected theological seminary. Instead the students are supposed to be in close contact with people and society. It is important that the students know the conditions under which most people live, that they are familiar with the work pressure, and gain an insight into different work environments, family situations and typical Brazilian worries and topics of conversation. Many of the students encounter demanding ethical dilemmas, which test their morality and integrity. All of this contributes to equipping the students for the tasks that await them in their service. Comments based on the students' work situations lead to interesting discussions during class, and open up for valuable reflection around theory and practice. The hectic rhythm, with both work and studies, also prepares the students for what might become the reality for many of them. Fewer and fewer congregations in Brazil can afford to hire a pastor or missionary for a full-time position. Many pastors need to work at a second job in addition to their service in the church.

### *An urban school*

FATEV was set up in a city because of the wish to prepare students for Brazilian reality. Today 84,35 % of Brazil's population lives in urban areas.<sup>6</sup> FATEV aims to equip the students in relation to the many challenges that cities represent. Various modules address topics such as urbanisation, city subcultures, the church's encounter with an urban context, cultural and religious diversity, secularisation, social problems, etc.

### *Evangelical church growth*

Brazil is experiencing a unique growth of evangelical/pentecostal churches, especially among the poor. It has been estimated that 50% of Brazil's population may be evangelical Christians by 2020.<sup>7</sup> This social and religious movement creates a pressing need to teach and equip an evangelical leadership. Many new and untraditional churches are being set up, and anybody can claim that they are a pastor or a missionary. There is a lack of preaching and teaching based on solid Biblical knowledge, and many people end up confused after visiting a number of churches and receiving contradictory spiritual guidance. FATEV attempts to draw a realistic picture of the Brazilian church landscape for the students, and to give them tools to orient themselves and to be able to discern what is and is not an authentic expression of Christian faith.

### *Practical placements at FATEV*

The school's requirements for practical placements lead the students straight into the context of the church's service, and from day one the students are faced with the challenges of communicating the gospel in an understandable and relevant way. One of the school's important principles is that theory and practice should go hand in hand. The students must have at least 400 hours of placement practice, but most usually have considerably more by the time they end their degree. The nature of the placements should vary from year to year. The first year starts off with *observational practice*, which means that the students visit different churches or other religious temples around the city. The goal is that the students should become familiar with some of the breadth and variation of the religious and spiritual life in the city. For the remaining hours the

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<sup>6</sup> IBGE (Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística/ The Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics, 2010). Available at [www.censo2010.ibge.gov.br/primeiros\\_dados\\_divulgados/index.php](http://www.censo2010.ibge.gov.br/primeiros_dados_divulgados/index.php) (accessed 31.5.2011).

<sup>7</sup> MAI (Ministério de Apoio com Informação/ Ministry of Information to Support), Source: IBGE, Analysis: Eunice Zillner 2009. Available at [www.mai.org.br/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=104&Itemid=102](http://www.mai.org.br/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=104&Itemid=102) (accessed 31.5.2011).

students themselves choose where to carry out their placements. Many participate in congregations in different parts of the city, while others choose to connect to social institutions, such as hospitals, homeless shelters, homes for young single mothers, or youth collectives.

It is expected that the students should gradually take on increasing responsibility in their placements, and that towards the end of their degree they should demonstrate the ability to work both in a team and independently. For this arrangement to work, it is necessary for the students to be given regular feedback both from a local mentor and a representative from the school. The placements provide ample opportunity for the students to consider their calling and whether they are headed in the right direction. It is an advantage that the students already during their first year come into close contact with the profession that the degree is directed towards.

In addition to the practical placements required by the degree, students who wish to be ordained for service in IECLB must also carry out a longer placement period arranged by the church. This is independent full-time congregational practice, which is assessed with a pass or a fail. IECLB is concerned that the church itself should decide who it declares to be ready for service.

### **Personal Formation**

FATEV aims to provide students with both an academic education and a personal formation. It is a common saying at the school that students should not be sent off with giant heads and tiny legs. This means that one needs to see the student as a whole person, and that the school needs to take into consideration how to form and develop this whole person. The Lausanne movement's Occasional Paper on theological education also emphasises this balance between academic and personal formation:

Necessarily any education must involve the passing on of content. However effective education for world evangelisation must see as its goal the formation of values and attitudes as well as the communication of knowledge and skills. Effective education for evangelisation must, therefore, be transformational.<sup>8</sup>

It is not sufficient to acquire new knowledge and to adjust to certain methods and means of expression. The teaching must affect the students to the degree that it is internalised and naturally expressed through their attitudes, ways of behaving, and values. It is expected that the teachers at FATEV will go beyond the call of duty in order to get to know the students, and that they themselves will be open to letting the students get to know them and their lives.

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<sup>8</sup> Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, 'Effective Theological Education', 2.



*Student-to-student guidance*

Most students live with a group of other students, and this provides an important process of socialisation. The students learn to handle conflicts and differences, they need to take on commitments related to finances and household chores, and they practice respecting each other and taking on responsibility. From the start, students are encouraged to give each other mutual guidance and support. This is done in classes, in the homes where they live together, and through a mentoring arrangement in which final-year students mentor first-year students. The students often agree to continue this mentoring relationship beyond the stipulated time of one year.

*Professional guidance*

FATEV employs a student pastor at the school, and also offers a psychological and pedagogical support service together with specialists in order to give students with particular needs the necessary support. FATEV does not wish to take on the role of a psychiatric treatment centre, but the school is aware that everything that the students carry with them from their past will affect the learning process. Many of them carry a lot of baggage that they need to work through. Serving as a pastor leads to many intense encounters with people in difficult life situations. It is therefore evident that the pastor needs to have a healthy and resolved relationship to her or his own background and life story. We cannot expect the theological degree to cover all of this, but since it is a professional degree that is meant to enable pastors to serve, these are important considerations to bear in mind when deciding on the form that the degree should take.

*A vibrant life of faith*

A theological degree runs the risk of appearing overly theoretical and cut off from people's spirituality and faith. FATEV attempts to counter this in several ways. Every week is closed with a church service for students and teachers. The responsibility for the service rotates among the student cohorts, and the students organise everything, including leadership, worship, preaching, prayer, and communion. The student pastor has regular dialogues with the students about the service, but tries to let the students put their own stamp on the symbols and forms of expression that are used. Each class period starts off with a devotion that is held by each student in turn. FATEV does not wish to replace the students' need for a congregational fellowship, but emphasises the need to create a good spiritual fellowship at the school. This contributes to connecting the academic courses closer to an authentic expression of faith that is true to life.

### **Looking at the Professional Theology Degree in Norway from the Perspective of FATEV**

All the three theological training institutions in Norway see it as an important task to train pastors for the Church of Norway. The three training institutions have long histories and strong traditions, but they are constantly striving to renew the courses they offer and to revise the professional theology degree. The three institutions each have their own unique character, which they use to market themselves.

The Faculty of Theology (TF) at the University of Oslo wishes to present itself as the only theological training institution in Norway that is located at a university. TF considers its own task to be that of educating pastors for a new age in which religions other than just Christianity are clearly present in Norwegian society. 'The characteristics of this education are that the candidate is to become competent in offering critical and constructive interpretations of Christianity in national and international context and in its encounter with other religions and new issues tied to gender and ethics.'<sup>9</sup>

The Norwegian School of Theology (Menighetsfakultetet, MF) has from the start been tied to the congregations of the Church of Norway. In the strategy for the next four years it is stated that 'MF will maintain and develop further its central role as a training institution for church-related professions'<sup>10</sup>. MF has a Lutheran base, but also wishes to present an ecclesial profile characterised by ecumenical openness. Regarding the training it offers, MF states that it 'will take future needs in the church, schools and society into account. Considerable emphasis is placed on the relevancy of the degrees and on the importance of the learning environment for the students' academic development and personal growth and maturation.'<sup>11</sup>

The degrees at the School of Mission and Theology (Misjonshøgskolen, MHS) are internationally oriented and the student exchange programme is a central part of the school's identity. The plan for the Masters degree in Theology states that '[t]he purpose of theological studies at the School of Mission and Theology is to provide a professional foundation and encourage personal and spiritual growth toward serving as missionaries, ministers and other leading professions within the fields of mission and

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<sup>9</sup> The Faculty of Theology, University of Oslo, 'Teologi, religion og etikk i det offentlige rom: Faglig prioritering ved Det teologiske fakultet' ['Theology, religion and ethics in the public arena: Academic prioritisation at the Faculty of Theology'] (Oslo, 2008), 4. Available at [www.tf.uio.no/om/strategi/faglig-prioritering/faglig-prioritering-tf2%5B1%5D.pdf](http://www.tf.uio.no/om/strategi/faglig-prioritering/faglig-prioritering-tf2%5B1%5D.pdf) (accessed 26.5.2011).

<sup>10</sup> The Norwegian School of Theology, 'Strategisk plan 2010-2013' ['Strategic plan 2010-2013'] (Oslo, 2009), 1. Available at [www.mf.no/doc//Dokumenter/Strategisk%20plan%202010-13%20VEDTATT.pdf](http://www.mf.no/doc//Dokumenter/Strategisk%20plan%202010-13%20VEDTATT.pdf) (accessed 26.5.2011).

<sup>11</sup> The Norwegian School of Theology, 'Strategisk plan', 1.

church both globally and locally'.<sup>12</sup> The school still trains missionaries for the Norwegian Mission Society (NMS), but many of the current students envision serving as pastors in Norway.

All the three theological training institutions emphasise that they wish to provide their students with a relevant education that will enable them to meet the challenges that the national church in Norway is facing today. But it may be that the fact that all of the church's training institutions are tied to either a university or to an academic college leads them to prioritise the academic study of theology, at the expense of the professional dimension of the degree. In order to strengthen a missional education for pastors in Norway, one important condition that must be met is that the training institutions must include this aim as they revise their degrees and strategies. But the largest challenge is perhaps to be found in the actual implementation of this plan. It is one thing to say that the professional dimension needs to be strengthened and that the institutions must focus on integrating academic study and faith or the students' personal formation; it is another thing to implement these goals in a way that actually affects how the degrees are taught. FATEV is a theological training institution that right from the start has focused on offering a professional degree, and to a large extent FATEV has managed to implement those dimensions of the degree that perhaps for a long time have been given low priority at the training institutions in Norway. There are three key areas in which experiences and examples from FATEV might make some contributions to the education of pastors in Norway.

### *Degrees that emphasise a professional education*

The Church of Norway wishes to be a missional church and therefore needs pastors who can exercise missional leadership. The concept 'missional' underlines 'the essential nature and vocation of the church as God's called and sent people'.<sup>13</sup> The pastors that are educated at the theological training institutions in Norway will have mission as a foundational dimension of their service as pastors. FATEV has chosen to let mission theology be the framework of everything that happens at the school. In this context it is worth noting that MHS is the only training institution in Norway that counts mission theology as one of the main subjects at the school. The other institutions probably teach on mission, but bearing in mind the changes that have taken place in Norway over the last decades when it comes to the position of Christianity, and based on what we know about the

<sup>12</sup> The School of Mission and Theology, 'Master of Theology Degree' (Stavanger, 2009-2010), 4. Available at [www.mhs.no/uploads/master\\_of\\_theology.pdf](http://www.mhs.no/uploads/master_of_theology.pdf) (accessed 26.5.2011).

<sup>13</sup> Darrell Guder (ed.), *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (The Gospel and Our Culture; Grand Rapids, MI/Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans, 1998), 11.

challenges faced by the Church of Norway, it is worth asking whether mission theology should not play *the* central role in a professional degree for pastors.

Some of the students at FATEV choose to continue their theological studies and apply to the Masters degree programmes at other institutions. Those who choose this path are often thinking of pursuing more academic work and research. Professionally speaking, there is a great difference between working as a pastor in a congregation and researching and teaching theology at a higher level. It has been suggested that the theology degree in Norway might be divided into different directions, so that the students could choose more practically-directed theology courses that led to service as a pastor, or more academically-directed theology courses that led to a research or teaching position. If such a division were made, FATEV could serve as an example of what the practically-directed degree might look like.

A professional degree does not need to be identical for everyone. Every year FATEV offers different seminars that the students can choose from, and research groups are formed across student cohorts, chosen on the basis of interest and skills. Today it might seem like many congregations expect the pastor to be able to take on all kinds of different tasks. But one of the primary tasks for the pastors should be to equip the congregational members for service, and to facilitate arrangements for an increasing number of these members to take on meaningful tasks. The pastors might be better leaders if they have an insight into which tasks they are able to do themselves and which tasks might well be left to others.

Given the way that theological training is organised in Norway today, it seems probable that most of the students who embark on a degree in theology are academically inclined. FATEV has students with very different characteristics. The reason for this might be the practical orientation of the degree. It is probably also important that the degree does not take more than four years. Perhaps a more practically oriented and shorter professional degree in Norway might attract a more diverse group of students.

### *Contextualisation*

As mentioned above, FATEV has come far in terms of taking the Brazilian context seriously. The school also represents an attempt at contextualising the theology degree. The very concept of 'contextualising' implies that lessons cannot be transferred directly from one place to another. The theological training institutions in Norway must take contemporary Norwegian society into account. They need to find out what characterises a postmodern, secularised and individualised Norway, and which challenges this presents to the church when it comes to sharing the gospel. Furthermore, it is appropriate to organise the education of pastors in close

dialogue with the church, taking into consideration the issues that a pastor will face in her or his everyday work, and the demands that are placed on her or him in terms of practical skills, personal attributes, and theoretical knowledge.

FATEV has made good use of other subject areas, and people who represent other contexts are invited to teach. Pastors in Norway may need to be competent in areas that are not necessarily covered by the classical theological disciplines. Needless to say, the theological degree cannot cover every need, but it is possible that pastors in the Church of Norway could use a broader and more general competency than that provided by academic specialisation on a narrow theological topic.

The three theological training institutions in Norway offer different forms of practical placements. In addition to an integrated congregational and diocesan placement, the students also work at a public or charitable institution, and MHS provides the possibility of mission placement in a foreign country. One of the differences between these schools and FATEV is that the practical placements at FATEV are designed to be part of a long-term programme that runs throughout the degree. Most of the placements at the schools in Norway are carried out during the last half of the degree. The training institutions organise the placement periods somewhat differently when it comes to length and scope, but usually the placements are carried out within discrete time periods that last a few weeks each. It would probably be an advantage for the theological students in Norway to be connected to some practical placement earlier in their degrees. It is a long time to study for three years before one is given the chance to test out one's attributes and skills in relation to the profession that one is aiming at. Besides, the valuable interaction between theory and practice is lost during the first years.

The Church of Norway does have a programme that runs parallel to the theological degree, and which is meant to discern which candidates might fit the role of pastor. The programme, 'The road to pastoral service', is obligatory for anyone who wishes to become ordained as a pastor in the Church of Norway, and consists of three ordination gatherings in which the bishops participate. This programme is an initiative aimed at bringing the church and the theological students closer together, but the bishops' impressions of the suitability of a candidate are still rather limited after only three conversations. In addition, the programme does not give the church any opportunity to exert influence over the candidates' education. IECLB might seem to be somewhat controlling in relation to the theological training institutions in Brazil, but it is understandable that the church wishes to have a larger say in relation to what it expects from its pastors. The Church of Norway might speak more clearly about what it expects a professionally oriented theological degree to include.

### *Personal formation*

The three training institutions in Norway provide students with a good academic education, but usually do not give as high priority to the work of forming the students as people. In addition to imparting greater knowledge, the theological degree should affect the students' attitudes, ways of behaving, and values. At FATEV this means that a lot is required of the teachers. They must be willing to take on roles that go beyond that of a lecturer or an academic.

It might be an idea for the training institutions in Norway to facilitate greater student-to-student guidance. This can be made part of the degree for students who have reached the level of a Masters degree. It will be worthwhile training for them to give personal and spiritual guidance to someone else, and for the new students it can be an important source of support during the first years to be given feedback by someone who has gone the same path earlier.

The collaboration that FATEV has entered into with experienced Christian counsellors and psychologists may stand as an example of how it is possible for theological training institutions to guide students with particular needs towards the right kinds of support. Presumably, some of the theological students in Norway too carry with them unresolved episodes from their past. The content and character of the theological subjects may mean that what the students carry with them in their past baggage emerges into daylight with full force. In these situations it is important that the students are given help and that they are given the opportunity to discuss difficult issues with people who are qualified in this area.

The training institutions in Norway also have an active worship programme and are aware that they wish to foster the spiritual life at the school. FATEV has had positive experiences when it comes to leaving the responsibility for the church services to the students. Of course, this can be organised in different ways, but the advantage of leaving it to the students is that they get to try it out in practice, they learn from and with each other, different traditions are given room, and the expressions used will be their own. It also means a lot for the integration of study and faith that each class period starts off with a devotion, and that the classroom fellowship is a natural place to request prayers for oneself and to share personal prayer topics.

### **Conclusion**

FATEV has made some conscious decisions about the degree they offer, based on a clear vision of the school's aim and profile. The strength of the pastors who are educated at FATEV is that they are very familiar with Brazilian reality. They have had a lot of practical placements, and they have been trained to assess social situations based on God's word. Mission theology, Biblical studies and practical theological classes have formed the

foundation of their education, and in addition the students have been encouraged to work on their own growth, their background, character and spirituality. The example of FATEV may have something to contribute to other theological training institutions that wish to strengthen the professional dimension of their degrees and to educate pastors for a missional church.

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**BUILDING UP THE  
MISSIONAL FELLOWSHIP OF LOVE:  
A REVIEW OF T.C. CHAO'S MISSION THEOLOGY.  
THE EVANGELICAL TRADITION**

**Wen Ge**

**Introduction**

*Chao, the ecumenical theologian*

Tsu Chen Chao (1888-1979) was one of the leading theologians of the Chinese churches in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, who exerted great influence on both the Chinese and ecumenical churches. He was dean of the School of Religion at Yanching University from 1928 to 1952. He was a prolific writer who was the first Chinese to have written *Philosophy of Christianity* and *Life of Jesus* in China.<sup>1</sup> He was one of the key Chinese leaders, striving to build up an indigenous<sup>2</sup> church when Christianity was challenged by Chinese intellectuals' anti-Christian movement in the 1920s<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Chao, *Ji Du Jiao Zhe Xue (The Philosophy of Christianity)*, in *Works of Tsu Chen Chao*, Vol. I, (Beijing: Commercial, 2003), 11; Chao, *Ye Su Zhuan (Life of Jesus)*, in Vol. I, 455.

<sup>2</sup> In the National Christian Council Meeting of 1922, the indigenous church movement was greatly promoted in China. Chao came to realize that the challenges of the Chinese churches were not only the foreign socio-cultural forms of Christianity in China, but also problems related to the world economic-political situations in his context. Therefore, what Chao did was not only to inculturate Christianity into China, but also to take the socio-economic-political problems into serious consideration in the Chinese context. According to David Bosch's categorization, Chao was actually doing contextual theology (albeit anachronistic to Chao). See David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shift in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991), 420-21.

<sup>3</sup> According to Jessie G. Lutz, the Anti-Christian Movement in China could be divided into two phases: the first (1920-22) "can be understood as one expression of iconoclasm and scientism of the New Culture Movement" and the second phase (1924-28) to restore Educational Rights by the Chinese government "can be best understood as one facet of the anti-imperialism nationalism." See Jessie Gregory Lutz, 'Preface', in *Chinese Politics and Christian Missions: The Anti-Christian Movements of 1920-28* (Notre Dame, Indiana: Cross Roads Books, 1988).



and when China was suffering national humiliations from imperialism, colonialism and civil wars. He was conferred an honorary doctorate degree by Princeton University in 1947 and commended as the “foremost interpreter of Christian faith to Oriental minds; scholar, inspiring teacher, distinguished poet, gentle mystic.”<sup>4</sup> He was also actively involved in the ecumenical movement and became a well-known spokesperson for the Chinese churches. In 1922 he attended the general assembly of the World Student Christian Federation at Tsinghua University of Beijing; in 1927 he participated in the Faith and Order meeting at Lausanne; he was also present at the World Mission Conferences at Jerusalem (1928), Madras (1938) and Whitby (1947) and gave important speeches; and finally he was elected one of the six presidents of the World Council of Churches at Amsterdam (1948), representing the younger churches.<sup>5</sup> Unfortunately, he resigned his post due to the issue of WCC’s standpoint on the Korean War in the early 1950s. Later on, his theological enterprise was also suspended when China’s religious situation became more and more difficult, so that his vision of an indigenous Chinese church remained a dream in the next 30 years. He was gradually forgotten by the Chinese and ecumenical churches until he was justified again by the government shortly before his death in 1979.

### Purpose

It is a well-acknowledged fact that the contemporary global gravity of Christianity has shifted from the global North to the South. Missiologists have tried to examine the spiritual, the cultural and the socio-economical factors to account for the current revival of Christian faith in the global South. Sociologically speaking, with the rising national consciousness, the younger churches became independent together with their nations especially in 1960s. The postcolonial perspective as well as the growing indigenous mindsets of third-world Christians not only challenged the traditional western standards of orthodox faith and church politics, but also affirmed the rights to run their own churches. This, however, did not imply an antithesis or even isolation between South and North, but behooves a new model of ecumenical cooperation between the two sides for the mission and unity of the Church. Chao’s motto is that “Life is Friendship,”<sup>6</sup> which was also reflected in his mission theology. But how could this new

<sup>4</sup> Katherine R. Green, ‘Resume of T.C. Chao’ in her ‘Some Christian Leaders of Present-day China’, quoted in T.C. Chao, *The Collected English Writings of Tsu Chen Chao: Works of T. C. Chao* Vol.V, edited by Xiaochao Wang (Beijing: Religion and Culture Press, 2009), 3.

<sup>5</sup> T.C. Chao, ‘pushi jidujiao xiehui de dongxiang’ (The Recent Development of the World Council of Churches) in Chao, *Works of T.C. Chao*, Vol. IV (Beijing: The Commercial Press, 2010), 48-9.

<sup>6</sup> Chao, *The Philosophy of Christianity in Works of T.C. Chao*, Vol. I, 159.

interdependent missional fellowship of love be established in order to continue bearing effective witness to the Lord's gospel in a pluralistic and fragmented world?

Without a ready answer yet, I think we may try to learn from the history of the pitfalls that once hindered the formation of such an ecumenical community of love. Chao once said that the churches could be the laboratory of international life,<sup>7</sup> which is also true in today's globalized context. Therefore, this essay aims to rediscover one pragmatic aspect of Chao's theological legacy, that is, to introduce to the ecumenical churches Chao's significant contribution to world mission theology in light of his understanding of the historical relationship between the northern and western mother churches and the southern younger churches in China, so that the contemporary mission enterprises in different parts of the world might benefit from what the Chinese churches had learned through their own difficult experiences, especially since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. A general historical examination of Chao's reflections in this aspect will be made; these reflections were unfortunately eclipsed by the East-West ideological conflict especially since 1950s. The problems discussed in this essay were no longer new when the postcolonial churches started to thrive with their growing national consciousness to find their own selfhood. The present-day younger churches in different countries may have different challenges from those of the Chinese churches now. But in my opinion, Chao's theological deliberations and relentless efforts to construct an indigenous church can still remind us how the socio-economic-political elements matter when we carry on contemporary mission.

### **A General Review of Mission History in China in the First Half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century**

#### *The national crisis*

Since 1840 when the first Opium War with UK took place, China had been forced to open its door to the western colonial and imperial powers. A series of military defeats resulted in many unequal and unfair treaties between China and the powerful western countries, with indemnities, land cessations, and extraterritoriality granted to foreigners in China. The Chinese people were suffering from foreign invasions, economic exploitation,<sup>8</sup> governmental corruption, civil wars and two world wars in a

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<sup>7</sup> Chao, 'zhongguo jidujiao de guoji wenti' (The International Problem of the Chinese Church), Vol. III, 158.

<sup>8</sup> According to Chao, the social chaos of China resulted mainly from foreign invasion and economic oppression especially through the sale of opiate to the

semi-feudal and semi-colonial society before 1949. Traditional Chinese culture had almost disintegrated<sup>9</sup> through the decline of traditional Chinese religions, the prevalence of western thought of science and democracy in the Chinese academic circles, and the western denationalizing religious education imposed on Chinese students at church-run schools.<sup>10</sup> The Chinese Christians shared these humiliations with their fellow countrymen. Thus the Chinese Christians were pursuing not only evangelism, but also viable Christian contributions to the national salvation of the Chinese people. While young Chinese Christian students felt at a loss as to what to do under such circumstances, T.C. Chao wrote several articles, offering spiritual guidance to the youth from a Christian perspective.<sup>11</sup> Chinese Christians, in Chao's opinion, should identify themselves with the Chinese suffering mass and strive to build an independent free nation together with the Chinese people.

### *The challenges of the Chinese churches*

The Chinese churches in the first half of 20<sup>th</sup> century continued to be challenged by both external and internal difficulties. The Protestant mission shared the dream of western modernization to reach the end of world via technocratic rationality, and the missionaries sought correspondingly a spiritual occupation of the whole world. In the case of China, protestant mission started almost at the same time as western colonial expansion, with missionaries ambiguously related to their own national colonial enterprise.<sup>12</sup> Protected by the unfair treaties and enjoying the privileges of

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Chinese people from the west. Chao, 'duan lun' (A Short Commentary), Vol. III, 297-98.

<sup>9</sup> Chao, 'The Articulate Word: The Problem of Communication', Vol.V, 484; see also, 'Christian Faith in China's Struggle', Vol. V, 507.

<sup>10</sup> Chao, 'A Preface to the moral and Social Problems of Chinese Youth', Vol. V, 316; See also, 'jinri zhongguo de zongjiao sixiang he shenghuo' (Today's Chinese Religious Thinking and Life), Vol. III, 192.

<sup>11</sup> For example, 'qingnian jidutu de geren yundong' (The Individuals' Movement of Young Christians), Vol. III, 431; 'jiaohui yu xiandai qingnian' (Church and Modern Youth), vol. III, 448; 'yitiao zhai erqie chang de lu' (A Narrow and Long Road), vol. III, 494; 'yige daoshi suiyi wei yige qingnian zuo shehui fuyin de xiao zhujie' (A Professor's Random Interpretation of the Social Gospel for a Youth), vol. III, 586.

<sup>12</sup> For example, Chao noted that, although western churches declared to be uncontrolled by western politics and not supporting their government to conquer China, Christianity in China was imbued with the western political and military colour when missionaries talked about a Christian occupation of China. See, Chao, 'zhonghua jidujiao de guoji wenti' (The International Problem of the Chinese Church), Vol. III, 162.

extraterritoriality,<sup>13</sup> foreign missionaries started to build churches first of all in Chinese commercial ports which were forced to open, and then extended their work into the villages of inland China. Mainly motivated by pietistic or revival movements of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in the West, most of the missionaries came with a self-sacrificial spirit to save the lost souls of Chinese people into an other-worldly kingdom of God. They not only carried out evangelism, but also engaged themselves in education, medical care and other social charity work. Yet Chao understood the reason why missionaries were regarded as the pioneers of western commerce on which the political and economic exploitation depended: the missionaries, out of the Christian zeal for mission, tried to open China's door regardless of the approaches and to preach the Gospel no matter whether the Chinese needed it or not at that time, and they did not care much about the unfair treaties or the political powers that undergirded their mission.<sup>14</sup> With the Chinese people's rising nationalistic consciousness and with continued civil conflicts between Chinese people and missionaries, however, the missionaries' kind efforts were not easily understood and appreciated in that context. The Chinese people would generally identify missionaries with the western colonial powers. Furthermore, as most missionaries built up the churches in China according to the western models in terms of doctrines and arts and rituals, Christianity in China remained a "foreign" religion, not rooted in the Chinese soil. Consequently it did not have a direct appeal to the Chinese mind. But generally speaking, it was mainly the political anti-colonial mindset of the Chinese people that made it difficult for Chinese Christians to practice and promote their faith, for they were regarded as traitors and the running dogs of western colonial powers. The Anti-Christian movement in 1920s mainly criticized Christianity from a political perspective albeit in the western scientific and democratic spirit. The Chinese Christians' financial and ecclesial reliance on foreign missionaries for protection and continuation made them further alienated from the Chinese people. The churches belonged to missionaries, and hence Chinese Christians did not need to be responsible for them; they simply went and worshiped a God introduced from a western perspective.

#### *Chao's point of departure*

After his studies (1914-1917) at Vanderbilt University in the United States, Chao returned to China and started his ministry first at Suchow University, and then at Yanching University. His own experiences of the churches' challenges from within and without obliged him to think seriously about

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<sup>13</sup> Albert Feuerwerker, 'The Foreign Presence in China', in John Fairbank ed., 'Republican China 1912-1949, Part I', *The Cambridge History of China*, Vol. 12 (London: Cambridge UP, 1983), 165-66.

<sup>14</sup> Chao, 'zhonguo minzu yu jidujiao' (The Chinese nation and Christianity), Vol. III, 636.

the future of Chinese churches. As a faithful Christian and a patriotic Chinese, he devoted himself to responding to the difficult social situation by striving to construct a Chinese indigenous Church, aiming to transform western churches in China into a Chinese Church. The first measure he took to fulfill this vision was to sort out the relationship between the western mother churches and the younger churches in China, so that Christianity would no longer be misunderstood as a foreign religion of the colonizers, but as the ecumenical faith conveyed in Chinese indigenous forms, which might also serve as the spiritual foundation of China's nation-building.<sup>15</sup> In other words, Chao realized that mission in China was carried out not without national and cultural features of the West. He was prophetic to point out that western churches themselves were culturally and socio-politically conditioned in their own respective countries, in light of which western standards of orthodox doctrines and church polities were also historically relative. It was, therefore, absolutely necessary to build up a Chinese indigenous Church that could bear more effective witness to the gospel in China.

### **The Prerequisites for the Possible Missional Fellowship of Love: Christianity and National Identity**

Christians are not only heavenly inhabitants, but also earthly citizens. In the same vein, the Christian church is not only a spiritual fellowship, but also a concrete social institution in a sovereign state. The creative tension between Christian faithfulness to its prophetic vision and the civil allegiance demanded by the secular authorities resulted in different church-state relationships. With the formation of western nation states, churches gradually gained political legitimacy either in obedient or in military ways, and ended up becoming part of a cultural and spiritual constituent of western social reality. The same would seem also to happen later to the younger Chinese churches when national consciousness grew so strong due to the imperialist invasion and economic exploitation from the West. When Christianity was brought into China at the same time as colonial expansion, and when Chinese Christians were identified as foreign slaves to their western masters and to the colonizers, Chao who studied both theology and sociology at Vanderbilt University, realized that Christianity is not simply a spiritual matter, but “has everything to do with social, economic, political, as well as religious problems in the times in which they [ancient religious sages] lived.”<sup>16</sup> Christianity made a great contribution to western social and cultural development and was regarded as the foundation of western civilization. But why was it looked upon as opiate in the Chinese context?<sup>17</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Chao, ‘The Articulate Word: The Problem of Communication’, Vol.V, 485.

<sup>16</sup> Chao, ‘Revelation’, Vol.V, 451.

<sup>17</sup> Chao, ‘ben kan de hua’ (The Preface to This Issue), Vol.IV, 153.

With the rise of nationalistic feelings especially during the Anti-Christian movement, Chao realized that the Church in China should no longer be western, but Chinese and ecumenical.

To some conservative Christians, making the church Chinese or national in other countries, sounds nationalistic or even heretical, for it seems to imply a risk of domesticating the universal and transcendent Christian faith. But they do not realize that their understanding of Christianity is also related to their own national identity. On the one hand, they are right to warn against the potential danger of caesaropapism, i.e., the “Romanization of Christianity.” On the other hand, they, to some extent, confuse the church in a particular nation with the ecumenical Christianity revealed by Christ. Chao pointed out that the church was a social institution, which could guide the social development in a prophetic spirit, and be influenced by society in return.<sup>18</sup> The Church has a national character since the believers that form the church all share a common national character<sup>19</sup> shaped by common language, history and culture. Sociologically speaking, the church carried with it the particular historical sources and social background.<sup>20</sup> Chao argued, “The Chinese Church was just born, and so far it was not really a Chinese Church. In terms of spiritual experience, it still shared the same with western churches. In terms of organizations, however, the Chinese Church must be independent and self-governing.”<sup>21</sup> In this sense, the church as a social reality is also national, for it deals with concrete institutions to activate the Christian life,<sup>22</sup> Christianity proper, in contrast, is ecumenical, which, as the universal truth manifested by Christ in the universal spiritual fellowship of love, does not need to adapt to any national spirit, but to make Christ’s spirit become the national spirit.<sup>23</sup> “Christians should be good citizens, and the spirit of good citizens shapes the national spirit.”<sup>24</sup> To Chao, Christianity is Christ, the incarnated God, and hence, the church, as the body of Christ, is an imperfect but enlarged social Incarnation.<sup>25</sup> With the Spirit’s presence, the church is a “nation

<sup>18</sup> Chao, ‘fengchao zhong fenqi de jidujiao’ (*The Rise of the Church in a Turbulent Time*), Vol. III, 237.

<sup>19</sup> Chao, ‘jingzhi quanguo zhongguo jidutu shu’ (A Message to All Chinese Christians), Vol. III, 313.

<sup>20</sup> Chao, ‘jidujiao jiaohui de yiyi’ (The Meaning of the Christian Church), Vol. IV, 70.

<sup>21</sup> Chao, ‘wo duiyi chuanguan zhongguo jiaohui de jige yijian’ (Some of My Suggestions on Constructing the Chinese Church), Vol. III, 260.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Chao, ‘jingzhi quanguo zhongguo jidutu shu’ (A Message to All Chinese Christians), Vol. III, 313. See also, Chao, ‘jidujiao zai zhongguo de qiantu’ (The Future of Christianity in China), vol. III, 232.

<sup>24</sup> Chao, ‘Li Bai Cheng Xu Yu Jiang Zhang’ (The Liturgy and Sermon), Vol. IV, 256.

<sup>25</sup> Chao, ‘jidujiao jiaohui de yiyi’ (The Meaning of the Christian Church), Vol. IV, 71.

within nation, group within the group, culture within culture” and “society within society,” identified with the majority of the people to extend the Christian life and friendship outside the church, which can make contribution to China’s society-building.<sup>26</sup> In a larger scope, this consciousness of society should also prepare the Church Universal to establish a universal human consciousness of fraternity to help and love each other through mutual sharing.<sup>27</sup> In the case of China, Chao argued, for the sake of the Christianization of China, the churches need to be Sinolized.<sup>28</sup> This is, according to Chao, the mission of the so-called Chinese national church as the fruit of Christ’s life, to continue living out the Christ-like life of Christianity in a Chinese way.<sup>29</sup> It could create a new spirit for the fallen nation by converting people to Christian faith, and it could also make a moral and religious contribution to the nation by shaping a new cultural orientation.<sup>30</sup>

Practically, it meant that Chao, as a member of the Chinese nation, could not separate his Christian faith from the fate of the Chinese nation.<sup>31</sup> In his published prayers, Chao was grateful to God for making him a descendent of the Chinese nation, sharing the wonderful experience of the Chinese ancestors so that a great national consciousness is shaped.<sup>32</sup> At the same time, he was very critical of Chinese Christians’ indifference to the national sufferings under imperialist invasions and in the wars, saying that those who did not love their nation could not really love God.<sup>33</sup> He wanted to disseminate the Christian spirit in the heart of the nation, and to construct a “new nation, new culture, new society and new country.”<sup>34</sup> On the one hand, he thought it important and fair to promote the national consciousness at the time of national crises instead of blind talk about world peace, internationalism and super-nationalism; on the other hand, churches in China should try to respond to the criticism of Christianity out of this strong nationalistic feeling and to correct its tendency toward an ineradicable hatred and vengeance, so that it would not lead to a kind of

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<sup>26</sup> Chao, ‘jidujiaojiaohui de yiyi’, Vol. IV, 80-81; ‘xinshidai de jidujiao xinyang’, (The Christian Faith in the New Times) Vol. IV, 8.

<sup>27</sup> Chao, ‘xinshidai de jidujiao xinyang’, Vol. IV, 13.

<sup>28</sup> Chao, ‘jidujiao zai zhongguo de qiantu’ (The Future of Christianity in China), vol. III, 236.

<sup>29</sup> Chao, ‘jidujiao jiaohui de yiyi’ (The Meaning of the Church), Vol. IV, 70.

<sup>30</sup> Chao, ‘jidutu zhiye de zhaoming’ (The Vocation of Young Christians), Vol. IV, 117.

<sup>31</sup> Chao, ‘xin shi dai de jidujiao xin yang’ (Christian Faith in the New Times), Vol. IV, 3.

<sup>32</sup> Chao, *Qi Xiang* (Prayers), Vol. IV, 441.

<sup>33</sup> Chao, *Qi Xiang* (Prayers), Vol. IV, 455.

<sup>34</sup> Chao, ‘xinjing dui jidujiao de qixiang’ (The New Environment and the Christian Prayer), Vol. III, 42, 44.

exclusively military nationalism.<sup>35</sup> As to the church, Chao insisted that we should not only do away with other Chinese people's suspicion of the imperialist color of the Church, but also maintain its spirit of ecumenism or internationality.<sup>36</sup> Thus, Christians shared the same goal as the Chinese national movement to "oppose imperialism, spiritual invasion, capitalistic oppression and the civil warlords" and to "seek national and world peace," but by following Christ to carry on honest speeches and moral deeds, enduring love, hearty service and the faith in God who will save China.<sup>37</sup> The Chinese Christians' efforts at the time of national disaster aimed at establishing Christ's Lordship over all human institutions and human affairs by means of saving both individuals and the Chinese nation, developing Chinese culture, and transforming Chinese society.<sup>38</sup>

This, however, does not mean that the national church should be identified with any political parties or earthly powers. Chao tried to preserve the transcendent spiritual dimension of the church to broaden the Christ like life of the earthly fellowship in order to build a real society through love. Already in 1927 Chao discerned the danger of identifying the church with the imperfect political parties and socio-political movements, as the historical Lutheran Church in Germany and the Church of England did after the Reformation. Instead Chao would insist that the church be an institution beyond the political parties with its prophetic voice to criticize evil and encourage justice and friendship.<sup>39</sup> Thus the church might find its structural niche between nationalism and internationalism in social life.<sup>40</sup>

Unfortunately not all foreign missionaries comprehended well the relationship between Christianity and national identity. They even did not realize the close link between their understanding of Christian faith and their national identity. As Chao said, "The nations that sent missionaries to the world to evangelize were also the imperialist nations who invaded those weak and powerless nations; the nations that propagated equality of human beings were the nations that deprecated others' wealth, encroached others' land and suppressed others' freedom."<sup>41</sup> Missionaries did not understand why they, in their self-sacrificial spirit to help and save the Chinese people,

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<sup>35</sup> Chao, 'zhonghua jidujiao de guojiwenti' (The International Problem of the Chinese Church), Vol. III, 163. Copyrighted Material

<sup>36</sup> Chao, 'zhongguo jidujiao jiaohui gaige de tujing' (The Approach to Reform the Chinese Church), Vol. IV, 135.

<sup>37</sup> Chao, 'jingzhi quanguo zhongguo jidutu shu' (A Message to All Chinese Christians), Vol. III, 307.

<sup>38</sup> Chao, 'jidujiao zai zhongguo de qiantu' (The Future of Christianity in China), Vol. III, 231.

<sup>39</sup> Chao, 'duan lun' (A Short Commentary), Vol. III, 287.

<sup>40</sup> Chao, 'zhongguoren de jiaohui yishi' (The Chinese Churches Realizes Itself), Vol. III, 227.

<sup>41</sup> Chao, *Wanfang Chaosheng Lu* (The Record of the Jerusalem Mission Conference), Vol. III, 370.



were called pioneers of western colonial expansion. Generally speaking, it was more the political and the nationalistic feelings out of deep humiliation and suffering that led to the Chinese people's rejection of missionaries and the churches. In order to be able to enter China, some missionaries had to serve as interpreters for their governments and national companies to advance their interests in China; some missionaries sought protection by the unfair treaties when there were conflicts with Chinese people, which imperialist powers took as excuses to further exploit China.<sup>42</sup> Besides their sense of cultural superiority, the political sensitivity made most missionaries acquiescent, refraining from directly addressing the foreign causes for China's national disasters. Despite his appreciation of missionaries' love of China and the great self-sacrificial spirit, in 1948 Chao summarized the mistakes that missionaries made:

Because the western missionaries did not understand the vicissitude of Chinese society, they had different kinds of strategic mistakes. (1) The first mistake was the duplication of western churches in China; (2) the second mistake was the negligence of developing the church to the same level as the university in their educational enterprises, so that the church did not get first-rate talents and leaders to serve the cause of the gospel; (3) the third mistake was that they did not make the church closely relate to the Chinese society as early as possible.<sup>43</sup> [my translation]

In spite of the fact that there were two million Christians in China, they were so disconnected that they did not share a deep church consciousness. As a result the churches remained foreign, fragmented, and unable to confront the difficult socio-political challenges as a whole.<sup>44</sup> Therefore, Chao made relentless efforts to build up a real united Chinese church, a fellowship of love which could not only surpass western denominational differences and doctrinal controversies but also respond to the Chinese social challenges in its own creative and prophetic way.

This meant that Chao gradually found the basis of equal footing between younger churches and western mother churches. In other words, he no longer took as the absolute standard or frame of reference, the western church and theology as well as the socio-political systems in which western churches were situated, but realized that the churches, east and west, should cope effectively with the challenges in each of their contexts, and try their best, with joint efforts, to solve the world crisis. Chao said that, on the international level, the world wars resulted from the decline of Christian

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<sup>42</sup> Chao, 'zhongguoren de jiaohui yishi' (The Chinese Churches Realizes Itself), Vol. III, 224.

<sup>43</sup> Chao, 'jidu jiao jiaohui de yiyi' (The Meaning of the Christian Church), Vol. IV, 84.

<sup>44</sup> Chao, 'jidu jiao jiaohui de yiyi' (The Meaning of the Christian Church), Vol. IV, 84. It was generally held that before 1949 there were 700 000 protestant Christians in China. The author here was not clear whether Chao's statistic included Chinese Catholic Christians or not.

faith in the west, which used to be the strong public faith beyond the political orders of different sovereign nations.<sup>45</sup> Without Christ's life as the transcendent referent, Chao pointed out that no human institution or political power in the world, in one way or another, could avoid enslaving or mechanizing people visibly or invisibly<sup>46</sup> especially when interests and efficiency became the yardstick of social development.

What is the main reason behind all this? Did religion play a role in such a social mechanism? As early as 1920, Chao criticized individualism as the basic principle of economic and political competition in a society that stuck to Darwinism in the 19<sup>th</sup> century when religious individualism for moral deeds was transformed into a creed of jungle law.<sup>47</sup> But in 1950 he was greatly inspired by Paul Tillich's *The Protestant Era* in which Chao found the Christian reason for the world disasters:

The protestant reformation principle of justification by faith set individuals free...and Protestantism unfortunately joined the ethos of Renaissance and became a humanized religion which relied on the ruling class of the nation to win its cause of church reform and hence became gradually alienated from the common people...The development of modern science and technology led to the British industrial revolution and the French social revolution, so that the rise of capitalism resulted in the imperialist competitions of the world market as well as the proletarian communist revolution. All this was based on the liberal individualism which the doctrine of justification by faith gave birth to. The bourgeois regarded Protestantism as their religion while proletariats regarded it as opiate; the god of Protestantism became the amulet of the bourgeois and hence was transformed into an idol while proletariats regarded such a god as a non-existent nil which, therefore, should be criticized by the atheists. Actually the bourgeois did not worship a true God while the proletariats did not touch the truth of Christian faith. Thus, such a basic principle of reformation not only liberated the critical and rational power which brought about the progress of western culture, but also led to a great deviation due to its overemphasis on liberal individualism.<sup>48</sup> [my translation]

As Ralph R. Covell succinctly summed up, "The chief sin of Christianity was that it was an ally of both imperialism and capitalism"<sup>49</sup> in an anti-imperialist milieu. Because of Chao's embrace of Tillich's Protestant principle that Christian faith could not be rationally grasped or

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<sup>45</sup> Chao, 'xinshidai de jidujiao xinyang' (Christian Faith in the New Times), Vol. IV, 11.

<sup>46</sup> Chao, 'chuangzao yu zaizao' (Creation and Recreation), vol. IV, 60.

<sup>47</sup> Chao, 'cujin zongjiao gexin de shili' (Powers that Transforms the Church), Vol. III, 24.

<sup>48</sup> Chao, 'zhonguo jidujiao gaige de tujing' (The Approach to Reform the Chinese Church), Vol. IV, 140. In his letter to Bishop R.O. Hall dated 1950, Chao described how he was influenced by Tillich's epoch-making book. See Chao, *The Collected English Writings of Tsu Chen Chao*, Vol. V, 597.

<sup>49</sup> Ralph R. Covell, *Confucius, The Buddha, and Christ: A History of the Gospel in Chinese* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1986), 185.

ecclesiastically fixed, he was put in a boundary situation, not identifying himself with any human constructs, but adhering to the protestant prophetic insight to challenge the limits of any human institutions.<sup>50</sup> This, in part, accounted for his disappointment with western churches and for his point of view in 1949 that the Chinese church crises caused by the suspension of foreign financial support, “should be welcomed as God’s judgment.”<sup>51</sup> Therefore, he turned to cooperate with the Communist Party in the possible pragmatic aspect of social life from the end of 1948, but maintained the Christian transcendence,<sup>52</sup> for the Communists did, in the beginning, promise religious freedom<sup>53</sup> and did bring benefits to the Chinese poor mass who suffered so long under western colonists and imperialists as well as civil wars in the past 150 years. He even wrote three long essays<sup>54</sup> to deal with the reform of the Chinese churches in the new China. Unfortunately from the end of 1951 when the religious situation started to become difficult, he was heavily criticized due to his own close tie with western Christian churches. He was not given an opportunity to fulfill God’s calling upon him to build up a united Chinese indigenous church, an independent and ecumenically interdependent fellowship of love.

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<sup>50</sup> Paul Tillich, *The Protestant Era*, trans. James L. Adams (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1948), 163, 197.

<sup>51</sup> Chao, ‘Christian Churches in Communist China’, Vol.V, 544; See also Chao, ‘shenpan zhixia jiaohui de gexin’ (The Reform of the Church under the Judgment), Vol. IV, 207. This judgment opinion found its western resonance four years later when David M. Paton published his book *Christian Missions and the Judgment of God* (London: SCM, 1953). Paton said, “...God is addressing us in the political and social revolutions at its heart, which so disturb the life of the Church.” (Paton, 18.) Because the church had not a political movement to help the suffering people and hence was at a distance from the common people, it hindered the effective witness of the Gospel. “We lack these advantages, and in compensation seem to have only superior technical military potential (which we cannot always effectively deploy) and a belief in liberal capitalist democracy as a superior way of life, whose relevance to the quite different circumstances of countries that have never been through the struggles of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in the West is not always obvious.” (Paton, 19.) That is in part why Paton believed that the leave of missionaries from China was God’s judgment. Like Chao, Paton was also influenced by Paul Tillich’s *The Protestant Era* (Paton, 74).

<sup>52</sup> Chao, ‘Letter to Bishop R.O. Hall’, Vol. V, 598.

<sup>53</sup> Chao, ‘Christian Churches in Communist China’, Vol. V, 540.

<sup>54</sup> The three essays are: ‘zhongguo jidujiao gaige de tuijin’ (The Approach to Reform the Chinese Church), ‘yong aixin jianli tuanqi’ (Building up the Fellowship in Love), and ‘shenpan zhixia jiaohui de gexin’ (The Reform of the Church under the Judgment), See Vol. IV.

### **The Prerequisites for the Possible Missional Fellowship of Love: A Truly Indigenous Church**

Only based on a proper understanding of the relationship between Christianity and national identity could the indigenization of the Chinese churches be carried on. In hindsight, Chao was again, very prophetic in many aspects.

#### *Self-government*

Because of the over-identification of Christianity with the western socio-political system or imperialist powers in the colonial period that led to the political attack of Anti-Christian Movement on churches in China, Chao, as early as 1924, had thought about the possibility that the Chinese Christians should try to build up the Chinese Churches perhaps without foreign missionaries.<sup>55</sup> In 1927, Chao believed that handing over the Churches from the missionaries to the Chinese Christians would be the first step to build up the Chinese church organizations<sup>56</sup> so that the true encounter of Christianity and Chinese culture could happen. The transfer should be done urgently when the socio-political situation in 1927 became radical and when the education rights were taken back from church-run schools by the Chinese national government.<sup>57</sup> This was because, at a difficult time when the majority of missionaries followed their own governments' order to leave China for the sake of security, the Chinese churches were left almost helpless to continue. In light of this situation, Chinese independent churches needed to be built up with the remaining missionaries' cooperation.<sup>58</sup> Yet most missionaries, on the one hand, did not trust the ability of Chinese Christian leaders, and on the other, did not want to give up their control of the churches for their financial support.<sup>59</sup> Unfortunately this transfer was not easy after 1949 when missionaries' church properties were marked as imperialist.

Furthermore, Chao believed that, it did not function well to train indigenous Christian leaders to be responsible for Chinese churches when foreign missionaries still held administrative power over churches in China. On the one hand, due to the cultural superiority and national pride of missionaries, there was almost no personal friendship between missionaries

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<sup>55</sup> Chao, 'The Indigenous Church', Vol. V, 178.

<sup>56</sup> Chao, 'jidujiao yu zhongguo wenhua' (Christianity and Chinese Culture), vol. III, 268.

<sup>57</sup> Chao, 'fengchao zhong fenqi de jidujiao', Vol. III, 241; 'jingzhi quanguo zhongguo jidutu shu', Vol. III, 312; 'wo duiyu chuangzao zhongguo jidujiaohui de jige yijian', Vol. III, 259-60.

<sup>58</sup> Chao, 'jingzhi quanguo zhongguo jidutu shu' (A Message to All Chinese Christians), Vol. III, 312-13.

<sup>59</sup> Chao, 'The Indigenous Church', Vol. V, 183.

and Chinese colleagues,<sup>60</sup> which manifested a lack of authentic koinonia spirit of love; on the other hand, some Chinese workers simply complied with all the orders of western missionaries who actually did not know much about Chinese culture, and some missionaries only wanted second rate Chinese workers to join them which made cooperation a “one sided business.”<sup>61</sup> This kind of environment could not produce indigenously able Chinese pastors and leaders. Obviously the lack of Chinese church leaders would not help to build up an indigenous Chinese church. Thus churches in China would continue to be foreign and ambiguously related to foreign imperialist power.

### *Self-support*

Why does the Chinese Church need to be self-supporting? In a world where people believe that money speaks, the financial support of churches in China from the mother churches would naturally make missionaries leaders of the church. But Chao challenged the western idiom that “beggars are not choosers” by arguing that in Christ’s time “beggars did choose.”<sup>62</sup> First of all, Chao believed that the independence of the Chinese churches depended on self-support; he quoted Dr. Robert Speer who said that only financially independent churches could be really free to develop themselves indigenously without foreign intervention.<sup>63</sup> Secondly, it has something to do with national dignity. Chao felt it painful to learn from Hu Shih’s lecture on his American experience that “foreign missionaries in order to raise money upon their return from China went around to tell how uncivilized China was and how savage she was.”<sup>64</sup> This made it more difficult for Chinese Christians to get reconciled with the Chinese people. Thirdly, with self-support, Chinese pastors could have the dignity and freedom to work with missionaries on an equal footing, and their reliance on congregations’ support would enable them to work more responsibly. Thus, there would not emerge different social classes among Chinese pastors due to their different wage resources.<sup>65</sup> Finally, to achieve the goal of self-support is the glory of the indigenous church, which can be conducive to build up the churches’ spiritually and to strengthen the communal cohesion of the fellowship of love.<sup>66</sup> According to Chao, self-support does not mean being suspicious of the motives of all foreign financial support, or questioning all the friendship or fellowship between Christians east or west, as the new

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<sup>60</sup> Chao, ‘zhonghua jidujiao de guoji wenti’ (The International Problem of the Chinese Church), 159.

<sup>61</sup> Chao, ‘The Indigenous Church’, Vol. V, 179.

<sup>62</sup> Chao, ‘The Indigenous Church’, Vol. V, 179.

<sup>63</sup> Chao, ‘duan lun’ (A Short Commentary), Vol. III, 282.

<sup>64</sup> Chao, ‘Some Thoughts on International Relations’, Vol. V, 145.

<sup>65</sup> Chao, ‘yong aixin jianli tuanqi’ (Building up a Fellowship in Love), Vol. IV, 168.

<sup>66</sup> Chao, ‘zhongguo jidujiao jiaohui gaige de tujing’, Vol. IV, 149-50.

churches may still need some material support from the developed churches, but the “ethics of financial transaction” should be taken into consideration between the two sides so that the financial support would be used in a proper way to build up a united indigenous church without leading to schism.<sup>67</sup>

Could the Chinese Church continue to survive and be revived without western support? In the past, the western financial situation influenced the Chinese churches, for it determined the number of the missionaries that could be sent to China.<sup>68</sup> It seemed as if the development of Chinese churches depended on how many missionaries could come and serve. Chao, however, maintained that the Christian new life is more important than the material resources and the big church buildings if foreign missionaries had to retreat from China, for only with the Christ like life can the churches be deeply rooted in the Chinese socio-cultural soil.<sup>69</sup> Compared with the external necessities of the churches, Chao would rather build up the internal Christian spiritual fellowship first.

### *Self-propagation*

Chao believed that the spread of the Gospel in China depended on how appealing it is to the Chinese mind. The duplication of western churches in China by missionaries would not be feasible. In contrast, such western historical accretions of the western churches as rituals, church buildings, and festivals did not quite fit the Chinese context.<sup>70</sup> As Chao said,

Then Chinese Christians are united in demanding that the Christian religion be truly expressed. The Church transplanted from the West seems to us to be entirely buried under a mass of forms, traditions and customs. We want to brush aside all these things in order to make manifest the essence of Christianity, so that we may accept what we can, discard what we should discard, improve what can be bettered, and create what we need. We are united in demanding a true Christianity, which is one not covered up by things that do not properly belong therein.<sup>71</sup>

For example, Santa Claus was exotic to Chinese culture. Therefore Chao suggested that the proper way for Chinese Christians to celebrate Christmas could be to honour the senior citizens, which would be in accordance with the Chinese ethical tradition of filial piety. (Even today some Chinese churches maintain the tradition of visiting senior brothers and sisters at Christmas time although Christmas is also being commercialized in China.) In addition to the symbols of Christian faith, a more important aspect of

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<sup>67</sup> Chao, ‘Experts and Interpreters’, Vol.V, 279; ‘zhongguo jidujiao jiaohui gaige de tujing’, Vol. IV, 149-50.

<sup>68</sup> Chao, ‘Religious Situations, 1930’, vol. V, 307.

<sup>69</sup> Chao, ‘The Chinese Church Realizes Itself’, Vol.V, 219.

<sup>70</sup> Chao, ‘zhongguo jidujiao jiaohui gaige de tujing’, Vol. IV, 144.

<sup>71</sup> Chao, ‘The Chinese Church Realizes Itself’, Vol V, 212.

self-propagation is the indigenization of theology. Part of the reason for Chinese churches' weakness in their own theology, according to Chao, is due to western missionaries' control of church experience and their inability to promote intellectual reflections on indigenous Christian experiences, so that Chinese churches, unfortunately, could only follow the west to debate over modernism and fundamentalism.<sup>72</sup> Chao pointed out that actually any theologians in the world should realize that theology is relative as it addresses a concrete historical context with a certain national spirit and denominational feature and that only God is absolute.<sup>73</sup> Therefore, Chao was engaged in constructing a Chinese indigenous theology by promoting the dialogue between Chinese culture, science and Christianity, and later he also engaged communism as a basic interlocutor.<sup>74</sup>

### *A united church*

The concept of Western denominations appeared quite foreign to the Chinese people, and the Chinese Christians in mission churches were also naturally baptized into a denominational Christianity, which duplicated the western denominational schism in China. This disunity among the churches was heavily criticized during the Anti-Christian Movement, as Mr. Yui Chia Chueh wrote:

Not only does the Christian religion allow no other religion to stand on equal footing with it, but it also is unable to have peace within its own fold. Each sect exerts its utmost in fighting against the other sects of the same religion. The warfare between Catholic and Protestant Christianity caused a great deal of bloodshed and was carried on through hundreds of years. Even to-day, we hear of the struggles between the so-called radicals and conservatives, mutually blaspheming. Christianity is not the only religion in the world, nor is Christianity the only religion that has sects and denominations; but we do not hear any other religions kill each other, nor the sects and denominations of the same religion carry on such slaughter among themselves. In this and in this alone Christianity might take pride in saying that it is the only religion in the world.<sup>75</sup>

The disunity of the church not only weakened the external witness of Christian love, but also hindered the development of the church-consciousness among Chinese Christians. Early in 1927 Chao called on a united Chinese church in light of the political criticism of the Anti-Christian Movement, since he believed that no church traditions such as

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<sup>72</sup> Chao, 'jihou sishinian zhongguo jidujiao jiaoyi shenxue keneng de fazhan' (The Possible Doctrinal Developments of the Chinese Churches in the Next Forty Years), Vol. IV, 177-79.

<sup>73</sup> Chao, 'zhongguo jidujiao jiaohui gaige de tujing', Vol. IV, 146.

<sup>74</sup> Chao, 'Days of Rejoicing in China', Vol. V, 538.

<sup>75</sup> Quoted in Chao, 'Some Thoughts on International Relations', Vol. V, 150.

creed, theology, ritual, or denomination should bring about schism within the fellowship of love.<sup>76</sup> As Chao noted,

She [The Chinese Church] is foreign both in thought and form. So sealed is Christianity within the organized variety of forms that its true life and spirit can be liberated to touch Chinese hearts and minds with very great difficulty. This foreign character of the Church is seen most clearly in the existence of denominations and denominationalism. On account of this diversity of sects and societies, we have had small visions focused on small localities, satisfaction in individualistic religion, and ignorance of the world issues of Christianity on the one hand and lack of the vision born of a nation-wide and unified Christian consciousness and work on the other.<sup>77</sup>

Thus Chao realized that the future Chinese church must be non-denominational in order to better serve the cause of the Gospel in China. He described his vision in the following way,

Again Chinese Christians do not understand the multiplicity of denominations. Indeed we have a feeling that we should not be everlastingly loyal to any denomination whatsoever... In the future when Chinese Christians have established their own independent church, there can be no denominations. Chinese churches may spring up anywhere, may become independent anywhere. Wherever they are, they will be the Chinese Church. If there is a central organization it will surely be the central organization of the Chinese Church; and if there is no central organization, the separate churches will still be the Chinese Church. It may be one. It may be many. Whether one or many they are nonetheless the Church of the Chinese Christians. There may be different creeds and different schools of thought but all will agree in having Jesus as the master and doing loving service to their fellows. In China there will be schools (of thought) but not denominations, and these schools will be all included in the fold of the church, existing in the one Church without fuss, without spiritual cleavage, working and progressing together for the glorification of God. Whether there be one Church with many sects in its fold, or many sects with one Church towering above them all, there will be freedom of thought, coexistence of various forms of worship and various ceremonies, correlations of activities, differences in creeds, and harmony in service. Such a church will not need any doctrine of apostolic succession in order to be related to the Church Universal, for it depends upon something more intrinsic than such a doctrine. It will not need any central authority in order to realize the unity of faith with all the Christians in the world, because that which united them in Christlikeness, is truth, is experience, is life, is its mission, is the Gospel, is sincere and loving service, and not customs and traditions. Such a church is of course not made in a day. It is only in its beginning in China!<sup>78</sup>

Chao talked about building up a fellowship of love as the model of a non-denominational church in 1950. But unfortunately the radical socio-political situation did not allow him to continue with this vision. But in

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<sup>76</sup> Chao, 'fengchao zhong fenqi de jidujiao', Vol. III, 240.

<sup>77</sup> Chao, 'The Strength and the Weakness of the Church in China', Vol. V, 108-09.

<sup>78</sup> Chao, 'The Chinese Church Realizes Itself', Vol. V, 213.



1958, the Chinese Church did start to enter the post-denominational stage albeit in an unexpected way, which has become God's special blessing for the present-day Chinese churches.

### **The Prerequisites for the Possible Missional Fellowship of Love: An Ecumenically Interdependent Church**

To Chao, an independent indigenous Chinese Church, however, does not mean the self-isolation of the Church. Churches are actually always interdependent as different members in one body are. The missional cooperation between Chinese Christians and western missionaries could continue, but should not stick to the past one-directional way. Missionaries should understand and respect the self-governing rights of the indigenous churches. On this basis, Chao suggested that the roles of missionaries in the future Chinese indigenous churches be "fraternal delegates, representing their churches as guests, advisors or assistants, or be a member in the Chinese Church, equal to others without special privilege of racial and national connection."<sup>79</sup> If they were still not aware of the significant difference of national identity, missionaries would continue to impose the orthodox church standards of the West on the younger churches without acknowledging that the "right" way of practicing Christian faith in their eyes was also context-conditioned.

In the same vein, the Chinese churches could only cooperate with other churches in the spirit of equality and mutual respect. As a member of the ecumenical spiritual fellowship, the Chinese church's weakness could be transformed into strength when connected with the Church Universal.<sup>80</sup> Chao believed that, in order to confront such a big world crisis as the world war, "Chinese Christianity must work hand in hand with Western Christianity."<sup>81</sup> But later, when the western churches proved equally weak in stopping their governments from wars, and in protecting the persecuted Jews, Chao realized that the Chinese church also needed a strong self-development. In 1948, Chao was exuberantly happy to report to the Chinese churches about the first World Council of Churches assembly, and he sincerely hoped that one day the Council would give way to a real "One Holy Church" in Christ.<sup>82</sup> Chao also believed that, "in terms of communication, the ecumenical movement is a great Christian revival movement while the church leaders of the world were conscious of such a church as a community of friendship which united all human beings in the world by the Spirit" through the manifestation of Christian faith in a

<sup>79</sup> Chao, 'The Chinese Church Realizes Itself', Vol. V, 217.

<sup>80</sup> Chao, 'jidujiao jiaohui de yiyi', Vol. IV, 85.

<sup>81</sup> Chao, 'Christianity and National Crisis', Vol. V, 408.

<sup>82</sup> Chao, 'pushi jidujiao jiaohui xiehui de dongxiang', Vol. IV, 52.

corporate shared life.<sup>83</sup> In other words, according to Chao, the Christian Church has a unique role in the world, to gather all human beings together in order to create peace.<sup>84</sup> I think Chao's discussion of this topic was earlier than Faith and Order's research on the unity of Church and unity of Humankind in 1970s.

### **Conclusion**

What Chao envisioned was an independent, self-supporting, self-propagating, self-governing, united, democratic and people's church as a fellowship of love.<sup>85</sup> He insisted that a church without its own independent autonomous right could not be a true church, but would remain the mission fields of western churches. Without a Chinese church consciousness, the indigenous theology would not be possible, either. The prerequisites for missional fellowship of love in Chao's theology, may help us better understand the notion of moratorium on mission in the 1970s. The concrete churches are always related to their national identities. The Chinese Churches today are exploring to balance Christian faithfulness and civil allegiance while the traditional western churches may also need to address the challenges brought about by historical liberal individualism. Both east and west are challenged by the homogenizing power of economic globalization, and the sense of national identity has been more and more emphatically strengthened and consolidated. Therefore, the proper understanding of the relationship between Christianity and national identity is, I believe, still a necessary prerequisite for the missional cooperation between the global North and South today, within the ecumenical vision of the unity of humankind.

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<sup>83</sup> Chao, 'xinshidai de jidujiao xinyang', 13.

<sup>84</sup> Chao, 'jidujiao jiaohui de yiyi', Vol. IV, 85.

<sup>85</sup> Chao, 'zhongguo jidujiao jiaohui gaige de tujing', vol. IV, 135, 150-51; 'duan lun' (A Short Commentary), Vol. III, 281.

# LEARNINGS FROM THE MISSIONAL CHURCH IN INDIA

**John Amalraj**

## **Introduction**

More than two thousand years have passed, since the gospel was first preached in the southern part of India. More than a century has gone by, since the first structured expression of the indigenous missional movement began in India. At the time when India gained her independence, many of the foreign missionaries and mission agencies began to withdraw voluntarily, paving the way for indigenous leaders and structures to take over the church and mission leadership in a greater manner than ever before. It was at this time that indigenous ecumenical church unions developed. Later from the sixties onwards hundreds of indigenous mission agencies emerged as an expression of the missional activity of the Indian church which eventually resulted in the growth of several new churches across India. The Indian church owes its existence to the mission of both the eastern and the western church's missionary enterprise. The eastern church's missionary effort is evident in South India and the western church's efforts are closely linked to the colonial era which only started around 250 years ago. The growth of mission awareness and involvement by Indians over the last fifty years has increased enormously. It is now acknowledged that India is one of the major missionary sending nations, a reflection of the geographical change in global mission.

## **What Does the Indian Church Look Like?**

### **Identity of the Indian Church**

The Indian church owes its existence to the missionary efforts of the eastern and western church and therefore bears much resemblance to them. The Syrian church, the Roman Catholic Church and the protestant churches found roots in different parts of the country. All the churches pioneered by the overseas missionaries struggled over the centuries to make a transition to Indian leadership and to adapt to the Indian culture. The missionaries brought the Gospel along, together with their culture and denominational structures, transplanting the traditional religious and cultural practices in order to do away with the evils of the caste system and other exploitative

practices.<sup>1</sup> Until the sixties most of the churches in India showed very little cultural difference. The liturgy, worship songs, architecture and the Episcopal order continued to imitate the western culture, although there were several attempts to experiment by composing new songs, lyrics and music in different regional languages. The caution of syncretism has curtailed many initiatives towards contextualisation. In most regions, especially in urban churches, there seemed to be a sense of satisfaction in adapting to the western models of worship and structures. This has been one of the major reasons for a misconceived perception of Christianity as a foreign religion. The recent political development and the emergence of religious fanaticism have now contributed towards making this perception become a popular public opinion. Emerging Pentecostal and charismatic churches as well as the “assemblies” founded by Bakht Singh<sup>2</sup> did attempt to show a different face of the Indian church but it did not become very visible at the national or global level.

The efforts of the western missionaries, apart from church planting, have been to establish educational and health institutions which continue to play a major role in the Indian church. The ministry of the church in pioneer primary education, higher education, primary health and even super speciality health care has strengthened the role Christians in nation building. Historians and politicians from many backgrounds have recognised the contributions of the missionaries who founded these institutions and the present Indian Christians who continue to maintain and run the same. This identity of the church’s ministry in India is a very important factor in our discussion of the emergence of the missional church in India.

### **The Ecumenical Union as a Missional Expression**

The Indian church is the fruit of the missionary effort of the overseas mission agencies which belonged to the denominations and traditions of East Asia (specifically Syria), Western Europe and North America. Those agencies established churches and institutions directly under the organisational structure of their parent denominations. Therefore when the time came for the foreign missionaries to leave India, the leadership transition from the foreign missionaries to Indians became a very important issue that impacted the identity, growth and missional nature of the Indian church. In South India many local churches founded by Anglicans, Methodists, Presbyterians, Congregationalists and Baptists formed one of the world’s first ecumenical union churches, called the Church of South

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<sup>1</sup> Bishop Dr. S.K. Parmar, *The Indian Church: A Search for Self Identity* (Bangalore: Theological Book Trust Journal), 26.

<sup>2</sup> [www.brotherbakhtsingh.org](http://www.brotherbakhtsingh.org).

India.<sup>3</sup> In the seventies a similar effort took place in North India and the Church of North India<sup>4</sup> was formed. The remaining local churches which preferred to maintain their traditional relationship with their parent bodies, came together to form their own denominational structures like the Methodist Church in India, United Lutheran Church in India, Presbyterian Church in India, Council of Baptist Churches in North East India, the Free Methodists and many others. This ecumenical movement was on several occasions spearheaded by Bishop Azariah of Dornakal and others who believed that the unity of the churches was a very important form of the witness of the church in India. Even though the ecumenical movement may be criticised, the vision of its leaders was to express unity in the proclamation of gospel to the diverse cultures and languages.

The efforts of the ecumenical movement did not mean that relationship with the parent churches was immediately severed. New forms of relationships to continue to run the educational and medical institutions were formed. The foreign budgetary support continued until the last two decades when efforts were made to decrease the financial support. The majority of the church members are from the lower economic strata and do not have the necessary capacity to support large institutions. This made it necessary for the Indian leadership to continue its dependence on the foreign missions. Thus the ecumenical unions retained the major western traditions in their liturgy and episcopal structure and also continued their links through other partnerships. Although the presence of international personnel has been restricted by government, the partnership has continued in terms of sharing of other resources.

In the last decade, the ecumenical movement has achieved another milestone as the Church of South India, Church of North India and the Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church<sup>5</sup> formed a forum called "Communion of Churches in India"<sup>6</sup> through which they accepted each others' episcopal structures and agreed to have fellowship with one another. This is a testimony to the missional expression of the church. The Ecumenical union is an expression of unity as a missional nature of the church

### **Emergence of New Denominational Structures**

The ecumenical union expressed the missional nature of the Indian church. At the same time new denominational structures have emerged from the existing structures. This often happens because of the desire among a smaller section of the church to express the missional nature in a different

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<sup>3</sup> [www.csisynod.com](http://www.csisynod.com).

<sup>4</sup> [www.cnisynod.org](http://www.cnisynod.org).

<sup>5</sup> [www.marthoma.in](http://www.marthoma.in).

<sup>6</sup> [www.marthoma.in/ecumenical-relations](http://www.marthoma.in/ecumenical-relations).

way. The emergence of the Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church out of the Malankara Syrian Orthodox Church in Kerala is a typical example. In 1873,<sup>7</sup> following a great evangelical awakening, the Mar Thoma church was formed and in the year 1888 the Mar Thoma Evangelical Association,<sup>8</sup> a mission agency to send missionaries, was founded. Mar Thoma missionaries began to work among the Syrian Christians in North Travancore in the first decade of the twentieth century. After many years history repeated itself as the St. Thomas Evangelical Church<sup>9</sup> in Kerala came out of the Mar Thoma Syrian Church. Although the emergence of the new structures in some sense seemed to show a church in disunity or disagreement, they also expressed the missional nature: when the existing structure and leadership resisted, a new independent denominational structure became a natural consequence. There are many examples of this in Pentecostal and charismatic churches too.

### Followers of Christ Outside the Existing Structures

Sadhu Sundar Singh struggled to identify himself with the denominational church in India. In the end, his charisma transcended the denominational barriers, and he was able to witness to the Indian masses. This has been a major issue as many followers of Christ from the high caste people groups and others who resent the western face of the Indian church, have chosen to remain outside the established structures. Thousands of ‘unbaptized’ followers of Christ who meet in groups in their own homes or in other common places, can be found in South India and a few other places. They are called ‘Jesubhakthas’ or ‘Christubakthas’ and seem content with being outside any ‘church’ structure. Herbert Hofer,<sup>10</sup> a missionary and author of the book “Churchless Christianity” has researched this phenomenon. He asks “Do you think the vast majority of India will ever join the church?” “If you could envision an India won for Christ, what would its religious life be like?” These two questions he has asked Christians and non-baptized believers in Christ in India. He concludes that there is an overwhelming recognition that the Western-structured institutional church is basically incompatible with the culture of the nation. The Christ followers outside the organizational structures form a unique expression of the missional nature of the growing church in India.

<sup>7</sup> J. Edwin Orr, *Evangelical Awakenings in Southern Asia* (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, Inc., 1975), 135.

<sup>8</sup> www.marthomaevan.org.

<sup>9</sup> news.steci.org.

<sup>10</sup> Herbert Hofer, ‘Follow up Reflections on Churchless Christianity’, *Mission Frontiers*, March-April 1999.

## Reflections on Missional Church from an Indian Perspective

### *Denominational decline in response to new missional needs*

The present church scenario in India is diverse. There are denominational and traditional churches (established churches) with highly structured organisations and emerging churches with fewer structures, claiming to be independent and forming loose networks. Many of these churches were brought into existence as a result of the cross cultural mission of the established churches. On the other hand, most of the established churches came into existence as a result of the cross cultural mission of European and American mission societies. Just as many inter denominational mission societies assumed responsibility for cross cultural mission during the colonial period, inter-denominational mission societies were formed in India to assume responsibility for cross cultural mission. All the churches in India thus owe their existence to cross cultural mission. Therefore when we refer to the missional expression of the Indian church, we should look both at the established and the emerging churches. Many of the mission agencies that are interdenominational and remain outside the episcopal structure of the established churches have focussed on fulfilling the Great Commission and thereby expressed the missional nature. The structured established churches are preoccupied with worship, pastoral care, administering educational and medical institutions and local evangelistic efforts. The emerging churches and independently formed mission agencies are primarily involved in sending out people to fulfil the Great Commission through cross cultural mission. The major exception to this would be the established denominational churches in the North East of India. Recently some of the inter-denominational mission agencies have developed their own church structure and thus become a new denomination. The church-parachurch division is very much prevalent in India but we should avoid perpetuating this dichotomy.

### *The birth of the missional spirit among established churches*<sup>11</sup>

The first indigenous mission was the Mar Thoma Evangelical Association formed in 1888 in Kerala, with the zeal of reform and power of revival.<sup>12</sup> Later in the year 1902,<sup>13</sup> V.S. Azariah impressed by the fact that the Jaffna Tamil Christians had a missionary society of their own, inspired others and founded the Indian Missionary Society of Tirunelveli (IMS) in 1903.<sup>14</sup> In

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<sup>11</sup> This is my own personal view and does not necessarily reflect the official view of the organizations I represent.

<sup>12</sup> J. Edwin Orr, *Evangelical Awakenings*, 135.

<sup>13</sup> Carol Graham, *Azariah of Dornakal* (London: SCM Press, 1946), 31-33.

<sup>14</sup> J. Edwin Orr, *Evangelical Awakenings*, 127.

December 1905, a group of Indian leaders met in Carey's library at Serampore and launched the National Missionary Society of India (NMS).<sup>15</sup> The aim was expressly to place the responsibility for India's evangelisation on the Indians themselves.<sup>16</sup>

The Mar Thoma Evangelistic Association of the Marthoma Church, the Indian Missionary Society<sup>17</sup> and the National Missionary Society<sup>18</sup> were examples of the eagerness of denominational churches to be involved in cross cultural mission. In the south, the Diocesan Missionary Prayer Band<sup>19</sup> emerged in 1962. In the North East region of India, the Presbyterian Church in Mizoram<sup>20</sup> and the Nagaland Baptist Church Council, responding to the missionary zeal of their congregations, formed the Synod Mission Board and the Nagaland Missionary Movement.<sup>21</sup> These cross-cultural mission agencies sought to fulfil the missional role of the church.

The characteristic of the denominational missions was that they reported to their Church leadership and functioned as an arm or department of the Church. They became accountable to the Church leadership and integrated into the organisational structure of the denominational church. This resulted in loss of autonomy in decision making that was needed to respond to the emerging mission challenges. The consequence was the decline of priority for cross cultural missionary activities of the church.

Ken Gnanakan<sup>22</sup> rightly points out that it is only when the Church's being and becoming is held together that the totality of the Church is manifested. We need to restore the dynamism of mission within an otherwise static and institutional church. Therefore major denominational churches need to focus on contextualising worship patterns, discipling and witnessing.

### *The birth of the missional spirit among the lay people*

During the European and American mission period Indian national laypeople worked as catechists, Bible women, and lay preachers assisting the 'foreign missionary' in fulfilling his goals. Many of these lay people were often 'converts' who had to leave their homes and villages because of their faith. Therefore the missionaries trained them into various ministry roles within the mission compound. There were a few highly learned men

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<sup>15</sup> Carol Graham, *Azariah of Dornakal*, 27.

<sup>16</sup> Hugald Grafe, *History of Christianity in India*, 60.

<sup>17</sup> [www.csitirunselveli.org/Ministry/ministry-ims](http://www.csitirunselveli.org/Ministry/ministry-ims).

<sup>18</sup> [nmsofindia.org](http://nmsofindia.org).

<sup>19</sup> [www.dmpb.org](http://www.dmpb.org).

<sup>20</sup> [www.mizoram-synod.org](http://www.mizoram-synod.org).

<sup>21</sup> [www.cbcnei.com](http://www.cbcnei.com), [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nagaland\\_Missionary\\_Movement](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nagaland_Missionary_Movement).

<sup>22</sup> Ken Gnanakan, 'The Church: Its Mission and Theological Education', *TBT Journal*, 20.



and women who were converts and who voluntarily involved themselves in mission.

The emergence of interdenominational mission agencies can be directly attributed to the involvement of lay people, although outside their denominational structures. All mission agencies have their financial and personnel support basis from lay people who have their church membership in main line denominations or established churches. The missionaries who are recruited are all lay people and are seldom theologically trained. Their training is limited to the missionary task. The impact of these missionaries and their supporters in the home churches has increased their involvement in the life of the church.

Many parachurch mission agencies have played an important role in discipling lay people, outside the church structures. The Vacation Bible School<sup>23</sup> (VBS), started in the sixties, has disciplined and infused the missionary zeal among an entire generation of young people becoming missionaries in North India. Monthly evangelistic meetings organized by Youth For Christ<sup>24</sup> (YFC) in several cities, small group bible studies organized in colleges by the Evangelical Unions<sup>25</sup> (IFES / UESI) and short term mission teams opportunities provided by several mission agencies have all contributed to the discipling and envisioning of thousands of young people outside the structures of the established churches. Traditional churches organize mission weeks and mission Sundays to mobilize lay people like in Kerala where the Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church organizes the largest mission conference in India called the 'Maramon Convention' for decades drawing thousands of people.

On the negative side, it should be admitted that this lay movement has caused severe strains in the relationship between the active lay people and the pastor of the local congregation and among the top leadership in the denominations and missions. The issues of accountability and credibility of the mission agencies have often constituted the major complaint from the church leadership. When lay initiatives in missions do not find an avenue within the denominational structures they find fulfilment outside the established churches.

The involvement of the lay members to express the missional nature of the church has been exemplified in the New Life Fellowship Church,<sup>26</sup> Mumbai. This church was modelled after the house church and involved the leadership of lay people as pastors. This enabled the fellowship to multiply rapidly among the middle class and penetrate a socio-economic class who had been neglected in the urban context. This has been replicated by many with various degrees of success in other parts of the country.

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<sup>23</sup> [www.vbsindia.org](http://www.vbsindia.org).

<sup>24</sup> [www.indiayfc.org](http://www.indiayfc.org).

<sup>25</sup> [www.uesi.org.in](http://www.uesi.org.in).

<sup>26</sup> [www.newlifevoice.org](http://www.newlifevoice.org).

*Holistic ministry as part of missional expression*

The European and American mission movement in India laid a strong foundation for the missional expression through holistic mission. They founded many institutions in the field of education, health, community development and rehabilitation. Even now, many Indian political leaders have spoken highly of the Christians' contributions in nation building through 'social service'. William Carey in social reform, Alexander Duff in opening the education system for Indian masses and Ida Scudder for starting medical work for women are some of the examples.

Following in their footsteps, Pandita Ramabai, a convert from a high caste background, started a social service mission at Mukti in Maharashtra to rehabilitate young and neglected widows forbidden by Hindu custom to marry again.<sup>27</sup> The work was later extended to orphans, because of famine. This work was started at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Although the Mukti project received help through funds and foreign personnel, the mission itself was unique and it had a great impact on the Indian social life. There are many other such indigenous examples of mission involved in social ministry.

The emergence of numerous indigenous missions in the pattern of classical missions, involved in pioneering evangelism and church planting, has also raised the issue of social witness. The Christian presence and witness need to be authentic, relevant and meaningful in a socio-economically poor nation like India.<sup>28</sup> The indigenous Indian missions are often accused of being interested only in 'soul winning', which strengthens the view that they are only interested in converting people, building a Christian empire and boosting statistics. Social development as a witness without any strings attached, does not gain much acceptance among the evangelical indigenous and foreign missions. Whenever strings are attached to any social development, it antagonises the non-Christians as well as the Government and political parties. Therefore there needs to be understanding and mutual co-operation between evangelistic missions and other Christian social service agencies. Many of the mission agencies have now established schools, literacy class, community development projects, and medical clinics. Bishop Parmar asks whether a church, in a nation with the large part of its population below the poverty line, and with children malnourished and women being oppressed should express "the lifestyle of the well-to-do and the I-care-less attitude?" He suggests that the Indian church need not be dependent upon the western church for fulfilling its role to meet the needs of the poor.<sup>29</sup> It must raise resources from within the church in India by exercising faith and teaching the discipline of sacrificial giving. This call for the missional church to be holistic is very relevant

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<sup>27</sup> J. Edwin Orr, *Evangelical Awakenings*, 144.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>29</sup> S.K. Parmar, *ibid.*, 39.

today as the developing new Indian economy has its victims among the rural folks and the unemployed, exploited labour force that is growing day by day. The church has to meet the emerging social needs of the rapid urbanization.

*Signs and wonders as part of the missional expression of the church*

Healings, miracles, signs and wonders have always been reported by missionaries as they preached the Gospel. However, what attract media attention are the healing crusades organized by Indian evangelists from charismatic backgrounds. D.G.S Dhinakaran,<sup>30</sup> the most popular of such evangelists, has held thousands of crusade-style meetings and has attracted ordinary people who profess other faiths to become followers of Christ. Recently in the city of Allahabad, thousands of villagers attended healing meetings called 'Yeshu Darbar'<sup>31</sup> organized by the Allahabad Agricultural Institute run by a Christian management under the leadership of Dr. V.B. Lal and held almost every evening for the last several years continuously.

The Billy Graham crusades in the fifties and later in the seventies helped the churches to jointly reach out to their neighbours. In recent times there have been a flood of tele-evangelists from outside the country who still continue to hold large crusade style mass meetings where healing ministry is the focus. The responses to these meetings are mixed and at times give a negative perception of the church. The Pentecostal and charismatic movement has influenced many parts of the church at large. Even a few traditional churches now organize healing services.

*Contextualised expression of missional nature*

In 1921, a different kind of mission, The Christukulla Ashram,<sup>32</sup> was founded near Tiruppattur in Tamil Nadu to witness to the aspiration of brotherhood between men of different backgrounds along with the dimensions of social service and the indigenization of the Christian faith in India.<sup>33</sup> The founders, Dr S. Jesudason and Dr E. Forrester-Paton, were both trained physicians. Many Christian ashrams have emerged in different parts of the country. This contextualised model of living in a community attracted devout people of other faiths to come and learn more about Jesus Christ. In some of the ashrams, inter faith dialogue was also encouraged and it has helped in creating an environment where the claims of Jesus Christ can be discussed without any fear of intimidation.

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<sup>30</sup> [www.jesuscalls.org](http://www.jesuscalls.org).

<sup>31</sup> [www.aaidu.org/yeshuDarbar](http://www.aaidu.org/yeshuDarbar).

<sup>32</sup> The 'Ashram' was a community of believers who agree to live together in a simple life style and spend more time in prayer, meditation and reflection.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 60, 127.

Recently Satsangs (a devotional meeting open to all devotees) has become another successful model of the contextualised missional church, especially in North India. These Satsangs have been organized in rural settings in different places and have always drawn people of other faiths to come and hear the claims of Jesus Christ.

## **The Reasons for the Emergence of an Indigenous Missional Church**

### *Socio-political context*

Rajendran<sup>34</sup> states that the socio-political situation immediately after independence in 1947 raised a number of missiological issues. The foreign missionaries were leaving voluntarily and the foreign mission agencies began to lose their role in the new independent context. There was a need to determine the identity of the existing churches and missions. There was also a need to assume responsibility for mission to other Indians by Indian leaders. In grappling with these issues, various mission agencies emerged.

The western missionaries were not able to make much impact in many North Indian states due to the strong anti-colonial movement that had emerged among the masses and the history of violent imposition of Islam which has closed their mind to any other 'foreign' religion. The interior parts of the mainland were not easily accessible to the western missionaries. Therefore in the sixties and seventies, the South Indian Christians were challenged by the need for reaching out to North India. They wanted to take the Gospel and also development to the many tribal and rural groups. Many new missions began to emerge with the slogan of reaching North India.

The present socio-political context of rapid urbanization, increasing religious fundamentalism and the need for governmental recognition has created a new trend among the independent and inter-denominational missions. Geography has become irrelevant. The geographically distant people groups have now come to the door steps of the church due to migration which is a consequence of the rapid urbanization. Many of the established churches and emerging churches in urban centers are experiencing a tremendous growth in membership because of this migration. This means that Christians also are migrating to distant geographical locations and have the opportunity to become witnesses to the Gospel. The religious fundamentalism has put at risk career cross cultural missionaries who were normally being sent from South India to North India. Their identity and role in the community they have been sent to have been questioned. In this context, instead of full time gospel workers, missions have started to creatively use Christians who have been moving

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 81-83.

cross culturally in their vocations and to equip them as witnesses who are able to disciple others. Missions are also beginning to see the need to provide career missionaries with a vocational skill that can help them to earn their living, create a socially accepted identity and provide a positive role to the community. There has been an increase in the number of mono-cultural gospel workers emerging in many places. Finally the need for governmental recognition has provided the need for independent mission agencies to actively network with one another. A few missions have formed their own denominational churches with an 'Episcopal structure' irrespective of their background of Pentecostal or other traditions. The title 'bishop' for erstwhile 'senior pastors' is becoming common. A few independent missions have also merged with existing denominational churches.

### *Nationalism and patriotism*

The founding of the IMS and NMS at the beginning of this century by V.S. Azariah was the result of the awakening of the new national consciousness. These missions were founded with the principles of Indian men, Indian money and Indian management.

After independence, the emergence of other indigenous mission agencies had similar principles. Most of these mission agencies rightly demand that the allowances paid to the missionaries and staffs are raised from within the country. However, capital expenses, project funds are at times raised through Diaspora Indians and overseas partners.

Religious fundamentalists have challenged the Church to rid itself of its western face; this has made headlines. The visible face of the Indian church is its urban churches. Most of these churches have gothic architectural buildings built in the colonial era; they continue to be landmarks in the major cities. These churches also have worship liturgy and music that resemble western traditions. This, along with denominational and financial partnership with the west, has created the image of a western religion. It is not going to be easy to just get all the churches to change the liturgy or music overnight. In a few urban churches, traditional liturgical music has given way to contemporary western music to meet the needs of the globalized young people. This is more a reflection of the impact of globalization on the church, similar to the changes taking place in shopping malls, fast food centres, fashion stores etc.; Severing of fellowship and at times financial partnership with the western churches is not an easy matter as it would bring into question the universality of the Church. In the light of the growing climate of nationalism, the church in India has to find its own national identity without diluting its universal nature.<sup>35</sup> The church must consider more seriously how to be an alternative to the western episcopal

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<sup>35</sup> S.K. Parmar, 'The Indian Church – the search for self identity', *TBT Journal*, 28.

structure. Earlier the ashram and Gurukul models have been successful in certain contexts, but will the same be relevant in a nation that is under the onslaught of globalization? A few adventurous people have replaced western liturgical models successfully with Satsangs and bhajans (devotional songs). The missional role of the church cannot be fulfilled by just sending out missionaries and evangelists. Our organisational structure and style of worship must reflect the national culture.

### *Evangelical awakening and missionary zeal*

In the pre-independence era,<sup>36</sup> following the Great Awakening of 1873, the evangelicals in Kerala sought to reform the Syrian Orthodox Church and were forced out of its fellowship. They then formed the Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church. In 1888, the leaders harnessed the power of the Kerala awakening to form the Mar Thoma Evangelistic Association. The zeal of this dynamic and indigenous movement permeated the whole church.

In the post-independence era, Hrangkhuma<sup>37</sup> writes that as theological liberalism began to be imported into India, the leadership of the mainline churches became more and more liberal which resulted in a declining emphasis on evangelism. Thus the Evangelical Fellowship of India (EFI) was formed in 1951. As a result, in 1959 the Evangelical Overseas Mission (now called FEM) was founded by EFI to focus on evangelism.

The emergence of numerous missions during the eighties was due to the evangelical awakenings and spiritual revival of the churches at those times. The majority of denominational mission agencies in India are from the North East Indian Churches.<sup>38</sup> The growing involvement of the evangelical churches in Nagaland and Mizoram in missionary work outside of their own area was a result of the revival in these states.<sup>39</sup> By the nineties millions of Indian rupees, all generated from indigenous sources, were being raised for mission in the North East. Muanthanga<sup>40</sup> writes that there is a growing conviction that the North East India Church has to be a missionary church because within a short time the Church had become a self-supporting, self-governing and self-propagating Church.

This missionary zeal is the result of spontaneous prayer movements. Indigenous mission agencies have formed numerous prayer groups in almost every district of Tamil Nadu. These prayer groups meet in homes and are comprised of Christians from different churches who also support

<sup>36</sup> J. Edwin Orr, *Evangelical Awakenings*, 149.

<sup>37</sup> F. Hrangkhuma, 'The Church in India', 416.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>39</sup> Frederick S. Downs, *History Of Christianity In India*, 126.

<sup>40</sup> P.C. Muanthanga, 'The Unreached People Groups of North East India', *Aim* (New Delhi: Evangelical Fellowship of India) Vol. 28, No. 12', (December 1997), 21.

financially. Although the movement is outside the structure of the denominational churches, the prayer groups have a great impact on the local congregations. There are many churches where members of these prayer groups also are the active core leaders of the congregation. Thus, in addition to the growing awareness of the mission needs, the prayer life of the Church in general is strengthened among the lay people. A similar prayer movement among the lay people of the churches in Nagaland and Mizoram forms the backbone of the missionary enterprise of the North Eastern church.

An important characteristic of a missional church with zeal is the aspect of sacrificial giving by the ordinary Christians for the ministries of the church including its cross cultural mission. Stories of sacrificial giving to the ministry of the churches are many. Many of the people who support missions both from the Southern parts of India and the North Eastern states like Mizoram, Nagaland and Meghalaya, give sacrificially rather than from their wealth.

## Issues Raised by the Emergence of the Missional Church

### *Church-mission partnership*

The emergence of indigenous missions, especially that of non-denominational mission agencies, has negatively created a strain in the church-mission relationships. Sunder Raj,<sup>41</sup> says that there are deep rooted misconceptions and prejudices on both sides. While some churches are blamed for their loss of evangelistic fervour, some Indian missions are blamed for their lack of social responsibility. The proliferation of a variety of mission organisations with undefined structures has raised the issue of credibility.<sup>42</sup> Albert<sup>43</sup> says that evangelical missions should seriously think about motivating the mainline churches for mission because parachurch missions cannot complete the evangelisation task on their own. Sunderraj,<sup>44</sup> in his analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of Churches and missions, says that the strength and contribution of Indian missions is in planting churches in new areas, among new cultures, languages and people groups. However, neighbourhood evangelism is predominately accomplished by

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<sup>41</sup> Ebenezer Sunder Raj, 'Evangelism in India Today', *Second National Consultation on Evangelism* (Chennai: India Missions Association, 1996), 9.

<sup>42</sup> Jeevan Babu and Ebenezer Sunder Raj, 'Findings of Church Mission Consultation', *Indian Missions* (Chennai: India Missions Association) (April-June 1998), 18.

<sup>43</sup> Vasantharaj Albert, 'A Report on the Status of Evangelization of India', *Second National Consultation*, 16.

<sup>44</sup> Ebenezer Sunder Raj, 'Evangelism in India Today', *Second National Consultation*, 8.

the evangelical charismatic churches and denominations. This pattern of dividing the mission task is healthy and needs to be promoted to avoid duplication and wastage of manpower and resources.

Prabhu Rayan, the founder of India Fellowship for the Visually Handicapped, states that their motto is that when this vision becomes the mission of the church, the agency will fade away. He suggests that if given another opportunity, he would begin the ministry within the church and make it her mission just like the ministry for women, youth and children.<sup>45</sup>

India Missions Association, in partnership with the National Council of Churches in India, organised two partnership consultations in the December 1994 and January 1998. The joint declarations at this consultation seemed to resolve the conflict between mission organizations and churches. However, the benefit of these declarations and agreements is yet to percolate down to the local leaders.<sup>46</sup>

There seems to be a better atmosphere of church-mission relationships in North India. In most cases the church in North India has been the recipient of the pioneering efforts of the indigenous mission agencies emerging from South India. The mission agencies concentrated their mission efforts among the tribal peoples with great success. In most cases, the indigenous new churches have been handed over to the denomination dominant in that area. This has strengthened the denominational churches. Many pioneering missionaries have been ordained as pastors and have continued to serve the local churches they have planted within the dominant denomination in the area. However, recently there have been complaints from the mission agencies that churches planted by missions are considered as illegitimate or orphans by major denominations. Therefore there have been difficulties in handing over the new churches to the denominations. Some of these churches were not given proper pastoral care due to lack of personnel and the remoteness of the planted church. In some cases the local leadership was ignored as the denominational leadership dominated the new churches. This created a lot of tensions in the relationship between mission agencies and churches and also led to a leadership struggle within mission agencies themselves.

### **Conclusion**

The emergence of an indigenous missional church in India, especially in the last 30-40 years, has changed the church-mission history of India. It is unfortunate that traditional structures of the churches sometimes have been a stumbling block. God has used the lay people in different new ways to fulfil God's mission in India by breaking the traditional structures. The

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<sup>45</sup> J.N. Manokaran, IMA Member Missions Directory 2000, IMA, 159.

<sup>46</sup> IMA & NCCI Joint Declarations – posted on the [www.imaindia.org](http://www.imaindia.org) website, Press Release section.



Indian church is called to be the redeemed community that will share the gift of redemption with its brothers and sisters in a culturally relevant manner. The Indian church is also called to play a prophetic role that will make an impact on the social, political and economic sectors of society. In general the missions and churches have done well in responding to some of the challenges within India. The future needs the active involvement of the Indian church in global missions. If and when the Indian missional church fulfils its calling, it will begin to impact the world at large and give leadership to the global church in its missional role.

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# ENCOUNTER BETWEEN RELIGIONS

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# BIBLICAL AND QURANIC REFLECTIONS ON 'OBEDIENCE'

**Steinar Sødal**

## Introduction

'It was only when I began to believe in Jesus that I became a true Muslim.'<sup>1</sup> This quote highlights an interesting perspective on the relationship between Christianity and Islam. The person quoted here, gave the testimony that it was first as a believer in Jesus, she fully understood the meaning of being a Muslim, in the sense of 'being obedient to God'. This focus on 'obedience' is also apparent in the interviews of Christian converts from Islam in my master thesis.<sup>2</sup> As empirical evidences these suggest a further examination of the relation between the Christian and Islamic concepts of 'obedience'.

The concept of obedience is central to Islamic faith, as shown through the word 'Islam' itself. This is an Arabic word, *إسلام*, with 'obedience' as one of its most common translations. The concept of obedience is also addressed in the Bible, especially by Paul in the New Testament. He uses especially the Greek word *ὕπακοή*. In western Christian theology 'obedience' is an aspect that is little emphasized. With increasing interaction between Islam and western Christianity, this is an area that needs to be addressed more specifically. In this article the concept of obedience is explored both in the Quran and in the Bible, as an effort to build on the core understandings of this concept in each religion. This article goes on to raise the question whether 'obedience' can be used as a bridge between Christianity and Islam.

Some limitations are necessary. The concept of 'obedience' is primarily explored in the two words *إسلام*<sup>3</sup> and *ὕπακοή*. However, several other words would also be interesting, but because of the length and the purpose of this article, they cannot be taken fully into consideration. Those words

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<sup>1</sup> An anonymous Christian convert from a central-Asian country. Steinar Sødal, "Selvsagt må vi adlyde Bibelen" – en kvalitativ undersøkelse av bibelsynet til kristne konvertitter fra islam i Tyrkia' (Master of Theology thesis. Det teologiske Menighetsfakultet, 2009) 100, translated from Norwegian.

<sup>2</sup> Sødal. 'Selvsagt må vi adlyde Bibelen'.

<sup>3</sup> Arabic and Hebrew words consist of three consonants, which are called a root. S-L-M is the root of *إسلام*. I presuppose knowledge to the Greek alphabet, but for the ease of the reader, I give Latin transcription of Arabic and Hebrew roots.

include the Greek word *ὑποτάσσω*, which in the New Testament has a very similar meaning as translated into ‘subordinate’. The Arabic root طوع, *T-W-*, has 129 occurrences in the Quran, and the primary meaning is ‘obedience’. This is probably the best equivalent to *ὑπακοή*, but since *سالم*, *S-L-M*, has given name to the religion itself, it seems like this word gives best opportunities to explore a possible bridge between Christianity and Islam. The Hebrew root שָׁלַם, *SH-L-M*, in the Old Testament would also be interesting, since it is etymologically related to the Arabic root *سالم*, *S-L-M*.

One of the major similarities between these two religions is their common emphasis on their holy books. Sometimes the relation between historical writings and present traditions and ideas may be blurry. The challenge is to link the exegesis to the present situation. In this case, this is very much counteracted by the fact that the concept of obedience is regarded as one of the uttermost key virtues in Islam. The empirical data that are referred to also shows that this is a real subject in the mindset of converts. The design of this article reflects this challenge of linking historical writings with present conceptual meanings. First I give a short outline of *سالم*, *S-L-M*, in the Quran before I present and discuss how this is present in Islamic thinking today. Later I do the same with *ὑπακοή* in the New Testament and the present western Christian theology. The holy books serve as the starting-point, but it should be made clear that the understanding of the concepts today probably have more practical significance than the exegesis. Then I try to compare the concepts and discuss the possibility of using this as a bridge between the two different religions. The purpose of a bridge is to connect two sides divided by something that seems unsurpassable. The bridge may be used to increase the interaction between two sides, so they can be more familiar with each other. For those wanting to go to the other side, a bridge may also be a very useful instrument. To include these different opportunities, the ‘bridge’ seems like a proper metaphor to illustrate what usage this comparison may serve. The perspective in this article is comparative, but with a clear emphasis on Christianity as the base to build a bridge to Islam. This will mean that the Christian perspective will be given most space.

### Usage of *سالم* in the Quran

The root *سالم*, *S-L-M*, occur 140 times in the Quran,<sup>4</sup> 57 of these are nouns, the rest are different verbal forms. The verbs are mainly in form II and IV, with respectively the primary meanings of ‘peace’ or ‘submission, obedience’.

Approximately 50 of the occurrences of the root *سالم*, *S-L-M*, are normally translated as different forms of greetings of peace. Two occurrences of this root have a very different meaning; ‘ladder’, or

<sup>4</sup> The Quranic Arabic Corpus. 2010 [URL].

'stairway'.<sup>5</sup> Of the rest, more than 30 occurrences denote specifically either the religion 'Islam', or the people who are following this religion, the 'Muslims'.

In one verse, the prophet Muhammad is mentioned as the first Muslim. 'Say: "Shall I take to myself as protector other than God, the Originator of the heavens and of the earth, He who feeds and is not fed?" Say: "I have been commanded to be the first of them that surrender: "Be not thou of the idolaters."'"<sup>6</sup> Here the root *S-L-M* is used in the phrase 'them that surrender'. This has remained as the key meaning of 'Muslim'.

Another verse contrasts the difference between belief and obedience. 'The Bedouins say, "We believe." Say: "You do not believe; rather say, "We surrender"; for belief has not yet entered your hearts. If you obey God and His Messenger, He will not diminish you anything of your works. God is All-forgiving, All-compassionate."'"<sup>7</sup> The phrase 'we surrender' is here set in a very distinct contrast to the other phrase 'we believe'. Belief is regarded as one of the key virtues in the Christian tradition, so this contrasting is in that sense very interesting.

The Quran also accentuates that the prophets are people that were submitted to God. 'Surely We sent down the Torah, wherein is guidance and light; thereby the Prophets who had surrendered themselves gave judgment for those of Jewry, as did the masters and the rabbis, following such portion of God's Book as they were given to keep and were witnesses to.'<sup>8</sup> The prophets are also understood in terms of submission and obedience to God. This also shows that obedience to God is explained as one of the key virtues in the Quran.

### Islamic Understanding of the Concept of Obedience

Islam, as opposed to Christianity, gives more space to embodiment of the religion. Facing Christianity, it will be naturally to ask; 'what do the Christians believe?' The same question towards Islam, would be; 'what do the Muslims do?'<sup>9</sup> Deeds are therefore a broader reference in Islam, than in Christianity.

'O believers, obey God, and obey the Messenger and those in authority among you.'<sup>10</sup> This verse gives a good example of the range of obedience

<sup>5</sup> Koran 52:38 and 6:35. All translations and references are from the Quran translation by Arberry 1955. He uses the system made by G. Flügel to number the verses. This is the same system as in the Norwegian translation by Einar Berg, but different from the *Kufan* system which is normally used by most Muslims.

<sup>6</sup> Koran 6:14.

<sup>7</sup> Koran 49:14.

<sup>8</sup> Koran 5:48.

<sup>9</sup> Dagfinn Rian and Levi Geir Eidhamar, *Jødedommen og islam* (Kristiansand: Høyskoleforlaget, 1999), 160

<sup>10</sup> Koran 4:59.

that is inferred in Islam. The Muslims should obey God and the prophet Muhammad. But it doesn't stop there, the range of obedience goes further to include all who has authority in the community.<sup>11</sup>

This shows that obedience as a virtue is one of the key understandings of what it will mean to be a Muslim. It is not only to be obedient to God, but also to the human beings in the community who has authority. In this way, it serves to show that being obedient in Islam affects the whole life. This gives Islam an all-encompassing function in the daily life of the Muslims.

Cut to the point, obedience is the most important for a Muslim. 'But the "one necessity" for the believers is the obedience to Allah's will, as Islam makes it known.'<sup>12</sup> In the practice of daily life Islam, this is what gives all the practical consequences. The life of a Muslim is regulated down to the little daily-life details. This includes commonly known practices like ritual cleansing and prayer, abstinence from different types of food and drink, and dressing. But it may also include regulations about how to brush your teeth, or the practice of dyeing the beard red. The thing that ultimately encourages all this practices is the will to be obedient to Allah and his will.

Three quotes from three different Muslims show some of the facets of 'obedience' in Islam. A Norwegian Muslim convert from Christianity is giving the regulations as one of the main reason for her conversion. 'One of the reasons that I became Muslim, was "the Islamic system" with its firm frames.'<sup>13</sup> To submit oneself to a system with regulations for everything, even the daily-life, may be seen as a comfort to some. The 'obedience' is organized into a system.

That practice is a natural part of Islam is asserted by this young Norwegian-Pakistan Muslim. 'Of course I practice! For when ... I mean that once you have a religion, then you must either be religious or don't believe in it.'<sup>14</sup> This shows that practice is a central part of the understanding Islam as a religion.

A rhetorical question from a South-African Muslim theologian is revealing. 'If I see a banana peel on the sidewalk, do I really need a hadith to be motivated to clean it up?'<sup>15</sup> The regulations and the obedience may have so great impact on the daily life, that some get almost paralyzed.

The concept of 'obedience' in present Islam is clearly connected to deeds and practices. The Islamic understanding of salvation emphasizes

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<sup>11</sup> This has an interesting parallel in the New Testament. 'Peter and the other apostles replied: "We must obey God rather than men!"' (Acts 5:29)

<sup>12</sup> Jan Opsal, *Islam. Lydighetens vei*. (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 2005) 27, my translation.

<sup>13</sup> Anne Sofie Roald, *Er muslimske kvinner undertrykt?* (Oslo: Pax Forlag, 2005) 10, my translation.

<sup>14</sup> Sissel Østberg, *Muslim i Norge. Religion og hverdagsliv blant unge norsk-pakistanere*. (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 2003) 144, my translation.

<sup>15</sup> Kari Vogt, *Islam – tradisjon, fundamentalisme og reform*, (Oslo: Cappelen, 2005) 331, my translation.

good deeds as the measure all people should be weighed with on Judgement Day. Again, this underscores the fact that 'obedience' is clearly one of the key virtues of Islam.

### Usage of *ὕπακοή* in the New Testament

The noun *ὕπακοή* occur 15 times in the New Testament. The corresponding verb *ὕπακούω* has 21 occurrences. Of these 36 occurrences in total, 22 of them are in letters from Paul. Of the rest, 3 occurrences are in Hebrews, 4 in 1 Peter, and 7 in the synoptic gospels and Acts. This shows that it's primarily Paul who uses the terms *ὕπακοή* and *ὕπακούω* in the New Testament.<sup>16</sup>

The primary meaning of *ὕπακοή* is from the daily life. Different kinds of authorities demand obedience. The relationship between slaves and masters are in some sense built on this concept. One example of this is Ephesians 6:5: 'Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ.'<sup>17</sup> At biblical times, the relationship between children and parents was also expected to consist of obedience. Even Paul teaches this. 'Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.'<sup>18</sup> All of this is part of a traditional meaning of the word.

However, in Romans 6:16 Paul uses the original meaning, and expands it to a more abstract religious meaning. 'Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey – whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness?'<sup>19</sup> In the first part of this verse, Paul uses 'obedience' in the everyday meaning of the relationship between the slaves and the master. In the last part of the verse, he parallels slavery to sin, with slavery to obedience. To be a slave to obedience must infer some abstract meaning. In this verse it seems like obedience itself is the ultimate virtue. Elsewhere Paul elaborates this by giving this obedience a clearer direction.

There are especially three phrases where 'obedience' is used by Paul in a distinct manner, different from the traditional use of the word.

The first phrase is 'obedience and faith'. Both in the beginning and in the end of Paul's letter to the Romans, he uses these two words together in the phrase *εἰς ὑπακοὴν πίστεως*.<sup>20</sup> The significance Paul places on both

<sup>16</sup> The corresponding words *παρακοή* and *παρακούω*, primarily translated with 'disobedience' and 'to disobey', occur 7 times in the New Testament, and only two times in the letters of Paul (Rom. 5:19 and 2 Cor. 10:6).

<sup>17</sup> Eph. 6:5 Parallel in Col. 3:22. All New Testament quotations in English are from NIV 1984 unless otherwise stated.

<sup>18</sup> Eph. 6:1 Parallel in Col. 3:20.

<sup>19</sup> Rom. 6:16.

<sup>20</sup> Rom. 1:5.16:26.



‘obedience’ and ‘faith’, should be emphasized by the fact that Paul uses this phrase in the very beginning of his letter to the Romans, and also in his very last conclusion.

‘Obedience’ gives naturally associations to deeds. ‘Faith’ is very seldom related to deeds, and is normally part of a different sphere of meaning, with more spiritual emphasis. When these two concepts meet, one of the primary meanings must necessarily change. ‘Faith’ may have a more concrete meaning relating to different deeds.<sup>21</sup> In these two verses in Romans however, it is apparent that it is ‘obedience’ which gets a more spiritual meaning.

The phrase *εἰς ὑπακοὴν πίστεως* in Romans 1:5 have been translated and understood in many different ways. Some central examples are ‘obedience to the faith’ in KJV 1611, ‘obedience of faith’ in NRSV 1989, and the paraphrase ‘the obedience that comes from faith’ in NIV 1984. The Greek grammar implies a possessive relationship between faith as ‘the owner’, and obedience as the thing that is possessed.<sup>22</sup> Faith and obedience are related concepts in Romans, but can in my view not be treated as synonyms, as already explained by their different primary spheres of meaning. Faith is the origin which obedience builds on. The preposition *εἰς* gives a direction towards something, and in a more abstract way it is especially used about aim and purpose. A good paraphrase for the Greek phrase, *εἰς ὑπακοὴν πίστεως*, may be ‘(something) that leads to obedience of faith’.

The second phrase in question is ‘obedience and Christ’. In 2 Corinthians 10:5 Paul uses the phrase *εἰς τὴν ὑπακοὴν τοῦ Χριστοῦ*. This is translated into; ‘(and bringing into captivity every thought) to the obedience of Christ’.<sup>23</sup> In this phrase it may seem like the original meaning should be invoked, since it clearly speaks about obedience to a person, similar to the slave-master paradigm. However, the rest of the phrase gives another direction. How can thoughts be obedient in a practical meaning of the word? This shows that the phrase ‘obedience to Christ’ is more on a abstract and spiritual level, comparing to the phrase ‘surrender to Allah’, which seeks more practical consequences.

The third phrase is ‘obedience and the gospel’. Paul uses this two times, in Romans 10:16<sup>24</sup> and 2 Thessalonians 1:8.<sup>25</sup> A concise translation would

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<sup>21</sup> James 2 is a biblical example of the connection between faith and deeds.

<sup>22</sup> Glenn N. Davies, *Faith and Obedience in Romans. A Study in Romans 1-4*. (Sheffield: Journal for the Study of the New Testament, 1990), 26, builds on Cranfield 1975:66, who has 7 alternative understandings, when he sums it up in two possible meanings; ‘that which takes *πίστεως* as a genitive of origin and that which takes it as a genitive of apposition.’ He goes on to argue that genitive of apposition ‘fails to do justice either to the immediate context or the distinction Paul makes between faith and obedience in the rest of the epistle.’

<sup>23</sup> KJV 1611.

<sup>24</sup> *ὑπήκουσαν τῷ εὐαγγελίῳ*

be 'to obey the gospel'.<sup>26</sup> In accordance with Paul's understanding of the gospel, neither should this phrase relate to deeds. The gospel, according to Paul, may be best understood as the words already explored; faith and Christ.

Two other places, Paul explains the atonement of Jesus by using the word 'obedience'. When he famously contrasts the one man Adam, who sinned, with the one man Jesus, who didn't sin, he uses the paradigm of obedience-disobedience. 'For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.'<sup>27</sup> The obedience of Jesus lasted until death, on the cross, as Paul says in the letter to the Philippians. 'And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross!'<sup>28</sup> In these two verses, Paul elaborates not on the obedience the disciples should show, but he uses Jesus himself as example on this 'obedience'. Pauline theology emphasizes that Jesus gave his life voluntarily, and in this light the concept of 'obedience' also need to possess a voluntary element.

Abraham, a central figure in both Islam and Christianity, is in the Old Testament given as the prime example on a man obedient to God. 'I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and will give them all these lands, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because Abraham obeyed me and kept my requirements, my commands, my decrees and my laws.'<sup>29</sup> This promise given by God to Isaac focuses on Abraham's obedience as a reason for all the blessings on Isaac and his descendants.

Interestingly enough, when Paul elaborates on Abraham in Romans 4, he doesn't talk about his obedience, but his faith. In Hebrews however, we see Abraham's faith together with his obedience. 'By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going.'<sup>30</sup>

Also Sarah is commended for her obedience, but not obedience to God, but to Abraham. 'For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to make themselves beautiful. They were submissive to their own husbands, like Sarah, who obeyed Abraham and called him her master.'<sup>31</sup>

Then the circle is closed. We started out with obedience in a human context, with the slave-master paradigm as the primary meaning. It seems like when Paul and the other New Testament writers are using obedience in

<sup>25</sup> ὑπακούουσιν τῷ εὐαγγελίῳ

<sup>26</sup> KJV 1611.

<sup>27</sup> Rom. 5:19.

<sup>28</sup> Phil. 2:8.

<sup>29</sup> Gen. 26:4-5.

<sup>30</sup> Heb. 11:8.

<sup>31</sup> 1 Pet. 3:5-6a.

situations when humans are both the sender and the receiver of obedience, the primary meaning should still be applied. However, when they are talking about obedience by and to Jesus and abstract things like faith and the gospel, the term obedience invokes a different, more spiritual meaning. Especially 'faith' and 'obedience' may normally be seen as opposites, like previously quoted from the Quran. This review of the usage of *ὕπακοή* in the New Testament shows on the contrary that they may be seen as two aspects of the same case.

### Christian Understanding of the Concept of Obedience

Comparative to the significance in Islamic traditions, western Christian theology gives little attention and emphasis to the concept of 'obedience. There are some important exceptions, but the general picture is that this is a somewhat neglected theme. But in the following there will be given three different examples where 'obedience' is mentioned in some of the central texts in the western churches.

One phrase in particular has fairly recently gotten a central place in missiology. This is the phrase 'obedience to Christ'. This phrase has become a part of the Lausanne Covenant of 1974. The fourth paragraph, about evangelism, is concluded with the following statement: 'The results of evangelism include obedience to Christ, incorporation into his Church and responsible service in the world.'<sup>32</sup> Also the fifth paragraph about Christian social responsibility includes the same phrase.<sup>33</sup>

A later document from the Lausanne Movement indirectly shows how this has been understood. '[...] the picture of the essentially nominal Christian who does not realise (sic) or accept the need for obedience to Christ as Lord.'<sup>34</sup> Here we see that the phrase 'obedience to Christ' is expanded with the two words 'as Lord'. This is not insignificant. The word 'Lord' has a lot of connotations and a vast usage through the history of the Bible and the church. 'Lord' is one of the most common terms used on Jesus, but it is also one of the names used for God the Creator in the Old Testament. In this sense it goes directly to one of the core understandings of God in Christianity. The obedience gets a direction, at the same time as it gives input to the whole paradigm of God as Lord.

The different Christian monastic rules often consist of at least three promises; obedience towards the superiors, celibacy and a life in material

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<sup>32</sup> *The Lausanne Covenant*, 1974.

<sup>33</sup> '[...] Although reconciliation with other people is not reconciliation with God, nor is social action evangelism, nor is political liberation salvation, nevertheless we affirm that evangelism and socio-political involvement are both part of our Christian duty. For both are necessary expressions of our doctrines of God and man, our love for our neighbour and our obedience to Jesus Christ. [...]' *The Lausanne Covenant*, 1974.

<sup>34</sup> *LOP 8: Christian Witness to Secularized People*. 1980. [URL]

poverty. In this case, obedience is understood relatively close to the original meaning, relating to human life, that the subjects should obey the orders of the superiors.

The sixth article in *Confessio Augustana* is labelled *De Nova Obedientia*, 'Of new obedience'. The first sentence of the article states the following; 'Also they teach that this faith is bound to bring forth good fruits, and that it is necessary to do good works commanded by God, because of God's will, but that we should not rely on those works to merit justification before God.'<sup>35</sup> Obedience to God's commandment is in this case somewhat contrasted with the justification by faith.

These three examples show that the Christian understanding of obedience still are somewhat ambiguous. It seems like the concept of obedience differs between obedience to other human beings, and obedience to God and the spiritual sphere. This may have some similarities with Martin Luther's doctrine of the two kingdoms. God rules the world through two authorities, the secular and the spiritual. The secular kingdom may be compared to the original meaning of obedience, obeying the authorities in their orders. The church itself also has a secular authority in this meaning, as before demonstrated in the monastic rules. The spiritual authority also demands obedience, but this also has some elements of voluntarily willing to obey.

### **A Renewed Understanding of Christian Obedience in an Islamic Context**

As shown in the previous chapters, obedience is a virtue clearly present both in the Quran and the Bible. At first sight it would seem like the concept of obedience is almost the same in Islam and Christianity. Closer examinations show however that the concept of obedience especially in Christianity differs somewhat from the original meaning of the word. Another thing that further complicates an easy comparison is the fact that the Quran and the New Testament have different degrees of possibilities of interpretation. This means that quranic texts may be seen as easy to understand, while the biblical texts may be seen as ambiguous and difficult to understand.

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The Koran has a low tolerance for ambiguity, narrative, enigma; the Bible wallows in it. When one reads the Koran, one knows immediately why there are "Moslem fundamentalists." Yet it is more difficult to understand why there are those who read say, the Gospel of Luke, and find therein "fundamentals". Luke is "thick"; the literature is polyvalent, predominantly

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<sup>35</sup> *Confessio Augustana*. [URL]

narrative, almost never propositional, open to multiple interpretations, defying reductionistic reading.<sup>36</sup>

Can these differences be harmonized in such a way that it gives meaning to talk about a conceptual similarity between Islam and Christianity? Converts between Islam and Christianity are in a unique position to give interesting insights to such conceptual similarities. They can also give testimonies about how this sums up in their daily life. This is important to show that the concept of ‘obedience’ is not just a theoretical similarity, but actually in practice may be used as a functional bridge between Islam and Christianity.

In my masters thesis, with the English title: “‘Of course we have to obey the Bible’”: A qualitative research of how Christian converts from Islam in Turkey view the Bible’,<sup>37</sup> I interviewed eight Turkish converts on questions regarding the Bible. Interestingly enough, many of them focused on ‘obedience’ as a virtue. It seems apparent that this emphasis comes from their Muslim background. One of the informants explained about his understanding of obedience to the Bible.

Do we have to obey the Bible in all it says? Do I have to obey? Well, how can I say? Of course you have to, but I don’t think that you have to obey the rules, the regulations or the law, as religion. When you have The Holy Spirit, then you want to do it, you really want to follow the rules.<sup>38</sup>

Here we clearly see that the informant combines the concept of obedience in Islam and Christianity. When he affirms in an obvious tone, that ‘of course’ we have to obey, it seems almost as a spinal reflex. ‘Obedience’ is the core understanding of being a Muslim, and for a convert this is the closest reference.

But this quote is also interesting because of the development throughout. The informant both accepts and rejects to obey the rules. The Holy Spirit brings some encouragement into the situation. The Holy Spirit helps to wanting to obey. This clearly brings an aspect of voluntarily wanting to obey. As shown, this is also part of the Pauline understanding of obedience regarding the spiritual sphere.

What does Islam say about the voluntary aspect of obeying? This inevitably leads to one of the most quoted verses from the Quran. ‘No compulsion is there in religion.’<sup>39</sup> This verse is often used as an argument defending all the strict regulations found in Islam, especially regarding

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<sup>36</sup> William H. Willimon, ‘Postmodern Preaching. Learning to Love the Thickness of the Text.’, in Erskine Clarke (ed.), *Exilic Preaching. Testimony for Christian Exiles in an Increasingly Hostile Culture*. (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1998), 108-109.

<sup>37</sup> Sødal, ‘Selvsagt må vi adlyde Bibelen’.

<sup>38</sup> Sødal, ‘Selvsagt må vi adlyde Bibelen’, 98, translated from Norwegian.

<sup>39</sup> Koran 2:256.

clothing. Thus there are some hints also in Islam, that 'obedience' may be understood in a more spiritual sense, and not only in the practical sense.

The obviousness displayed by the informants when asking about obedience to the Bible, was striking. Another informant said it like this. 'Yes, one of the most important things is to obey what it says in the Bible. *Why?* If we don't do what it says in the Bible, what is then the point in reading, understanding and knowing? It changes my life, when I do what it says. Changes my thoughts.'<sup>40</sup> Comparing with Islam, it seems as if 'obedience' doesn't seem as the goal itself. 'Obedience' is part of the sanctification of the believers. This emphasis on 'obedience' as a process is further highlighted by another informant.

Do we have to obey the Bible in all it says? Yes, of course we have to, we need to. *Why?* Because we know what is in humanity. Sin came to the world with Adam, who disobeyed God. We see the consequences of sin through the world history. At last we see, the cross of Jesus Christ, how he paid for our sins. Because sin is no game, no children game. It really worries the Lords heart. So we need to obey. But when I say obey; it's not a word-by-word obedience. To understand the meaning with the Bible, it is important with the obeying-process. As an example, if you take the holy law, the Law of Moses, then we can't obey in that sense, but we need to understand the main essence which lies beneath the law. That is what we need to obey. And that is love, actually. It is love.<sup>41</sup>

This quote is also interesting because of the apparent flexibility of the concept of 'obedience'. The obedience should go further than the commandments and by doing so, the commandments themselves are not that essential anymore. This could very well be compared to the Pauline understanding of obedience to Christ, faith and the gospel.

The quote in the beginning of the article links Islam and Christianity in a new way. Through one of the core understanding of being a Muslim, this believer in Jesus finds a new way to identify herself. On the surface this doesn't seem problematic, since both Islamic and Christian theology accepts the concept of obedience. However, it is a clear fact that the direction of the obedience varies between the two religions. In this way, the concept of obedience interacts with the understanding of God in each of the religions. As much as the understanding of God varies, also the concept of obedience and its receiver must vary. Islam understands Allah as the Creator, holy and distant from human beings. Christianity also understands God as the Creator, but he is a God that constantly interacts with his creation and human beings. In the language of 'obedience' this would portray Allah as a distant master demanding submission of his subjects, and the Christian God as the leader who is present among his subjects, and through his presence and nature makes his subjects voluntarily wanting to obey him. This shows that 'obedience' could be used as a starting point to

<sup>40</sup> Sødal. 'Selvsagt må vi adlyde Bibelen', 54, translated from Norwegian.

<sup>41</sup> Sødal. 'Selvsagt må vi adlyde Bibelen', 99, translated from Norwegian.

conversations about differences and similarities on really central topics in both religions.

The missiological term *praeparatio evangelica* may be useful in explaining the possible usage of the conceptual similarity between obedience in Islam and Christianity. This term is explained like this.

When early Christians saw the many parallels between their own new religion and the ancient practices of Mediterranean paganism, they argued that God had already sowed the older cultures with ideas and themes that would grow to fruition once they were interpreted in a fully Christian context. The traditional religions should be seen as *praeparatio(sic) evangelica*, a preparation for the gospel.<sup>42</sup>

*Praeparatio evangelica* is often applied to traditional African religion, and seldom in connection with Islam. The connection with Islam may be somewhat logically problematic, since Islam historically is a younger religion than Christianity. However, present in Islam itself, the concept of obedience may be used as a starting-point of conversation. This question touches the larger discussion of the Quran as an equal to the Old Testament as a preparation for the gospel. Without suggesting anything in that matter, it seems evident that conversations about what it would mean to be 'obedient to God', may very well lead to interesting new insights for both parts.

John Travis<sup>43</sup> has presented us with a scale over contextualized Christian fellowships in a Muslim context. They range from C1, which is a church practically foreign for its context, through degrees of more contextualised churches, to C6, which are believers so embedded in Islam that they have to remain secret for their own safety.<sup>44</sup> Most of the discussion has centered on C5 on this scale, also labelled 'Insider Movement'. One term used by Travis to explain the scale is 'Biblical permissible Islamic/cultural forms'. By this he means forms, traditions and maybe also concepts within Islam, which are also acceptable by Biblical terms. This is a highly contextualized approach which still is trying to keep itself within the boundaries of the Bible. Considering the similarities between Quranic and Biblical

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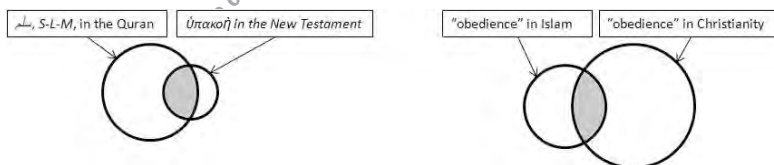
<sup>42</sup> Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 122.

<sup>43</sup> A pseudonym.

<sup>44</sup> The different labels are as following; C1: Traditional Church Using Outsider Language. C2: Traditional Church Using Insider Language. C3: Contextualised Christ-centered Communities Using Insider Language and Religiously Neutral Insider Cultural Forms. C4: Contextualized Christ-centered Communities Using Insider Language and Biblically Permissible Cultural and Islamic Forms. C5: Christ-centered Communities of "Messianic Muslims" Who Have Accepted Jesus as Lord and Savior. C6: Small Christ-centered Communities of Secret/Underground Believers. John Travis, 'The C1 to C6 Spectrum. A Practical Tool for Defining Six Types of "Christcentered Communities" ("C") Found in the Muslim Context', *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, 34:4 (1998), 407-408.

understanding of 'obedience', this should undoubtedly at least be considered as a 'Biblical permissible Islamic concept'. The danger of syncretism is present, but handled properly 'obedience' could prove to be a useful contextual bridge.

'Bridge' as a metaphor has been used throughout this article. The main purpose of a bridge is to link two different places divided by an insurmountable obstacle. In this article the question is whether 'obedience' may be used as such a bridge. Linguistically we have initially dealt with two words on two different languages, which have one area of meaning in common. These two words are each one of the starting points from which the concept of 'obedience' are built in each religion. The present understanding of 'obedience' in each religion, also have one area in common. But as we have seen, they also have different areas which are not in common. As examples given previously, Islam teaches obedience to the human authorities, and Christianity emphasizes voluntariness in the obedience. At first sight, it may seem as the word 'obedience' are the same in the two religions, since both religions use this word. But as this article has demonstrated, this equality is not total, but only partial.



Used carefully, it should be possible to use 'obedience' as a bridge to link Islam and Christianity. The important thing to be aware of, for both sides, is that the concept is overlapping partially, but not totally. The concept must be expanded in each religion to give a full and clear understanding of the concept. From a Christian point of view the area in common may be considered as *praeparatio evangelica*. This area should also undoubtedly be considered Biblical permissible forms.

The four quotations from Christian converts in this article all show a degree of movement in understanding the concept. This may be an indication that many converts are aware of the difference between the Islamic and Christian understanding. With this awareness in mind, the concept of obedience in Islam may be an interesting place to build one pillar supporting the bridge between Islam and Christianity.

## Conclusion

This article has focused on the concept of obedience. As for Islam, the root سَلَم, S-L-M, is part of the core understanding of what a Muslim is. This root سَلَم, S-L-M, may often be translated as someone who submits or obey Allah. Being a Muslim may be summed up in obeying God.



The Greek word *ὕπακοή* is used throughout the New Testament, primarily by Paul. The original meaning is clearly in the human sphere, but Paul uses this word also about the spiritual sphere. Especially the phrase *εἰς ὑπακοὴν πίστεως*, '(something) that leads to obedience of faith', shows the ambiguity in Paul's usage of a practical word as obedience, together with a spiritual word as faith. Obedience is little emphasized in western Christian theology, although obedience is used in some central texts. It is clear that a Christian understanding of the word also has an aspect of voluntarily wanting to obey.

This chapter discussed how the concept of obedience in Islam can be used as a bridge for a Christian understanding of obedience. Quotations from Christian converts from Islam show that the word 'obedience' needs clarification to be understood in a Biblical permissible form in regard to an Islamic context. However, used carefully, it is evident that obedience could serve as a relevant bridge between the two religions. The practical use of this in either dialogue or evangelism is beyond the scope of this article, but should definitively be a subject for further discussions.

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# **THE OSLO COALITION FOR FREEDOM OF RELIGION OR BELIEF: GROUND RULES FOR MISSIONARY ACTIVITIES**

**Ingunn Folkestad Breisteim**

## **Introduction**

How should mission be carried out in a pluralistic society without causing tension and strife? This issue was the background for the Oslo Coalition on Freedom of Religion or Belief<sup>1</sup> as it in 2005 started working with a document on ethical guidelines for missionary activities. The aim of the project was to contribute, on the basis of human rights, to the prevention of conflicts arising from missionary activities. The project also aimed at contributing to increased knowledge among those who carry out missionary activities on what UN conventions and declarations, the UN Human Rights Committee, the European Court of Human Rights and other regional human rights courts and commissions say about missionary activities. Missionary activity has many times and in many places given rise to conflicting views. Some times missionary activities are unduly hindered by state measures. Other times, missionary activities in some cases violate the human rights of the target group.<sup>2</sup>

“Ground Rules for Missionary Activities”<sup>3</sup> was printed and launched in December 2009, after a process of several years which had involved people

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<sup>1</sup> The Oslo Coalition on Freedom of Religion or Belief is an international network of representatives from religious and other life-stance communities, NGOs, international organizations and research institutes that works to advance freedom of religion or belief (FORB) as a common benefit that is accepted and embraced by all religions and persuasions. Drawing on and promoting the internationally accepted human rights standards on FORB, the Coalition works to promote mutual understanding and cooperation between communities of different persuasions and to hinder injustice, intolerance and distrust springing from religious differences. The Oslo Coalition was established by the participants of the Oslo Conference on Freedom of Religion or Belief, which was held in August 1998 on the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

<sup>2</sup> See the Ground Rules and the presentation of the project on the home page of the Oslo Coalition, [www.oslocoalition.org/mhr.php](http://www.oslocoalition.org/mhr.php), 24.5.11.

<sup>3</sup> The document was through most of the process called ‘Codes of Conduct’, but the name was changed to ‘Ground Rules’ in order to underline that the document was

from different religions and world views and from different countries. This article will focus on the process of developing the Ground Rules, and go on to describe and discuss the Ground Rules themselves. The main question of the article will be: What were the main issues discussed in the process of writing the Ground Rules? This question involves several minor questions like: What were the guidelines for the work? Who was involved in the discussions and in the editing process? Which issues were controversial? What is the content of the final Ground Rules? How has the reception of the document been?

### **Guidelines for the Work**

#### *Participants in the process of developing the codes of conducts*

Members of the Oslo Coalition (OC) focusing on issues concerning Missionary Activities and Human Rights started the work towards a Codes of Conduct (CoC) for Missionary Activities in 2005. Whereas other Codes of Conduct often represent one interest group (for example a Missionary Society, a church), or several interest groups (ecumenical CoC involving several churches or two parties), the CoC of the OC was to be developed in a process involving different faiths and world views. Therefore, people from different religions and world views, and from different countries, were invited to take part in the discussions and the development of the Code.

#### *The sources of the international freedom of religion or belief*

The sources of the international freedom of religion or belief are referred to in the final document, as well as in an appendix that has not yet been printed together with the Ground Rules, but are available at the web site of the Oslo Coalition.<sup>4</sup> The most important international legislation on the freedom of religion or belief is article 18 in the United Nation's International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (CCPR) that affirms the right to “manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching”.<sup>5</sup> About 160 states have ratified CCPR, and the freedom of religion or belief has generally a wide recognition. Thus, there are good

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not intended as a list of rules to be followed by all, but to stimulate to internal debate and ethical reflections within networks and organizations, as a help for them to develop their own codes of conduct.

<sup>4</sup> The Appendix 2 is called ‘The Right to Try to Convince the Other: Missionary Activities and Human Rights’, and is written by the lawyer Thom Arne Hellerslia, [www.oslocoalition.org/mhr\\_background\\_eng.php](http://www.oslocoalition.org/mhr_background_eng.php), 24.5.11.

<sup>5</sup> Recommended Ground Rules for Missionary Activities 2009:4, [www.oslocoalition.org/mhr.php](http://www.oslocoalition.org/mhr.php), 24.5.11.

reasons for stating that the basic elements of the freedom of religion or belief as expressed in article 18 are international customary law. This means that the states are legally obliged to respect this freedom, regardless of the ratification status of the different conventions.<sup>6</sup>

Four themes were addressed in connection with the right to freedom of religion or belief: the right to receive information on one's own and others' religions, the right to bear witness to and inform on one's own religion, the right to convert to another religion and the right to not be exposed to unwarranted pressure from missionary activities and humanitarian work.

*The different parties of interest: to whom should the code be directed?*

During the process, several parties of interest were identified: One was the actor of the missionary activity: This may be a single person, a congregation, a missionary society. It may be a foreigner or an inhabitant of the actual state. Another party was the object of the missionary activity: This may be a single person or a group of persons. A third party was the social or/and religious group to which the object is affiliated: This may be his or her family, working place, neighborhood, congregation/organization, ethnic/religious society. A fourth party was the governmental authorities of the state in which the act of missionary activity is performed.

During much of the process, the idea was that the Codes of Conduct was to be written to all of these parties of interest. However, in the end, the Ground Rules focused on two (three) of the groups. Most of the content in the Ground Rules is directed towards the actor of the missionary activities, such as missionary societies, religious groups and missionaries. A smaller part of the Ground Rules is directed towards the object(s) of missionary activities, both individuals and groups. It was decided not to direct the Ground Rules to the authorities, although the Ground Rules recognize that the state is obliged to respect and ensure the right of the individual to have religious freedom. The role of the state is therefore to secure the human rights, and to weigh the different rights and freedoms against each other.

This meant that the Ground Rules were directed towards individuals and groups that were not to be bound by them, but could be inspired by them to make their own Codes of Conduct, and that the document could appeal to "the conscience of faithful people, so that they see their obligation for other faiths".<sup>7</sup> One of the concerns for the Ground Rules is that authorities could hold it against missionary societies, religious organizations and individuals if the authorities can prove that a group or individuals do not stick to the principles developed in the Ground Rules.

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<sup>6</sup> Hellerslia, [www.oslocoalition.org/mhr\\_background\\_eng.php](http://www.oslocoalition.org/mhr_background_eng.php), 24.5.11.

<sup>7</sup> Quotation from Dr. Ataullah Siddiqui, A Muslim Viewpoint, held on a conference discussing a draft of the codes of conduct in November 2008.

*What is meant by “missionary activities”?*

During the work with the CoC and the discussions in the conferences, it became clear that the document should not discuss whether or not missionary activities are right or wrong, or give a thorough explanation of what mission means. In the final Ground Rules, it is simply stated that “by the term “missionary activities” this document understands the *activity of communicating a religion or world view through verbal communication or through various related activities as an invitation to others to adopt the religion or world view*”.<sup>8</sup> The Ground Rules are ethical guidelines to people engaged in missionary work, and to people who are targets/receivers of missionary work. The terms “mission” and “missionary work” were chosen instead of the term “proselytism” or “propagating religion or belief” because these last terms often give negative associations. The concept of “mission” arose in Christian environments, but is now also used as a religious science category.<sup>9</sup>

However, the concept of mission is often linked to Christian mission, whereas other religions use other terms to explain the work of spreading their faith to other people. One of the conferences held during the work with the CoC/Ground Rules, had Mission as its topic, and was focusing on the concept of missionary activity seen from the perspective of different religions. Four articles were written as an appendix to the Code: “What is Islamic Mission?”, “What is Christian Mission?”, “Proselytizing and the Hindu Traditions”, and “What is Buddhist mission?”.<sup>10</sup>

The Ground Rules state that “the right to have or adopt a religion or belief of his choice” (CCPR, article 18) and “the freedom to change his religion or belief” (UDHR, article 18) are the most fundamental of all human rights connected with freedom of religion. The document simply takes for granted that missionary activities (conducted within ethical boundaries) are allowed according to human rights. Therefore, both in the discussions and as expressed in the final draft, it was said that individuals or groups that would not acknowledge people’s right to choose a religion, or change their religion (or keep their religion), were not the targets of the Ground Rules. “Without genuine consensus regarding this point any further discussion on the topic of missionary activities will be flawed from the very beginning”.<sup>11</sup>

However, the main purpose of the Ground Rules was not (only) to state that missionary activities could be conducted with support from human

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<sup>8</sup> ‘Ground Rules’ 2009:3-4.

<sup>9</sup> ‘Ground Rules’ 2009:3.

<sup>10</sup> The Appendix 1 is called ‘The concept of missionary activity seen from the perspective of different religions’, and the articles are written by Nora Eggen, Tormod Engelsen and Tore Laugerud, Knut A. Jacobsen and Egil Lothe. [www.oslocoalition.org/mhr\\_background\\_eng.php](http://www.oslocoalition.org/mhr_background_eng.php), 24.5.11.

<sup>11</sup> Gard Lindseth, Introduction to the international conference in November 2008.

rights, the main issue was to say that missionary activities have to be conducted in a way that must be according to ethical standards respecting people's rights to remain faithful to their religion, or not to have a religion. Therefore, missionary activities may be according to human rights, or they may not be, if conducted in a manner that is inappropriate or violate other people's rights.

### **The Consultative and Editing Process**

In 2006, there were two fact finding missions to Azerbaijan and Sri Lanka. These trips, together with discussions with representatives from minority and majority groups from these two countries, made it visible how difficult it is to make a code of conduct with one set of rules supposed to give guiding principles for different situations in different countries. The contexts in which missionaries operate vary enormously and practices that are acceptable in one context, may be deemed unethical in another.<sup>12</sup>

There were several workshops<sup>13</sup> with participants from Azerbaijan, England, Germany, Greece, India, Jordan, Sri Lanka, Sweden, USA, as well as from Norway. The participants belonged to different religions, Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, and life stance organizations.<sup>14</sup> In addition to the working group within the Oslo Coalition, there was also a reference group connected to the project.<sup>15</sup>

The purpose of the workshops was to facilitate a discussion among academics, missionaries and activists in the field of mission and human rights on how missionary activities relate to the freedom of religion or belief in concrete situations. It was also important to explore whether or how ethical considerations might lead to commonly agreed norms for

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<sup>12</sup> Tormod Engelsen, 'What is Christian Mission?', paper to workshop in June 2007.

<sup>13</sup> The workshops/conferences held during the process were: August/September 2006 with the theme 'Proselytism and Human Rights'; June 2007, 'What is Christian and Muslim mission?'; November 2008, 'Codes of Conduct for Missionary Activities'; June 2009, 'Code of Conducts Strategy Meeting'. All workshops were held in Oslo.

<sup>14</sup> The World Council of Churches (WCC) and the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA) were both involved in the consultation process through Dr. Shanta Premadawahana (WCC) and Dr. Thomas Schirrmacher (WEA).

<sup>15</sup> The working group from the Oslo Coalition consisted of: Guro Almås, Sven Thore Kloster, Egil Lothe, Dag Nygård and Ingunn Folkestad Breistein. As the project started in 2004 (the writing process and the fact finding missions started in 2005), Olav Fykse Tveit from Church of Norway Council on Ecumenical and International Relations had a leading role. Chairpersons were Gard Lindseth (2008-2009), Ingunn Folkestad Breistein (2009-2011). The reference group through the whole process consisted of: Lars Gule, Ernst Harbakk, Thom Arne Hellerslia, Vebjørn Horsfjord, Senaid Koblica, Lena Larsen, Bjørn A. Wegge and Gerd Marie Aadna.

missionary activities. The goal was to make a voluntary code of conduct for missionary activities.<sup>16</sup>

There was agreement that the codes were operating in an ethical rather than legal realm, but different opinions as to whether the codes should address attitudes as well as concrete actions and practices.

### *The issues debated in the workshops*

Which issues were most controversial during the discussions, and which of the issues seemed to be easier for all participants to agree on?

One main theme that came up during the discussions was the supposition of the whole document: whether or not religious freedom as expressed in the human rights conventions was understood as correlating to the different religious views, or seen as contradicting them. It was pointed out that many Muslim countries have made a reservation in the human rights documents which they think are in conflict with the Koran. For example, Article 18 concerning freedom of religion or belief is difficult for these countries. Therefore, an important issue is whether or not Islamic law contradicts the human rights, especially the freedom of religion or belief.<sup>17</sup> However, it was pointed out that the issue of human rights is also about finding language and a rationale within a religion, especially within Islam. One of the Muslim participants said: "I cannot see anything in the human rights that contradict my faith. I see them as a part of Sharia".<sup>18</sup>

How can people belonging to a religion that proclaims to have the only truth, present their message in a pluralistic world without offending other people? This was an issue that came up several times during the discussions. "Mission will always, directly or indirectly, involve critique of the faith one wants people to leave behind. If a person claims that something is the truth, implicitly, other views are false".<sup>19</sup> It was pointed out that the document needed to focus on the individual missionary and his

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<sup>16</sup> See Conference Report from the Workshop on Proselytism and Human Rights, Oslo Coalition for the Freedom of Religion and Belief, Oslo, 31 August to 2 September 2006, [www.oslocoalition.org/mhr.php](http://www.oslocoalition.org/mhr.php), 25.5.11.

<sup>17</sup> Nora Eggen, 'What is Islamic Mission?', June 2007.

<sup>18</sup> Dr. Ataullah Siddiqui, 'A Muslim Viewpoint', November 2008. Dr. Siddiqui also referred to the Chambesy Agreement between Orthodox Christians and Muslims in 1975 which states: "The conference upholds the principle of religious freedom recognizing that the Muslims as well as the Christians must enjoy the full liberty to convince and be convinced, and to practice their faith and order their religious life in accordance with their own religious laws and principles; that the individual is perfectly entitled to maintain his/her religious integrity in obedience of his/her religious principles and in faithfulness to his/her religious identity."

<sup>19</sup> Dr. Tormod Engelsen, 'What is Christian Mission?', June 2007.

or her attitudes and values: “Which behavior and attitudes are permissive for someone who believes he/she has the only truth?”<sup>20</sup>

The Hindu representatives expressed their support for freedom of thought, expression and consciousness, but said that there is no need for conversion: “Conversion would presuppose full knowledge of the old and the new religion and of their social implications... We are against propagating religion. An Indian declaration says that missionary activity may lead to unrest, and that matters of peace, order and moral should take priority. In their eagerness to convert, missionaries often give negative descriptions of the native religion and thus threaten culture, families and social stability”.<sup>21</sup>

One of the issues brought up in the discussions, was genuine sensitivity to cultural differences. The difference between sharing faith and talking about faith, and how this difference is perceived in South-East Asia and Europe, was mentioned. Lack of sensitivity to cultural differences may turn “dialogue” into “monologue”.<sup>22</sup>

Another point in the discussion about cultural sensitivity was that people from the East might understand human rights differently from people in the West. It was pointed out that the freedom of expression should be balanced against freedom of thought. In the Asian culture, the freedom of thought is seen as very important. It is more easily threatened than in other cultures, because the custom of hospitality makes it impossible to ask missionaries who come to people’s homes, to leave the house. In the case of missionary activity, therefore, applying one person’s rights might mean violating the rights of others: “Freedom of expression is problematic if it is to take place without an invitation. Thought processes are very important and involve all senses; the perception of sound, light etc. If I am to think for myself, it is very problematic if someone comes and presents his/her views uninvited. He/she will destroy my process. If someone imparts the wrong views without an invitation, he/she violates my freedom of thought and interfere with our freedom of religion”.<sup>23</sup>

Also, several of the participants coming from western and Christian background, pointed out that the codes of conduct was heavily oriented towards the human rights discourse of the West: “What is needed is a large and diverse effort at reassessing the religious and moral tradition of various cultures to reveal more clearly the convergences between their (non-western cultures) and the concerns enshrined in the human rights discourse.”<sup>24</sup> One of the findings of the workshops was that mission has to be balanced between the right of the individual and the right of the group to control the individual. Positive and negative freedom has to be balanced: in

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<sup>20</sup> Mr. Thom Arne Hellerslia, Discussions during the conference in November 2008.

<sup>21</sup> Dr. Girdhari Lal Bhan, ‘A Hindu Viewpoint’, November 2008.

<sup>22</sup> Dr. Ataulla Siddiqui, ‘A Muslim Viewpoint’, November 2008.

<sup>23</sup> Mr. Manohara De Silva, ‘A Buddhist Viewpoint’, November 2008.

<sup>24</sup> Dr. Dennis Mc Cann, Discussion in the workshop November 2008.



the West, freedom is often defined as “freedom from”, whereas in the East, freedom often is defined as “freedom to”.

Another issue that came up was the relationship between religion and power. Several of the speakers from South-East Asia mentioned the connection between western religion and power, and how the issue of religion always is linked to the issue of power. “The Christian NGO’s, with their financial power, are eyed with great suspicion because their programs of secularization, commercialization and emancipation of women are seen as conscious methods used to “capture” Muslims and others to Christianity. Another complication is that certain actors may pretend to have religious motivations when they are in fact motivated by factors of politics, power and trade.”<sup>25</sup>

Representatives from the Hindu faith were also concerned for the social stability in India, and pointed out that Indian conversions to Christianity often result in social instability and increase social and political division within the country. It was pointed out that the evangelical movement is a global movement and that it views India as containing some of the least reached ethnic groups in the world and therefore as their biggest target. When they do church planting among unreached and disadvantaged peoples, they dismiss eastern philosophical concepts and Vedic systems. The Hindu representatives also pointed out the problematic issue of solidarity organizations supported by state churches: “Highly organized groups of solidarity organizations, such as Care and Church Aid are supported by state churches to do missionary activity. Government funding thus supports missionary activity among these very vulnerable groups. They aim at marginalized people and conduct mass conversions conflicting with Indian laws”.<sup>26</sup>

The issue of vulnerable groups had been taken into the document, but several of the participants meant that the issue of children and missionary activities should be left out of the document. They expressed that they were skeptical of implying that children should be targets for missionary activities.<sup>27</sup>

### **The Content of the Final Document**

In 2009 The Code of Conducts was redrafted in response to the input from the international conference in November 2008. The future of the new edition was discussed at an international editing committee meeting in Oslo on the 18th June 2009, after which it changed form and became the “Missionary Activities and Human Rights: Recommended Ground Rules

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<sup>25</sup> Dr. Ataulh Siddiqui, ‘A Muslim Viewpoint’, November 2008.

<sup>26</sup> Dr. Anuja Prashar, ‘A Hindu Viewpoint’, November 2008.

<sup>27</sup> Mr. Manohara De Silva, ‘A Buddhist Viewpoint’ and Dr. Ataulh Siddiqui, ‘A Muslim Viewpoint’, November 2008.

for Missionary Activities.” This edition was finalized by the Board of Directors in August, and published as a booklet in December.

I will now describe and discuss some of the issues that are treated in the final version of the Ground Rules. The largest part is directed to people or organizations involved in missionary activities, the smallest part is directed to those to whom missionary activities are directed.

*Communicating belief ethically in cross-cultural situations.*<sup>28</sup>

The advice for missionary organizations is that they should “focus on their own religion, and not misrepresent or denigrate the faith of others for the purpose of turning followers away from their religion”. However, it is pointed out that criticism of other religions is not prohibited, but that it should be limited to “well-reasoned, persuasive critique and rational comparison between alternative faiths”. The discussion of how a person or an organization should present what they believe to be true, in a pluralistic world, is expressed in a way that does not advise against truth claims, but advise the missionaries to do this in a way that do not ridicule other faiths: “Making truth claims is inherent in missionary activities, but the presentation of these should take into consideration the feelings of others. Hostility and ridicule are unacceptable, but well-reasoned, persuasive critique should never be so”. Another issue from the discussion is mentioned, the right to privacy. The Ground Rules state that if an organization is propagating religion by door-to-door canvassing (mentioned as a potentially controversial means), it should do so in a way that respect the right to privacy<sup>29</sup>

One of the issues mentioned under this heading, is the issue of contextualization and inculturation: “The missionary organization should be careful in adopting terminology, rituals and customs from other religions, so as not to create misunderstandings about its identity. It should not attempt to achieve acceptance through adopting the outward appearance of other religions”. During the discussions, several of the participants expressed that they were of the opinion that contextualization could lead to conversions that were not a result of free will: “To the question of contextualization, I will say there is a room for that in language, habits, sincerity and commitment. I have no problem with it if it leads to a conversion of willingness”.<sup>30</sup>

The Ground Rules state that “the undertaking of undercover missionary activities is not recommended, and that the laws of a country should be respected. However, when freedom of religion or belief of the target group is seriously violated, such activities should be considered”. This issue has

<sup>28</sup> All quotations in this section are from ‘Ground Rules’ 2009, 5.

<sup>29</sup> All quotations in this section are from ‘Ground Rules’ 2009, 5.

<sup>30</sup> Dr. Ataullah Siddiqui, ‘A Muslim Viewpoint’, November 2008.

been somewhat controversial in the discussions, because some people and religious groups would never want to defend the undertaking of undercover missionary activities, whereas others would defend it in countries where the authorities forbid the presence or presentation of (other) religions. This point tries to combine the main principle of obeying the laws of a country with the principle of opening up to undercover missionary activities if the country does not abide by the human rights standards of religious freedom.

*Communicating belief through education and charity work*<sup>31</sup>

This section treats the issue of missionary activities and educational services as well as missionary activities and charity work. The advice that missionary organizations should not combine charity and preaching in a way that impairs the freedom of the recipients to choose whether or not to listen, and the statement that charity should be given without any explicit or implicit religious obligations upon the part of the recipient, have been widely agreed upon during the process. It is stated in the text that the organizations helping people in vulnerable situations, should assure themselves that any steps taken to adopt the religion of the organization spring from a non-coerced conversion. However, in spite of the agreement of the people involved in the process of making the Ground Rules that missionary organizations should be careful in promising worldly benefits as a result of joining their religion, and not to use education and charity work to convert people, missionary activities involving education and charity work might be the place where it is most difficult to see how what is not intended (charity in exchange for conversion) might still be the result.

*Communicating belief to vulnerable and/or disempowered groups*<sup>32</sup>

This section focuses on children, women, refugees and asylum seekers. As mentioned above, several of the participants in the discussions did not want this issue to be mentioned in the CoC/Ground Rules. However, it is consistent with the idea that the Ground Rules urge people and organizations involved in missionary work to do this in a manner that does not act against human rights, and to be especially careful when it comes to vulnerable groups. The Ground Rules mention the Convention on the Rights of the Child and say that missionary organizations should respect the rights of parents to give their children an upbringing in accordance with their beliefs. They also say that missionary activities “should not be directed at minors without informed, explicit and voluntary consent by the children themselves and their parents/guardians”.

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<sup>31</sup> The text discussed in this section is from ‘Ground Rules’ 2009, 6.

<sup>32</sup> All quotes in this section are from ‘Ground Rules’ 2009, 6-7.

There was a discussion whether or not women should be seen as a disempowered/vulnerable group. The text included gender perspectives, but says that missionary organizations should acknowledge that women *may* be disempowered in many cultures and religions, that is, this is not always the case. The text emphasizes that the missionary organization should recognize the right of the woman to have, adopt or change her belief according to her choice, but also underlines that it is important that the missionary work does not endanger the woman's situation within the family: "Missionary organizations should act with care in cases where they know that there is a danger that a woman will come into conflict with her family (husband/father) if she should choose to convert as a result of their activities".

The third group mentioned in the Ground Rules as vulnerable, is refugees and asylum seekers living in temporary camps. The advice given to the missionary organizations is that they should be aware of the difficulties it might create for an asylum seeker if he or she converts and is returned to his or her home country. Missionary organizations should also reflect on how their message is understood, so "that it is not perceived as a promise of residence permission or other benefits".

*Those to whom missionary activities are directed*<sup>33</sup>

Those to whom missionary activities are directed are called "target groups" in the document. There was a discussion whether they should rather be called "receivers" of missionary activities, but this might imply a positive welcoming of a new religion or belief. Therefore, it was decided to keep the word "target groups". Target groups are asked to recognize the right people have to have or adopt a religion of his/her choice, and the right to change his/her religion or belief.

If a target group considers the means of missionary organizations as unethical, the community members are asked to solve the issue by direct contact with those involved. If this does not work, the community members should bring the problem to the attention of leaders of the missionary organization. The Ground Rules also recommend the establishment of broadly based inter-religious councils. Community members are finally asked to appeal to legal measures if mediation or dialogue with the missionary organization do not lead to satisfactory protection of the rights of the community members to maintain their religion or belief.

The issue of the individuals and the community, to whom missionary activities are directed, also concerns the reactions of the religious structures surrounding the target for missionary activity. During the discussions in the work shops, it was mentioned that the religious group surrounding a convert may present the target with sanction and threats. "This is a form of

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<sup>33</sup> The text discussed in this section is from 'Ground Rules' 2009, 7-8.

*defensive missionary activity* which should also be encompassed by the codes of conduct for missionary activity”.<sup>34</sup> Although this issue was not mentioned explicitly in the final Ground Rules, the challenge of the collective side of the religion has to be considered by the missionary societies as well as by those to whom missionary activities are directed.

### **The Reception of the Ground Rules**

The Ground Rules were launched by the Oslo Coalition in February 2010. They were then presented to, and commented on by some of the people that have been involved in the whole process, including representatives from the Norwegian missionary organizations, and NORME (Norwegian Council for Mission and Evangelization). Also, representatives from World Council of Churches (WCC) and World Evangelical Alliance (WEA) were present, as well as representatives from different religions and life stances.

The feedback from Protestant churches and their mission organizations has been very positive. Many mission organizations have already a Code of Conduct, and they have welcomed the Ground Rules. Many of the participants in the process have pointed out the evangelical and/or charismatic churches as the groups that violate ethical rules for missionary work, but the WEA and other evangelical churches that have commented on the Ground Rules, have agreed to most of their content. They have noted the fact that the Ground Rules acknowledge that missionary activities can be done in accordance with the religious freedom stated in human rights.

From WCC and churches belonging to WCC, the feedback and comments have been that the Ground Rules are an important document. It has, however, been commented that the Eastern Churches do not understand mission in the same way as the Protestant churches some times do. The Orthodox Churches are much more restrictive in regard to intra-religious mission, and within the WCC it has been expressed that the member churches should not try to convert people from one Christian church to another. Many of the Eastern Churches are minorities in Muslim countries, and they do not see missionary work as their main task. In a meeting in Geneva with representatives from the WCC, it was also commented on the impression that the Ground Rules were secular. The WCC and the Roman-Catholic church have been working on a Code of Conduct for several years together with WEA, but this document has not yet been launched.

The advantage of Codes of Conduct written and signed by one or more missionary organizations or churches, is that the signers have agreed to act according to the codes. The advantage of the Ground Rules is that they do not belong to one religion or world view, and that they can be used by inter-religious groups. The Ground Rules might be a useful tool in societies

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<sup>34</sup> Thom Arne Hellerslia, discussions during the conference in November 2008.

where missionary work has created tension, or even better, they might be used to prevent conflicts before they arise. The common ground for the use of the Ground Rules is the acknowledgement that the religious freedom as stated in the Human Rights Conventions both allow missionary activities, but also in some ways limit it. The Ground Rules are grounded on the idea that the human rights conventions should provide the framework for missionary activities<sup>35</sup>, and all who agree to this idea, can therefore use the Ground Rules as a tool for ethical reflection on the issue of missionary activities.

### **Summary**

This article has tried to answer the question of what were the main issues discussed in the process of writing the Ground Rules. The process has involved people from different faiths and different countries. The Ground Rules do not wish to analyze the issue of “mission”, but state that missionary activities are a fact, and that missionary work in itself is consistent with the religious freedom and freedom of expression in the HR. The Ground Rules deal with the problems that might arise from the missionary work, and try to address some ethical guidelines for missionary activities in order to work for peaceful coexistence between people of different faiths. The Ground Rules address the missionaries/missionary organizations, the people whom the missionary work are directed at. During the process, it was decided not to address governments, although they are important because they are supposed to protect the HR of individuals. The idea behind the document is that it could be used as a tool for organizations that want to make their own Code of Conduct, or simply as a tool to reflect upon ethical questions facing those who are involved in missionary activities, or are targets of such work.

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<sup>35</sup> ‘Ground Rules’ 2009, 3.

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# MIGRANT PERSPECTIVES

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**CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES IN  
CONTEMPORARY CONTEXTS:  
A CROSS-CULTURAL CHURCH  
AND MISSION EXPERIENCE  
Adèle Djomo Ngomedje**

I do not recall precisely when I got involved in mission but looking back I suppose it started with the Student Christian Movement in Cameroon where I had the opportunity to work with fellow students, various denominations and organisations. This led to working in Geneva with the World Council of Churches for the organisation of the Conference on World Mission and Evangelism which took place in Athens in 2005. I was one of the delegates representing the World Student Christian Federation at the Edinburgh 2010 Conference. During this time when I lived, worked and studied in three different countries including Cameroon, Switzerland and the United Kingdom I visited or came across in some shape or form a wide range of various constituencies representative of global Christianity as of today.

I am reformed from *Eglise évangélique du Cameroun* (Evangelical Church of Cameroon) but one could argue that my background is more ecumenical than denominational and this would of course have a bearing on this article. I am neither a theologian nor an expert on issues of migration and mission but I would like to offer this reflection as an African Christian in Europe. This has to be put into perspective and viewed as a personal cross-cultural, church and mission narrative. In this vein, if I were to summarise in a few words my whole experience of being away from home or let alone my cross-cultural church and mission experience as a migrant in Europe, it would come down to *hospitality, vulnerability and love*. These words encapsulate the opportunities related to migration but also the challenges of finding oneself in a completely new and different environment.

This paper aims at sharing some insights based on my personal cross-cultural church and mission experience as a migrant from Africa to Europe against the backdrop of Christian Communities in Contemporary Contexts (one of the study themes of Edinburgh 2010). Migrants in mission should endeavour to engage with the local context, learn from cross-cultural missionaries from the Bible with a view to working intentionally towards inclusive ecclesial communities. This could take various forms including the integration of migrants in the host country and the renewal of church

life through fresh expressions of church with the active participation of all involved. Could hospitality, vulnerability and love be lenses through which we see and interpret the experience of migrants including migrant ecclesial communities?

### **To Engage with the Local Context**

While studying at the University of Bradford in England, fellow students could not understand why I went to church on Sundays. They thought it was weird, odd and a waste of time. At first it was hard to comprehend but I was nonetheless determined to try to understand whether such an attitude was prevailing in society at large or just the reaction of some students who could not care less about faith or let alone my involvement with the World Student Christian Federation. As I pondered over the issue I realised how important it is to engage with one's local context when it comes to mission.

#### *Introduction to the context of Europe from a migrant perspective*

Migration has contributed to changing the ecclesial landscape in Europe. In urban areas, mainstream churches and migrant churches can be found side by side. This throws up theological and practical challenges but also opportunities related to specific local contexts. These new ecclesial communities are quite diverse and their make up may reflect multiethnic, multicultural and non-denominational features. Some of these churches belong to traditional church families including Baptists, Methodists, Catholics, Anglicans, Pentecostals, Lutherans and different Orthodox families, whereas others are independent churches, Diaspora churches of national or international mother churches in Africa, Asia or Latin America. Christianity is a migrating religion<sup>1</sup> as Christians move within and across national borders.

Migration in this framework is understood as a movement of people from one place to another, from the country where they are born, or are normally resident, to another country. It can also occur within the same country. Migration is used as a neutral term to encompass both immigration and emigration. People move in various circumstances and for different reasons, and sometimes religion is the only baggage left for some of them when away from home in a foreign land and faced with various challenges.

The Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe through the MIRACLE<sup>2</sup> project (Models of Integration through Religion, Activation

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<sup>1</sup>D. Balia & K. Kim (eds), *Edinburgh 2010: Witnessing to Christ Today* (Oxford: Regnum, 2010), 194.

<sup>2</sup> Bertelli, Olivia & Doris Peschke (eds), *MIRACLE: Models of Integration through Religion, Activation, Cultural Learning and Exchange, Recommendations for Active*

Cultural Learning and Exchange) suggests ten ways of improving the active participation and integration of migrants in churches. These recommendations include the following:

1. Integration as a two-way process based on mutual and equal efforts by migrants and the host society/church.
2. A welcoming attitude.
3. The introduction of intercultural church activities.
4. The improvement of social interaction among members.
5. A reflection on church structures related to aspects and attitudes that influence active participation.
6. Going where the others are.
7. Establishing dialogue on core issues.
8. Addressing conflicts in the church.
9. Creating and improving relations with associations, migrant-led churches and traditional churches for exchanging good practices.
10. Data collection on church participation.

MIRACLE suggests indeed that integration can happen through religion. This is because religion and belief play a crucial role in someone's identity. There are also points of connection between individuals and communities, between migrants and natives. Cultural learning and exchange are fundamental pillars in the integration process. In a church context the integration process can be examined through the relations between migrants and natives in both mainstream churches and migrant churches. Churches can therefore be viewed as bridges between migrants and local communities. Churches have a dual responsibility to encompass both the local and the global in terms of mission.

Nowadays, dynamic witness to Christ is carried out by Diaspora communities spread across the world because people who take the faith from one place to another are more often migrants or refugees than missionaries in the traditional Western sense. This offers new opportunity for fresh expressions of church life and may be promising for the future of Christianity in Europe. However, migrant churches "still have to answer the question as to whether they can carry out a cross-cultural mission which addresses the gospel to the particular context of Europe today"<sup>3</sup>.

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### *Dealing with post-modernity*

To witness to Christ here and now in an effective and credible way would require migrant ecclesial communities to seriously engage with the local context wherever they find themselves. This may involve learning about the

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*Participation of Migrants in Churches*, Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe (Brussels: June 2010).

<sup>3</sup> Kenneth R. Ross, *Edinburgh 2010: Springboard for Mission* (Pasadena: William Carey International University Press, 2009), 56.

people in a context and to immerse oneself into the realities of the host country and the local setting. It would also require among other things some critical analysis of some of the topical issues in a particular context including secularisation, relativity and youth culture. It is worth mentioning at this juncture that the language of demonising or condemnation of fellow human beings is not at all helpful. Mutual acceptance, recognition and equality are vital for any constructive assessment of the prevailing culture.

Kenneth R. Ross puts it clearly in *Edinburgh 2010: New Directions for Church in Mission* that any consideration of “the West as mission field” cannot be complete without tackling the “strength of post-modernity as the prevailing culture”. Post-modernity is a fluid concept characterised by plurality, construction and change<sup>4</sup>. There is a wide range of choices whether cultural, linguistic, political or even religious. The individual is free to choose his/her understanding and way of life out of personal preferences, and reality is always changing.

Post-modernity is thought of as a subjective, relational and dialectical approach to life where identity is liquid and not static. Notions of subjectivity and “conditioned-ness” of experiences and opinions are emphasised whereas concepts of objectivity and universality are frowned upon. One’s context and perspective are crucial in post-modernity because ‘Where you stand depends on where you sit’<sup>5</sup>

Mission in the context of postmodern Europe is challenging in many respects. This challenge may be summarised in the words of Kenneth R. Ross as follows:

Right on the doorstep of the church in Europe today there is a cultural gulf to be crossed, a new language into which to translate the gospel, a new missionary frontier to cross, a new idolatry to combat. It may ultimately be necessary to criticise a postmodern, relativistic, hedonistic culture from a Christian point of view but criticism should not be the first or the only approach to be taken. Just as the nineteenth-century missionaries had to learn, often the hard way, that the societies in which they found themselves were not all bad and that indeed they often had much to teach the missionary, so it will be a surprise if the postmodern Western societies do not possess features that make possible a new revealing, and energizing appropriation of the gospel of Christ.<sup>6</sup>

Post-modernity should be analysed in a critical way bearing in mind that Christ is not tied to a specific culture. The Gospel of Christ can be translated into any culture including post-modernity and any way of thinking. This should be done in a way relevant to the cultural context in question.

In post-modernity, the individual and not God is author of his/her own life and rather than seeking truth outside ourselves, emphasis is given to

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<sup>4</sup> Balia & Kim, *Edinburgh 2010*, 66.

<sup>5</sup> Quoted in Balia & Kim, *Edinburgh 2010*, 66.

<sup>6</sup> Ross, *Edinburgh 2010: Springboard*, 61.

relationships with the other. There is no hope in the future. Christian mission in this respect should account for the postmodern world with both its negative and positive features. This would require some humility in order to let the Bible be the grand narrative through which we see and interpret the world. This is not an easy task because post-modernity is highly suspicious of any grand narrative. As Christians, we are more than aware of the importance of Scriptures in the understanding of our faith and theological reflection. Christians could also build on the hope that comes from Christ and engage confidently with post-modernity.

*Learning from the experience of early missionaries*

Migrant ecclesial communities in Europe could also learn lessons from the experience of Western missionaries in other parts of the world, including Africa, so as not to repeat the same mistakes. Kenneth R Ross uses the analogy of learning a new language in order to communicate the gospel to portray a vivid image of a two-stage process. First of all, there is the frustration phase when and where the missionary is fully aware of his/her inability to communicate in accustomed terms. Secondly, there is the liberating phase when the missionary realises that the new language opens up a wide range of possibilities and new insights into the meaning of the gospel likely to turn received understanding upside down and inside out. He goes on to suggest that to reach the second phase, the missionary has “to enter deeply into the language and culture, to esteem it, to come to love it”. It is only through such experience that the faith will “be commended to the peoples of the West in the new cultural context into which they have entered.” Such a task requires the missionary sense of adventure that enters the vulnerability of a new place with the confidence that the gospel of Christ can be translated into the native idiom.<sup>7</sup>

The significance of the context is crucial when it comes to Christian Communities in Contemporary contexts. Christian ideals of equality, unity and diversity are often challenged in the context because religious, historical, ethnic, political and socio-economic factors interact and affect all people including Christians. The church must embrace these factors and not ignore them. This is because the church irrespective of denominations does not exist in a vacuum but often mirrors its context. A contextual approach relevant to the ‘West’ is fundamental to reach hearts and minds with the understanding that God carries out God’s mission in God’s world. Such an approach could be based on concrete actions on issues related to the equality of women and men, human dignity, respect of people of other faiths and none, dialogue, peace and environmental justice, care for and integrity of God’s creation. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century with the Internet, 24 hour news coverage, the need for preparation or the state of readiness is crucial

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<sup>7</sup>Ross, *Edinburgh 2010: Springboard*, 61.

for anyone involved in God's mission. To learn from cross-cultural missionaries in the Bible could be a starting point.

### **To Learn from Cross-cultural Missionaries in the Bible**

The Bible offers various perspectives of the migrants as partners and co-participants in the mission of God. God uses migrants as active agents in God's mission to the nations. God can choose anyone to carry out God's mission in God's world. Charles Van Engen<sup>8</sup> argues that migrants are agents of God's mission used by God to fulfil God's plans and purposes and invites us to think about the following question:

Can we imagine what God might want to do through the Hispanic/Latino, Korean, African, Filipino, and Chinese diasporas (to name a few) now spread all over the earth if we were to view them as agents of God's mission in the re-evangelization of North America, Europe, the Middle East and the globe?<sup>9</sup>

Cross-cultural missionaries in the Bible undertook their tasks in remarkable ways; they were immigrants, strangers, and aliens away from their homeland. God used migration in order to equip these cross-cultural missionaries in preparation for their participation in God's mission. In the process, they adapted and did not assimilate with the host culture and were used as agents of God's mission. They include among other characters Joseph, Moses, Daniel, Esther and Jesus himself throughout his earthly ministry.

Some of the salient features at various stages and not necessarily in a linear way characterising the lives of cross-missionaries in the Bible include hospitality, vulnerability and love. They love God above all and experience vulnerability for the sake of God whom they served, which in turn prompted them to give and receive hospitality as a way of fulfilling an imperative and of responding to God's love.

Joseph sold into slavery and forced to become an immigrant adapted quite well to the culture of the host country. As an immigrant he was sent away to save his family, Egypt and the surrounding people from famine. His own brothers could not even recognise him when he speaks to them in Genesis 45:4-8, 50:19-21.

Then Joseph said to his brothers, 'Come closer to me.' And they came closer. He said, 'I am your brother Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. And now do not be distressed, or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life. For the famine has been in the land these two years; and there are five more years in which there will be neither ploughing nor harvest. God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. So it was not you who

<sup>8</sup> Charles Van Engen, 'Biblical Perspectives on the Role of Immigrants in God's Mission', *Evangelical Review of Theology* 34:1 (January 2010), 29-43.

<sup>9</sup> Van Engen, 'Biblical Perspectives', 37.

sent me here, but God; he has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt...But Joseph said to them, 'Do not be afraid! Am I in the place of God? Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good, in order to preserve a numerous people, as he is doing today. So have no fear; I myself will provide for you and your little ones.' In this way he reassured them, speaking kindly to them.

As a slave Joseph found himself in a vulnerable position. From this position of vulnerability he went on to become one of the most important figures in Egypt. This allowed him to offer hospitality to his siblings and extended family during the famine because he loved them irrespective of the past.

Moses was raised in a bicultural and bilingual environment (Aramaic and Egyptian)<sup>10</sup> and had to spend forty years as an immigrant among the Midianites in order to be trained for survival in the desert and shaped as a well-rounded person ahead of his leadership role. He describes himself as an immigrant and stranger in Exodus 18:1-3

Jethro, the priest of Midian, Moses' father-in-law, heard of all that God had done for Moses and for his people Israel, how the Lord had brought Israel out of Egypt. After Moses had sent away his wife Zipporah, his father-in-law Jethro took her back along with her two sons. The name of one was Gershom for he said, 'I have been an alien in a foreign land'

From being a powerful member of Pharaoh's household to becoming a shepherd in a foreign land, he experiences vulnerability in his exile. It takes a certain degree of commitment to God, a deep sense of duty of care on behalf of God's people or simply God's love, to go back to Egypt in order to contribute to the fulfilment of God's promise of liberation.

Daniel was another cross-cultural missionary. In his missional role in Babylon, he worked as an administrator although he was sent against his will to a strange land. He devoted his life to serving as counsellor and friend of the kings of Babylon and Persia even though he was a foreigner and an exiled prisoner cast into the dens of lions as described in Daniel 6. He uses his skills, his competencies, his abilities, and his willingness to serve in order to contribute to the host community. He illustrates the example of how migrants should not withhold what they know but share it with the host community in an attempt to be a part of it.

Paul during his various missionary journeys described in the book of Acts was welcomed in some places and then driven out because of hostility towards his message. He suffered persecution, received death threats, was deprived of freedom and died as a martyr. As he travelled from place to place he received hospitality and experienced vulnerability for the sake of God's love.

Charles Van Engen emphasises that the church is a pilgrim community of immigrants. As such Christians should strive to fully understand and live

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<sup>10</sup> Van Engen, 'Biblical Perspectives', 38.



out the Bible's missiological and instrumental perspectives relating to the immigrant and stranger as expressed in the missionary vision in I Peter 2:9-12

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. Beloved, I urge you as aliens and exiles to abstain from the desires of the flesh that wage war against the soul. Conduct yourselves honourably among the Gentiles, so that, though they malign you as evildoers, they may see your honourable deeds and glorify God when he comes to judge.

From the Old Testament to the New Testament, God uses God's people irrespective of their background to carry out God's mission to the world as God's agents working within God's structures. So it should not be any surprise if the same pattern continues to happen. God's church is both local and global in its very nature and is made up of people of all tribes and languages.

As migrants endeavour to fulfil God's mission, they should intentionally strive to work towards inclusive ecclesial communities with a view to working collectively with local people. Building such communities would require that we further explore and deepen our biblical and theological understanding of hospitality, vulnerability and love with regard to mission and migration. Could the parable of the Good Samaritan inspire us as we read the story anew in the light of hospitality, vulnerability and love?

### **Hospitality**

For Christians, it is a gospel imperative to practise hospitality. Jesus portrays hospitality and care for strangers in relation to the Last Judgement in Matthew 25: 35 – 36<sup>11</sup>. Hospitality is often understood as welcoming and providing help, assistance and shelter to those in need. Throughout the Old Testament, God's people are reminded to treat the stranger and alien with care and compassion because they were once in a foreign land. This is portrayed in Exodus 20:2<sup>12</sup>, Deuteronomy 10: 17-19<sup>13</sup>, Leviticus 19:33-34<sup>14</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> NRSV Mt. 25:35-36, "For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me."

<sup>12</sup> Ex. 20:2, "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery."

<sup>13</sup> Dt. 10: 17-19, "For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who is not partial and takes no bribe, who executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and who loves the strangers, providing them

In the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10: 25-37), the responsibility to care for others does not depend on ethnic, cultural or religious background. Regardless of colour or creed, or class or ethnicity Christians should treat their fellow human beings with respect and friendliness. They should welcome people with humility, which for some is actually easier said than done. God in Christ meets human beings with openness and hospitality without any requirements or conditions. This is about human dignity in the household of God.

Hospitality also involves the recognition of the worth of other people including their equal value and human dignity. It shows our response to God's love who welcomes us unconditionally and called us to do the same. The hospitality of friendship and fellowship is more costly than the hospitality of food, shelter, and clothes. This is our challenge as Christians as we work towards the unity of the body of Christ. Is God calling us to rethink the way we have always practised hospitality and step up in a new and completely different direction?

At its very core hospitality requires us to confront our own prejudices, opinions and subjections and ultimately place them to one side if we wish to be truly hospitable. It is the generous and human act of treating those we do not possibly know or trust to any great lengths, with respect, kindness and openness. With this definition of hospitality there is however sometimes a contrasting response between the need to provide hospitality and the suspicion of strangers. This suspicion can be of a hostile type but usually it is a benign suspicion submerged in a subconscious mistrust for those that we do not yet know. These conflicting points of view can be resolved by understanding the Christian need to overcome suspicion with hospitality, as highlighted in Hebrews 13: 2-3<sup>15</sup>.

Moreover, hospitality can be the perfect antidote for suspicion. Hospitality provided in its true essence shows openness, tolerance and transparency in equal measure that allow for suspicion and doubt to be removed. Hospitality is the traditional way for people to respect each other even when they know nothing else about one another. Hospitality removes the constraints that suspicion and mistrust can muster in people, in a positive way. The act of being hospitable goes to great lengths in allowing people from different backgrounds and different cultures to relate with each

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with food and clothing. You shall also love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.”

<sup>14</sup> Lev. 19:33-34, “When an alien resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress the alien. The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God.”

<sup>15</sup> Heb. 13: 2-3, “Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it. Remember those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them; those who are being tortured, as though you yourselves were being tortured.”

other. In religious settings, such as Sunday worship within any church, the environment should be one of hospitality to all, strangers and regular worshippers alike, based on a welcoming and friendly atmosphere of openness and kindness. Hospitality in essence is about the goodness in human beings, the want and ability to show unconditional warmth and kindness to others regardless of their background.

In the era of migration and mission, we need to rethink our priorities and reshape our churches and structures in order to welcome those who are different from us. This happens when the guest does no longer consider themselves a stranger but as equal to the host. A new form of relationship has to be formed to better articulate this new situation. The depth and intensity of our hospitality will determine our faithfulness in responding to God's call to care for the migrant and stranger in the light of the two most important commandments according to which we are encouraged to love God with all our heart, soul, strength and mind and love our neighbour as ourselves.

Churches throughout Europe are committed to hospitality and have responded differently to welcoming migrants. There is no one approach that could be applied to all contexts. Some denominations have offered their buildings for worship to migrant churches. Others have provided humanitarian assistance to individual members. In Italy for instance, the Waldensian Church has more African members than Italian ones as a result of a deliberate decision by the church to welcome migrants and to be transformed in the process. In the United Kingdom, Ghanaian ministers<sup>16</sup> within Methodist churches are chaplains to Ghanaian fellowships for monthly services while Ghanaians worship in mainstream Methodist churches for the rest of the time.

Hospitality with regard to welcoming and integrating migrants in the host church requires the willingness to accept the contributions of migrants to change and to shape the church into a community that caters for all in a meaningful way. In practice, it can be quite challenging. This is because churches who seek to open themselves to people of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds often find the process to be more difficult than anticipated. Migrants bring with them different theological traditions, different liturgies that may enrich churches but also divide them. This could be due among other things to the fact that

Christian migrants from the South tend to be more socially conservative and more evangelical than the mainline churches in the North. They often gravitate towards evangelical and Pentecostal churches in the North, thus strengthening the more conservative evangelical churches and, at least indirectly, weakening certain ecumenical initiatives.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> 'Report on Theme 7' in Balia & Kim, *Edinburgh 2010*, 191.

<sup>17</sup> S. Kobia, 'Global Migration and New Ecclesial Realities', address by WCC General Secretary, Cardiff: 25 April 2007.

Hospitality requires openness and willingness to welcome strangers as God has welcomed us in God's household. This can be a challenging process as both the host and guest strive to form a balanced relationship. The joy and pain of hospitality go hand in hand. When people receive another person, they open themselves up to criticism because the other can easily see their faults, inadequacies and limitations. This could give rise to misunderstanding and potential conflict. Being open to welcome migrants and strangers exposes oneself to a certain degree of vulnerability. People are vulnerable in various ways depending on personal circumstances and other factors.

### **Vulnerability**

In contrast to the confidence that can be generated by hospitality are the apprehensiveness and fear that are bred by vulnerability. Vulnerability is possibly the one emotion that identifies the exposure of a person at his/her most fearful yet honest. It is what makes us human and remind us that we need other people around us. Where hospitality could be about the removal of prejudice to provide love and care for others, vulnerability can instead breed fear and worry about surrounding prejudice in life and the self-opinions of others. People do not like feeling vulnerable because regardless of the reasons, for it human beings would rather prefer to be in control. Hospitality and vulnerability are therefore very closely linked as to how one can contest with the other.

Vulnerability and hospitality are more closely related and more complexly linked than may be first assumed although each may be at opposing ends. The former at its most exposed is the human want and distressing need for hospitality to be shown as a potential solution to loneliness and suffering. The latter is about caring for and understanding those who are vulnerable. Vulnerability could be discovered in the process of hospitality when the host realises that he/she can learn from the guest and sees in them a reflection of their own imperfections. Such a mutual recognition of our shared vulnerability gives us a level playing field as we interact with one another. This is not a weakness of the human character because it shows the core wants and needs of a person or even a community. These wants and needs are based on the human connection with others. The interconnectedness of the human family is at the heart of vulnerability. It illustrates our need for God and our interdependence and interconnectedness. God did create human beings to relate to one another and be interdependent in good and bad times.

Vulnerability is part and parcel of our lives as human beings. When we acknowledge our mutual vulnerability, we recognise the need for mutual responsibility. To be human is to be vulnerable and the human face is all

the more beautiful when vulnerability marks its features<sup>18</sup>. It is an indispensable prerequisite for fellowship and interdependence and for rejoicing together and extending hospitality. Acknowledging this is also relevant when meeting refugees. Vulnerability reveals a basic interdependence and dependence of all God's people

Furthermore, vulnerability and hospitality could also be illustrated as a "give and receive" relationship where the host and guest are in interchangeable positions. Here strength and vulnerability are associated with how people respond if they were to identify themselves with the other. This could lead to fairer and just relationships as we rely on one another and recognise the need to work in networks and partnerships while supporting each other in mission.

Migration, whether undertaken individually or collectively, can be a lonely experience. This loneliness is a form of vulnerability which calls for the warmth of hospitality. A migrant in a different country enveloped in a new culture can easily feel vulnerable. Migrant ecclesial communities are also vulnerable<sup>19</sup>. This vulnerability could be due to the fact that they are away from home in mission in a foreign land with little or no resources at all. They may not be well acquainted with the workings of the host society. They are constantly adapting themselves and their mission to new situations and they provide insights into intercultural theology. They may lack the confidence to engage in conversation with mainstream churches. How do we explore and rediscover the meaning of vulnerability in Christ in the process of working towards inclusive ecclesial communities?

Vulnerability could be viewed as a metaphor for the meaning of the cross. God became flesh, shared in our vulnerability and identifies with the poor and marginalised. God's mission is undertaken from a position of weakness. Missionaries make themselves vulnerable by working in unfamiliar situations and sometimes accepting insecurity and material poverty. The church must identify with the poor as they participate in the vulnerable mission of God. Kenneth R. Ross observes that:

Those accustomed to living with vulnerability have little to lose and are often ready to take risks and be open to others in a way which would not come easily to those who are used to power and privilege. They also have a motivation, which could easily elude their more comfortable fellow Christians, to work with God for transformation. They are sensitive to the death-dealing forces, structures and systems which threaten human flourishing. Their prayer for the kingdom of God to come has a depth and potency which is rarely found among the prosperous. The poor therefore have a leading role in the mission of God in the world today. The task of the rest of

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<sup>18</sup> World Council of Churches, Commission on Faith and Order, *Realising Mutuality and Interdependence in a World of Diverse Identities*, Theological Consultation, Oslo, Norway, 27-30 April 2005.

<sup>19</sup> Balia & Kim, *Edinburgh 2010*, 194.

the church is to identify with the poor as they participate in the vulnerable mission of God.<sup>20</sup>

Moreover, there is a certain degree of vulnerability which comes from losing one's position of privilege. While the mainstream churches in Europe are struggling with decreased membership, financial difficulties and sometimes with a grave identity crisis<sup>21</sup> vibrant African, Asian and Latin-American congregations are emerging in urban areas. Mainstream churches, despite their resources and privileges, are also vulnerable in their own way. This aspect of vulnerability has to be taken into consideration when it comes to mission in this context. Another way of expressing such a type of vulnerability is summarised as follows:

A deep challenge for European churches is that they have been accustomed to being "in control" of the Christian message and its expression in church life. The opportunity to go into learning mode and discover from the experience of others new ways of understanding, experiencing and communicating the gospel is not easily grasped.<sup>22</sup>

Vulnerability has to do with emptying oneself for the sake of God and not for purposes of exploitation. Those who are truly vulnerable can be exploited and forced into being subversive to others. Those who are vulnerable are at their most exposed state and are at a high risk of being treated unfairly and even inhumanly by others. Vulnerability is a fact of being human and arguably affects every living person at some stage of their life.

Indeed God became a human being in Jesus Christ and was a refugee in his childhood according to the account of Matthew 2. Jesus experienced the pain and suffering that human beings experience. He also went through trials and temptations. Jesus met the outcasts and the weak with a love that emphasised their value and raised them up to new life. In those who are persecuted and vulnerable, we recognise our own vulnerability and God draws near to us.

Churches are encouraged to choose vulnerability and follow in the footsteps of Christ. Expression of solidarity in vulnerability among Christians is crucial to establish partnership between mainstream and migrant churches. This holds the potential for cross-cultural mission with all God's people, including those who are impoverished, marginalised and disempowered.

Furthermore, Jesus himself showed us how to be vulnerable as he gave himself up as redemption for all of our sins. With this action he displayed how complete the relationship between vulnerability and being a Christian should be. Vulnerability can be overcome when human beings care for one

<sup>20</sup> Kenneth R. Ross, *Edinburgh 2010: New Directions for Church in Mission* (Pasadena: William Carey International University Press, 2010), 12.

<sup>21</sup> Balia & Kim, *Edinburgh 2010*, 206.

<sup>22</sup> Ross, *Edinburgh 2010: Springboard*, 59.

another. This humanisation is experienced in one's ability to love and to be responsible towards our neighbour and God's creation.

### **Love**

God is Love and love covers a multitude of sins. Human beings including Christians are not perfect. We all have strengths and weaknesses and it is not often easy for Christians from different traditions to work together. It is only through God's love that we can overcome our differences and support each other as we witness to Christ. Once we welcome one another with love in the spirit of hospitality and vulnerability, we could tackle theological and ecclesiological differences and engage in constructive dialogue on issues such as the unity of the body of Christ and environmental justice.

Love can be about caring for others who are close, to trust and look out for those that are important in life. It could also be associated with what one enjoys doing in life as a result of one's faith. Love may be overused in the way it is broadly displayed or spoken about in everyday life by many people, however, its emotional and social influence should never be understated. Community love is associated with the willingness to show care and attention to others, an unconditional choice by one person to love another within a social setting.

Love with respect to hospitality and vulnerability could be the foundation of a balanced relationship between the host and the guest. A sense of community love encourages hospitality and drives the willingness to translate it into actions. This allows the host to demonstrate his/her intentions and actions without being self-righteous or condescending towards the guest. Hospitality is often a manifestation of Christian love which in turn allows those at the receiving end of hospitality not to be overwhelmed by the sense of gratitude they owe their host or simply disempowered up to the point of becoming dependent on other people. This may happen when hospitality is exploited in the name of vulnerability.

This link between love and hospitality is what makes the relationship between the host and the guest so genuine and considerate. The host may be motivated in his/her act of hospitality by the fact that it is a blessing to give rather than to receive, although it is worth mentioning that some people are more comfortable as hosts rather than guests. For the stranger it is the feeling of joy and goodness that comes from this real expression of community love which reflects their appreciation of the hospitality.

The connection between community love and vulnerability is about the empathy that exists between the two. Community love uncovers the purity and innocence of vulnerability. It is also a response to the psychological and emotional pressure associated with being a migrant. Community love can be used to connect with and draw out the negative aspects of vulnerability. In many instances of vulnerability it is the isolation and

loneliness that really keep people down. It is under these conditions that community love can be used to reach out to the vulnerable and potentially change their situation for the better.

What does it mean to love our neighbour as ourselves, just like Christ loved us and died for us, in the context of migrant ecclesial communities? What can we learn from the parable of the Good Samaritan when it comes to mission and migration? Would Christian love be strong enough for local and migrant Christians to contribute together to the renewal of fresh expressions of church life?

The translation of God's love in concrete actions would enable us to break down the barrier of race and ethnicity which sometimes makes it difficult for Christians "to strike up a positive relationship"<sup>23</sup> when the migrant church encounters the long-established local church. This is also exemplified by the fact that people often prefer to worship with those who share their background and ethnicity rather than serving the "same Lord" together as part of the Body of Christ. Race and ethnicity including culture could be stepping stones or crippling factors to the unity of the Church. Some people are more willing than others to be open to those from a different background.

Advocacy for the rights and human dignity of migrants is another illustration of a concrete manifestation of love. This is because a community of believers cannot be conceived without the sharing of love, in Christ's way and in specific ways according to the needs of each cultural and social context<sup>24</sup>. This means we have to be open to one another and treat each other as equals. Everyone is created in God's image and churches should endeavour to uphold the human rights of migrants as fellow sisters and brothers in Christ.

God's church is a coat of many colours and a rainbow representing all God's people from all walks of life and from all over the world. As Milton Acosta suggests:

We are called to believe in word and in deed that the kingdom of God is multiethnic and multicultural. As we cross human borders we evidence the presence of Christ in us. If culture is the podium on which we stand to judge and despise others, Christ invites us to get down, to be like him. Let us all get out of our circle, find our Syrophoenician and live out the gospel. The inclusion of all people in our hearts, in our theology and in our praxis is an essential element of the gospel throughout the Bible. In terms of our mission today, we need to cross borders towards those who speak another language and towards those who speak with a 'theological accent'. The first step might be just to talk.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Ross, *Edinburgh 2010: New Directions*, 95.

<sup>24</sup> Balia & Kim, *Edinburgh 2010*, 209.

<sup>25</sup> Milton Acosta, 'Ethnicity and the People of God', *Evangelical Review of Theology*, 34:1 (January 2010), 70.



The potential for cross-cultural mission lies in talking to one another and not about each other. In doing so, some insights could be gained from the social sciences field of cross-cultural communication. It is a challenge to all God's people to find new ways to build inclusive ecclesial communities, bringing together migrants and local members with a common faith in Christ as the binding element. This is an opportunity to share and learn from one another and to further explore cultural and theological differences as resources and not tools for conflict in cross-cultural communities.

### **Conclusion**

To work towards inclusive ecclesial communities would require us to live out hospitality, to open ourselves to vulnerability and to love our neighbour as we love ourselves. Hospitality gives us the opportunity to express God's love and show kindness to strangers while at the same time leaving us open to the unknown and unexpected. In this process we discover ourselves in the other in the form of vulnerability. This allows us to grow together in God's love. Hospitality, vulnerability and love lie together when it comes to mission and migration.

Mission and migration interlink with hospitality, vulnerability and love in implicit ways in relation to contemporary global Christianity. Mission for migrants requires hospitality to allow them to feel welcome within their new Christian environments. The vulnerability they may feel from being migrants on a global mission may show them as humble and honest to their hosts allowing a mutual connection of love to develop. This mutual connection of love is only possible however if the Christian hosts are willing to show unconditional hospitality to their Christian migrant neighbours. In reciprocal response to this the Christian migrants must be able to display their vulnerabilities in an open and honest way.

When these levels of hospitality and vulnerability are displayed with mutual love, the whole concept of Christian host and Christian migrant working in mission together becomes more identifiable. The success of mission and migration in this setting is not of course guaranteed because people from various nations and cultures are involved. The range of understanding needed and the amount of different personalities involved can alone suggest that this task is not a simple one. The success of mission and migration enveloped by hospitality, vulnerability and love requires hard work and a common acceptance of what true Christianity means in the contemporary global world.

Migrants challenge churches to be open and inclusive of the diversity which is characteristic of the unity of body of Christ as expressed in I Corinthians 12: 18-19, 24b-26.<sup>26</sup>We did not choose God but God chose us

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<sup>26</sup> I Cor. 12: 18-19, 24b-26, "But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body

first and loves us. We are bound together in Christ because invisible unity as the work of God already exists. Visible unity is yet to be fulfilled as Christians who live in love and in spite of differences are committed to participate in God's mission. Just like the Good Samaritan, we are called to love not only with words but with deeds.

As migrant ecclesial communities participate in God's mission, they should endeavour to engage with the local context wherever they are, learn from cross-cultural missionaries in the Bible and work toward inclusive ecclesial communities. Such inclusive ecclesial communities would reflect the perfect image of the body of Christ. A body made up of God's people equal in rights and duties, endowed with various gifts and witnessing to the sacrificial love of Christ wherever they are. *Missio Dei* is God's cross-cultural mission because the whole world and its fullness belong to God.

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be? ... But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honour to the inferior member, that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together with it."

# **GOD'S TRANSFORMING MISSION AND NORWEGIAN CHURCHES AND MISSION ORGANIZATIONS: SOME OBSERVATIONS FROM A MIGRANT PERSPECTIVE**

**Lemma Desta**

## **Introduction**

This article has grown out of a brief presentation I made at the Norwegian celebration of the centennial of Edinburg 1910. The celebration took place in the form of a conference in Oslo in September 2010. The remarks are based on observation of Norwegian mission work in the 'mission field' as well as observations of Norwegian churches in the home context in Norway. I have been acquainted with Norwegian missions in Ethiopia in cooperation with the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY). I have also been privileged to have lived in Norway for eight years and have observed Norwegian Churches in their home context.

The 1910 World Missionary Conference or Edinburgh Missionary Conference convened to draft strategies for reaching the non-Christian world of that time with the gospel of Jesus. In 2010 we celebrated the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary in Oslo. While we celebrated, we also had an opportunity to look at that historic event in a new light. Such retrospective observation may contribute to a deeper understanding and appreciation of the developments in the course of the last century. It also gave us a prospect for assessing the current reality of mission and churches. The evaluation of the past and assessing the current will help us sketch the direction for the future.

Between Edinburg 1910 and Oslo 2010, there are two interrelated, yet also distinct contexts with respective realities, understanding and practice of mission. We therefore need a conceptual tool to analyze missions and churches; the priorities, activities and results. The concept of "paradigm" might help to envisage the understanding and practices of mission and Church in Edinburg 1910 and now. Paradigm theory originates from the work of physicist and science historian Thomas Kuhn. It was used as an analytical tool for understanding history of Christianity by Hans Küng and also for explaining shifts in mission theology by David Bosch. Paradigm is about theoretical or philosophical framework to explain theory, laws or generalizations. But when an existing paradigm fails to give adequate answers, crisis occurs. It calls for a shift of paradigm. Paradigm shift is

therefore about the insufficiency of an existing explanation and search for a new approach. The theory of paradigm shift has made significant impact. It is considered to “have a particular relevance in our time since, in virtually all disciplines, there is growing awareness that we live in an era of change from one way of understanding reality to another.”<sup>1</sup> According to Bosch, between Edinburgh 1910 and now, the contextual framework of mission has shifted from a modern enlightenment paradigm to the emerging post-modern paradigm.

In this article I want to employ paradigm shift theory in an attempt to understand Norwegian missions and churches in Edinburgh 1910 and now. The article will first assess the missionary paradigm emerging from Edinburgh 1910 and how that impacted Norwegian missions and churches by sustaining the classical understanding of mission. The second part deals with the emerging post-modern missionary paradigm of today. The later part will attempt to highlight some opportunities and challenges for mission and churches of Norway in light of the new missionary context and paradigm.

### **Edinburgh 1910, Western Missionary Enterprise and Norwegian Mission**

Edinburgh 1910 was a significant event for Christian history in general and for missionary work in particular. Its importance lies in the fact that the event served as the background for both modern ecumenical and missionary movements. It rightly enjoys the status of being the most important event behind the missionary endeavors of the 20th century which resulted in an explosive expansion of Christianity. Before we address the mission paradigm of Edinburgh 1910 and Norwegian missions, we need to briefly look at the event itself. There are many general and specific questions that could be raised. How did the Edinburgh 1910 World Missionary Conference come about? Who organized it? Who were the participants? What were the themes in focus? In what kind of geo-political context did the conference convene? With regard to Norwegian participation in the conference there are some basic questions to be answered. Who constituted the Norwegian delegation? How did Edinburgh 1910 affect Norwegian mission?

The scope of this article does not allow us to answer all these questions, but there are a few general points worth addressing. Edinburgh 1910 was a grand event that drew 1200 delegates from the powerful world of that time. It had a vision of carrying the gospel to the entire non-Christian world. The theme of the conference eventually became “the evangelization of the world in this generation.” The conference was a result of a long process

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<sup>1</sup> David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (New York: Orbis Books, 1991), 185.

which is some times traced back to the 18<sup>th</sup> century. But the detailed planning began in the course of the decades before the conference. Looking closely at the list of the official delegates, we discover that 500 of them were from the USA, 500 from Great Britain, 170 from the rest of Europe; 26 delegates from the Colonies and four delegates from the “new churches” of Asia. Latin America was not represented, since it was considered a Catholic continent. Africa was also not represented unless we count the presence of an African who happened to be studying in Edinburgh.

In retrospect, it is evident that Edinburgh 1910 was a missionary conference where ambitious men from the Protestant world (of Europe and America) gathered to discuss how to reach the rest of the world. It drew a delegation with missionary expertise. The commission reports exhibit a thorough analysis of missionary challenges and strategies. The planning and realization of the conference exhibited strong mission spirituality accompanied by prayer and Word of God. Reading the commission reports, one senses bold theological convictions and rhetoric of world mission. Today, informed by a post-modern world view, we may look at the Edinburgh 1910 conference critically. Despite its grandeur, Edinburgh 1910 suffered some deficiencies or “historical limitations” as Kenneth Ross<sup>2</sup> calls it. The most significant of them was the mission understanding itself: Christian mission conceived as territorial expansion of the Church or in terms of Christendom.<sup>3</sup> In the background we find the geo-political context shaping this development. The epoch, being the era of nationalism and colonialism, affected Christian missions by providing a Christendom model for mission work. Christian mission was thus, receiving political justification and support. Alliances between ecclesiastical and political powers were obvious. The Edinburgh conference received “recognition from civil authorities with George V of Britain, the German colonial office, and Theodore Roosevelt, former president of USA.”<sup>4</sup>

Mission, in this context, regarded as part and parcel of extending the supposed universally suitable culture of the civilized world. This impact of the cultural context can also be exhibited from the triumphalist language of the conference.<sup>5</sup> Seen in the wider framework, it is a bare fact that Protestant (and Catholic) missionary endeavor (since the Middle Ages) in many regards suffered the consequences of political ideologies. The understanding of mission in reference to people of other cultures carries an overtone of imperialism. A significant limitation of Edinburgh 1910 conference in this aspect is the view of people from the African continent. There was neither indigenous black African Christian representation (except for an African already living in Edinburgh) nor was there a discussion about their absence. Stanley suggests many factors to explain

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<sup>2</sup> Kenneth R. Ross, ‘Edinburgh 1910 – Its Place in History’, manuscript 5, 2009.

<sup>3</sup> Walls 2002, Ross 2009, and Stanley 2009.

<sup>4</sup> Kenneth R. Ross, ‘Edinburgh 1910 – Its Place in History’, manuscript 5, 2009.

<sup>5</sup> Bosch 1991, Walls 1996, 2002, Ross 2009.

the absence. He suspects the view of Africans among the planners and other factors such as education. Writing about the planners view of Africans, Stanley comments

No indigenous black African Christian was originally deemed worthy of an invitation to Edinburgh. If the African Churches were deemed to be insufficiently "advanced" to merit their own representatives, it was not simply because these churches were young in years, but also because their members were thought to be starting from much further back in the process of human development than were Christian converts in Asia. The inhabitants of the African continent were still in 1910 regarded as primitive, childlike, and the bottom of the evolutionary hierarchy, relatively unimportant for the future of the world Church. The sources suggest that nobody passed critical comment on the fact that there were virtually no African present.<sup>6</sup>

On the other hand, the World Atlas of Christianity estimates that there were 11 million Christians in Africa by then. Other sources, like the Dictionary of African Christian Biography, witnesses to the fact that there were many qualified African church leaders such as Archdeacon Dandeson Crowther, Bishop Samuel Adjai Crowther, Bishop James Johnson of Sierra Leone and many more. Interestingly the issue of racial relations was raised by the few Asians present in the conference. They highlighted the race issue and its relevance for cross cultural missionary endeavor. They expressed the need for a world view that sees the other as an equal partner and a friend. One of the Asian delegates, Bishop V-S Azariah from India, addressed the problem of race relations in his speech about cooperation between missionaries and natives. He concluded with the following appealing words:

The exceeding riches of the glory of Christ can be fully realized neither by the Englishman, the American, and the Continental alone, nor by the Japanese, the Chinese, and the Indians by themselves but by all working together, worshipping together, and learning together the Perfect Image of our Lord and Christ. It is only "with all Saints" that we can "comprehend the love of Christ which passes knowledge, that we might be filled with all the fullness of God." This will be possible only from spiritual friendships between the two races. We ought to be willing to learn from one another and to help one another. Through all the ages to come the Indian Church will rise up in gratitude to attest the heroism and self-denying labors of the missionary body. You have given your goods to feed the poor. You have given your bodies to be burned. We also ask for love. Give us FRIENDS!<sup>7</sup>

The assumed lack of qualified leaders in the African Church or rather their absence in the conference on the one hand, and the plea for friendship

<sup>6</sup> Stanley, Brian, *The World Missionary Conference: Edinburgh 1910, Studies in the History of Christian Missions* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2009), 97-99.

<sup>7</sup> *World Missionary Conference, 1910, The History and Records of the Conference* (Edinburgh & London: Oliphant, Anderson and Ferrier; New York, Chicago and Toronto: Fleming H. Revell, 1910), 315.

from the Asian delegation on the other hand, exhibit the key deficiency of the Edinburgh 1910 conference. It illustrates the working influence of the colonial ideology affecting mission theology. From a critical African point of view the Edinburgh conference could easily be suspected to be the missionary counterpart to the 1884 Berlin conference of the scramble for Africa. But the fact that there were no black Africans represented and there was no discussion about it remains a big shortcoming of the Edinburgh 1910 missionary conference. Not only what happened then is discomfoting but also the fact that this was not exhaustively addressed in the course of Edinburgh 2010 anniversary. This could be too sensitive issue to address even today.

### *Norwegian Missions and Edinburgh 1910*

‘World Mission’ was not something Edinburgh 1910 conference introduced into the Norwegian Christianity. It had already been part of Norwegian church life for decades when the Edinburgh conference convened. There were mission organizations established and missionaries sent.<sup>8</sup> Norwegian church history attributes the birth of missionary movements to the impulses coming from pietism in the continental Europe. But the most important contribution came from an indigenously Norwegian awakening led by Hans Nielsen Hauge.<sup>9</sup>

In the Edinburgh conference itself, there were 12 Norwegian delegates participating; eight delegates from the Norwegian Missionary Society, three from the Norwegian China Mission (later Norwegian Lutheran mission) and one from the Church of Norway. In the commission reports, references are made to the Norwegian mission tradition, especially the work of Hans Egede and Norwegian mission in South Africa.

The important aspect of Edinburgh 1910 for Norwegian mission lies in the mission paradigm re-affirming the classical understanding and practice of mission. According to the classical understanding, “mission” was a commitment by faithful Christians (the mission-loving volunteers) to be undertaken towards the non-Christian world overseas. To do mission was to recruit, train and send missionaries overseas to a mission field. The mission work was regarded to be part of the larger socio-political efforts in helping the uncivilized, exotic, pagan world come to salvation and civilization. Missionaries traveled long distances to strange lands, places and peoples. They established mission stations. Learning the languages, they translated the Bible into the languages of the people. They built schools, health stations and introduced modernization. Missionary work

<sup>8</sup> Norwegian Missionary Society established 1842, Norwegian Israel Mission established 1844, Norwegian Lutheran Inland Mission 1867, Norwegian Lutheran Mission 1891.

<sup>9</sup> Berentsen, Jan-Martin, Tormod Engelsen og Knud Jørgensen, *Missiologi i dag*. (2nd ed. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 2004).

was an important venture that received support and admiration at home as well as in the mission field. But it also became very much associated with attempts of spreading western culture and civilization.

### *Critics and dilemmas of mission*

In recent decades things have changed. The post-colonial world is generally critical, even hostile, to mission work and missionaries. Once taken-for-granted Christian world (of Europe and America) began to exhibit critical attitudes towards mission. There are growing sentiments of apology and regrets over the shortcomings of mission and the ideology behind it and its consequences for people of other cultures. Its impossible to deny atrocities of transatlantic slavery and colonialism, but little or no recompense done to redress. The current world order with its power structures between rich and poor regions of the world has its roots in the colonial period which robbed raw material and human labor from one part of the world, and resulted in accumulation of wealth, power and capital on the other end. Today, mission is not a great endeavor many people may proudly associate themselves with any longer. It is often associated with cultural imperialism. This popular displeasure needs further exploration in order to build a culturally credible justification for cross-cultural mission work.

Popular criticism is just one aspect. There is another aspect referring to dilemmas to mission work from the recipient's perspective. We are forced to raise critical questions as to whether missionary work was solely evangelistic or whether there were other motives behind. Was it only the love and call from God to preach the gospel and the welfare of other people that inspired missions and missionaries? Did not missions and missionaries operate in the pattern of relation between peoples of different nations or races?

Reading theological literature in a missionary context (Ethiopian evangelical theology) we grew up with the stories of mission work and of how God called and inspired people to come into missionary work. Some of those stories could be genuine and difficult to doubt. There must have been some elements of supernatural motivation at work despite human weaknesses in missionary endeavors. Whatever the motives (whether adventure, colonialism, imperialism, or the love of God) mission made an immense contribution in transforming the lives of those who received it. Two examples can be mentioned.

Evangelical Christians in Ethiopia trace their origin to the missionary work of the later part of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. It came about as God almighty intended it, and through a relentless effort by Lutheran, Presbyterian, Baptist, and Pentecostal missions from Europe and America in collaboration with the indigenous converts. One of the results of those joint efforts was the birth of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY) which was established as a national Church on 21 January 1959.



Its start was simple and humble. But like the mustard seed it grew to become a big tree. In 1959, at the establishment, there were 20,000 members. In 2010 EECMY had 6,985 established congregations and 3,578 preaching places in 21 Synods, one Area Work and one Parish, 2,061 pastors, 2,728 evangelists and some 300,000 voluntary persons actively involved in the mission work of the Church. Its membership has reached to 5,576,156. Over the last 50 years the EECMY aided by its wide range of ministries have been instrumental in spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ and contributing immensely to the up building and welfare of millions of people in all parts of Ethiopia. God has brought the good news of the gospel (with an evangelical conviction) to our land through overseas mission engagement of Protestant Churches in Europe and America. We are indebted to the sacrifices paid by our fellow Christians who were instrumental in that process.

On a personal level, I am from a rural town in Southern Ethiopia. Around the time I was born, a mission station including a clinic was established in collaboration with EECMY. As a low land area, it was prone to many diseases. Before the mission station, there was no place to get modern medical help unless one traveled around 50km to the next mission station established earlier. With the clinic in my area, it became possible to survive tuberculosis, cholera and many other treatable diseases. In addition many mothers and babies survived death during delivery. On one hand it would be very unfair and ungrateful to mind missionary motives while benefiting from services delivered. But on the other hand as fellow Christians it is puzzling that our fellow brothers and sisters in the Lord did not share with us their life in such a way that it could transform their worldview and our livelihood. I had wished missionaries in my village had shared with us the advantages of knowledge, skills, economic power and possibilities. Far from those wishes, missionaries and mission stations continued to function in their double role of serving the people, but also keeping the status quo whereby the rich, white missionary lived and worked among the poor Ethiopians. They were treated as guests, as rich, as white, as knowledgeable, as civilized etc. Their life and relation with people in my village symbolized and represented the power structure of the bigger world. From my village to the national and even to the global level, we are still living in a world structured in accordance with the benefits and interests of the rich and powerful.

### **Oslo 2010: The New Mission Paradigm and Mission Context**

In September 2010 we celebrated the centenary of the Edinburgh 1910 World Mission Conference. Since Edinburgh 1910 many things have changed. We are facing a new context with an unchanged eternal gospel. The changed and changing context calls for a mission paradigm that adequately meets the challenges and opportunities. Fortunately, there also

has been a paradigm shift in the understanding mission. We have entered the emerging ecumenical missionary paradigm of the post-modern age.<sup>10</sup> Some core aspects of the new mission paradigm need to be discussed before drawing its significance and implication for churches and missions in Norway.

### *Mission as Missio Dei*

The understanding of mission is a very important issue for Christian mission. Especially how we define what mission is, why we have mission, whose mission it is, which goals it shall achieve etc are crucial issues. For the most part of the 20th century, there were debates around these questions. One of the useful concepts emerging from those debates is the understanding of mission as "*Missio Dei*."<sup>11</sup> Since it is a well established concept, further discussion may not be needed here, other than to briefly mention the core notions of "*Missio Dei*" and its connection to "*missiones ecclesiae*" as described by David Bosch.

The classical doctrine on the "*Missio Dei*" as God the Father sending the Son, and God the Father and the Son sending the Spirit was expanded to include yet another "movement": The Father, Son and the Holy Spirit sending the church into the world. Our mission has no life of its own: only in the hands of the sending God can it truly be called mission. Mission is thereby seen as a movement from God to the world; the church is viewed as an instrument for that mission. There is church because there is mission, not vice versa. To participate in mission is to participate in the movement of God's love toward people, since God is a fountain of sending love.<sup>12</sup>

"*Missio Dei*" as indicated above challenges our image of God as it calls us to an understanding of God always at work in the world from creation to sending His Son, the Holy Spirit and His Church. This is an important correction to the modern technocratic and rationalistic mind which tends to overemphasize human ability and distances God from the affairs of His world. *Missio Dei* acknowledges room for God almighty the creator, sustainer, life giver and redeemer of the world. It acknowledges God's authority and power, his plans and workings in creation, history and Christian mission and ministry. It provides us with an opportunity to reflect on the attributes of God; his greatness, goodness, purposefulness and powerfulness which are the sources of His mission and engagement. The God-centered worldview of *Missio Dei* humbles us as it underlines mission as participation in God's mission. Mission in the *Missio Dei* becomes a privilege of stewardship extended to us, his agents on earth, while God

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<sup>10</sup> Bosch 1991, 349-510.

<sup>11</sup> Engelsviken, Tormod, 'Missio Dei: The Understanding and Misunderstanding of a Theological Concept in European Churches', *International Review of Mission* 92, no. 367 (October 2003): 481-497.

<sup>12</sup> Bosch 1991: 390.

himself taking active part through the person of the Holy Spirit who dwells among/in us. Mission is no longer something we do for God; but something God does in/through/together with us. Thus, it is part and parcel of our identity and our calling.

The debates surrounding *Missio Dei* have led us to grasp of the holistic scope of Gods mission. In the past, Christians have struggled to maintain the balance between proclamation of the gospel and service to human beings in need, between salvation and fight for justice. At times one part of the Christian family tended to emphasize service over witness, development over proclamation, justice over salvation or the vice versa. But the emerging *Missio Dei* perspective challenges the dichotomy. One aspect of *Missio Dei* cannot be detached from the other. God cares for our whole human life both spiritual and physical. In the 1970s, the EECMY rejected the dichotomy and called for an integrated Christian ministry that holds together the interrelation between the proclamation of the gospel and human development.<sup>13</sup> EECMY developed a theology of "Serving the Whole Person", also referred to as Holistic Ministry. Its a Christian theology of service that sees the spiritual and the physical needs of a person.

#### *All of us are vehicles of Missio Dei*

Between Edinburgh 1910 and Oslo 2010, the understanding of the bearers of mission has changed radically. In 1910 when Western Christianity comprised 80% of the global Christian population, the discussion was how to carry out mission from the Christian world to the non-Christian world. In geographic terms, this meant from the North to the South or from Europe and America to Africa, Asia and other places. For the larger part of 20th century churches and mission agencies in the North dominated the mission scene especially with regard to sending missionaries overseas. The missionary work followed the pattern of "from the West to the rest" up until the middle of 20th century. It was the mission conference of the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism (CWME) meeting in Mexico City in 1963 that first coined the theme of "mission in six continents". Ever since, in both ecumenical and evangelical circles, there has been convergence that *Missio Dei* is our common calling to be undertaken by the whole Church, i.e. all denominations/church traditions, all generations, all cultures (in the global North and the global South). All sides are both receivers and bearers, both objects and subjects of God's mission. There is no single place that can be treated as an exception. Every country, every region, every congregation, every believer are both receivers and partakers of *Missio Dei*. The call is to take "the gospel from

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<sup>13</sup> 'Interrelation Between Proclamation of the Gospel and Human Development', 1972, EECMY, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

everywhere to everyone.”<sup>14</sup> It is both an ecumenical and truly global task. As such, it calls for alliances and networks beyond cultural, denominational, generational, racial, social and other dividing lines.

Christianity has truly become a global religion, not only through its global expansion, but also through taking roots in many cultures. Despite its origin in Jewish history and religion, its expansion to the Greco-Roman empire, and its long history in Europe, it is only in the last century that it has moved far and wide beyond all imagination. No single ethnic group, no single language, no single country can claim exclusive ownership of Christianity. No single tradition and mode of expression shall be treated as “the only and the right way”; it shall be translated continuously, making deeper roots in every new culture and context (Sanneh 1989). The gospel reaches many places. It will take indigenous forms embracing diversity existing in human cultures. This can easily be misused by destructive forces to divide and create enmity across the lines of diversities. But if we withstand those forces, the gospel has an enormous potential for creatively uniting diversities. Real universal and global Christian faith with local flavor in respective national realities that can draw many to the Lord, it reconciles and creates “one new body, a people of God, “a great multitude.”<sup>15</sup>

### **Missio Dei and Its Implications for Norwegian Churches and Mission**

The two aspects of *Missio Dei* discussed above have significant implications for Norwegian missionary engagement at home and overseas. We shall first take a glimpse of the developments in the home context of Norway and then review Norwegian overseas missionary engagement.

#### *Norwegian home context: secularism and migration*

God's mission, *Missio Dei*, has important relevance for mission work in the home context of Norway. There is no doubt about Norway itself being a mission field. That is a relevant observation today in view of changes transforming Norwegian society in the last 50 years. The missionary challenges of Norway can be seen in reference to two important social changes. Those are secularization and international migration. Norway has been a nation with a homogenous population for hundreds of years. A thousand year old state church (first Catholic and later Evangelical Lutheran) provided the cultural framework for the majority of the Norwegian people and contributed to nation building. But already in the

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<sup>14</sup> Escobar, Samuel, *The New Global Mission: The Gospel from Everywhere to Everyone* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003).

<sup>15</sup> Rev. 7:9.

middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century Norway began heading in a new direction from a monopoly of state-church towards religious diversity allowing establishment of Free-churches (independent churches besides the Evangelical Lutheran Church which is a state-church). In addition, with the establishment of a welfare state and the emergence of a liberal society in the last part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, church has lost part of its privileges as an important player in shaping the life of the nation. It no longer runs schools, municipal registry and health care services to the same extent as in earlier times.<sup>16</sup>

Oddbjørn Leirvik observes that multiple developments have taken place in the Norwegian religious landscape in the recent decades. Among the changes he lists we can mention discuss a few here. The first one is changes in Norwegian Christianity. He observes a simultaneous weakening of Christian churches (a decrease in membership, participation and adherence especially among youth.) Pluralism, privatization and a less hegemonic society resist a traditional image of Christianity which claims to shape the life style of the majority. In a modern liberal state, religious life and expression has diminished to the private sphere of the individual. This is often justified with the argument that it is an inevitable consequence of secularization. But the delicate distinction between secularization as a form of institutional arrangement and the ideology of secularization remains ambiguous. Aided by political, academic and media forces, the atheist-secularist discourse seems to have gained an upper hand in the Norwegian society. Religion is a less exciting topic for the Norwegian discourses. Many people often dismiss talk about religion, subscribing to some of the common myths “religion leads to conflict; rational people do not need to believe in God; religion will disappear as modernization and rationalizations deepens; religion is just a fabrication for exerting power and control over other people etc”

It may be important to point out that secularization as an ideology could be the major factor for this change, as long as it infuses hatred towards religions in general and Christianity in particular. Having lost the privileged position of being a natural part of Norwegian life, Christian faith and church faces many difficulties and resistance. Some people perceive “to be a Christian” as being imprisoned in traditions, dogmas and morality. Shortcomings of Christian churches in the past might have contributed to the perception of that Christian faith as being legalistic. But on the other hand, for many people, Christian teaching and Jesus stories sound like a fairy tale in light of the ideologies and values of secular society. The most challenging influence of secularism is its effect on Christians who justify societal values even when it stands in sharp contrast to Christian teaching. A serious weakness in Western Protestant Christianity is its subscription to

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<sup>16</sup> Aud V.Tønnessen (2000), ‘...et trygt og godt hjem for alle?’ Kirkelederes kritikk av velferdsstaten etter 1945, Tapir bokforlag, Trondheim.

societal values of humanism, liberalism, consumerism, relativism and the decline of confidence in the authority of the word of God. Could it be that, in an effort to compensate for the legalism of the past, the Church is now afraid of speaking about morality? Could it be that the Church is losing credibility as it fails to lift up the values in the Scriptures as authoritative guideline for its life and ministry? Churches are suffering ambivalence serving and conforming to the interests of the earthly lord (society) as well as the heavenly Lord (Christ).

The second development Leirvik observes is the emergence of a well-organized humanist association offering a competing alternative. Christianity no longer enjoys a privileged status in the school curriculum as a subject on its own. Thirdly there is a growing interest in alternative spiritualities. Fourthly the religions of immigrants are spreading.<sup>17</sup> Due international migration Norway's religious landscape is no longer dominated by Christianity and its diverse denomination, but also all other world religions. Larger cities are hosting not only Churches and synagogue, but also mosques, temples, and gurdwaras. The religious diversity is bringing mission field home to Norway.

Contrary to myths and misconceptions surrounding migration, one of the positive consequences with migration is the growing establishment of new congregations known as migrant-led churches. Until very recently a typical perception of migrants was that the majority, if not all of them, were Muslims. But a recent survey<sup>18</sup> of the wider Oslo area shows that there are more than 90 congregations established by people with migrant background. This number includes churches of various denominational/theological traditions: Catholic (with services in different nationality groups and languages), Orthodox, Evangelical, Pentecostal, and independent congregations. It also includes older congregations established by Europeans who migrated to Norway and migrants from Asia, Africa and Latin America who have come to Norway in recent decades.

These churches represent a potential oasis of inspiration and renewal for Christianity in Norway as they bring a non-Norwegian spirituality, tradition and practices. In addition, due to migration in general and migrant Christians and their theology in particular, there is an opportunity for churches and Christians in Norway to re-claim the public role of faith. The growth and strength of migrant Churches contribute to the ministry and ecclesiological landscape in Norway. It can also help Norway maintain its participation in world mission by providing potential human resources for mission. The uttermost contribution would be to reach out to their own kin, in so far as Norway has become a home for people from all over the world. Because of immigration, the mission fields have come home to Norway. Some 31,000 Pakistanis, 25,000 Somalis, 15,000 Bosnians, 26,000 Iraqis,

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<sup>17</sup> Oddbjørn Leirvik 2010:12-44.

<sup>18</sup> Kartlegging av migrantmenigheter i Oslo, DAWN Norge, 2010'

20,000 Vietnamese, 16,000 Iranians, 16,000 Turks, 13,000 Serbs, 12,000 Thais, 14,000 Sri Lanka, 9000 Indians, 8,000 Morocco, and 10,000 Afghans<sup>19</sup> live in Norway. They have a possibility to hear about Jesus and choose to follow him, if someone bears witness in word and deed.

### *Norwegian mission overseas*

Norway has taken an active part in world mission for a long time. It possesses an accumulated wealth of experience. Today, Norway sends missionaries to all over the world. According to a recent report about Norwegian overseas missionary engagement (NORME rapport 2009), we find 38 mission organizations sending missionaries to 116 nations (in partnership with 340 registered organizations and churches in mission-receiving countries.) Around 23 to 25 organizations are involved in evangelism, church planting and theological education. The total budget of the mission organizations adds up to 512 million Norwegian kroner (around USD 100 million). Most of the money spent in different projects in many countries in East-Africa, East-Asia and Latin-America. Of the total sum, 129 million kroner was received as grants from the Norwegian government (this amounts to 0.5% of the total development aid budget of the Norwegian government (around 25 billion kroner). 530 long term missionaries work abroad with the largest share sent to different parts of Africa, but the number of long term missionaries is decreasing. There were 814 long term missionaries in 2000, while only 530 by 2009.<sup>20</sup> Declining economic and human resources confront the future of Norwegian overseas missionary engagement.

### **Conclusion**

At the occasion of the Edinburgh 1910 anniversary we should thank God for the visionary and prophetic efforts. We should honour all those who made the vision into reality and contributed to the expansion of the church of God on earth. Edinburgh 1910 was an epoch-making event that still challenges us in many ways. It was grand in its vision, planning and delivery. The commissions produced sound theological documents. Such a grand vision might sound impossible at best and arrogant at worst in our time. However, we must admit that we have lost the courage to dream big and ambitious. We live in an age where we rather have a more cautious understanding and approach of mission. This can be seen even from the rhetoric we read in many contemporary mission documents. But there is a

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<sup>19</sup> Kristin Henriksen, Lars Østby and Dag Ellingsen (eds) *Immigration and immigrants 2010* (Statistics Norway: 2011).

<sup>20</sup> Årsrapport [Annual Report] NORME, 2009, Oslo ([www.misjon.info](http://www.misjon.info)).

real danger that the ideology of humility might draw us to the other extreme where we find ourselves uncomfortable with mission.

Just as we have great stories of sacrifice and service in the mission and church history, we also have sad realities of the Church. It is difficult to hide that churches played a role in conflicts and wars in their immediate context as well as in mission field overseas. Power has been the most challenging issue for the Church of Jesus Christ on earth. It is generally true of churches (with "Christendom mentality") that they have either played active part or been indifferent when atrocities were committed. Crusades, trans-Atlantic slavery, colonialism, holocaust, apartheid, neo-colonialism and the emerging climate change crisis are some of the examples that still call for repentance. In this connection we need to regret the shortcomings of Edinburgh 1910 conference in that it operated with a colonial mindset.

Between Edinburgh 1910 and Oslo 2010, the world has undergone many changes. We have passed from colonial-imperialism through a bipolar world of cold-war to a multi-polar globalization where many actors contending for dominance. We have stepped forward from an industrial to technological revolutions. In terms of political changes, there has been a steady increase of number of states transitioning from monarchy and dictatorship to (democratic) republics. The hegemony of the western civilization is no longer a pride, though it is still powerful. East and West are competing for power and domination. The rest, even if not yet contending in global power struggle are resistant to domination. The technological revolutions, emerging economic and political interdependencies are bringing into reality a truly global world with new winners and losers. In terms of religion the international travel and globalization is causing multi-directional follow and resurgence of religions. With regard to Christian faith, the old Christian heartland is losing grip and the center of gravity is moving southwards (Jenkins 2002, Walls 2002) where the majority of the world population and majority of Christians live i.e. Asia, Africa and Latin America. With regard to mission, western missionary enterprise is still going on despite growing decline of resources.

Today we find ourselves in a new and ecumenical missionary paradigm. Unlike the previous paradigm, the emerging missionary paradigm acknowledges that the mission is God's and that all of his people are called to take part in it. Acknowledging God as the source and owner of mission and all of us as fellow workers in the field of working in partnership with all God's people requires a change of mindset as well as structures. What does this mean for all us who genuinely seek to take part in God's mission?

It means that we need to learn to seek God and let him lead, send and empower. Letting God lead mission starts by seeking God through prayer



and fasting as the Church in Jerusalem and Antioch.<sup>21</sup> Secondly it requires aligning our mission and church understanding and practice with the Word of God. It also calls for alliances and partnership beyond diverse Christian traditions participating in God's mission. One way of alliance goes beyond denominational dividing lines. Another way goes beyond cultural dividing lines between natives and immigrants. The mission *Missio Dei*) emanating from the triune God is calling us to a united witness. The emerging missionary paradigm and context calls for a better coordinated endeavor beyond old structures and differences. God's mission keeps moving towards its goal inviting and calling Norwegian missions to join.

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<sup>21</sup> Acts 2:42, 13:1-3.

# MISSIONAL CHALLENGES

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# THE CHURCH IN MISSION: CONTEXTUAL BIBLE STUDY AND LIBERATION

**Marit Breen**

## Introduction

In many places one finds that the Christian church not only proclaims the Gospel of salvation in order to bring people to faith but also aims at enabling people to improve their life conditions physically and mentally, by equipping them for individual and social liberation and transformation. These are all dimensions of the mission of the church; the proclamation of the gospel and the diaconal service. In his book *Transforming Mission, Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*,<sup>1</sup> David Bosch advocates for a paradigm shift in the Theology of Mission. He mentions several elements of what he calls an “Emerging Ecumenical Missionary Paradigm”,<sup>2</sup> which aims at a “relevant Missiology”<sup>3</sup> for today. Mission as *transformation* and Mission as *liberation* are elements that are part of this new paradigm. The terms transformation and liberation are central in this article and will be dealt with more in detail later. If we look at churches that engage in promoting such social and individual transformation and liberation as part of their mission, various methods and approaches are made use of. One such method is Contextual Bible Study (CBS), which will be the focus in this article.

One of the main objectives of this article is to describe the CBS method with reference to marginalized women and *The Ujamaa Centre for Biblical and Theological Community Development and Research* in South Africa (*Ujamaa Centre*), which is the centre that developed the method. I will investigate how the CBS method can be a tool in the liberating call for the church in mission. In doing this I will first look at the practice of the method in South Africa, representative of the Church in the South. Then I will go on to look at the practice of the method in Norway, a context representing the Church in the North. Various contexts in Norway have practiced – and include the method in different kinds of work. These will be presented towards the end of this article, whilst discussing the potential

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<sup>1</sup> David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (New York: Orbis Books, 1991).

<sup>2</sup> Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 368.

<sup>3</sup> Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 349-511.

of the method applied in the Norwegian context. According to Bosch and the new paradigm he advocates, the mission of the church must consider dimensions focusing both on transformation and liberation. This focus should be objectives of the Church in mission on a global scale. Therefore the method of CBS in South Africa, representing the church in the South, should carry the potential of being applicable also in the church in the North, in this case Norway. The nature of the Bible study method being contextual also implies that it may be applicable in both contexts. Thus the main question this article aim to answer is as following;

*How can the contextual Bible study method be a tool  
in the liberating role of the church in mission?*

To answer this question I will present the method as it is known in South Africa and at the *Ujamaa Centre*. The article focuses on how the CBS method contributes toward bringing transformation and liberation for poor and marginalized women in South Africa, with particular reference to settlements around Pietermaritzburg in the KwaZulu-Natal region. The presentation is based on conclusions from a three month long fieldwork conducted in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa, as part of my Master Degree in Global Studies in 2008. My fieldwork consisted of qualitative in depth interviews with eleven women from poor and marginalized communities, some of them living with HIV/AIDS. The presentation will also demonstrate how the CBS method can be a tool for a “relevant Missiology” for today – a tool in the churches’ call for mission as transformation and liberation. The women interviewed shared their stories and experiences with the CBS method as part of their participation with the work of the *Ujamaa Centre*. They all indicated that their engagement in CBS had created self-awareness and empowerment, which in turn brought light to the process and nature of transformation and liberation. This presentation gives a foundation to discuss the potential – and the benefits of the method when carried out in the Norwegian context. In this article, the role of the Church is being presented in light of Bible study, demonstrating in particular its role in mission as bringing about transformation and liberation.

Another three sub questions will help answer the main research question, bringing in perspectives from the South (South Africa), and from the North (Norway). The two first questions will be answered in the presentation of the method with reference from my fieldwork in South Africa. The third question focuses on CBS in Norway, and will be discussed towards the end of the article. The three sub questions are as follows;

1. How is Contextual Bible study an instrument for individual and social liberation and transformation in South Africa?

2. Does the Contextual Bible study method contribute to individual and social liberation and transformation for poor and marginalized women?
3. How is the Contextual Bible study method applicable in the Norwegian context, and does it carry the potential of bringing transformation and liberation for its participants?

Before I go on to describe the method and answer the questions listed above, I will introduce some central terms and concepts.

### Central Terms and Concepts

The term *empowerment* is used in relation to a *process of empowerment*, being,

a process of gaining understanding of, and control over, the political forces around one as a means of improving one's standing in society. This requires awareness of one's situation, skill acquisition that enables change, and working jointly in effecting change.<sup>4</sup>

The term *empowerment* further refers to "increasing the spiritual, political, social or economic strength of individuals and communities. It often involves that the empowered developing confidence in their own capacities".<sup>5</sup> Finally, empowerment as "the expansion in people's ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them"<sup>6</sup>, is also included in the definition of the term and my use of it here. What empowerment means in the context of CBS and the women I interviewed is described more in detail later. Transformation and liberation are other terms that will be used frequently in the article. These terms are understood and defined as following;

- The term *transformation*, means changed people, and is also understood as a process, which takes place over time.
- *Liberation* is understood as "the condition in which an individual has the ability to act according to his or her own will".<sup>7</sup>

Since the *Ujamaa Centre* in South Africa was the reference of my fieldwork investigating the Contextual Bible study, I find it necessary to briefly introduce the centre before describing the method.<sup>8</sup> Some

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<sup>4</sup> Karen Monkman, 'Training Women for Change and Empowerment' in Nelly P. Stromquist (ed), *Women In The Third World: An Encyclopedia of Contemporary Issues* (New York and London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1998), 498-509, 498.

<sup>5</sup> Wikipedia, 'Empowerment', [www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Empowerment#The\\_process\\_of\\_empowerment](http://www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Empowerment#The_process_of_empowerment) (accessed 15.05.09).

<sup>6</sup> 'Discussing Women's Empowerment, Theory and Practice', *Sidastudies* no.3 2004, 19.

<sup>7</sup> Wikipedia, 'Liberation', [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/WOMen%27s\\_liberation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/WOMen%27s_liberation) (accessed 15.05.09).

<sup>8</sup> In 2008, as part of my Master degree in Global studies at the School of Mission and Theology in Stavanger, Norway, I did a three months long fieldwork with the

knowledge about the centre is also necessary for understanding the CBS as method.

### The Ujamaa Centre in South Africa

The *Ujamaa Centre* is affiliated with the School of Theology and Religion at the University of KwaZulu-Natal in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa. The core purpose of the centre is described as follows; “Our core purpose is to mobilise, train, support, and empower the poor, the working-class, and the marginalized.”<sup>9</sup> The *Ujamaa Centre* thus represents an interface between socially engaged biblical and theological scholars, organic intellectuals and local communities of poor, working-class, and marginalized people. Biblical and theological resources are made use of in contributing towards individual and social transformation. The CBS method is one of the main tools in the multiple works of the centre. It was developed in the late 1980s during the time of apartheid in South Africa. The *Ujamaa Centre* was eventually founded in 1998, bringing together two previously separate organisations, namely the Institute for the Study of the Bible (ISB) and the House of Studies for Worker Ministry, which had been working to bring about individual and social transformation since the late 1980s. Socially engaged biblical scholars, organic intellectuals and displaced communities came together to read the Bible in the times of a difficult conflict in KwaZulu-Natal. They sought the Word of God for a message that was relevant to what they experienced in their country at that particular time. As they saw it, this message from the Bible could only be found by finding a new way of doing or conducting Bible study. The different groups of what the centre now calls “trained readers”, and “ordinary readers”<sup>10</sup> came together, resulting in Contextual Bible Studies.<sup>11</sup>

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*Ujamaa Centre for Biblical & Theological Community Development & Research* in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa. I conducted qualitative in depth interviews with eleven women from poor and marginalized communities in and around Pietermaritzburg to see whether the Contextual Bible study method contributed towards individual and social transformation and liberation for these women.

<sup>9</sup> Quote from Ujamaa Folder; *Ujamaa Centre for Biblical & Theological Community Development & Research*.

<sup>10</sup> In Gerald West, *Contextual Bible Study* (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 1993), 8-9, the terms of ‘ordinary’ and ‘trained’ reader is introduced. The term *reader* is often used both in a literal and metaphoric sense in that it includes the many who are illiterate, but who listen to, retell and remake the Bible. The term *ordinary reader* is used both in a general and specific sense. It refers to pre-critical readers, but also those who are poor and marginalised. The latter is similar to the term ‘the people’ or ‘the masses’ as they are popularly used. Often when opposed to the ordinary reader, the term *trained reader* refers to socially engaged biblical scholars who are trained in the use of the tools and resources of biblical scholarship and who read the Bible critically. However, this does not mean that ordinary readers don’t have resources to read the Bible critically, but often they do not use the

### Contextual Bible Study in South Africa

The Contextual Bible study method derives from different theological streams, whereas Contextual theology and Liberation theology are among these. Both Contextual theology and Liberation theology are theologies focusing on the relationship between theory and praxis, and according to Bosch, are known to be manifestations of the new theological paradigm. Central to the CBS method are some of the elements Bosch mentions as part of this new paradigm in Missiology. Some of these elements are; Mission as quest for justice, Mission as contextualization (including Contextual theology), Mission as liberation (including Liberation theology), “God’s preferential option for the poor”, and Mission as action in hope<sup>12</sup>. These are all aspects that aim towards a “relevant Missiology” for today, and which are also reflected in the CBS approach. Christian mission involves the aspect of transformation where the church encounters cultures in a way that impacts the socio-political spheres of society. This is the aim of Liberation theology; to side with the poor, with an emphasis on praxis and action, and to make theology contextual and relevant to the poor and oppressed. The Bible study which the church engages in is an integral part of Liberation theology – and hence also missiologically relevant.

Contextual Bible study normally takes place in local Bible study groups in different churches and communities, involving men and women, youth and elders. To understand the method of Contextual Bible study it is helpful to look at the four commitments of those who engage in the process. These commitments can be seen as the foundations or basis of the method, all four aiming at enabling the voices of the marginalized.

### The Four Commitments in Contextual Bible Study

*A commitment to read the Bible from the perspective of the South African context, particularly from the perspective of the poor and oppressed.*

Bible reading, according to this method, begins with the lived reality of the poor, the working class and marginalized communities. This first commitment is founded on the incarnation and life of Jesus; “The incarnation and life of Jesus give clear testimony to God’s preferential option for the poor and marginalized”.<sup>13</sup> The poor people’s lives, their daily

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structured and systematic sets of resources that constitute the craft of biblical scholars.

<sup>11</sup> For more information about the background for and the history of the *Ujamaa Centre*, see [www.ukzn.ac.za/sorat/ujamaa/history.htm](http://www.ukzn.ac.za/sorat/ujamaa/history.htm) (accessed 10.02.09).

<sup>12</sup> Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 420-507.

<sup>13</sup> Ujamaa Centre, [www.ukzn.ac.za/sorat/ujamaa/history.htm](http://www.ukzn.ac.za/sorat/ujamaa/history.htm) (accessed 09.02.09).



struggles for survival, liberation and life represent the starting point for their biblical reflection, as everyone who reads the Bible brings his or her context into the reading. Hence “a commitment of contextual Bible study is that we acknowledge and recognize the environmental factors that have formed us”.<sup>14</sup> “When we choose to read the Bible from the perspective of the poor and oppressed in South African context we choose to hear the concerns of the vulnerable and marginalized and God’s concern for them.”<sup>15</sup> According to the *Ujamaa Centre*, ordinary people are empowered when they discover that it is legitimate to bring their experience to their reading of the Bible. By taking the social conditions and environment of the ordinary people seriously the method therefore aims at bringing in their perspectives, experiences and realities. Hence the CBS method is *context oriented*.

*A commitment to read the Bible in community with others, particularly with those from contexts different from our own.*

CBS is a communal process in which people come together and read. The Bible reading takes place in the community, underlining the importance of learning from one another through listening and sharing. “We cannot just make the Bible say what we want it to say, and by reading the Bible with others we allow the views and experiences of others to shape us and our readings.”<sup>16</sup> This commitment can be a challenging task for the trained reader who is often trained within a context where the individual stands in focus. Those who are theologically and biblically trained often find it hard to listen genuinely and learn from ordinary readers of the Bible. It is therefore easy to lose the sense of community consciousness, so awareness about one’s own situation and background is important. “So for us reading the Bible with ordinary readers requires something of a conversion experience; we need to be converted to a sense of community consciousness.”<sup>17</sup> The concept of reading *with* is important here. When the Bible is read *with* ordinary people, the trained reader will not be tempted to interpret the biblical texts *for* them. On the other hand, there is the challenge that any interpretations from ordinary readers are just accepted uncritically and without further reflection. If this is the case, there is the danger that the contributions of the ordinary readers may become idealised and romanticised. The point here is that contributions from both parties are to be considered valuable and given due reflection. This reflection is a joint *critical* undertaking – a point I shall return to below. “The contextual Bible study process, however, attempts to avoid these two dangers by reading the

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<sup>14</sup> West, *Contextual Bible Study*, 12.

<sup>15</sup> West, *Contextual Bible Study*, 13.

<sup>16</sup> Ujamaa Centre, [www.ukzn.ac.za/sorat/ujamaa/history.htm](http://www.ukzn.ac.za/sorat/ujamaa/history.htm) (accessed 09.02.09)

<sup>17</sup> West, *Contextual Bible Study*.

Bible *with* ordinary readers.”<sup>18</sup> The purpose of this is to create a “transforming discourse”, where unequal power relations are recognised and where the “culture of silence” is broken.

It is only when both ordinary and trained readers come together and read the Bible together as *active subjects*, being aware of *who* they are, that there is really a process of reading *with* and a true communal reading of the Bible. Different perspectives are brought into the reading process by the different participants and may thus contribute to opening up for new ways of understanding and interpreting the text. The stress on this commitment is made in order that potential unequal power relations can be eliminated through recognizing them. A process of *reading with* requires respect and an ear to truly listen to others and to acknowledge what the others bring to the study. The trained reader must therefore truly convert to a community consciousness where he or she believes that ordinary readers have something significant to offer to reading the Bible and hearing God in the South African context. This can only come through fellowship between the two parts, through acknowledging and *reading with* one another. Hence the CBS method is *community centred*.

#### *A commitment to read the Bible critically.*

Reading the biblical texts critically means asking structured and systematic questions about the Bible. This process is where the biblical scholars may often have a particular contribution. Ordinary people may not have access to the resources needed to learn how to ask such questions. According to the *Ujamaa* these resources are “deeply valued because they open up the Bible in ways ordinary people do not usually experience”.<sup>19</sup> This is due to the socio-historical, literary, and theological-thematic questions that biblical scholars often pose, and which create a critical consciousness;

A critical consciousness includes asking questions, especially the question ‘Why?’. It also includes probing beneath the surface, being suspicious of the status quo. And it also includes systematic and structured analysis.<sup>20</sup>

Many poor and oppressed people in South Africa do have a critical consciousness towards their socio-political situation, but somehow this critical consciousness fails to materialize when it comes to their faith and their reading of the Bible.<sup>21</sup> In fact, according to West, few of the Christians probe beneath the surface or are suspicious of the status-quo-Christianity. They do not usually analyse systematically the Christian tradition and its effects on their context, even though Christian faith has

<sup>18</sup> West, *Contextual Bible Study*, 15.

<sup>19</sup> Ujamaa Centre, [www.ukzn.ac.za/sorat/ujamaa/history.htm](http://www.ukzn.ac.za/sorat/ujamaa/history.htm) (accessed 09.02.09).

<sup>20</sup> West, *Contextual Bible Study*, 17.

<sup>21</sup> West, *Contextual Bible Study*, 17-18.

had both a profound oppressive and a liberating effect on their context. This commitment to critical reading in the CBS process therefore aims at facilitating the development of critical consciousness in the area of faith, beginning with critical Bible reading. Achieving such awareness is something that everybody can learn when the needed recourses are available. This third commitment also includes equipping people with knowledge of three different ways or modes of reading the Bible, which I will not elaborate on further here.<sup>22</sup> Suffice to say that critical consciousness is important for transformation and liberation to take place. Hence the CBS is oriented toward *critical engagement* with the biblical texts. This leads us to the last commitment in the CBS process, that is, personal and social transformation.

*A commitment to personal and social transformation  
through contextual Bible study.*

The aim of CBS is that it should lead to both personal and social transformation. The method does not focus on gaining knowledge about the Bible as such – although such knowledge will naturally result from the very reading and study of the Bible. It rather focuses on the personal and social change, which follows from reading the Bible. “South African society has been shaped by biblical interpretation, often in damaging ways. The challenge that lies before us is to allow the Bible to transform our society for the better.”<sup>23</sup> The Bible is already a source of transformation for many readers. But in the context of CBS both Bible and theology are used with a view to benefitting the poor and oppressed, in rather the opposite way to which the apartheid theology was applied, namely to oppress or uphold the status quo of discrimination;

In South Africa, and elsewhere, the Bible tends to be appropriated and applied uncritically, and this can be dishonest and dangerous. [...] It is dangerous because it has led to oppression and death, and it is dishonest because it uses the Bible selectively for narrow interests.<sup>24</sup>

This fourth commitment, therefore, means that CBS is oriented towards *individual and social transformation*. When the CBS process focus on both individual and social transformation, it includes the “existential, the political, the economical, the cultural, and the religious spheres of life”.<sup>25</sup> Basically all aspects of an individual’s social reality are of concern. The

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<sup>22</sup> See West, *Contextual Bible Study*, 23-43 for the three different modes of reading the Bible; reading behind the text, reading the text itself, and reading in front of the text.

<sup>23</sup> Ujamaa Centre, [www.ukzn.ac.za/sorat/ujamaa/history.htm](http://www.ukzn.ac.za/sorat/ujamaa/history.htm) (accessed 09.02.09).

<sup>24</sup> West, *Contextual Bible Study*, 21.

<sup>25</sup> West, *Contextual Bible Study*, 21.

way transformation is understood in this commitment requires some elaboration, which I shall presently engage in.

### Individual and Social Transformation

Basically this last commitment in the CBS process is dependent on the three former commitments. One can therefore see the potential for transformation throughout the CBS process itself. I wish to point out four perspectives that represent potential transformational power, all taken from different stages in the CBS method. These four perspectives are; 1) *A new way of seeing reality from the perspective of God's project of liberation*, 2) *providing resources for increasing knowledge and a critical consciousness*, 3) *challenging all ordinary readers to re-evaluate their Bible reading and apply its message*, and 4), *accountability*. Each of the perspectives has a different focus that is unique in the CBS process, equally valuable, but emphasizing and challenging different elements. As perspectives they speak from different angles of the CBS process, but all carry transformational power. The two first perspectives in particular carry the potential of affecting the poor and oppressed directly, while the other two do so more indirectly. I shall now proceed to presenting these four perspectives, all highlighted in the CBS process as representing potential transformational elements.<sup>26</sup>

*First*, according to the *Ujamaa Centre*, ordinary people are empowered when they discover that it is legitimate to bring along their experiences when reading the Bible. Hence, the CBS method finds it important to working from their perspectives, taking their experiences and realities seriously. In discovering this, *dignity* is affirmed and the people involved can start seeing themselves as *active subjects and co-workers* in God's project of liberation rather than as passive objects of fate.<sup>27</sup> This includes rediscovering one's identity and vocation; also a feeling of ownership is gained. This again empowers the individuals' potential for change within their own community. "Bible study plays an important role in breaking the culture of silence of the poor and oppressed."<sup>28</sup> This means that things that have been kept secret can finally be spoken of in public, also making it possible to start a process of change.

*Second*, many have heard the saying "knowledge is power". I regard this to be true for the CBS as well. Poor and oppressed people are given new knowledge as well as analytical tools through CBS, both playing a role in

<sup>26</sup> Some of these points are taken from West, *Contextual Bible Study*, in what he writes about the fourth commitment (of individual and social transformation), and some are my interpretations inspired by this in addition to own observations and experience of CBS that I participated in during my fieldwork. Based on this, I have created the categories or perspectives presented here.

<sup>27</sup> West, *Contextual Bible Study*, 77.

<sup>28</sup> West, *Contextual Bible Study*, 77.

developing a critical consciousness. CBS is the learning and transferring of critical skills, the providing of tools and educating the people involved. When such knowledge is gained it is in the hands of the ordinary people and they must in turn apply it themselves in their own context, without being controlled by the trained reader or anyone from outside. This view also reflects the approach of “analysis from below” which the *Ujamaa Centre* works from. It is a method of empowering people so that they can own the projects and take responsibility and control of their own situation.

*Third*, CBS challenges all ordinary readers of the Bible, including those who do not belong to poor and oppressed communities, to re-evaluate the ways in which they read the Bible and to apply its message. The method itself addresses issues reaching beyond the issues of ordinary people from poor and oppressed communities. It raises an awareness of one’s reading of the Bible and how the message can be applied in a fruitful way to issues of unequal power, injustice and oppression. These are issues relevant to all ordinary people regardless of their context and social status. Creating such awareness therefore has a wider and more overarching objective than addressing merely the poor and oppressed. This is so since CBS addresses issues of awareness also in areas that are normally not spoken of. Awareness of such can therefore also affect the prophetic voice of the church. When people are becoming aware of how their Bible reading can be connected to relevant issues of society and be applied to address issues of unequal power, injustice and oppression, they have a stronger voice to use against the sinful systems at work in their society, be they oppressed, marginalized or representatives of oppressing and discriminating forces.

*Fourth*, as we have seen, CBS empowers ordinary readers, develops processes and facilitates biblical studies and theological education among ordinary people.<sup>29</sup> Biblical scholars learn about democracy from below through working *with* ordinary people from poor and oppressed communities. This is important because trained readers are enabled to abandon their tendency to want to be in control so as to learn to take the deeply communal nature of CBS seriously. This awareness or new knowledge, reflecting a conscious accountability, can serve to secure the quality and ways of interpreting the Bible, hence avoiding harmful attitudes and practices like the ones emerging from Apartheid theology. By learning to become accountable the theologian also realises that he or she is a subject who needs to go through individual transformation to be able to work with ordinary people. This becomes an integral part of the commitment of trained readers who choose to involve themselves in the CBS and work *with* the poor and oppressed. Individual and social transformation is here considered equally important also for them. The individual transformation must not only be seen as a step towards social transformation, but something being valuable in its own right. The CBS

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<sup>29</sup> West, *Contextual Bible Study*, 78.

process influences its participants in ways that do not always lead to social transformation, but there is nonetheless a transformation of the individual that must be considered valuable on its own.

From this presentation we have seen that the four commitments carry potential for transformation and liberation for the CBS participants – be they trained or ordinary readers. We have seen how the Contextual Bible study presented from the perspective of the *Ujamaa Centre*, is an instrument for individual and social liberation and transformation. Contextual Bible Study method presented by the four commitments is claimed to be a tool in the Church's mission to bring about both transformation and liberating to those participating in the Bible studies. Hence the first sub question is hereby answered. I will now go on to share some of the conclusions that came out of the interviews with some of the South African women who participated in CBS. This next part will therefore give answer to the second sub question; *does the Contextual Bible study method contribute to individual and social liberation and transformation for poor and marginalized women?*

### Voices and Stories from Women in South Africa

According to Gerald West, rural black women in South Africa are suffering from oppression of race, class and gender;

[...] not only bear the triple oppression of race, class and gender, but [who] also are expected to carry the threefold load, in development terms, of productive, reproductive and community management functions, and [who] sustain and support the church with their presence, faith and finances.<sup>30</sup>

West's remarks tie in with the stories told by the women whom I interviewed in South Africa, yet in different ways. What they all had in common were their stories of struggle for survival, liberation and life. West describes the role of the Bible among poor and oppressed South Africans, including the women, as "a symbol of the presence of God with them, and a resource in their struggle for survival, liberation and life"<sup>31</sup>. *Oppression of gender* reflects the patriarchal system, which many South African women live under and have to relate to. Male power or men being in control of women is still common in this environment. *Oppression of race* refers to their status as being non-white, and the *oppression of class* refers to their life in poverty and of being poor themselves. This triple oppression is a primary concern to the *Ujamaa Centre* and its work with CBS. The aim of CBS is to identify and make participants aware of these aspects of oppression, and to help the oppressed to manage their lives better, even to

<sup>30</sup> Gerald O. West, *The Academy of the Poor, Towards a Dialogical Reading of the Bible* (Sheffield: Academic Press, 1999), 10.

<sup>31</sup> West, *The Academy of the Poor*, 9.

overcome oppression, and to help the oppressors to amend their ways and contribute to reducing or vindicating oppression.

The stories of the women whom I interviewed can be structured in separate thematic groups, where each of the groups reflects different types of struggles shared by many women in South Africa. Due to limitations of this article, I will mainly refer to findings from two of these thematic groups<sup>32</sup>: 1) *The struggle of women living with HIV and AIDS*, and 2) *The struggle of women having a story with experiences of abuse, violence and male oppression*.

Part of the conclusion from my fieldwork is that the women in each of the different groups were impacted by the CBS in a positive way. Common themes for all the women are their engagement with the Bible, and how they find strength and hope in the Bible whilst living within a culture, which contains sinful structures, trapping and keeping people oppressed and marginalized. The women described the Bible as having a significant and defining role in their lives; in it they had found hope and encouragement. In CBS the Bible is both a symbol of the presence of God in people's lives and becomes a resource when dealing with struggles in life. CBS and the communities in which the CBS takes place can provide a safe place where participants learn from each other. Through CBS there was an increase of self-awareness and self-development, which have empowered the women to cope with life. This can in turn prompt a desire to help others. Knowledge of these processes of self-awareness, empowerment and community consciousness, is important in understanding the liberating role of the church in mission. They are significant parts of the transformation and liberation that Bosch mentions as elements in the new paradigm – “a relevant Missiology” for today (see quotation above). For these women the CBS method contributed towards transformation and liberation, yet in different ways and on different levels.

The women confirmed that the CBS method gives results. On the other hand, some of them mentioned the need for supportive structures and follow-up in relation to some of the Bible studies that dealt with difficult matters, like sexual abuse, where old wounds were opened up. Some of the women pointed out that there is a lack of supportive structures in relation to CBS, a lack, which may have a negative effect on the participants. This is also connected to how the participants relate to the facilitator in CBS. If there are no relationships built with the facilitator, a safe place is not created where their stories can be shared and their wounds can be healed. Some of the women who had experienced abuse pointed out the critical matter of the facilitator leaving them “at the door” with their wounds.

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<sup>32</sup> To see findings from all five of the groups, see Marit Breen, “Transformational Journeys Towards Liberation”: Contextual Bible Study among Poor and Marginalized Women, South Africa. An Investigation of the Study of the Bible and its Implications for Individual and Social Change’, (Germany: VDM Verlag Dr. Müller, 2010), chapter six.

These matters must also be considered seriously in CBS because they speak of the reality of these women. Although the CBS method is committed to take the reality of these women seriously, their problems are still not met sufficiently or adequately. This weakness connects with how CBS groups are facilitated. West emphasizes that the facilitators must be willing to learn to be enablers and not dominators.<sup>33</sup> Community consciousness and critical consciousness cannot develop in authoritarian forms of Bible study. It can only develop through a democratic process where there is mutual respect and trust and a deep sense of community. Only in such a context do self-confidence, responsibility, and accountability grow. These elements are crucial to the CBS process. But it also means that the facilitators in CBS have not fully carried out their responsibility if they do not also provide for relevant and skilled follow-up for those in the group who are victimised or have suffered wounds, which is the case for many of these women. The diaconic task cannot merely surface as a theme in the group; it has to be implemented in the lives of the wounded or suffering as well. Also here the trained reader must see herself or himself as a facilitator and seek to establish adequate means of follow-up, either juridically, socially, medically or spiritually.

### God's Project of Liberation

When saying something about how poor and marginalized women are influenced by CBS, and whether individual and social transformation and liberation is identified as part of this influence, one has to be aware of how one defines the process of transformation and liberation, including elements connected to it. My investigation into processes of transformation and liberation in this context makes use of theory from Myers 1999, and theories of empowerment.<sup>34</sup>

A concern of West is that in the CBS process, the Bible is not “merely a strategic tool for liberation; the Bible is the source of ‘God’s project’, which is a project of liberation”.<sup>35</sup> Myers’ understanding of transformational development from a Christian perspective is helpful in explaining what God’s project of liberation is. He focuses on the fact that,

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<sup>33</sup> West, *Contextual Bible Study*, 22.

<sup>34</sup> Myers’ theories include ideas from Jayakumar Christian, which are applied in Bryant L. Myers, *Walking With The Poor, Principles and Practices of Transformational Development* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2006). Theories of empowerment are collected from *Discussing Women’s Empowerment, Theory and Practice* (Sidastudies no.3, Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, Stockholm: Edita Sverige AB, 2004), and from Monkman, ‘Training Women for Change and Empowerment’.

<sup>35</sup> Gerald West, *Biblical Hermeneutics of Liberation: Modes of Reading the Bible in the South African Context* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1995), 117-118.



The development journey belongs to God and those who are on it, not to experts, donor agencies, or development facilitators. Whatever our framework or our methods, we must be willing to set them aside and let the poor discover their own way, just as we have done.<sup>36</sup>

According to Myers the result of transformation is “changed people”. Changed people are those who have “discovered their true identity as children of God and who have recovered their true vocation as faithful and productive stewards of gifts from God for the well-being of all”.<sup>37</sup> In the context of CBS this perspective is seen in the commitment of reading *with* the community. Here the poor not only understand their role as *victims* or *oppressed* persons in need but also as contributing subjects with resources to share with others. Thus true identity and vocation is recovered through the reading *with*; this enables the voices of poor and marginalized to be heard and for them to hear one another’s voices. As such this realization of true worth and dignity is part of God’s project of liberation.

### **Taking Confidence in Own Capacity – Increased Self-Awareness**

Related to this liberating process is the readers’ capacity to take ownership of the project. According to Myers, people need to be part of the project because “they have a history that needs to be heard and respected”.<sup>38</sup> The effect of the participation of poor and marginalized in CBS must be empowerment, implying taking confidence in their own capacity to understand, to take ownership and to contribute. “Empowerment is, after all, one of the means of transformation.”<sup>39</sup> CBS has the potential to empower its participants when their realities are taken seriously and when they feel that they are in a safe place to share and voice their opinions. This is something that the women I interviewed confirmed to be true in CBS. When they felt that a CBS group was a safe place for them to share their stories of HIV/AIDS or of abuse and hurt, they became aware and empowered by telling their own stories and by breaking the silence concerning the specific matters. The participation in the CBS was empowering, both in terms of reading the Bible in their own capacity, in bringing their own interpretations to the reading, and by sharing their life stories and hearing others. Hence they took ownership of the Bible reading because they felt that their realities were considered important.

Another major transformational frontier mentioned by Jayakumar Christian in the book of Myers<sup>40</sup>, is the act of getting the poor to believe in the possibility of a better future – a “prophetic act”. Hope of a better future for some of these women is brought to them when they share their stories

<sup>36</sup> Myers, *Walking With The Poor*, 14.

<sup>37</sup> Myers, *Walking With The Poor*, 14.

<sup>38</sup> Myers, *Walking With The Poor*, 15.

<sup>39</sup> Myers, *Walking With The Poor*, 148.

<sup>40</sup> Myers, *Walking With The Poor*, 114.

and realize that they are not alone. Some of the women living with HIV shared with me that hope of a good life after having been infected with the virus was brought through CBS and Support Groups for people living with HIV/AIDS. “A new way of seeing the reality from the perspective of God’s project of liberation” (the first perspective of potential transformational power), is crucial to starting the process of transformation. Alongside with this awareness the women are empowered by “the resources to increase the knowledge and a critical consciousness” (the second of the four perspectives). Both the realization of being part of God’s project of liberation and the development of a critical consciousness work together toward empowerment and toward taking ownership of the process. This is both transforming and liberating to the women.

### Empowerment

In the book *Discussing Women’s Empowerment*, three levels of empowerment are suggested to measure processes of change.<sup>41</sup> These levels are, the immediate level, the intermediate level, and the deeper level. *The immediate level* refers to empowerment of the individual in terms of self-awareness and identity building, but also to how the individual perceives the interests and capacity to act on the basis of this. *The intermediate level* refers to the relationships prevailing in the personal, social, economic, and political spheres of life. *The deeper levels* affect changes in the hidden structures that shape the distribution of resources and power in a society and reproduce it over time. “For any such change to translate into meaningful and sustainable process of empowerment, it must ultimately encompass both individual and structural levels.”<sup>42</sup> For some of the women I interviewed, changes in the immediate level had taken place, and they voiced an interest and capacity to act, so that changes in the next level also might happen.

According to Monkman’s article “Training Women for Change and Empowerment”,<sup>43</sup> the process of empowerment requires awareness of one’s own situation, skill acquisition that enables change, and working jointly in effecting change. All these aspects are seen in the CBS process to different extents. Women are empowered when they “change their ideas about the causes of their powerlessness, when they recognize the systemic forces that oppress them, and when they act to change the conditions of their lives”.<sup>44</sup> When women come to realise the injustice of violence and abuse during the participation of CBS, an important feature of the transformation process

<sup>41</sup> Sidastudies, *Discussing Women’s Empowerment*, 26-27.

<sup>42</sup> Sidastudies, *Discussing Women’s Empowerment*, 27.

<sup>43</sup> Monkman, ‘Training Women for Change and Empowerment’, 498-500.

<sup>44</sup> Quotation from Sandra Morgen and Ann Bookman, ‘Rethinking Women and Politics: An Introductory Essay’, in Monkman, ‘Training Women for Change and Empowerment’, 499.

has taken place. This reflects change in the immediate levels of empowerment according to the theory mentioned above. This is awareness of one's own situation, to use the words of Monkman. Skill acquisition, enabling change, is crucial for them to take the next step, which is to apply this new knowledge to their own lives. These are changes leading to the intermediate levels. For one of the women I interviewed, who experienced abuse by her partner, this could be taking the step of seeking counselling (or juridical assistance). For one of the ladies living with HIV, it might be to join a Support Group for people living with HIV/AIDS.

The CBS method seems to be affecting change in the immediate levels of empowerment, whereas the intermediate levels and the deeper levels are conditioned by the changes in the immediate levels. If changes in the immediate levels fail, or are limited due to lack of supporting structures or follow-ups, the next intermediate and deeper levels will not be reached and the process of change will be weakened or even stop. Yet, some transformation still takes place, to which extent being conditioned by the level of empowerment.

### Transformation Towards Liberation

Answering the second sub question, my research concludes that CBS indeed influenced the women I interviewed. Awareness of one's own reality equals changes on the immediate and the intermediate levels of empowerment, depending on whether or not the person wants to act according to the increase of self-awareness. Self-awareness and empowerment impact the way the participants relate to their social context, which increases the power of the CBS method to also affect them on a wider scale; "it is a transformed person who transforms his or her environment".<sup>45</sup> In line with the theory of transformation represented by Myers we have seen that these features of the processes of transformation and liberation, awareness and empowerment, are crucial factors and also confirmations of the processes. In light of the four categories of transformation that I introduced earlier, we have seen that they are highly functional and fruitful in the contexts of these women. The women seem to be taking ownership of the Bible reading process through resources provided through the CBS method, and they have their roles affirmed in God's project of liberation. This realization can serve as the beginning of the transforming process, as it is crucial to how they feel that the mediation role of the CBS affirm their own realities. This again can empower them to use their voices to reach out to others, as much as uniting them in a communal voice. When ordinary people re-evaluate their Bible reading, it enables them to join in the communal voice against injustice and oppression. Accountability throughout the process of *reading with* keeps

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<sup>45</sup> Myers, *Walking With The Poor*, 116.

the relationships between the poor and the non-poor in balance, and securing the owning of the project to belong to the poor and oppressed.

What I have written so far shows that various elements are central in the CBS when it comes to processes of transformation and liberation for the participants. Increase of self-awareness, empowerment, taking confidence in own capacity, community consciousness, and taking ownership of the Bible reading and processes connected to the reading, are all elements that were connected to the impact of the CBS method. I will now look at how the CBS method has been practiced in the Norwegian context, and discuss the potential of the methods impact to participants in Norway. Can the CBS method contribute to liberation and transformation in Norway, or be connected to similar processes of empowerment, increase of self-awareness, and taking ownership of the reading process?

### Contextual Bible Study in Norway

In his book *Ordet tar Bolig* (1994),<sup>46</sup> Kjell Nordstokke mentions the need for a new way of reading the Bible in Norway. He raises concerns about the role of the Bible in people's lives, and he also points at the fact that Christians in Norway read the Bible less today than before. His book was written in 1994, but little seems to have changed the situation in 2011. Nordstokke is concerned with how the Bible can be read in a way that connects it to people's realities and everyday life. His context of reference is Brazil and small groups of poor people who come together to read the Bible in a contextual way. This Bible reading in Brazil is known to be a new Bible movement of the poor and the "ordinary" readers who read the texts and understand the meaning of them in connection to their own lives and contexts. The movement has a lot in common with CBS in South Africa, also in the way that it takes place in community, and takes seriously the contexts of the people, especially the poor and marginalized. Nordstokke uses the term *folkelig bibellesning* to describe this Bible reading, which can be translated to "Bible reading of the ordinary people". Because this reading is similar to the Contextual Bible study method, I will refer to it here as contextual Bible reading. In contrast to the traditional Bible reading in Norway, Nordstokke emphasizes that contextual Bible reading enables the reader to connect their lives with the Bible because there is dialogue between their contexts and the Biblical texts. Such dialogue contributes to a new way of seeing both the Bible and their lives, and which enables them to implement the Word in their every day living. It is a liberating way of reading the Bible, also serving the diaconal task of the Church in mission as the biblical message impacts their lives and enables them to become *doers* of the Word and not only *listeners*. In this way we

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<sup>46</sup> Kjell Norstokke, *Ordet tar bolig, Om folkelig bibellesning* (Oslo: Verbum Forlag, 1994).

can see that the CBS method is both theological, in the way that the participants *listen* to the Word, and diaconal in how the participants become *doers* of the Word through how the impact of the study prompts them to make changes both in their own lives and in the society in which they live.

The Contextual Bible study has been applied in Norway in different contexts; some of these will be presented here. But first I want to present the “two fold sphere-thinking”, which may be typical of the traditional Bible reading in Norway and contains principles contrasting those of the CBS method.

### “Twofold sphere-thinking”

To explain the situation of Bible reading in Norway, Kjell Nordstokke uses the imaginary thinking of two separate spheres of society. One sphere deals with everyday life, and the other sphere on the opposite, deals with religious activities including Bible reading. When these spheres are separate, the guidance of the Bible and the relevance of its message become distant to everyday life. The consequence being that the Bible is disconnected, and may seem irrelevant, to people’s lives and daily concerns. This thinking contrasts central principles in the CBS method. We have seen that the CBS manages to make the Bible relevant in people’s lives; it empowers, raises awareness and contributes to transformation and liberation both on an individual and social level in ways truly integrated in people’s everyday lives. In his introduction to the book about contextual Bible reading, *Ansikt til ansikt. Folkelig bibellesning verden rundt*<sup>47</sup>, Jon Andreas Hasle also warns against this way of separating life and Bible reading. Hasle advocates contextual Bible reading in Norway and the need for a method that can help implementing the message of the Bible in people’s lives, and where the message can prompt people to act according to biblical values and principles. Hasle raises concerns about challenges in the Norwegian context, such as material consumption, environmental problems, lack of solidarity both on a local and a global level, increase of stress, anxiety, depression, and loneliness; challenges that can be approached through the use of CBS. He advocates smaller communities where people can come together to talk and share about life whilst reading the Bible in a way that connect the two spheres (refer above) instead of separating them. This communal and contextual Bible reading can bring new light to challenges and concerns in everyday life. And the sharing of everyday life’s challenges and concerns can bring new light to the biblical texts. One such setting may be to apply CBS in small groups, which I will turn to later.

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<sup>47</sup> Jon Andreas Hasle, *Ansikt til ansikt: Folkelig bibellesning verden rundt* (Oslo: Genesis Forlag, 1996).

Contexts where CBS has been introduced and applied in the Norwegian context are presented in the following. These are: work with HIV and AIDS, the LIFE SKILLS training material and small groups.

### **HIV and AIDS**

The Church City Mission in Norway has used Contextual Bible study in Support Groups for people living with HIV and AIDS. Even though the medical situation and access to medication for a person living with HIV in Norway is different from South Africa, attitudes of stigma and discrimination are however, not so different in the two contexts. CBS in Support Groups for people living with HIV and AIDS in Norway, can have a similar positive impact on its participants in this context, as the one in the South African context. Biblical texts that are especially relevant for issues of stigma and discrimination are applied in this work, and are thus relevant both in the South and the North.

The AIDS pandemic is a global challenge that also affects Norway and the Church of Norway. In 2003 the Church General Synod made four strategic areas of commitment in its work on HIV/AIDS as a national and global challenge. These are stigmatization, sexuality, dialogue and global justice. One response to this commitment was the creation of the book *Positiv*<sup>48</sup>, which uses CBS as one of its methods to help youth leaders in the church talk about topics of stigma, sexuality and HIV and AIDS. These topics could easily be seen to belong to the “none religious sphere of society”, and therefore be silenced within the church. By dealing with the topics through CBS they are put in connection with biblical texts in a way that may contribute to transformed views on both the matters and on the texts. This impact can further contribute to transformation and even liberation for the participants. *Positiv* applies the CBS method based on the four commitments presented in this article, and uses the CBS as one tool among others to approach the different topics in the book. The topics in the book are also similar to challenges in the South African context, and the CBS here is not very different, except from the first commitment. The first commitment of the CBS described in *Positiv*, is to read the Bible from the perspective of one’s own reality and challenges.

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### **LIFE SKILLS**

NMS U (The Norwegian Missionary Society for Children and Youth) in collaboration with the Centre for Intercultural Communication (SIK) has

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<sup>48</sup> Elisabeth Tveito and Estrid Hessellund (red), *Positiv, stempling, seksualitet, hiv & aids* (Oslo: Verbum Forlag, 2005).

developed LIFE SKILLS<sup>49</sup>, a training material for youth leaders to help enable young people to be better equipped in making good choices and live in good relationships with others. Through developing young people's skills that can equip them as people and make them more confident in their religious identity, CBS is being used to bring the biblical perspective into the project, alongside with various practical exercises for inspiration and development for youth leaders and young people between the age of 13 and 18 years. The development of skills in communication, confidence, friendship, empathy, dealing with peer pressure, making good choices and the ability to reflect upon own choices are central in LIFE SKILLS. These are all skills that are necessary in young people's lives today. The aim of CBS in LIFE SKILLS is to integrate the Bible and its message to everyday challenges. It seeks to enable youth to see that the Bible is relevant to their lives, and a positive source of encouragement and guidance bringing new light to life situations when applied practically. The Bible in LIFE SKILLS is presented in a way that its message can be implemented in a natural way in the lives of the youth.

The four commitments in the CBS are the underlying principles in the different Bible studies in the material, and the Biblical texts are presented as case studies with questions, practical steps, creative exercises or drama attached. In LIFE SKILLS the Bible and the CBS is viewed equally important alongside with other exercises, and is presented in all seven themes<sup>50</sup> of the material also demonstrating the broad relevance of the Bible through the use of CBS. The LIFE SKILLS material has recently been launched, so as this article is written I can only mention the potential of the CBS method in such a context. From CBS in South Africa we have learned that the method is a tool to bring transformation and liberation through processes of empowering, increase of self-awareness, and gain of self-confidence in own capacity. These processes are central in LIFE SKILLS with regard to how the youth may be better equipped to make good life choices based on their own context and their own capacity. Thus the CBS in LIFE SKILLS aim to contribute towards transformation and liberation for the participants through enabling them to become *doers* of the

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<sup>49</sup> The LIFE SKILLS project and the various exercises in the project are based on the methodological approach called Life Skills, used by UNICEF in HIV/AIDS prevention work. From this method life skills are defined as human qualities and skills promoting the individual's ability to reflect and develop constructive behavior with respect to themselves and others. The project was developed by funds of the Religious Education in the Church of Norway. The training material is available on the Internet ([www.nmsu.no/lifeskills/](http://www.nmsu.no/lifeskills/)), and a booklet introducing the material can be ordered from NMS U ([www.nmsu.no](http://www.nmsu.no)).

<sup>50</sup> The seven themes in LIFE SKILLS that the various exercises are built around are; Relationships and influence, To know yourself, Communication, Conflict and negotiation, Consumption, Solidarity, and Sexuality. To read more about the LIFE SKILLS project, see [www.sik.no](http://www.sik.no), or [www.nmsu.no](http://www.nmsu.no).

Word as an integrated part of taking action in and responsibility for their lives.

### **Small Groups**

Nordstokke and Hasle both argue for communal Bible reading in small groups in line with the tradition of laypeople created by Hans Nielsen Hauge. Going to church in Norway often means listening to – and receiving the pastor’s presentation and interpretation of the text with limited room for engagement. In addition to the Sunday services many people are also involved in small groups where the Bible is read and discussed. These small groups can be a potential place where the Contextual Bible study method, or a Bible reading of the ordinary people to use the words of Nordstokke, can be applied. Based on my findings from the investigation of the CBS in South Africa, I will argue for the potential of the CBS method to contribute towards transformation and liberation on both an individual and social level, when applied in such small groups. Especially due to the safe place small groups are likely to create, processes of empowerment, increase of self-awareness and self-confidence may take place. These are long-term processes that can have great impact both on the individual and on the society, the extent of which depends on the person and the context, whether it is South Africa or Norway. We have seen that contexts in the South and in the North can represent similar challenges for the church, where the CBS can be applied in similar ways. However there are differences, which require contextualization of the method. Processes of transformation and liberation can still be traced in the different contexts, and will then serve the dimensions of the Church in mission; the proclamation of the Word and the diaconal service of the church.

Another important feature of small groups is that they serve as structures of support to the participants. We have learned that for some of the women involved with CBS in South Africa, these supporting structures were lacking, which could lead to further suffering. CBS applied in small groups in a Norwegian context might not run such risk. Hasle also suggests contextual Bible reading in Norway to be applied as an alternative to the traditional sermon on a Sunday service. This could then, in addition to already existing small groups in the same congregation, serve as a place where participants can increase their biblical knowledge and critical consciousness, be inspired to create dialogue between their context and the texts, and then continue the process in the small groups.

### **Conclusion: The Voice of the Church in Mission – A Liberating One**

The empirical evidences from my fieldwork research imply that CBS as a method operates both adequately and legitimately with regard to assisting



oppressed and marginalized women in South Africa in their transformational journeys towards individual and social liberation. Processes of awareness and empowerment condition their journey. This is in line with the elements of a new paradigm for a “relevant Missiology” for today, which Bosch has outlined. Where processes of transformation and liberation are central, CBS can be a tool in the liberating role of the Church in mission, for which CBS serves as a tool in South Africa, and can be applied, in the Norwegian context. Similar challenges are to be found within the work of HIV and AIDS in Norway, especially in terms of dealing with stigma and discrimination, where the CBS can be a helpful tool to start processes of transformation and liberation for the participants. The LIFE SKILLS project is based on principles of how to cope with life in a better way, where elements of empowerment, and development of self-confidence and self-awareness are central. In the way that the CBS method enables participants to integrate the Bible in their daily struggles, challenges or concerns in life, it provides the participants with a tool to start a journey towards transformation and liberation. The safe place of small groups is especially interesting when speaking about the potential of the CBS method in Norway. A two fold sphere-thinking has characterized the tradition of reading the Bible in Norway, which needs to change according to Nordstokke and Hasle. CBS can provide a new way of reading the Bible in our Norwegian context where lives and contexts can seek relevant light from biblical texts, and where these can be a positive source for coping with life. When people read the Bible together in community and take their contexts and lives into the reading, transformation and liberation can take place, and here the liberating role of the Church in mission is carried out. In this article we have seen that the CBS method is applicable in creating a platform for processes of transformation and liberation, on both an individual and social level. Thus the CBS can be used as one way by which the Church can implement its liberating role in mission, both in the South African context, representing the Church in the South, and the Norwegian context representing the Church in the North.

# MISSION AND THREE SOUTH AFRICAN METROPOLITAN MEGACHURCHES: MIDDLE-CLASS MASSES IN SEARCH OF MAMMON?

**Genevieve Lerina James**

Megachurches have incurred strong disapproval from segments within the global Christian community. These churches are often at the receiving end of jokes pertaining to their size. Mocked with names like ‘soul garage’, ‘McChurch’ and ‘faith-factories’ megachurches have certainly unintentionally and in some cases intentionally encouraged a lively discussion and debate about the new face of Christian presence in our cities today. According to Shelley and Shelley,<sup>1</sup> megachurches are the ‘newest feature on the ecclesial landscape of large metropolitan areas’. The strong presence of these churches in the major cities of South Africa warrants exploration.

This article will describe the ethos, practise and presence of three Pentecostal/Charismatic megachurches in three South African cities. The research on which this article is based is located in the cities of Johannesburg, Durban, and the administrative capital, Pretoria. These cities were selected on account of their dominance in shaping the political, economic, cultural and religious landscape of the country. The descriptions and explorations in this article are based on participant observation over the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Participant observation as the fieldwork strategy of this research has provided extensive opportunities to experience and view the phenomena discussed here.

In this article, I will discuss the significance of size as the most obvious characteristic of the megachurches. I will move on to explore forms of megachurch mission engagement strategies, thereafter tackling what I call mega-hazards, which include potentially risky mission practice.

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<sup>1</sup> B. Shelly and M. Shelly, *The Consumer Church: Can Evangelicals Win the World Without Losing Their Souls?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1992), 204.

### Size Counts

The megachurches' most obvious characteristic is their size. Rothauge (in Shelley and Shelley)<sup>2</sup> suggests that there are four basic sizes of churches. A small church is called a 'family church', and can have up to 50 active members, while a medium size church with 50 to 150 members is a 'pastoral church'. Here the pastor's role is to provide the common purpose and identity of the church. A large church with 150 to 350 people is a 'programme church'. The extra-large church has 350 or more people and can be called a 'corporation church'. Thumma<sup>3</sup> describes a megachurch as constituting a minimum weekly attendance of 2000 people. All three South African congregations in question have memberships of well over 15 000 people. National membership of these congregations could in some cases surpass 50 000 people. One news reporter<sup>4</sup> described one of the congregations as an '... empire called the fast-food of spirituality, [that] has been growing steadily and in the last four years attracted 10 000 new members... National membership exceeds 70 000'.

To experience the megachurch multitudes, a Sunday morning church visit is necessary. A traveller on the roads leading to these churches may not recall that it is actually a Sunday morning, since the traffic that leads to these churches resembles the Monday morning peak hour. It is not uncommon to witness people queuing in long lines just to get into the service. Ushers skilfully filter the crowd in and out of the massive halls. As the auditoriums fill to capacity, rows of chairs are often set up for the overflowing crowd at the back of the church or outside. In some instances when popular guest preachers are invited, people occupy aisle space, hallways and entrance areas to accommodate the influx. Crowds bring delight to the leadership of these churches. The presence of crowds indicates the success of the churches' evangelistic and marketing efforts. Further to this, statistics play a huge role in megachurches self-value and appraisal. It is common to hear about the number of people who were saved or baptised in the last church meeting.

The other major observation is that the three megachurches have an overwhelmingly middle-class membership. The churches have become brand names that have massive brand loyalty from the middle class. One of the reasons that these South African megachurches grow can be ascribed to the simple theory that big crowds attract big crowds; however, there is more to the growth of these churches. Given the phenomenal rate of urbanisation in post-apartheid South Africa, the megachurches also attract people who are first-generation urban dwellers.

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<sup>2</sup> Shelley and Shelley, *Consumer Church*, 203.

<sup>3</sup> S. Thumma, 'Megachurches Today', [hrr.hartsem.edu/org/faith\\_megachurches\\_FACTsummary.html](http://hrr.hartsem.edu/org/faith_megachurches_FACTsummary.html) (2000).

<sup>4</sup> A. Eliseev, 'Stressed out Pastor McCauley heads for Durban', *The Mercury* 20 April 2006, 1.

The pastors and congregants often suggest that the growth of their churches should be attributed to the prompting and guiding of the Holy Spirit who leads people to these churches. Several members of the three congregations believe that people are attracted to their church, since it is a 'spirit-filled church'. The term 'spirit-filled church' is commonly used in Pentecostal and Charismatic circles. It refers to a church that allows the move of the Holy Spirit as opposed to churches that abide by a strict liturgical structures and time limits. Exuberant worship styles, lively musical instruments, testimonies, healing and prophetic services are often elements of spirit-filled churches.

### **Megachurch Mission Engagement Strategies**

The South African urban megachurches reflected in this article have a wide array of mission strategies. I will briefly focus on four main strategies, which are as follows: Evangelism, Mobilised masses – the agency of the flock, Social interventions, 'Send us the power Lord!'

#### *Evangelism*

Megachurches in South Africa are deeply evangelistic in their practice. Evangelism is often considered to be the core function of the church and the primary priority. Congregants are conscientized about their role as messengers of the gospel and 'proof producers' that Christianity works. 'Give us souls Lord' is the recurrent prayer at these churches. The churches spend generously on hosting evangelistic campaigns and crusades. The senior pastors travel around the country and the world preaching and teaching and 'leading the lost to Christ'. As mentioned earlier, statistical gain is crucial, as the senior pastors often return home sharing the news of the number of people who 'came to the Lord'.

The megachurches teach that every Christian is responsible for the communication of the good news of Jesus Christ. Things start to get murky when we explore the megachurches' interpretation of the good news. The good news of the fullness of life through Jesus is often mixed with references to emotional well-being, secure and happy families, riches, living luxuriously, better jobs and houses. The message of Jesus is communicated as a message of a better life. Now, this is a very South African message, in fact, a slogan of the ruling political party is 'a better life for all'. Given the massive discrimination and inequality that plagued South Africa during the apartheid era this is a pertinent and powerful message, rich with promise. Unlike the transitory nature of political parties, the good news of the better life courtesy of Jesus, who through the Holy Spirit will always be with us, is a compelling and comforting message for South African urban masses.

### *Mobilised masses – the agency of the flock*

Another significant form of mission engagement is the special prayer and bible studies that take place in the homes of the megachurch members. The congregants are mobilised to reach their communities through ‘home cells’ or ‘life groups’, which are gatherings of small groups of people. Members are encouraged to bring along ‘unsaved’ families and friends to house meetings. These meetings form an indispensable feature of the growing megachurches. The house becomes a neutral space for people who do not attend church services and who would feel uncomfortable and intimidated in an actual church building. The guest is nurtured and encouraged through other members of the home group who share their personal narratives of strength in situations of crisis. Stories of healing, salvation and answered prayer are part of the appeal of the house meeting. The megachurches grow as a direct result of the social networks established at the home level.

### **Social Interventions**

Realising their capacity to contribute to change in their cities, the megachurches have engaged in a wide range of social interventions ranging from HIV and AIDS awareness and treatment, youth and children mentorship programmes, counselling services, places of safety, children’s homes, employment clinics and migrant integration support services. These churches offer valuable support to the already-strained city social development and relief programmes. It could be said that the overriding mission themes behind these interventions is that of evangelism through compassion and acts of social good as acts of blessing, this since the megachurches often explain that they are ‘blessed to be a blessing’.

### *‘Send us the power Lord!’*

One of the major reasons why people are attracted to the megachurches is their need for power. The old Pentecostal song ‘Send us the power Lord’ aptly describes the congregations of the three churches. According to Schreiter,<sup>5</sup> the primary answer to the question, what does an individual seek from participation in popular religion, is ‘access to power in times of crisis’. The three congregations confirm Schreiter’s analysis, as weekly Sunday church services reveal an emphasis on the acquisition of personal power. The worship leader or preacher often refers to crisis situations reflected in the news and general family or individual situations such as divorce, financial, health and employment predicaments. Congregants are told that they can tap into the ‘same power that raised Jesus from the dead’ to transform their situations. Access to power in times of crisis is one of the dominant mission themes at these churches and amongst the dominant

<sup>5</sup> R. Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1985), 139.

reasons that people attend these churches. The communication of the availability of power to the overwhelmed, beleaguered and stressed urban populace is a key mission strategy in these megachurches. At this point, it necessary to ponder the purpose of the power of God as John Hamby<sup>6</sup> so aptly states:

The power of God turned despairing doubters into dynamic disciples. They had received the promise of the Holy Spirit and were clothed with power from on high. But power for what? Did they receive the power of God simply so they could feel good about themselves? Did they receive the power of God to keep it to themselves? No! They received the power of God to energize them to be witnesses to Jesus Christ in a secular society. The power of the Holy Spirit was for people; to enable the disciples to reach out and touch human need and share the liberating truth of the Gospel of Christ.

### **Mega-Hazards**

While the megachurches in question boast an array of mission activities too many to account for in this article there are mega-hazards in their current mission praxis. I outline them in the following section.

#### *Middle-class masses in search of mammon?*

A popular Pentecostal song I remember singing at church as a child was Ira Stanphil's 'Mansion over the hilltop'. This song dealt with the eschatological hope of prosperity and longevity. This hope was eschatological, since Pentecostals at that time were mainly poor working-class people, who did not have many 'worldly possessions'. Now many Pentecostals and Charismatics have become upwardly mobile and are comfortably located in the middle-class bracket. So, 'Mansion over the hilltop' is no longer sung at these Pentecostal/Charismatic megachurches. Songs like Stanphil's are placed in archives and called 'old school' or 'classics', for the simple reason that they are considered irrelevant today. This is because many megachurch members who, when referring to a mansion over a hilltop, would probably be referring to their own houses here on earth, and not some hope in the afterlife. The megachurch congregants have moved from the romanticism of poverty and the hope of a better life in heaven to a global, public embracing of prosperity and abundance here and now. The 'prosperity gospel' has influenced the masses attending the three churches. Owing to the globalization of Charismatic Christianity, prosperity teachings of Western proponents have permeated the three megachurches. American prosperity preachers are household names in South Africa, since their television programmes are broadcast almost daily on Christian TV channels.

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<sup>6</sup> J. Hamby, 'Ministering in the Holy Spirit's Power', [www.antiochchurchofchrist.com/Sermons/2010-01-10%20Ministering%20in%20the%20Spirits%20Power.pdf](http://www.antiochchurchofchrist.com/Sermons/2010-01-10%20Ministering%20in%20the%20Spirits%20Power.pdf).

I would hope that the churches consider the reflections of Ronald Sider and Walter Hollenweger. Sider's 1977 thought-provoking book 'Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger'<sup>7</sup> discusses the folly and injustice of the gratuitous acquisition of the material amongst the Christian community while people continue to hunger and starve in the world. This still holds true today. Hollenweger<sup>8</sup> offers a spirited disapproval of affluent Pentecostals. He describes the 'insulation of elite Pentecostals from a meaningful dialogue' with poor Pentecostals. He laments the disinterest and disrespect shown to the poor primarily by those who have become rich. He then reminds us that Pentecostalism began as a religion of the poor. Now the upward mobility of Pentecostals has brought with it a sense of elitism, 'money-based power structures and world conformism'.<sup>9</sup> Though poor Pentecostals became rich through the 'work and life discipline that Pentecostal conversion entails'<sup>10</sup> and their ability to 'actively create, work in the informal sector of the economy',<sup>11</sup> they lose sight of their humble beginnings and join the race for 'more', more power, money and recognition. Hollenweger<sup>12</sup> further asserts that Pentecostalism has to be 'delivered from its Babylonian bourgeois captivity'.

Since the churches in this article have mastered the art of ministry to the middle class, they continue to attract a steady stream of upwardly mobile individuals. These churches often use the concept of 'excellence' to explain why they insist on only the best in life. The quest to attain the living standard of the bourgeois is being marketed as the quest for God-ordained wholeness. The megachurches in question have indeed reached outside the walls of the church and are involved in several social interventions in their respective cities. Despite this, I believe, the megachurch leadership of the three churches are far removed from the day-to-day struggles of the poorest people in the cities in which they operate. This lack of proximity to the poor has created a deficit in understanding the total plight of the disadvantaged and the urgency needed to authentically advocate for the poor. One megachurch pastor put up his five-bedroom house for 10 million Rands. The reporter<sup>13</sup> described the house as a 'palace' of '800m<sup>2</sup> of luxury'. The pastors live in unapologetic luxury compared with the South African urban poor. Their theology that it is God's will for people to prosper and enjoy the finer things in life (also known as 'abundant life' in

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<sup>7</sup> R. Sider, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1977).

<sup>8</sup> W. Hollenweger, 'The Pentecostal Elites and the Pentecostal Poor – A Missed Dialogue?' in K. Poewe (ed), *Charismatic Christianity as a Global Culture* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1994).

<sup>9</sup> Hollenweger, 'Pentecostal Elites', 205.

<sup>10</sup> Hollenweger, 'Pentecostal Elites', 203.

<sup>11</sup> Hollenweger, 'Pentecostal Elites', 204.

<sup>12</sup> Hollenweger, 'Pentecostal Elites', 208.

<sup>13</sup> Eliseev, 'Stressed out Pastor McCauley', 1.

these circles) justify their lifestyle choices. The megachurch pastors will further vindicate their lavish lifestyles by using the sow–reap principle. They often talk about what they personally sowed into the work of God, how they sacrificed, and how God has subsequently blessed them. These pastors believe that they are in control of riches and that riches are not in control of them.

The flaw in the logic above is that there is a failure to consider the full reality of the context in which the pastors live. The blessing of God is not the issue that I personally dispute; my dilemma is with the justification of extreme wealth and affluence in the presence of gross poverty and lack. The cities of Johannesburg, Durban and Pretoria are by no means without visible signs of poverty, inequality and injustice. Thousands of people in South Africa live in a labyrinth of tin and plastic makeshift structures, which we have clinically named ‘informal settlements’. Megachurch ministers should ask the popular question, ‘What would Jesus do?’ Would Jesus have opted for ostentatious crusades, luxury cars, business-class air travel and palatial mansions, or would Jesus have identified with the poor and marginalised? If the pastors considered a simpler lifestyle for the sake of authentic identification with the poor, the impact of such a lifestyle choice may have a great influence on the thousands of middle-class congregants who hold in high esteem the very words of these leaders.

In South Africa, the number of people living on less than a dollar a day has ‘more than doubled since the first democratic election in 1994’.<sup>14</sup> What is more disturbing is that ‘black economic empowerment’<sup>15</sup> and the surge in the black middle-class have worsened inequality amongst black South Africans by boosting wealth and incomes at the middle and top end’.<sup>16</sup> It could be said that the megachurches in question contribute to the widening gap between the poor and the rich by unconsciously encouraging the black middle class who throng to these churches to maintain the status quo of middle-class individualism and consumerism. This is achieved through constant references to personal prosperity and blessings.

### *Megachurches, capitalism and consumerism*

The next mega-hazard to consider is what Luisa Kroll<sup>17</sup> wrote about in *Christian capitalism: megachurches, megabusiness*. Kroll notes the similarities between corporations and churches. After presenting these similarities, she offers a welcome to the world of megachurches, ‘Where

<sup>14</sup> G. Steyn, ‘Different Conclusions’, *Finweek* 2006, 47.

<sup>15</sup> In an African special report, Robinson discusses how the spoils of black economic empowerment are benefiting a few. S. Robinson, ‘The New Rand Lords’, *Time* (6 June 2005), 30-33.

<sup>16</sup> Steyn, ‘Different Conclusions’, 47.

<sup>17</sup> L. Kroll, ‘Christian Capitalism: Megachurches, Megabusinesses’, [www.forbes.com/2003/09/17/cz\\_1k\\_0917megachurch.html](http://www.forbes.com/2003/09/17/cz_1k_0917megachurch.html) (17.9.2003).



pastors often act as chief executives and use business tactics to grow their congregation'. This entrepreneurial approach, Kroll believes, has contributed to the explosive growth of megachurches. Kroll ventures to mention that churches have 'learned valuable lessons' from business corporations, and 'maybe they can teach businesses a thing or two'. Kroll is certain that companies would appreciate 'having the armies of non-paid, loyal volunteers'.

*The Learning Annex Real Estate Wealth Expo*, where consumers learn about wealth creation and real estate opportunities, was held in several American cities in 2007. Keynote speakers include the likes of real estate mogul Donald Trump, founder of the multinational 'Virgin' enterprise Richard Branson, former boxer and entrepreneur George Forman, and life strategist Anthony Robbins. What is fascinating about this conference is that amidst the lineup of keynote speakers, there was a megachurch pastor, Paula White, who "taught on why God wants you to be wealthy".<sup>18</sup> The presence of a megachurch pastor at a wealth-creation conference is a conspicuous example of how megachurch leaders have become proponents for capitalism and consumerism. The American influence of size and wealth fixation has become deeply embedded in the consciousness of the South African megachurches in this study. There is little critical consciousness to counter the relentless sway of American megachurch values.

The South African megachurches' enthusiastic adoption of corporate-style growth strategies is giving them an advantage in the business of church growth. The churches display savvy use of corporate strategies. They are major shareholders in the religious economies of the cities of Johannesburg, Durban and Pretoria. The contemporary business strategy of these churches is not without theological backing. They prescribe to a theology that suggests that it is God's wish for his peoples' expansion, excellence, success and prosperity.

### Individualism

The mega-hazard of individualism is a serious threat to the Mission of God. I have observed that the worship service content of the megachurches is intentionally directed towards the upliftment and encouragement of the individual. Although the Sunday services are described as the equipping of the saints for the harvest field, the services' striking resemblance to psychotherapy sessions and motivational workshops cannot be ignored. Sermon content is largely confined to themes that deal with positive

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<sup>18</sup> Donald Trump at The Learning Annex Real Estate & Wealth Expo. [www.thefreelibrary.com/Donald+Trump+at+The+Learning+Annex+Real+Estate+%26+Wealth+Expo.-a0159654740](http://www.thefreelibrary.com/Donald+Trump+at+The+Learning+Annex+Real+Estate+%26+Wealth+Expo.-a0159654740).

confessions, self-esteem, self-actualization and self-empowerment. Vanhoozen<sup>19</sup> describes individualism as a:

Distinctly modern ideology that promotes the sacred value of the self: individual freedom, private prosperity and personal wealth, personal fulfilment, self-improvement and the self-made man [sic] and the right to pursue one's own happiness

The megachurches appeal to the desires, needs and senses of the individual is crucial. Individualism is what drives many members of the megachurches. People can dispense with a church that is not meeting their needs or fancies. Bellan (in Vanhoozen)<sup>20</sup> describes this as: 'a group of persons united by their shared interest in a project that they believe will contribute to their individual good'. Vanhoozen<sup>21</sup> states that individualism is followed by consumerism. 'To elevate the individual is to focus on my needs, my want, and my fulfilment',<sup>22</sup> this is the ethos of individualism. The prosperity gospel adds to the notion of individualism, despite the fact that this gospel is marketed as 'blessed to be a blessing'. Individualism also contributes to the ease of which Pentecostal/Charismatic theology ushers its followers on to the road to capitalism and neo-liberalism.

*Go tell it on the mountain, over the hills and everywhere:  
Mega-marketing*

The next mega-hazard is the thin line between marketing and evangelism. In general, marketing activities are all those associated with identifying the particular wants and needs of a target market of customers, and then going about satisfying those customers better than the competitors.<sup>23</sup> Though the megachurches' theology can be considered conservative, the marketing is certainly progressive. The purpose of marketing is to draw people to the church. The churches use the usual marketing means from expensive glossy brochures, welcome booklets and weekly bulletins to electronic advertising boards located at the entrance to the church premises. What used to be weekly announcements is now transformed into *Coming Attractions*, which is presented in a high-tech, action-packed video format during the Sunday morning services.

The churches target people at every stage of their lives. There is specific targeting of children and youth with weekly contemporized versions of

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<sup>19</sup> K. Vanhoozer, 'Evangelism and the Church: The Company of the Gospel', in C. Bartholomew, R. Parry and A. West (eds), *The Futures of Evangelicalism* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 2003), 58.

<sup>20</sup> Vanhoozer, 'Evangelism and the Church', 58.

<sup>21</sup> Vanhoozer, 'Evangelism and the Church', 58.

<sup>22</sup> Vanhoozer, 'Evangelism and the Church', 58.

<sup>23</sup> Boone and Kurtz, *Contemporary Marketing Wired* (Dryden Press: 1998), leasingtoolkit.org/lease\_production.

Sunday school with trendy name brands. I once witnessed costumed mascots walk through the crowds, gathering the children in order to take them to the children's church. Here the children are not only educated about the Bible, but also come to enjoy high quality entertainment.

The intentional use of captivating contemporary names for the programmes, sensational language and the call to be part of something greater is a common thread in the three churches' advertising campaign targeting younger people. The focused targeting of children and youth in these megachurches is not without reason, since it is thought that if children become attached to the church, their parents will certainly follow.

One of the churches once marketed itself as 'More than just a Church'; this was presented on large billboards outside the church facing the street. This captures the essence of what these churches want to be known and experienced as. It is important at this point to reflect on the Theology of Church. What does it mean to be Church? Why do churches have the desire to be more than just a Church? Will this lead to the diminishing prioritising of the true purpose of Church? I will not go into a long systematic theology discussion on the doctrine of the Church in this article, I will merely state that the megachurches would do well to revisit the Church as the Bride of Christ and the Body of Christ. The Church is also viewed as the alternative community of mercy and justice, the sign of the Kingdom of God that is not yet but already here. This understanding seems far from the savvy sales pitch and bumper-sticker reductionism that emanates from the megachurches.

If the instructions of Jesus had to be marketed, I believe few people would be interested in signing on. Consider Jesus' answer to the rich man who asked how he could enter the Kingdom of God: 'Sell all you have and give it to the poor'. I am certain that this kind of radical instruction is not the kind of catch phrase that will be used in the megachurches' marketing. Imagine passing a church with a billboard saying 'take up your cross and follow Jesus' or 'die to self' or 'wash one another's feet' or 'If the world hates you know that it hated me before it hated you', or 'why do you call me Lord, Lord and don't do the things I say?' These statements will not attract people to megachurches, since these churches market a softer more 'user-friendly' version of Jesus, the Jesus who is Healer, Provider, Saviour, the Prince of Peace and the Jesus through whom we are now heirs of the Father who owns the whole earth. The Jesus who passionately opposed the oppression and negligence of the poor is not marketable amongst middle-class circles who, while climbing the socio-economic ladder, need a Jesus who keeps them at peace in times of stress, provides them with luxury goods and assets, and facilitates their upward mobility through promotions and salary increases.

### **Crucial Missional Considerations for the Metropolitan Megachurches**

In order to conclude the reflections of the three megachurches in the three South African cities, I propose three crucial mission considerations in this section.

#### *Convert the middle class*

Pixley and Boff<sup>24</sup> assert that ‘the main objective of the pastoral care of the non-poor has to be to associate them with the cause of the poor’. Further to this, they advise the non-poor to ‘take on the cause of justice, adopt the viewpoint of the poor, to show solidarity with their struggle, and be their companion’. The gospel speaks of the conversion of the middle class and rich. This conversion is the need for a decision to choose between the ‘plan of mammon (accumulation), or that of God (freedom and sharing)’.<sup>25</sup> The megachurches’ interpretation of excellence should be interrogated and revised. Excellence cannot be the aligning to the mission and vision of corporatism and the super rich. The quest for excellence should be in the churches’ sustained, prophetic and vigorous engagement with the injustice of our time.

Although the economic well-being of the middle class is crucial to the economy of the country, this well-being cannot come at the cheap satisfaction that supporting a children’s home or an AIDS clinic through the church is sufficient. Vincent<sup>26</sup> succinctly states that pastoral action must move past the comforting of the middle class. He argues that the church in the city must ‘submit to becoming vile’. The church must have a legitimate presence amongst the poor of the city in order to truly be a church of the city. The black middle class and all the members of the megachurches should be personally involved in advocacy and justice for the poor. Members should be discerning and ask critical questions about the way money is spent: is it just to spend millions on sound and light technology? Is it fair to use the money set aside for ‘the extension of God’s kingdom’<sup>27</sup> for flashy conventions and hosting budgets for superstar evangelists? Are the megachurches really aware of what the extension of Kingdom of God entails? I believe that extending the Kingdom of God is extending and increasing the environment or conditions of justice, mercy and shalom. While I am attracted to the Jesus of the middle class, I am also aware that

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<sup>24</sup> G. Pixley and C. Boff, *The Bible, the Church and the Poor* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1990), 230.

<sup>25</sup> Pixley and Boff, *Bible*, 231.

<sup>26</sup> J. Vincent, *The Public Presence of the Church in the City* (São Paulo, Brazil: September 2005).

<sup>27</sup> It is common to hear the words “bless this money for the extension of your kingdom” when an offering is taken.

part of God's dissatisfaction over the twin cities of Sodom and Gomorrah was over the economic injustice that they perpetuated. I fear that South African cities are also guilty of this serious indictment.

### *Understand the power of the small*

Being part of the Pentecostal/Charismatic movement myself, over the years, I have observed the transvaluation of the value of weakness to strength and material simplicity to extravagance. Many proponents in Pentecostal/Charismatic churches have become bloated with pride and intoxicated with triumphalism. Humility is a crucial characteristic in the mission of the church. While strength in the megachurches discussed in this study is manifested through size, power rhetoric and wealth, it is necessary for me to concur with Hall,<sup>28</sup> who points out that all the metaphors Jesus used 'to depict the community of witness... are metaphors of smallness':

Little things that perform some essential service for bigger things—salt, yeast, a candle, a little town on a hill in a dark night, a pearl, a mustard seed. He speaks of his "little flock," which he sends out "as sheep into the midst of wolves" (Matt.10:16). He assumes that the missionary vocation of this koinonia will involve excruciating isolation, rejection, and suffering – should not the disciple follow the master?<sup>29</sup>

The imagery contained in these metaphors of smallness point to the power and possibility contained in the small, less obvious, or seemingly insignificant. The small groups that meet across the city in the homes of megachurch members are the actual sites of mission. These are the communities of witness. Megachurch leaders would do well to invert their power hierarchies and support the local area networks and house meetings.

### *We must decrease*

I am profoundly moved by the writing of Koyama<sup>30</sup> who advocated for the 'crucified mind' and not the 'crusading mind' in the missionary. He asserts that the crusading mind is not the mind of biblical communicators. Koyama's reflection rings true for the churches in this study. The megachurches' statistic-driven, increase-hungry empire lusts need to be carefully critiqued. Unfortunately, the expansionist objectives of church growth could become a serious hindrance to the Missio Dei.

Koyama<sup>31</sup> laments the crusading mind in mission, imploring for the Johannine principle that 'he must increase, but I must decrease' (John 3:30). He states:

<sup>28</sup> D.J. Hall, *The Cross in our Context* (2003), 189.

<sup>29</sup> Hall, *The Cross in our Context*, 189.

<sup>30</sup> K. Koyama (1974), 132.

<sup>31</sup> Koyama, 131.

What does this decrease mean? Decrease in number? Decrease in influence? Decrease in prestige? I understand it in the framework of the history of “reviled” (decrease) – bless (increase) – persecuted (decrease) – endure (increase) – slandered (decrease) – conciliate (increase)... It is a mind that does not seek profit for itself. It is a mind which is happy in becoming refuse (decrease) of humanity since it brings increase to others.

Can the megachurches apply the Johannine principle to their mission discourse, consciousness and engagement? Are they willing to become insignificant, small, vulnerable and powerless? Are they willing to allow the names of their leaders to fade away so that the name of Jesus can be lifted up? Are they willing to disparage their brands so that people will only know the crucified Christ, the suffering servant? Are they ready to be persecuted and not praised? Is the megachurch ready to decrease so that He can increase in the pain and poverty and torment of many in the cities of Johannesburg, Durban and Pretoria?

### Conclusion

This article has embarked on the journey of discovery of three South African megachurches and their mission engagement strategies. A critical evaluation of the practice and presence of the megachurches in the three South African cities was conducted in order to attain an account of the churches’ missional presence.

The similarities between South African megachurches and their American counterparts was discussed in order to provide evidence of the influence of American models of Christianity on segments of South African Christianity. The megachurches’ attraction of large crowds can be attributed to the agency of the congregants, their advertising prowess and the diverse programmes that target young people and children and the middle class in general. Realising that the congregants are religious consumers, the churches ensure that the peoples’ senses are appeased.

In this article, I have made several references to the megachurches’ individualism, brand consciousness, consumerist middle-class lifestyles and their appetite for mammon. At this point, I have to admit that although some Christian traditions and theologians may not share the Charismatic theologies of prosperity and blessing, this does not preclude their quest for riches. The Pentecostal/ Charismatic megachurch middle class is not the only segment in society that has a penchant for the material. The government, multinational corporations and even *some* liberation theologians are in the ‘get all you can’ mode. This is the prevailing spirit of our time.

According to Davey,<sup>32</sup> Jesus taught about ‘the economy of God’, which is concerned with the ‘reordering of relationships and resources through a just and gracious liberality’. Davey<sup>33</sup> adds that the apostle Paul believed that economy was the ‘Christ-centred activity of God’. The following view of an alternative economy is necessary for us all to consider.

As God encourages generosity, the economy is about the possibility of new communities: a new pattern of relationship, internally and with other communities; it is an involving system that seeks to include and empower those who are not “economically active”, which should not lack the gifts necessary to its life and mission. It is an economy with a critique that offers radical criteria for the valorisation of people, places, and activities, concerned with bringing the experience of the future into the present in its exploration and embodiment of the possibilities that its experience of the Spirit makes possible.<sup>34</sup>

Finally, megachurches are not to be discounted in the mission endeavour. While I have covered elements of megachurch mission praxis that are hazardous, I would end this article by emphatically stating that in spite of some faulty perceptions, flawed theologies and imperfect mission engagements people are discovering the liberating presence of Jesus Christ in these churches. Countless personal stories of renewal, healing and restoration are heard across the three cities. I seem to be making an about-turn in my final analysis of the three megachurches. What I want to convey is that all churches are flawed by virtue of their susceptibility to the spirit of the age. This is what churches all over the world need to be aware of. The half-truths and ideal visions we have of our own churches need constant interrogation. I am from the Pentecostal/Charismatic background, so this article is an exploration of my own tradition. I believe that there are mission merits to the presence of these megachurches and that would have to be considered in another paper. My only cry is that the three megachurches who claim to be intimately connected with the Holy Spirit and the will of God should be at the forefront of advocacy and action for the poor and the marginalised. Super-sized urban congregations may be the bother of mainline churches, but for many Pentecostals/Charismatics across the globe megachurches are viewed as signs of the next move of God, a revival of faith, and the churches’ ability to blend into an increasingly urban, market-driven society. Copyrighted Material

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<sup>32</sup> A. Davey, *Urban Christianity and Global Order* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002), 111.

<sup>33</sup> Davey, *Urban Christianity*, 111.

<sup>34</sup> Davey, *Urban Christianity*, 111.

**CHALLENGES FACING THE ETHIOPIAN  
EVANGELICAL CHURCH MEKANE YESUS (EECMY):  
A GROWING CHARISMATIC CHURCH  
IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH**

**Dawit Olika Terfassa**

**Introduction**

Like many other churches in the global south, the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY) is among the rapidly growing Lutheran churches in the world. The fact that the membership of EECMY grew from ca 20.000 in 1959 to ca 6 million in 2010 places this church among the largest Lutheran churches in the world. The different waves of charismatic movements experienced by the church in the 70s and 80s are one of the important reasons for such a rapid growth.<sup>1</sup> But the charismatic movement in EECMY is not without problems and challenges. In many ways problems and crises from the charismatic movements have challenged the mission and theology of EECMY.

EECMY today is facing various challenges with regard to its mission and theology. Even if the challenges EECMY is facing are many, I will limit myself to those related to the understanding and practise of charismatic gifts with emphasis on the gift of prophecy and the danger of syncretism as a result of retained attitudes and beliefs from traditional religion by EECMY members. The challenge of syncretism in EECMY has been pointed out by earlier studies; I am quoting two examples “The ties to old tribal religions are not totally broken. Some Christians believe in suppressions. For example, belief in the power of ‘evil eye’ is still strong. ‘Fortune’ is one of the common suppression practiced also among some

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<sup>1</sup> Terfassa, Dawit Olika. ‘Prophecy: a blessing or a problem: a critical study of the understanding and practice of prophecy in EECMY’, Master of Philosophy in Theology (Menighetsfakultetet Oslo, Norway, 2007), 18. Hagström, Magnus. ‘Reasons for the Growth of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY) in Western Wollega, Central Synod, 2004-2009: A Quantitative Study’. *SMT Swedish Missiological Themes*, Vol. 98. No. 2. Uppsala, Sweden: R. X-O Graf Tryckeri AB, 2010.



Christians.”<sup>2</sup> “... from a cross-cultural communication and cultural anthropological perspective, I want to point to the challenge to be considered, and draw attention to a possible theological research project on syncretism amongst the evangelicals in Sidama ... In light of this cross-cultural communication and cultural anthropological considerations, I have during several visits to the rural areas of Sidama over the last three decades observed the strong ‘charismatic’ elements. Having visited services of worship held at the Ethiopian Evangelical church Mekane Yesus I have recognized and identified elements that have created a sense that the mission and/or church has left this area ‘too early’ without having paid enough attention to Christian education and to contextualizing Christianity into the Sidama culture in a real sense. Have the large crowds of Sidama converts been left with rather strong elements of syncretism?”<sup>3</sup>

My BTh paper entitled ‘Parallelism between Charismatic Prophecy in EECMY and *Qallu* Institution in Oromo Traditional Religion’ and my MTh paper entitled ‘Prophecy: A blessing or a problem “A critical study of the understanding and practice of prophecy in EECMY”’ have at different levels dealt with these two issues that are challenging EECMY’s mission and theology today. In both papers I have critically evaluated the understanding and practise of charismatic movements and spiritual gifts in general, but more specifically the gift of prophecy in EECMY, on the basis of New Testament theology and the tradition of the Early Church. The papers also point to the retention of beliefs, attitudes and practises from traditional belief as one of the reasons for the growth of problems around the understanding and practise of prophecy specifically and charismatic gifts in general in EECMY. Even if this paper focuses on EECMY, it may be relevant to other churches in the Global South in similar contexts where rapid growth of the church is obtained as a result of charismatic movements and where large numbers of new converts come from traditional religious backgrounds.

### General Overview

The Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY) is ranked as the second largest Lutheran church in the world. The charismatic experience and life of the church have played a significant role for the remarkable growth of the church<sup>4</sup>. But the charismatic movements and revivals did not have only a positive effect or impact. Due to problems

<sup>2</sup> Tadesse, Amsalu, ‘A case study: demonization and the practice of exorcism in Ethiopian Churches’, presented to the Lausanne movements issue-based gatherings, Nairobi, 2000.

<sup>3</sup> Aadland, Öyvind, ‘The problematic of church growth in Southern Ethiopia’, in Sannes, Kjell Olav (ed.) *Med Kristus til jordens ender, festskrift til Tormod Engelsviken* (Trondheim: Tapir akademisk forlag, 2008), 203-213.

<sup>4</sup> Hagström, ‘Reasons for the growth’, 157-168.

related to the experience of charismatic gifts in general and the understanding and practise of prophecy specifically, a large number of Christians have withdrawn from their Evangelical faith to return to their old religion or have become atheists. Their bad experience with the practice and understanding of prophecy has made them hostile to Christian belief, church and even to God.<sup>5</sup> In addition, a number of non-Christians have been hindered from coming to evangelical faith by the many problems and scandals (deceptions, false promises and empty hopes) related to prophecy and prophets in EECMY.<sup>6</sup>

In addition, a large number of Christians in EECMY are full of disappointments and frustrations caused by the many false prophecies they have experienced on a regular basis. Most of these Christians have decided to remain in the church in spite of their frustrations and disappointments because they don't feel comfortable about leaving the Christian community. But it is quite common that such Christians are the most sceptical<sup>7</sup> members of the church when it comes to prophecy and other gifts.

Influences from surrounding Pentecostal Churches, lack of adequate biblical instruction about the right use and understanding of the spiritual gifts and influences from traditional religions in the form of retained attitudes, beliefs and practises are among the main factors for the problems in relation to the understanding and practise of charismatic gifts in EECMY.<sup>8</sup>

The fact that this paper focuses on the problems related to the gift of prophecy does not rule out the importance and wonderful role of the gift of prophecy in the growth of the church. EECMY has experienced a remarkable growth as a result of the charismatic movements and revivals. Prophecy with its good fruits is one of the results of such charismatic revivals that had an impressive impact on church growth as long as it was used properly.<sup>9</sup> Its positive effect in transforming lives, introducing Christians into a new dimension of spirituality by strengthening and refreshing the personal faith of the members, being the cause for many new converts, producing committed voluntary ministers and bringing inspiration to the global church, are all worthwhile noticing. But at this time prophecy

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<sup>5</sup> Interview with Mr. Temesgen Alemu and Mrs. Elisabeth Terfa, 17.11.2006, Nekemte. Interview with Rev Abebe Waktole, 13.11.2006, Nekemte.

<sup>6</sup> Interview with Rev. Gilo Si'a, 20.11.2006, Arjo. Interview with Evangelist Chaltu Tesfa, 7.12.2006, Addis Ababa.

<sup>7</sup> Many have noted that the problems related to prophecy and healing have made them skeptical toward all kinds of gifts of the spirit and ministry of the church in general. Interview with Rev. Miressa Berhanu, 5.12.2006, Addis Ababa. Interview with Rev Alemu Sheta, 5.12.2006, Addis Ababa. Interview with Mrs. Berhane Dirribsa, 25.11.2006.

<sup>8</sup> Terfassa, 'Prophecy a blessing or a problem?', 10-24.

<sup>9</sup> Hagström, 'Reasons for the growth', 157-168.

and the so called prophets are negatively affecting the charismatic life of the EECMY by hindering and threatening its growth.

### History of Charismatic Revivals/Experiences in EECMY

The last 50-60 years have been years of great harvest for EECMY and have resulted with mainly quantitative, but also qualitative growth to some extent. The strong growth in membership, compared with the lack of trained leadership and pastors, has, however, made it difficult to maintain the qualitative growth.<sup>10</sup> The charismatic movement which spread to all the Synods<sup>11</sup> started in the Central Synod, although Illubabor Bethel Synod also had some significance.<sup>12</sup> The Central Synod was one of the four Synods that constituted the national church EECMY at that time. “*The charismatic renewal began in the Central Synod in the early 1970s. Rev Belina Sarka said it was the first charismatic renewal in the history of Mekane Yesus Church*”.<sup>13</sup> The two great waves of revivals that came to the EECMY in the 1970s and 1980s highly contributed to the growth of the church in many ways, such as: the spread of news about charismatic healings, exorcisms, and fulfilled prophecies; sharing of the gospel with others; the rise of a large number of highly devoted lay ministers<sup>14</sup> (filled the gap of lack of enough trained people); experience of transformed

<sup>10</sup> In most cases EECMY congregations with 1000-2000 members have just one trained pastor and may be an evangelist and this makes it impossible to make a close follow up and proper nurturing of the spiritual life for each individual members. This is affecting the Qualitative growth of the church to a certain degree.

<sup>11</sup> EECMY has 21 different synods that have self-governing status based on the Constitution and By-laws of the EECMY. [www.eecmy.org/?page=%7Dsynods](http://www.eecmy.org/?page=%7Dsynods).

<sup>12</sup> Thomas Debela, *The Effect of Charismatic Renewal upon Church Growth in the Central Synod* (MYTS, AA: Ethiopia, 1999), 12-14. Motuma Bedhassa, *The Impressive Impact of Charismatic Movement on the Church Growth of Bakko Parish EECMY Central Synod* (MYTS, AA: Ethiopia 2005), 10. Fanuel Abera, *Introduction of Evangelical Christianity and the Effects of Charismatic Renewal in Gore Bethel Mekane Yesus Congregation* (MYTS, AA: Ethiopia 1999), 31. The role of these two synods in modeling and pioneering the charismatic movement in the country is very important. Interview with Mr. Fekadu Bengna, 14.11.2006, Nekemte. Interview with Miss Sara Alemayehu, 10.12.2006, Addis Ababa.

<sup>13</sup> Thomas D, ‘The Effects of Charismatic’, 14.

<sup>14</sup> Tekla Obsa, *The Charismatic Movement in the EECMY: Some Doctrinal and Practical Issues – An Explorative and Evaluative Case Study, The Case of EECMY Congregations in Nekemte* (MYTS, AA: Ethiopia, 2000), 10. Thomas D, ‘The Effects of Charismatic’, 22. Teferi Benti, ‘The Impact of Charismatic’, 21-24. Motuma Bedhassa, ‘The Impressive Impact Of’, 14, 19. Fanuel Abera, ‘Introduction of Evangelical’, 35. Bakke, Johnny, *Christianity, Patterns, and Functions within the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus* (Solum Forlag AS: Oslo, Norway, 1987), 209.

Christian life (new spiritual dimension) which attracted many non-believers.<sup>15</sup>

### **Seven Problematic Areas Related to the Use and Practise of Prophecy**

Some of the main problems can be summarized as follows:

#### *Unfulfilled prophecy*

The issue of unfulfilled prophecy includes the unfulfilled prophetic promises of pregnancies for a barren woman (sometimes to a woman whose womb has been removed because of cancer or other reasons), the healing of those diagnosed as HIV– positive, the raising of the dead<sup>16</sup> etc. The most grotesque example, shown on Ethiopian TV, involved a woman who had been buried for two days. A group of prophets ordered the grave to be dug open and that the body to be brought into the church with the promise that she would wake up. They prayed and prophesized over the dead body. After several hours of in vain prayers the police intervened and arrested the prophets and reburied the woman.<sup>17</sup>

#### *Interest in gaining power and becoming popular*

Instead of becoming humble servants of God, most of the prophets get intoxicated with the desire to obtain power and popularity. “*The man who had the spirit from above is gentle, quiet, and humble and abstains from all wickedness and futile desires of this world.*”<sup>18</sup> But prophets in EECMY nowadays want to take over the church leadership and would like all the church members and leaders to subject to them and their prophetic office. They are therefore unwilling to subject to the leadership of the church and let their prophecies be subject to testing, questioning and evaluation in

<sup>15</sup> Yacob Godebo, *Charismatic Movement and Related Theological and Doctrinal Problems in the South Central Synod* (MYTS, AA: Ethiopia, 1997), 18. Thomas D, ‘The Effects of Charismatic’, 23. Interview with Rev Kano Galan, 30.11.2006, Addis Ababa. Interview with Rev. Tadesse Ayana, 16.11.2006, Nekemte. Interview with Evangelist Abdi Megersa, 5.12.2006, Addis Ababa.

<sup>16</sup> Motuma Bedhassa, 29-30. Interview with Rev Gilo Sia, 20.11.2006, Arjo. Interview with Mr. Amensissa Ulfata, 28.11.2006, Addis Ababa. Interview with evangelist Abdi Megersa, 5.12.2006, Addis Ababa.

<sup>17</sup> Teferi Benti, ‘The Impact of Charismatic’, 27-28. Interview with Rev. Wakseyom Idossa 15.12.2006, Addis Ababa. Interview with Rev. Diriba Atomsa, 20.11.2006, Arjo. Interview with Rev. Lachisa Camada, 25.11.2006, Bako. Interview with Evangelist Fekadu Tesema & Rev Shibru Oljira, 25.11.2006, Bako.

<sup>18</sup> Reiling, J., *Hermas and Christian Prophecy: Study of the Eleventh Mandate* (Leiden, Netherlands: E. J Brill), 1973, 48-49.

accordance with the word of God. Rather they often use a tactic of drama, of using loud and threatening, judgemental voice/message to discourage any attempt of testing their ministry. They avoid cooperation with one another, but level harsh criticism at their competitors, sometimes in the form of character assassination. “According to the understanding of the leaders, those people who claim to have the gift of prophecy often abuse the gifts for the sake of getting popularity.”<sup>19</sup>

*The use of the prophetic office as a means to material and financial benefits*

The gift of prophecy is regarded as a good source of income by many prophets. They use it as a means to material, financial, and all kinds of personal gains.<sup>20</sup> They will tell any kind of prophecy if that will give them some benefit, no matter whether it is true or false. They promise good fortunes when their hosts pay well, but pronounce curses and misfortunes on those that refuse to pay well and resist/question their authority/prophecy. Most of the prophets regularly visit the rich and well-to-do families and not the poor and the sick, they act as advisers and intercessors, thus becoming influential characters.<sup>21</sup>

People who claim to have been manipulated financially as well as in kind by those who claim to have the gift are not few. The underlying reason for such economic manipulation is that most people with the gift do not want to think that their prophetic message is subject to the scrutinising and validating authority of the Bible.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Estifanos T, ‘Charismatic Experience’, 2005, 62. Interview with Eva, Abdi Megersa 5.12.2006, Addis Ababa. Interview with Rev Gilo Si’a 20.11.2006, Arjo.

<sup>20</sup> Tesfaye Tadesse, 25, 29. Interview with Rev. Wakseyoum Idossa, 15.12.2006, Addis Ababa. Interview with Rev. Asfaw Terfassa, 27.11.2006, Nekemte. Interview with Mr. Asefa Woyessa, 13.11.2006, Nekemte. Interview with Mr. Mesfin Mekonen, 29.11.2006, Addis Ababa. Interview with Mr. Fekadu Begna, 14.11.2006, Nekemte. Interview with Miss Sara Alemayehu, 10.12.2006, Addis Ababa.

<sup>21</sup> Interview with Mr. Bizuayehu Kebede, 20.11.2006, Nekemte. Interview with Mr. Dereje Gutema and Bilisuma Mitiku, 4.12.2006, Addis Ababa. Interview with Mr. Itana Abdissa, 4.12.2006, Addis Ababa. Interview with Evangelist Chaltu Tesfa, 7.12.2006, Addis Ababa. Interview with Eva, Kidanu Mosissa, 8.12.2006; Addis Ababa. Interview with Miss Sara Alemayehu, 10.12.2006, Addis Ababa. The society is used to bring gifts of money, material and cattle etc. whenever they were going to *Qallu*, the traditional prophet in order to know their future of receive healing from sickness or internal problems. Dawit Olika, *Parallelisms*, 12.

<sup>22</sup> Estifanos T, ‘Charismatic Experience’, 62. Interview with Rev. Belayneh Gashare, 8.12.2006, Addis Ababa.

*The wrong use and attitude toward the Bible*

Bible studies and correct teaching of scripture played an important role in the charismatic history of EECMY in the 70s and 80s. But this is no longer the case: many of the prophets lack biblical knowledge and show no interest in learning it either. They avoid bible courses and constantly refer to the guidance of the spirit (illumination of the spirit)<sup>23</sup> providing them with extra-Biblical revelations. The believer's life and understanding is dominated by and bound to the words of the prophets rather than the word of God (Bible).<sup>24</sup> "...Sometimes it [prophecy] competes with the scripture or even replaces scripture, in giving guidance concerning God's will."<sup>25</sup>

*Problem of believers: attitude toward the prophets and the gift of prophecy*

Many of the church members originate from a traditional religious background and are used to visiting traditional healers or prophets, (Qallus which are witchdoctor, diviners or spirit mediums) to get their immediate problems resolved, get security from fear of evil spirits and hear how their future is going to be.<sup>26</sup> Believers highly respect the words of prophets and fear them, as if they were more than ordinary human beings. They prefer a prophet predicting good future in their home rather than attending church services. Many within the church regard prophets in the same way as they used to regard Qallus in the traditional religion.<sup>27</sup> The prophets themselves are doing all they can to reinforce such an attitude through their words, teaching and actions.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>23</sup> According to Thomas's assessment they put strong emphasis on their own experience as they value their personal experience in contrast to corporate experience and emotion as contrast to intellect. Thomas D, 'The Effects of Charismatic', 33-34. Interview with Evangelist Kidanu Mosissa, 8.12.2006, Addis Ababa.

<sup>24</sup> Interview with Rev Wakseyom Idossa, 15.12.2006, Addis Ababa. Interview with Mrs. Genet Teshome, 4.12.2006, Addis Ababa. Interview with Mr. Dereje Gutema, 4.12.2006, Addis Ababa.

<sup>25</sup> Grudem, Wayne, *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today* (Illinois: Crossway Books, 1988), 245.

<sup>26</sup> It is many people in the church today that looks up on prophets in the church in the same way as they were looking up on their traditional prophets. This is a general experience for most of them though they come from different Religious backgrounds. Teferi Benti, 'The Impact of Charismatic', 9-10.

<sup>27</sup> Interview with Rev. Wakseyoum Idossa, 15.12.2006, Addis Ababa. Interview with Motuma Bedhassa, 13.11.2006, Nekemte. Interview with Mr. Dereje Gutema and Bilisuma Mitiku, 4.12.2006, Addis Ababa. Interview with Evangelist Chaltu Tesfa, 7.12.2006, Addis Ababa.

<sup>28</sup> Yacob, G, 'Charismatic Movement', 22. Duressa Mabesha Taka, 'Charismatic Movement and its Effect in the Aira District of the EECMY', (MYTS, AA: Ethiopia 2002), 25. Interview with Rev. Alemu Sheta, 5.12.2006, Addis Ababa.

*Prophecy as a cause for spiritual, economic and social crises*

Unfulfilled prophecies have led many to spiritual crises mentioned earlier. Most Christians feel that they are simply cheated.<sup>29</sup> Economically many naive Christians have put themselves in debt in order to meet the prophet's demands, even relinquishing their houses and cars. "...they [prophets] request (or command) people to give them money or any help in kind, underlining that the command comes directly from God."<sup>30</sup> Youths give up their jobs to follow the prophets, idly waiting for the things God will do through them. They lose all sense of responsibility for the community and work moral.<sup>31</sup> There is also a social crisis resulting from the prophet's engagement in marriage relationships through prophecy that forces NN (male) to marry NN (female) or command a married couple to divorce or break engagement ties. In many cases the prophet himself marries the divorced wife. The prophet claims that such commands come from God and failure to obey them will result in punishment and curses. Prophets are also behind the splits and divisions among different groups and leaders in the congregations.<sup>32</sup> The existence of these problems in EECMY are challenging the church's motto which is to render 'wholistic ministry'<sup>33</sup>, encompassing physical, social, economical and spiritual healings.

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Interview with evangelist Tesfaye Tesgera, 14.12.2006, Addis Ababa. Interview with Mr. Tesema Jaleta, 15.11.2006, Nekemte. Interview with evangelist Merga Negeri, 5.12.2006, Addis Ababa. Interview with evangelist Chaltu Tesfa, 7.12.2006, Addis Ababa. Interview with evangelist Kidanu Mosissa, 8.12.2006, Addis Ababa.

<sup>29</sup> Interview with Rev. Gilo Si'a, 20.11.2006, Arjo. Interview with evangelist Chaltu Tesfa, 7.12.2006, Addis Ababa.

<sup>30</sup> Estifanos T, 'Charismatic Experience', 65.

<sup>31</sup> In EECMY more than 60% of the church members are youngsters between 16-30. They have highly welcomed the charismatic movements but also became victims of all problems that result from the misuse of the spiritual gifts/prophecy. Interview with Berhane Temesgen, 2.12.2006, Addis Ababa. Interview with Mr. Michael Tefera, 16.11.2006, Nekemte. Interview with Evangelist Merga Negeri, 5.12.2007, Addis Ababa. Researches done by UNICEF, World Bank and others have shown how "Ethiopia accounts for the largest youth population in the Sub-Saharan Africa and the lack of employment opportunities Ethiopian young people is among the critical developing challenges facing the country." Child labor and youth employment: Ethiopia country study by Lorenzo Guarcello and Furio Rosati, March 2007, Introduction and p.2., [siteresources.worldbank.org/SOCIALPROTECTION/Resources/SP-Discussion-papers/Labor-Market-DP/0704.pdf](http://siteresources.worldbank.org/SOCIALPROTECTION/Resources/SP-Discussion-papers/Labor-Market-DP/0704.pdf).

<sup>32</sup> Duessa Mabesha, 'Charismatic Movement', 24. Interview with Rev. Bekeuma Sura, 1.12.2006, Addis Ababa. Prophets according to Rev. Abraham are the main dividers these days, Interview with Rev. Abraham Lami, 19.11.2006, Nekemte. Interview with Evangelist Abdi Megersa, 5.12.2006, Addis Ababa.

<sup>33</sup> We have a deep concern, not only for the spiritual needs of a person, but also for his/her physical needs. Our motto of service is 'Serving the Whole Person', better known as Wholistic Ministry. [www.eecmy.org](http://www.eecmy.org).

### *Problem of uncontrollable emotionalism*

It is common to see a strong element of uncontrollable emotionalism both among the prophets and the believers. The prophet's aim is often the immature expression of emotions of ecstasy, of people shouting, shaking and falling to the ground as proof of the presence of the Spirit...<sup>34</sup> "although prophets often performed symbolic acts which they then interpreted, the main stream of prophetic activity, at least as it came to be canonized, had very little to do with 'ecstasy.'"<sup>35</sup>

### **Factors Contributing to an Increase of the Prophetic Activity in EECMY**

In spite of the above problems, there is an increase in the prophetic activity in EECMY. Here are some of the factors which have contributed:

#### *Increasing poverty and unemployment*

"Ethiopia is one of the bottom line countries in its economy, most of whose people live below the poverty line (44% according to World Bank assessment and the Official poverty line is US1.50)".<sup>36</sup> Evangelicals in Ethiopia are no exception. Lacking all the basic needs like food, house and clothes is something people experience on a daily basis. People come to the church with questions about their daunting economic situations, their financial depravity, and their joblessness. They need relief from these

<sup>34</sup> Thomas D, 'The Effects of Charismatic', 1999, 28. Interview with Rev. Wakseyom Idossa, 15.12.2006, Addis Ababa. Interview with Rev. Miressa Berhanu, 5.12.2006, Addis Ababa. Interview with evangelist Chaltu Tesfa, 7.12.2006, Addis Ababa. Interview with evangelist Kidanu Mosissa, 8.12.2006, Addis Ababa. Interview with evangelist Fekadu Tesema and Rev. Shibru Ojira, 25.11.2006, Bako. Interview with Rev. Abraham Lami, 19.11.2006, Nekemete.

<sup>35</sup> Fee, Gordon D, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (NICNT, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987), 595. According to Wayne A. Grudem if any of the four conditions (speaking against one's will, losing self control and begin to rave violently, speaking things which made no sense and being unaware of the surroundings for a time) is true of a prophets then that it is ecstatic. But speaking with strong emotions, having high level of concentrations and unusually strong sense of the presence and working of God should not be seen as ecstasy. Grudem, Wayne A, *The Gift of Prophecy in 1 Corinthians* (MD: University Press of America, 1982), 150-151.

<sup>36</sup> 'Child labor and youth employment: Ethiopia country study' by Lorenzo Guarcello and Furio Rosati, March 2007, 3, [siteresources.worldbank.org/SOCIALPROTECTION/Resources/SP-Discussion-papers/Labor-Market-DP/0704.pdf](http://siteresources.worldbank.org/SOCIALPROTECTION/Resources/SP-Discussion-papers/Labor-Market-DP/0704.pdf).



questions and look for answers and ways out.<sup>37</sup> So the ears of such people are always open for anything that can give them a promise of good news. Many are in desperate need of economic, social and medical assistance and anyone promising a remedy for improved living conditions and health has a ready audience. Most of the prophecies are concerning material things, promises of a good source of income in the future, an open door and job opportunity, a chance to go abroad, etc. They invoke a psychological feeling of satisfaction and relief, however short-lived. *“The false prophet is empty, the people who come to him are empty, and the answers are empty too.”*<sup>38</sup>

### *Traditional religious background*

A large number of members EECMY come from traditional religion and have brought their experience and believes with them into the church. What is common for almost all of the different religious backgrounds is the dependency on mediators, fortune-tellers, diviners, witchcraft ‘*Qallus*’ to know the future. People bring their inquiries to them in times of problems, to get security and protection from fear of evil spirits.<sup>39</sup> This mentality is retained by many church members from traditional religion. Consequently, there is a strong similarity between the functions of ‘*Qallus*’ or mediums in the traditional religions and the activity of many charismatic prophets. For example according to the customs in the Oromo traditional religion, it is quite common that people consult ‘*Qallus*’ on everyday problems such as sickness and accidents. This custom is not necessarily shed when becoming a Christian, rather the prophet is now singled out and approached with

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<sup>37</sup> Estifanos T, ‘Charismatic Experience’, 65. Interview with Rev. Waksyoum Idossa, 15.12.2006, Addis Ababa. Interview with Rev. Alemu Sheta, 5.12.2006, Addis Ababa. Interview with Mr. Temesgen Alemu and Mrs. Elisabeth Terfa, 17.11.2006, Nekemte. Interview with Rev. Abraham Lami, 19.11.2006, Nekemte. Interview with Mrs. Rahel Refissa, 17.11.2006, Nekemte. Interview with Mrs. Tadelech Mekonen, 17.11.2006, Nekemte. Interview with Mrs. Abebech Sambo, 12.12.2006, Addis Ababa. Interview with evangelist Merga Negeri, 5.12.2006, Addis Ababa. Interview with Miss Sara Alemayehu, 10.12.2006, Addis Ababa.

<sup>38</sup> Reiling, J. ‘Hermas and Christian Prophecy’, 38-39.

<sup>39</sup> “In Africa it is very common to think that someone is under the influence and control of some kind of spirit whether that spirit is good or bad. So when people come from such a traditional background they still want to be as close as possible to the spirit through the mediation of the prophets. In order to have this religiosity properly functioning, the people always need spiritual leaders that have the capacity of serving as links between the spirit-world and the physical world.” Mbiti, John, *African Religions and Philosophy* (London: Morrison & Gibb Ltd, Heinemann, 1969), 43, 68. Interview with evangelist Merga Negeri 5.12.2006, Addis Ababa. Interview with Mr. Asefa Woyessa, 13.11.2006, Nekemte. Interview with Rev. Tamiru Tuli, 18.11.2006, Nekemte.

questions such as ‘what did God tell you about me/my life or my future?’<sup>40</sup> Retained attitudes from ‘*Qallus or Kallichas*’ have strongly influenced EECMY members understanding of prophets. ‘*Qallus or Kallichas*’ are high priests who are a spiritual leader of Oromo traditional religion and claims to have direct contact with the spirits that possesses them and spoke and did things through them.<sup>41</sup>

*Being born (spiritually) in a charismatic church*

Many of the members and prophets in EECMY were spiritually born in the charismatic context of the church especially in the 1970s and 1980s. They saw a church that was experiencing charismatic gifts with healings, prophecies and speaking in tongue. So for most of them it was the normal and natural characteristics of the church to have as many healing announcements and prophecies as the church had at that time. A church life without such healings and prophecies (followed by people’s applause), the shouting of halleluiahs and amen’s was not accepted as a normal and good Christian life, but seen as a sign of weakness in prayer in one’s Christian life, as a lack of holiness caused by sin against God, as a result of which God withdrew his gifts from the church. Out of great interest and pressure to keep as close as possible to the standard of charismatic church life, prophets continued to feel they had to prophecy and the people continued to expect it regularly.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Dawit Olika, ‘Parallelisms’, 25-26. Interview with Rev Wakseyoum Idossa, 15.12.2006, Addis Ababa. Interview with Rev. Alemu Sheta, 5.12.2006, Addis Ababa. Interview with Rev. Lachisa Camada, 25.11.2006, Bako. Interview with Rev. Gudina Tola, 26.11.2006, Nekemte. Interview with Mr. Asefa Woyessa, 13.11.2006, Nekemte. Interview with Rev. Tamiru Tuli, 18.11.2006, Nekemte. Interview with Mr. Dereje Gutema and Bilisuma Mitiku, 4.12.2006, Addis Ababa. Interview with Mr. Itana Abdissa, 4.12.2006, Addis Ababa. Interview with Miss. Yegnawoin Abebe, 18.12.2006, Addis Ababa. Interview with evangelist Chaltu Tesfa, 7.12.2006, Addis Ababa. Interview with evangelist Kidanu Mosissa, 8.12.2006, Addis Ababa. Interview with Rev. Belayneh Gashare, 8.12.2006, Addis Ababa. Interview with Miss Sara Alemayehu, 10.12.2006, Addis Ababa.

<sup>41</sup> The parallelisms are seen in many aspects, but generally the way people looked up on their traditional sort of prophets, fortune tellers, and witchcrafts is exactly how prophets are looked up on today in the church. Dawit Olika, ‘Parallelisms between charismatic prophecy in EECMY and Qallu Institution in Oromo Traditional Religion’ (MYTS, AA: Ethiopia, 2003), 12-25, 45. Johnny Bakke, *Christianity*, ‘Patterns’, 1987, 125, 250.

<sup>42</sup> Interview with Rev. Jira Dhufera, 29.11.2006, Addis Ababa. Interview with Mrs. Genet Teshome, 4.12.2006, Addis Ababa.

### Useful Tools and Recommendations Derived from the New Testament Teachings and Early Church Traditions

The following are some recommendations and guidelines derived from the general teaching on prophecy in New Testament and the Early Church. As described above, there are understandings and practises of charismatic gifts in general and gifts of prophecy in EECMY that are not compatible with the teaching and tradition of the New Testament and Early church. Due to this, the following recommendations and guidelines can be used by EECMY, and other churches that have similar challenges, to come to terms with the misuse of the gift of prophecy and spiritual gifts in general.

Most of EECMY members have limited the definition of prophecy to prediction of future events (a promise of good hope or forecasting of judgement and curse). Even if prediction is one part of prophecy in New Testament, it has more aspects. Prophecy is defined as reception of divine revelation of God's will, which originates from God and is communicated through inspired intermediaries with intelligible words, actions or signs (1Corinthians 14: 29-30). Aune defines prophecy as "a specific form of divination that consists of intelligible verbal messages believed to originate with God and communicated through inspired human intermediaries."<sup>43</sup> According to the New Dictionary of Christian Theology, prophecy is defined as "*Human utterance believed to be inspired by a divine or transcendent source... Its expressions may be words, signs, actions, and way of life or sacrifice of life.*"<sup>44</sup>

Another misunderstanding and practise in EECMY is to regard gifts of prophecy as the highest and the best spiritual gift. According to New Testament teaching and the tradition of the Early church intelligibility is what makes prophecy the greater gift compared to un-interpreted tongues, but "*for many Christians in Corinth [EECMY], to be regarded as 'spiritual' constituted a claim to high status in the community.*"<sup>45</sup> "*Some of the Corinthians have placed inordinate emphasis on showy displays of spirituality...disrupting or dominating the church's meetings by disorderly spirit-inspired utterance that is unintelligible to other members of the community.*"<sup>46</sup>

Prophecy is only one of the spiritual gifts for the New Testament church. The understanding of 'Charismata, gifts of grace' should not be limited only to the supernatural gifts like gifts of prophecy, healing and speaking in

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<sup>43</sup> D.A. Carson, *Showing the Spirit* (1995), 93. Aune, David E, *Prophecy in Early Christianity and the Ancient Mediterranean World* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1983), 339.

<sup>44</sup> Richardson, Alan and Bowden, John, *A New Dictionary of Christian Theology* (London: SCM Press), 473.

<sup>45</sup> Anthony C. Thiselton, *First Corinthians* (2006), 192.

<sup>46</sup> Hays, Richard B, *First Corinthians: Interpretation. A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville, Kentucky: John Knox Press, 1997), 206.

tongues, but be understood broadly including all other gifts like encouraging, generous giving, gift of celibacy or gift of marriage, with the gift of salvation itself as the core of all gifts. Paul makes an interesting shift in 1 Cor 12:1 from spiritual gifts (*pneumatikon*), a term the Corinthians preferred, to gifts of grace (*charisma*), a term he preferred in order to place the emphasis on grace. “He wants to remind them that ‘spiritual’ is better thought of as a gracious gift from God ... and the quest for an individualizing and self centred form of ‘spirituality’ is in danger of denying the source of all true spiritual gifts, the unbounded grace of God”<sup>47</sup>.

The diversity of the gifts of the spirit, as shown by the body metaphor used in 1 Corinthians, shows the importance, equality and interdependency of the different gifts.<sup>48</sup> The fact that the diversity of gifts is grounded in God’s distribution<sup>49</sup> of the gifts calls on all Christians to be content with the gifts given to them without being proud of what they have or jealous of what they don’t have. 1 Corinthians 12: 4-30 “In this sense, therefore, every Christian is charismatic because every person has received gracious gift from God. Rom 6:23 ‘the gift of God is Eternal life’”<sup>50</sup>. Such an understanding can help EECMY to correct its members’ understanding and practise of raking spiritual gifts and classifying one another as first and second class Christian depending on what kind of gifts one has.

The third major problem is the fact that personal gains and benefits are the motivations for having and exercising the gift of prophesy. But the motivation for manifesting and having the gifts of the Spirit should not be for personal status<sup>51</sup> or benefit<sup>52</sup> but for the common good. The purpose of the gifts should be the edification of the church through their varied functions of convicting the sinner, comforting, exhortation, and prediction.<sup>53</sup> Love is the gift all Christians must have and the context in

<sup>47</sup> D.A. Carson, *Showing the Spirit*, 23. Hays, Richard B, *First Corinthians: Interpretation*, 207.

<sup>48</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *First Corinthians*, 600-616.

<sup>49</sup> Talbert, Charles H, *Reading Corinthians: A Literary and Theological Commentary* (Macon, GA: Smyth and Helwys Publishing, 2002), 106. Thiselton, Anthony C., *First Corinthians: A Shorter Exegetical and Pastoral Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm.B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2006), 197. D.A. Carson, *Showing the Spirit*, 32. Gordon D. Fee, *First Corinthians*, 599.

<sup>50</sup> D.A. Carson, *Showing the Spirit*, 20-21. Richard B. Hays, *First Corinthians*, 208-209.

<sup>51</sup> Anthony C. Thiselton, *First Corinthians*, 2006, 192.

<sup>52</sup> Matthew 7:15,23, Herman’s mandate XI 7, 16, Acts of Thomas 79, as quoted in van de Sandt, Huub and Flusser, David, *The Didache: Its Jewish Sources and Its Place in Early Judaism and Christianity* (The Netherlands, 2002), 345. Milavec, Aaron, *The Didache: Text, Translation, Analysis, and Commentary* (Collegeville, Minn: Liturgical Press), 2003, 73.

<sup>53</sup> 1Cor 14: 26-34a. Wayne A. Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy*, 181.

which all these gifts should function<sup>54</sup> (1Cor 12:31-14:1). Love as ‘concern for others’ is what Paul is presenting as the excellent way or motivation for the manifestation of the gifts. The gift of prophecy is never to be used for personal benefits of any kind (Didache 11:3-12 and 13:1-7).

As indicated earlier the uncontrollable emotional, ecstatic practises and nature that are dominating most of the spiritual gathering and worship services in EECMY are also a major problem. But according to New Testament teaching prophecy and other spiritual gifts should be exercised in the congregation in an orderly manner so that they may edify the believers and convict the non-believers. This calls for intelligible content when exercising the gifts.<sup>55</sup> Self-control when practising the gift and living a good ethical life with sound results are expected, specifically from prophets (1 Cor 14: 29-31). “*The spirit does not ‘possess’ or ‘overpower’ the speaker, He is subject to the prophet or tongue speaker; in the sense that what the spirit has to say will be said, in an orderly and intelligible way.*”<sup>56</sup> Lack of self-control, being highly emotional or ecstatic has not been identified with true prophecy in the New Testament and the Early Church.<sup>57</sup> “*Although prophets often performed symbolic acts which they then interpreted, the main stream of prophetic activity, at least as it came to be canonized, had very little to do with ‘ecstasy.’*”<sup>58</sup>

<sup>54</sup> 1Cor 14:1a, 1Cor 13: 1-3: “You remain spiritually bankrupt, a spiritual nothing if Love does not characterize your exercise of whatever grace-gift God has assigned to you.” D.A. Carson, *Showing the Spirit*, 61. Anthony C. Thiselton, *First Corinthians*, 217.

<sup>55</sup> Different analogies (instruments and different languages) used by Paul to argue for intelligibility, Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle*, 1987, 661-665.

<sup>56</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle*, 571 & 692. Wayne A. Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy*, 120-128. 1Cor 14: 29-31, 40.

<sup>57</sup> For example: Eusebius of Caesarea, fourth century criticized monotonists for their unnatural ecstasy, and trance, in their exercise of prophecy. Yocum, Bruce, *Prophecy: Exercising the Prophetic Gifts of the Spirit in the Church Today* (Michigan: Servant Publications, Michigan, 1993), 34. “He conveyed his prophecies in an ecstatic manner that involved ‘frenzy’ as well as ‘convulsions.’” The prophecies of Montanus differed markedly from accepted standards in the early church, for his ecstatic prophecy caused considerable alarm in the church with “some... thinking that he was possessed by a devil and by a spirit of error.” The anonymous attributed the activity to satan himself.” F. David Farnell, *TMSJ*, 245, ‘Monotonists and Eusebius’, [www.tms.edutmsjtmsj14i.pdf](http://www.tms.edutmsjtmsj14i.pdf). Estifanos T, ‘Charismatic Experience’, 2005, 1-8.

<sup>58</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle*, 595. “If any of the four conditions (speaking against one’s will, losing self control and begin to rave violently, speaking things which made no sense and being unaware of the surroundings for a time) is true of a prophets then that it is ecstatic. But speaking with strong emotions, having high level of concentrations and unusually strong sense of the presence and working of God should not be seen as ecstasy.” Wayne A. Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy*, 150-151.

In general claiming special status and authority because of the gifts of prophecy, trying to benefit from prophecy or using the gift for any kind of manipulation/exploitation, leading astray from the true faith with false deceiving messages and living immoral life in luxury of sin are depicted as signs of false prophecy in the New Testament and the Early Church<sup>59</sup> (Didache 11:3-6, 13:1-7, Herman's Mandate XI, 1-6, 6-16).

Some charismatic leaders and their followers treat prophecies of their leaders as if they possess the unqualified authority of God himself... God has given the leader a prophecy that commands him to build something and to tell the people to send in some money. No community of believers carefully checks out this claim, nor does the leader submit himself to the evaluation of a spiritually minded community. The resulting exploitation is manipulative, arrogant, sometimes dishonest, and corrosive of the leader's humility and destruction of the follower's spiritual maturity.<sup>60</sup>

The above recommendations can be a useful resource to EECMY and other churches in similar situations. They may primarily help the different charismatic denominations and churches in Ethiopia and in the Global South by providing them with the chance to learn from the mistakes and struggles of the EECMY and from the teaching of the New Testament and the Early Church, to correct the misuses of prophecy or spiritual gifts which they in one or the other way are struggling with due to the charismatic movements, high church growth, retention of beliefs from Traditional Religions and problems of syncretism. The recommendations may also be used by western churches that are confronted with the increasing influence from Diaspora churches and a growing interest in contact with the spiritual world through mediums and magicians as part of a growing search for new worldviews and explanations for crisis in life.

In both contexts, in addition to equipping Christians with enough Biblical instruction concerning the right use and understanding of spiritual gifts, it is the responsibility of church leaders to set a good example in testing all kinds of prophecy on the basis of Scripture. Prophecy should always be subject to the testing and judging role of the congregation (1John 4:1-6, 1Thessa 5: 19-21 and Didache 11: 7-12). Most of all, the authority of Scripture in guiding, informing our faith and worship as our main source of knowing God's will should be maintained over against basing one's life and worship on prophetic utterances.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Herman's Man. XI: 12 list the problems and wrong behaviour of false prophet saying, he is instantly impudent and shameless, and talkative and lives in great luxury and in many other deceits. Kurt Niederwimmer, *The Didache*, 1998, 179.

<sup>60</sup> D.A. Carson, *Showing the Spirit*, 121.

<sup>61</sup> "People who claim to have been manipulated financially as well as in kind by those who claim to have the gift are not few. The underlying reason for such economic manipulation is that most people with the gift do not want to think that their prophetic message is subject to the scrutinising and validating authority of the Bible. Therefore, in this praxis of prophecy, there seems to be a major theological

The sufficiency of the Scripture shows us that no modern revelations from God are to be placed on a level equal to the scripture in authority and nothing is required of us by God which is not commanded in Scripture. It is not sin to disobey some claimed revelations if it is not confirmed by the Scripture<sup>62</sup>. But "... Sometimes it [prophecy] competes with the scripture or even replaces scripture, in giving guidance concerning God's will."<sup>63</sup>

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struggle between the authority of the prophets and their current message, and the authority of the Bible." Estifanos T, 'Charismatic Experience', 2005, 62.

<sup>62</sup> Wayne Grudem, *The Gifts of Prophecy*, 306. Schlink, Edmund, *Theology of the Lutheran Confessions* trans. Koehneke. Paul F. and Bouman, Herbert J.A. (Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1984), 1-3, 17, 25.

<sup>63</sup> Wayne Grudem, *The Gifts of Prophecy*, 245.

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## INDEX

- Allah, 88, 90, 95, 97  
Apartheid, 6, 158  
Ashram, 76  
Baptist, 70, 73, 137  
Bible/ biblical, v, vi, 12, 35, 38,  
39, 40, 47, 73, 74, 85, 92, 93,  
94, 95, 96, 97, 98, 115, 119,  
120, 121, 122, 129, 131, 136,  
149, 150, 151, 152, 153, 154,  
155, 156, 157, 158, 159, 160,  
161, 162, 164, 165, 166, 167,  
168, 169, 170, 180, 181, 190,  
191, 196, 199  
Bridge, 97  
British, iv  
Buddhist/-ism, 102, 103, 105,  
106  
Capitalism, 177, 205  
Catholic, 34, 58, 64, 68, 134,  
141, 143  
Charismatic, vi, 171, 173, 175,  
176, 179, 182, 183, 184, 185,  
186, 188, 189, 190, 191, 192,  
193, 194, 198, 200, Child/-  
ren, 108, 192, 193  
Christ, 3, 5, 8, 18, 21, 25, 28, 55,  
57, 59, 62, 63, 66, 71, 74, 76,  
77, 89, 90, 91, 92, 95, 116,  
117, 118, 119, 123, 126, 127,  
128, 129, 130, 131, 135, 138,  
143, 145, 173, 175, 180, 183,  
184  
Christendom, 3, 4, 5, 22, 96,  
134, 145  
Christianity, 2, 1, 4, 6, 7, 11, 22,  
26, 28, 33, 34, 43, 44, 49, 50,  
52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 59, 61,  
63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 69, 71, 73,  
79, 85, 86, 87, 88, 91, 92, 93,  
94, 95, 96, 97, 103, 106, 115,  
116, 117, 130, 132, 133, 135,  
136, 140, 141, 142, 143, 173,  
175, 176, 183, 184, 186, 188,  
195, 196, 197  
Church, iii, iv, v, vi, 1, 3, 6, 7, 9,  
10, 12, 13, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19,  
20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27,  
28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35,  
36, 37, 43, 44, 46, 50, 51, 52,  
54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61,  
62, 63, 65, 66, 68, 69, 70, 71,  
72, 73, 74, 77, 78, 79, 80, 92,  
96, 103, 106, 115, 118, 124,  
127, 129, 132, 134, 135, 136,  
137, 139, 140, 142, 143, 145,  
146, 149, 150, 159, 165, 167,  
168, 169, 170, 171, 172, 179,  
180, 181, 185, 186, 188, 196,  
198, 199  
Colonies, 134  
Commission, 6, 26, 72, 116, 117,  
126, 140  
Communion, 2, 70  
Community, 109, 128, 149, 152,  
161  
Conflict, 168  
Congregation, 2, 16, 188  
Contemporary, v, 3, 115, 119,  
151, 179  
Context, 6, 25, 93, 96, 116, 138,  
161, 182  
Contextual/ contextualization/  
contextualization, vi, 12, 149,  
150, 151, 152, 153, 154, 155,  
156, 157, 158, 159, 160, 161,  
165, 166, 167, 169  
Convert/-sion, 24, 25, 105, 181  
Creation, 59  
Creator, 92, 95  
Cross-cultural, v, 120  
Crusades, 145  
Dialogue, 176  
Diaspora, 12, 78, 116, 117, 199

- Ecclesial, 124  
 Ecumenical, 20, 69, 70, 103, 149  
 Education, v, 10, 33, 37, 41, 73, 168  
 Environment/-al, 56  
 Evangelical, v, vi, 10, 12, 28, 30, 34, 36, 40, 49, 71, 72, 74, 75, 79, 96, 103, 110, 115, 120, 129, 132, 137, 141, 143, 185, 186, 188  
 Evangelism, 80, 115, 140, 173, 179  
 Evangelization, 21, 37, 41, 80, 110, 201, 204, 205, 210  
 Experience, v, 115, 190, 192, 194, 198, 200  
 Faith, 50, 52, 56, 59, 67, 90, 126  
 Fellowship, v, 49, 54, 60, 61, 62, 66, 71, 74, 79, 81  
 Foreign, 53  
 Formation, 41  
 Freedom/ of religion/ of belief/ of expression/ of thought, v, 99, 104, 105  
 Global/globalization, v, vi, 1, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 15, 22, 23, 26, 27, 29, 32, 96, 124, 141, 150, 151, 176, 184, 185, 186, 199  
 God, v, 2, 3, 4, 26, 29, 33, 44, 47, 53, 55, 56, 59, 60, 64, 65, 66, 81, 85, 87, 88, 91, 92, 93, 95, 96, 97, 118, 119, 120, 121, 122, 123, 124, 125, 126, 127, 128, 129, 130, 131, 132, 134, 135, 137, 139, 140, 141, 142, 143, 144, 145, 152, 153, 155, 157, 159, 160, 161, 162, 163, 164, 175, 176, 177, 178, 180, 181, 184, 187, 189, 191, 192, 193, 195, 196, 197, 198, 199, 200  
 Gospel, 3, 4, 5, 6, 16, 23, 24, 26, 27, 29, 44, 52, 53, 59, 60, 63, 65, 68, 76, 77, 93, 118, 140, 141, 149, 175, 179  
 Growth, 185, 188  
 Guidelines, 100  
 Hermeneutics, 161  
 Hindu/-ism, 75, 102, 105, 106  
 Holistic, 75, 140  
 Holy Spirit, 3, 94, 139, 173, 175, 184  
 Hospitality, 122, 123, 124, 125, 128, 130  
 Human/-ism, 99, 100, 103, 104, 106, 111, 128, 140, 196  
 Humility, 182  
 Identity, 18, 54, 68, 69  
 Indigenous/-ization, 61, 62, 77, 79  
 Individual/ individualization, 157, 158, 160  
 Individualism, 178, 179  
 Integration, 116, 117  
 Intercultural, 167  
 Interdependence, 126  
 Islam/ic, 11, 77, 85, 86, 87, 88, 91, 93, 94, 95, 96, 97, 98, 103, 104  
 Jesus, 3, 4, 18, 21, 25, 28, 49, 65, 76, 77, 85, 91, 92, 95, 96, 120, 122, 127, 132, 138, 142, 144, 145, 153, 173, 174, 175, 177, 180, 181, 182, 183, 184  
 Kingdom, 115, 124, 180, 181  
 Koran, 87, 93, 94, 104  
 Lausanne Movement/Covenant, 21, 28, 29, 37, 41, 50, 92, 186  
 Learning, 1, III, 1, 3, 7, 9, 12, 94, 116, 117, 119, 136, 178  
 Liberation theology/-ians, vi, 12, 149, 151, 153, 160, 161, 164  
 Local, 116, 174  
 Lord, 1, 4, 26, 51, 89, 92, 96, 121, 122, 123, 129, 135, 138, 141, 143, 173, 174, 180  
 Love, v, 49, 54, 60, 61, 62, 66, 94, 128, 197, 198

- Luther/-an, 2, 8, 17, 30, 34, 35, 37, 43, 57, 70, 136, 137, 141, 185, 186
- Mainstream, 127
- Mammon, vi, 171
- Methodist, 70, 124
- Middle-class, 175
- Ministry, 24, 40, 73, 140, 152, 192
- Missio Dei, 15, 25, 131, 139, 140, 141, 146, 182
- Missiology, 23, 26, 149, 150, 153, 160, 170
- Mission, iv, v, vi, 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 12, 15, 16, 18, 20, 22, 23, 24, 25, 27, 28, 29, 30, 32, 33, 34, 37, 43, 44, 47, 49, 50, 51, 57, 71, 73, 79, 80, 102, 103, 104, 110, 115, 117, 118, 120, 127, 130, 132, 133, 134, 136, 138, 139, 140, 141, 149, 151, 153, 167, 169, 171, 173, 178
- Missional, I, III, v, vi, 1, 9, 10, 12, 13, 15, 16, 22, 24, 26, 28, 30, 32, 33, 44, 49, 54, 61, 66, 68, 69, 72, 77, 80, 147, 181
- Missional church, 16
- Missionary, 2, v, 11, 15, 16, 19, 20, 21, 24, 72, 73, 99, 100, 103, 106, 109, 132, 133, 135, 136, 149, 167
- Missionary activity, 99
- Muhammad, 87, 88
- Muslim, 85, 87, 88, 94, 95, 96, 97, 101, 103, 104, 105, 106, 107, 110
- Mutuality, 126
- New Testament, 85, 86, 88, 89, 90, 91, 93, 98, 122, 186, 191, 196, 198, 199
- North/northern, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 16, 22, 27, 44, 50, 67, 69, 70, 71, 72, 73, 74, 77, 79, 80, 81, 120, 124, 140, 149, 150, 167, 169, 170
- Obedience, 85, 87, 90, 92, 93, 94, 95, 98
- Old Testament, 86, 91, 92, 96, 122
- Oppression/-ed, 159
- Orthodox/-y, 71, 79, 104, 110, 116, 143
- Paradigm, 8, 22, 49, 132, 133, 138, 149
- Partnership, 201
- Peace, 180
- Pentecostal/-ism, 34, 69, 71, 76, 78, 124, 137, 143, 171, 173, 174, 175, 176, 179, 182, 183, 184, 187
- Political, 100, 208, 220
- Poor, 157, 159, 160, 161, 162, 164, 176, 181
- Postmodern/-ity, 94
- Power, 5, 145, 175
- Practice, 28, 151, 161,
- Praeparatio evangelica, 96
- Prayer, 38, 56, 73
- Presbyterian, 70, 73, 137
- Prophecy, 185, 186, 187, 189, 191, 192, 193, 194, 196, 197, 198, 199
- Proselytism, 103, 104
- Protestant, 15, 52, 59, 60, 64, 110, 134, 138, 142
- Quran/quranic, 85, 86, 87, 92, 93, 94, 96
- Renewal, 188
- Rich, 176
- Right, 100, 118
- rights, iv
- Scriptures, 119, 143
- Social, 15, 52, 75, 157, 160, 173, 174
- South/southern, vi, 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 15, 26, 50, 67, 68, 69, 70, 71, 77, 81, 124, 136, 140, 149, 150, 151, 152, 153, 154, 155, 156, 159, 160, 161, 165, 167, 168, 169,

- 170, 171, 172, 173, 175, 176,  
177, 178, 181, 182, 183, 185,  
186, 189, 199
- Strategy, 103
- Teaching, 38, 196
- Testimony, 94
- Theology/-ical, v, 6, 8, 10, 16,  
22, 23, 28, 33, 36, 37, 41, 43,  
44, 49, 69, 73, 85, 120, 126,  
129, 133, 139, 149, 151, 152,  
180, 185, 189, 196, 197, 200
- Transformation, 28, 29, 151,  
157, 164
- Vocation, 56
- Vulnerability, 125, 126, 127
- Wealth/wealthy, 178
- Western, 1, 4, 5, 6, 8, 11, 12, 23,  
64, 66, 69, 117, 118, 119,  
133, 140, 142, 175, 185
- Witness, 92
- Youth, 19, 21, 24, 52, 74, 167

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**Knud Jørgensen**, 1942, journalist, MTh from the University of Copenhagen, Ph.D. in missiology from Fuller Theological Seminary. Journalist and theologian. Has served with Radio Voice of the Gospel in Ethiopia, the Lutheran World Federation in Geneva, the International Mass Media Institute in Kristiansand, Go Out Centre in Hurdal, Norway, Norwegian Church Aid, the Mekane Yesus Seminary in Addis Ababa, and the mission foundation Areopagos. Dean of Tao Fong Shan in Hong Kong until 2010. He is now adjunct professor at the MF Norwegian School of Theology and the Lutheran Theological Seminary, Hong Kong. Published books and articles on journalism, communication, leadership and mission. One of the editors of the Regnum Edinburgh 2010 series.



**Kari Storstein Haug**, PhD Associate Professor of Missiology at School of Mission and Theology, Stavanger, Norway. Former missionary in Bangkok, Thailand for 8 years (Dean of Studies and lecturer in Biblical Studies at Luther Seminary in Thailand)



**Knut Tveitereid**, 1973. Cand.Theol. from MF Norwegian School of Theology. Now a PhD-student at NLA University College/School of Mission and Theology within the field of Youth Ministry. Ordained as Minister in the Church of Norway. The writer of several Christian books for youth. Widely used as speaker and lecturer.



**Rolv Olsen**, b. 1956. Cand.theol. School of Mission and Theology, Stavanger, Norway 1984. Teol.lic., Lund University, 2001, teol.dr., 2007. Missionary pastor, Norwegian Missionary Society (NMS), Taiwan, 1985-90. Student pastor, NMS, Oslo, 1990-92. Missionary pastor, Christian Mission to Buddhists (CMB) (now: Areopagos), superintendent, Tao Fong Shan Christian Centre, Hong Kong, 1992-98. Research Scholarship, CMB, 1998-2000. Director, Egede Institute, 2000-02, 2004-. Lecturer in KRL (Christianity, Religions and Lifestands) in various University Colleges, 2000-. Asia Secretary, Areopagos, 2009-10. Parish pastor, 2010-.



**Beate Fagerli**, 1970, Studied theology at the School of Mission and Theology in Stavanger, Norway, CIEETS in Managua, Nicaragua, and the University of Oslo, Norway (Cand Theol. 1999). Has worked with the World Student Christian Federation, the World Council of Churches' Commission for World Mission and Evangelism (CWME) and the Conference of European Churches. She is currently working with the Church of Norway Council on Ecumenical and International Relations as adviser on theology and ecumenical relations.



### Contributors



**Ragnhild Kristensen**, 1982, Currently working as Mission Advisor in Oslo Diocese, Church of Norway, has a Professional Degree in Theology and Ministry (cand.theol.) from Norwegian School of Theology, (MF), has also worked in the Norwegian Mission Society's Youth Organisation (NMS U).

**Steinar Sødal** (born 1983), has a master degree in theology from the Norwegian School of Theology in Oslo, Norway. The master thesis was in missiology, and was a qualitative study on how Turkish converts to Christianity view the Bible. He has also a bachelor degree in linguistics from University of Oslo. He currently works with Mission Aviation Fellowship in Norway.



**Dawit Olika Terfassa**, Born March 16, 1975. BTh from Mekane Yesus Theological Seminary, 2003 and Master of Philosophy in Theology from Norwegian School of Theology (MF), 2007. 1999-2001 Administrator and Evangelist of a congregation in EECMY, 2003-2005 Instructor, Dean of study and Co-ordination for Theological education by Extension at Nekemte Christian Education College, 2008-2010 Principal and instructor at Nekemte Christian Education College, Nekemte, Ethiopia. Since August 2010, I am working as coordinator for Lindsberg Congregations international work with in church of Sweden.



**Ingunn Folkestad Breistein**, born 1963, Associate Professor in Church History, Ansgar College and Theological Seminary, Oslo, Norway. Vice Chair of the Board of Oslo Coalition on Freedom of Religion or Belief.



**Adèle Djomo Ngomedje** is a translator. She participated in Edinburgh 2010 Mission Conference and was also involved in the Conference on World Mission and Evangelism in 2005. She has served as a Vice-Chairperson of the World Student Christian Federation and General Secretary of the Movement of Protestant Students in Cameroon.



**Marit Breen**, 1980, Master in Global Studies with specialization in Christian Studies, School of Mission and Theology, Stavanger, Norway (2009). Discipleship Training School and School of Biblical Studies, Youth With A Mission, South Africa (2006-2007). Currently working on several projects at the Norwegian Missionary Society (NMS) and NMS U (Norwegian Missionary Society's Children and Youth Organization), on mission and youth, involving teaching and information work on HIV/AIDS and North/South issues among youth in Norway ([www.who-cares.info](http://www.who-cares.info)).



**Mona Dysjeland**, 1979, Master in Theology, School of Mission and Theology, Stavanger, Norway (2006). Working for the Norwegian Mission Society as a teacher and a student pastor at the Evangelical Theological Seminary in Curitiba and as the representative of the Norwegian Mission Society in Brazil.



**Dr. Genevieve Lerina James** serves at the University of South Africa in the capacity of project leader of the Chance 2 Advance programme which is a national learning intervention particularly designed for poor communities. She is a missiologist with particular interest in Urban missiology. She also serves as the executive assistant to Unisa's Pro-Vice Chancellor.



**Lemna Desta**, an Ethiopian with church affiliation to the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus. I came to Norway for study in 2003. I have received a Master of philosophy in theology from the Norwegian school of Theology (Oslo) and Master of philosophy in International and comparative Education from the University of Oslo. While in Ethiopia I worked as a teacher and dean of studies at Hossana Seminary, one of the regional seminaries of Mekane Yesus Church. Since I came to Norway I have also been part of a congregation development process, project cooperation between Norwegian Mission Society and Oslo Diocese of the Church of Norway. Currently I am working as project





coordinator for multicultural network under the auspicious of the Christian council of Norway.

**John Amalraj**, son of a pastor, started his career in the corporate sector as a Personnel Manager for a few years before starting to serve with India Missions Association from the year 1993. He has been trained in Law, Political science, HRD and Theology. He has coordinated Leadership training programs for mission leaders, facilitated think tank meetings on mission issues. John now serves as the Executive Secretary and CEO of Interserve India from

January 2006 mobilizing, placing and caring for Christian professionals and entrepreneurs involved in wholistic mission in India and beyond. John is married to **Jessie**, who is trained as an English teacher for second language adult learners and serves as a part time volunteer staff with the Union Biblical Seminary, Pune. They both are blessed with two active sons Jason in the university (18+) and Joash in middle school (10+).



**Wen Ge** graduated from Nanjing Union Theological Seminary and has become a theological teacher there since 2001. Currently he is a researcher trainee at the Grundtvig Study Center of Aarhus University, Denmark. He attended Edinburgh 2010 as a delegate from China Christian Council.

## REGNUM EDINBURGH CENTENARY SERIES

### Series Listing

David A. Kerr, Kenneth R. Ross (Eds)

#### **Mission Then and Now**

2009 / 978-1-870345-73-6 / 343pp (paperback)

2009 / 978-1-870345-76-7 / 343pp (hardback)

No one can hope to fully understand the modern Christian missionary movement without engaging substantially with the World Missionary Conference, held at Edinburgh in 1910. This book is the first to systematically examine the eight Commissions which reported to Edinburgh 1910 and gave the conference much of its substance and enduring value. It will deepen and extend the reflection being stimulated by the upcoming centenary and will kindle the missionary imagination for 2010 and beyond.

Daryl M. Balia, Kirsteen Kim (Eds)

#### **Witnessing to Christ Today**

2010 / 978-1-870345-77-4 / 301pp

This volume, the second in the Edinburgh 2010 series, includes reports of the nine main study groups working on different themes for the celebration of the centenary of the World Missionary Conference, Edinburgh 1910. Their collaborative work brings together perspectives that are as inclusive as possible of contemporary world Christianity and helps readers to grasp what it means in different contexts to be 'witnessing to Christ today'.

Claudia Währisch-Oblau, Fidon Mwombeki (Eds)

#### **Mission Continues**

*Global Impulses for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*

2010 / 978-1-870345-82-8 / 271pp

In May 2009, 35 theologians from Asia, Africa and Europe met in Wuppertal, Germany, for a consultation on mission theology organized by the United Evangelical Mission: Communion of 35 Churches in Three Continents. The aim was to participate in the 100th anniversary of the Edinburgh conference through a study process and reflect on the challenges for mission in the 21st century. This book brings together these papers written by experienced practitioners from around the world.

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Brian Woolnough and Wonsuk Ma (Eds)

#### **Holistic Mission**

*God's plan for God's people*

2010 / 978-1-870345-85-9 / 277pp

Holistic mission, or integral mission, implies God is concerned with the whole person, the whole community, body, mind and spirit. This book discusses the meaning of the holistic gospel, how it has developed, and implications for the church. It takes a global, eclectic approach, with 19 writers, all of whom have much experience in, and commitment to, holistic mission. It addresses critically and honestly one of the most exciting, and challenging, issues facing the church today. To be part of God's plan for God's people, the church must take holistic mission to the world.

Kirsteen Kim and Andrew Anderson (Eds)

***Mission Today and Tomorrow***

2010 / 978-1-870345-91-0 / 450pp

There are moments in our lives when we come to realise that we are participating in the triune God's mission. If we believe the church to be as sign and symbol of the reign of God in the world, then we are called to witness to Christ today by sharing in God's mission of love through the transforming power of the Holy Spirit. We can all participate in God's transforming and reconciling mission of love to the whole creation.

Tormod Engelsen, Erling Lundebjerg and Dagfinn Solheim (Eds)

***The Church Going Glocal***

*Mission and Globalisation 2011 / 978-1-870345-93-4 / 262pp*

The New Testament church is... universal and local at the same time. The universal, one and holy apostolic church appears in local manifestations. Missiologically speaking... the church can take courage as she faces the increasing impact of globalisation on local communities today. Being universal and concrete, the church is geared for the simultaneous challenges of the glocal and local.

Marjina Ngurusangzeli Behera (Ed)

***Interfaith Relations after One Hundred Years***

*Christian Mission among Other Faiths 2011 / 978-1-870345-96-5 / 334 pp*

The essays of this book reflect not only the acceptance and celebration of pluralism within India but also by extension an acceptance as well as a need for unity among Indian Christians of different denominations. The essays were presented and studied at a preparatory consultation on Study Theme II: Christian Mission Among Other Faiths at the United Theological College, India July 2009.

Lalsangkima Pachuau and Knud Jørgensen (Eds)

***Witnessing to Christ in a Pluralistic Age***

*Christian Mission among Other Faiths 2011 / 978-1-870345-95-8 / 277 pp*

In a world where plurality of faiths is increasingly becoming a norm of life, insights on the theology of religious plurality are needed to strengthen our understanding of our own faith and the faith of others. Even though religious diversity is not new, we are seeing an upsurge in interest on the theologies of religion among all Christian confessional traditions. It can be claimed that no other issue in Christian mission is more important and more difficult than the theologies of religions.

Beth Snodderly and A Scott Moreau (Eds)

***Evangelical Frontier Mission***

*Perspectives on the Global Progress of the Gospel*

2011 / 978-1-870345-98-9 / 312pp

This important volume demonstrates that 100 years after the World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh, Evangelism has become truly global. Twenty-first-century Evangelism continues to focus on frontier mission, but significantly, and in the spirit of Edinburgh 1910, it also has re-engaged social action.

Rolv Olsen (Ed)

***Mission and Postmodernities***

2011 / 978-1-870345-97-2 / 279pp

This volume takes on meaning because its authors honestly struggle with and debate how we should relate to postmodernities. Should our response be accommodation, relativizing or counter-culture? How do we strike a balance between listening and understanding, and at the same time exploring how postmodernities influence the interpretation and application of the Bible as the normative story of God's mission in the world?

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# REGNUM STUDIES IN GLOBAL CHRISTIANITY

(Previously GLOBAL THEOLOGICAL VOICES series)

## Series Listing

David Emmanuel Singh (Ed)

### **Jesus and the Cross**

*Reflections of Christians from Islamic Contexts*

2008 / 978-1-870345-65-1 / 226pp

The Cross reminds us that the sins of the world are not borne through the exercise of power but through Jesus Christ's submission to the will of the Father. The papers in this volume are organised in three parts: scriptural, contextual and theological. The central question being addressed is: how do Christians living in contexts, where Islam is a majority or minority religion, experience, express or think of the Cross?

Sung-wook Hong

### **Naming God in Korea**

*The Case of Protestant Christianity*

2008 / 978-1-870345-66-8 / 170pp

Since Christianity was introduced to Korea more than a century ago, one of the most controversial issues has been the Korean term for the Christian 'God'. This issue is not merely about naming the Christian God in Korean language, but it relates to the question of theological contextualization - the relationship between the gospel and culture - and the question of Korean Christian identity. This book demonstrates the nature of the gospel in relation to cultures, i.e., the universality of the gospel expressed in all human cultures.

Hubert van Beek (Ed)

### **Revisioning Christian Unity**

*The Global Christian Forum*

2009 / 978-1-870345-74-3 / 288pp

This book contains the records of the Global Christian Forum gathering held in Limuru near Nairobi, Kenya, on 6 – 9 November 2007 as well as the papers presented at that historic event. Also included are a summary of the Global Christian Forum process from its inception until the 2007 gathering and the reports of the evaluation of the process that was carried out in 2008.

Young-hoon Lee

### **The Holy Spirit Movement in Korea**

*Its Historical and Theological Development*

2009 / 978-1-870345-67-5 / 174pp

This book traces the historical and theological development of the Holy Spirit Movement in Korea through six successive periods (from 1900 to the present time). These periods are characterized by repentance and revival (1900-20), persecution and suffering under Japanese occupation (1920-40), confusion and division (1940-60), explosive revival in which the Pentecostal movement played a major role in the rapid growth of Korean churches (1960-80), the movement reaching out to all denominations (1980-2000), and the new context demanding the Holy Spirit movement to open new horizons in its mission engagement (2000-).

Paul Hang-Sik Cho  
**Eschatology and Ecology**  
*Experiences of the Korean Church*  
2010 / 978-1-870345-75-0 / 260pp

This book raises the question of why Korean people, and Korean Protestant Christians in particular, pay so little attention to ecological issues. The author argues that there is an important connection (or elective affinity) between this lack of attention and the other-worldly eschatology that is so dominant within Korean Protestant Christianity.

Dietrich Werner, David Esterline, Namsoon Kang, Joshva Raja (Eds)  
**The Handbook of Theological Education in World Christianity**  
2010 / 978-1-870345-80-4 / 759pp

This major reference work is the first ever comprehensive study of Theological Education in Christianity of its kind. With contributions from over 90 international scholars and church leaders, it aims to be easily accessible across denominational, cultural, educational, and geographic boundaries. The Handbook will aid international dialogue and networking among theological educators, institutions, and agencies

David Emmanuel Singh & Bernard C Farr (Eds)  
**Christianity and Education**  
*Shaping of Christian Context in Thinking*  
2010 / 978-1-870345-81-1 / 374pp

*Christianity and Education* is a collection of papers published in *Transformation: An International Journal of Holistic Mission Studies* over a period of 15 years. The articles represent a spectrum of Christian thinking addressing issues of institutional development for theological education, theological studies in the context of global mission, contextually aware/informed education, and academies which deliver such education, methodologies and personal reflections.

J. Andrew Kirk  
**Civilisations in Conflict?**  
*Islam, the West and Christian Faith*  
2011 / 978-1-870345-87-3 / 205pp

Samuel Huntington's thesis, which argues that there appear to be aspects of Islam that could be on a collision course with the politics and values of Western societies, has provoked much controversy. This study offers a particular response to Huntington's thesis by making a comparison between the origins of Islam and Christianity.

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David Emmanuel Singh (Ed)  
**Jesus and the Incarnation**  
*Reflections of Christians from Islamic Contexts*  
2011 / 978-1-870345-90-3 / 250pp

In the dialogues of Christians with Muslims nothing is more fundamental than the Cross, the Incarnation and the Resurrection of Jesus. Building on the *Jesus and the Cross*, this book contains voices of Christians living in various 'Islamic contexts' and reflecting on the Incarnation of Jesus. The aim and hope of these reflections is that the papers weaved around the notion of 'the Word' will not only promote dialogue among Christians on the roles of the Person and the Book but, also, create a positive environment for their conversations with Muslim neighbours.

REGNUM STUDIES IN MISSION  
**Series Listing**

Kwame Bediako

**Theology and Identity**

*The Impact of Culture upon Christian Thought in the Second Century and in Modern Africa*

1992 / 978-1870345-80-2 / 508pp

The author examines the question of Christian identity in the context of the Graeco-Roman culture of the early Roman Empire. He then addresses the modern African predicament of quests for identity and integration.

Christopher Sugden

**Seeking the Asian Face of Jesus**

*The Practice and Theology of Christian Social Witness in Indonesia and India 1974-1996*

1997 / 1-870345-26-6 / 496pp

This study focuses on contemporary holistic mission with the poor in India and Indonesia combined with the call to transformation of all life in Christ with micro-credit enterprise schemes. 'The literature on contextual theology now has a new standard to rise to' – Lamin Sanneh (Yale University, USA).

Hwa Yung

**Mangoes or Bananas?**

*The Quest for an Authentic Asian Christian Theology*

1997 / 1-870345-25-5 / 274pp

Asian Christian thought remains largely captive to Greek dualism and Enlightenment rationalism because of the overwhelming dominance of Western culture. Authentic contextual Christian theologies will emerge within Asian Christianity with a dual recovery of confidence in culture and the gospel.

Keith E. Eitel

**Paradigm Wars**

*The Southern Baptist International Mission Board Faces the Third Millennium*

1999 / 1-870345-12-6 / 140pp

The International Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention is the largest denominational mission agency in North America. This volume chronicles the historic and contemporary forces that led to the IMB's recent extensive reorganization, providing the most comprehensive case study to date of a historic mission agency restructuring to continue its mission purpose into the twenty-first century more effectively.

Samuel Jayakumar

**Dalit Consciousness and Christian Conversion**

*Historical Resources for a Contemporary Debate* 1999 / 81-7214-497-0 / 434pp

(Published jointly with ISPCK)

The main focus of this historical study is social change and transformation among the Dalit Christian communities in India. Historiography tests the evidence in the light of the conclusions of the modern Dalit liberation theologians.

Vinay Samuel and Christopher Sugden (Eds)

**Mission as Transformation**

*A Theology of the Whole Gospel*

1999 / 978-18703455-13-2 / 522pp

This book brings together in one volume twenty five years of biblical reflection on mission practice with the poor from around the world. This volume helps anyone understand how evangelicals, struggling to unite evangelism and social action, found their way in the last twenty five years to the biblical view of mission in which God calls all human beings to love God and their neighbour; never creating a separation between the two.

Christopher Sugden

**Gospel, Culture and Transformation**

2000 / 1-870345-32-0 / 152pp

*A Reprint, with a New Introduction, of Part Two of Seeking the Asian Face of Jesus Gospel, Culture and Transformation* explores the practice of mission especially in relation to transforming cultures and communities. - 'Transformation is to enable God's vision of society to be actualised in all relationships: social, economic and spiritual, so that God's will may be reflected in human society and his love experienced by all communities, especially the poor.'

Bernhard Ott

**Beyond Fragmentation: Integrating Mission and Theological Education**

*A Critical Assessment of some Recent Developments*

*in Evangelical Theological Education*

2001 / 1-870345-14-2 / 382pp

*Beyond Fragmentation* is an enquiry into the development of Mission Studies in evangelical theological education in Germany and German-speaking Switzerland between 1960 and 1995. The author undertakes a detailed examination of the paradigm shifts which have taken place in recent years in both the theology of mission and the understanding of theological education.



Gideon Githiga

**The Church as the Bulwark against Authoritarianism**

*Development of Church and State Relations in Kenya, with Particular Reference to the  
Years after Political Independence 1963-1992*

2002 / 1-870345-38-x / 218pp

'All who care for love, peace and unity in Kenyan society will want to read this careful history by Bishop Githiga of how Kenyan Christians, drawing on the Bible, have sought to share the love of God, bring his peace and build up the unity of the nation, often in the face of great difficulties and opposition.' Canon Dr Chris Sugden, Oxford Centre for Mission Studies.

Myung Sung-Hoon, Hong Young-Gi (eds.)

**Charis and Charisma**

*David Yonggi Cho and the Growth of Yoido Full Gospel Church*

2003 / 978-1870345-45-3 / 218pp

This book discusses the factors responsible for the growth of the world's largest church. It expounds the role of the Holy Spirit, the leadership, prayer, preaching, cell groups and creativity in promoting church growth. It focuses on God's grace (charis) and inspiring leadership (charisma) as the two essential factors and the book's purpose is to present a model for church growth worldwide.

Samuel Jayakumar

**Mission Reader**

*Historical Models for Wholistic Mission in the Indian Context*

2003 / 1-870345-42-8 / 250pp

(Published jointly with ISPCK)

This book is written from an evangelical point of view revalidating and reaffirming the Christian commitment to wholistic mission. The roots of the 'wholistic mission' combining 'evangelism and social concerns' are to be located in the history and tradition of Christian evangelism in the past; and the civilizing purpose of evangelism is compatible with modernity as an instrument in nation building.

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Bob Robinson

**Christians Meeting Hindus**

*An Analysis and Theological Critique of the Hindu-Christian Encounter in India*

2004 / 987-1870345-39-2 / 392pp

This book focuses on the Hindu-Christian encounter, especially the intentional meeting called dialogue, mainly during the last four decades of the twentieth century, and specifically in India itself.

Gene Early  
**Leadership Expectations**

*How Executive Expectations are Created and Used in a Non-Profit Setting*  
2005 / 1-870345-30-4 / 276pp

The author creates an Expectation Enactment Analysis to study the role of the Chancellor of the University of the Nations-Kona, Hawaii. This study is grounded in the field of managerial work, jobs, and behaviour and draws on symbolic interactionism, role theory, role identity theory and enactment theory. The result is a conceptual framework for developing an understanding of managerial roles.

Tharcisse Gatwa  
**The Churches and Ethnic Ideology in the Rwandan Crises 1900-1994**

2005 / 978-1870345-24-8 / 300pp  
(Reprinted 2011)

Since the early years of the twentieth century Christianity has become a new factor in Rwandan society. This book investigates the role Christian churches played in the formulation and development of the racial ideology that culminated in the 1994 genocide.

Julie Ma

**Mission Possible**

*Biblical Strategies for Reaching the Lost*  
2005 / 978-1870345-37-1 / 142pp

This is a missiology book for the church which liberates missiology from the specialists for the benefit of every believer. It also serves as a textbook that is simple and friendly, and yet solid in biblical interpretation. This book links the biblical teaching to the actual and contemporary missiological settings with examples, making the Bible come alive to the reader.

Allan Anderson, Edmond Tang (Eds)

**Asian and Pentecostal**

*The Charismatic Face of Christianity in Asia*  
2005 / 1-870345-43-9 / 596pp  
(Reprinted 2011)

(Published jointly with APTS Press)

This book provides a thematic discussion and pioneering case studies on the history and development of Pentecostal and Charismatic churches in the countries of South Asia, South East Asia and East Asia.

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I. Mark Beaumont

**Christology in Dialogue with Muslims**

*A Critical Analysis of Christian Presentations of Christ for Muslims  
from the Ninth and Twentieth Centuries*  
2005 / 1978-1870345-46-0 / 228pp

This book analyses Christian presentations of Christ for Muslims in the most creative periods of Christian-Muslim dialogue, the first half of the ninth century and the second half of the twentieth century. In these two periods, Christians made serious attempts to present their faith in Christ in terms that take into account Muslim perceptions of him, with a view to bridging the gap between Muslim and Christian convictions.

Thomas Czövek,

**Three Seasons of Charismatic Leadership**

*A Literary-Critical and Theological Interpretation of the Narrative of  
Saul, David and Solomon*

2006 / 978-1870345-48-4 / 272pp

This book investigates the charismatic leadership of Saul, David and Solomon. It suggests that charismatic leaders emerge in crisis situations in order to resolve the crisis by the charisma granted by God. Czövek argues that Saul proved himself as a charismatic leader as long as he acted resolutely and independently from his mentor Samuel. In the author's eyes, Saul's failure to establish himself as a charismatic leader is caused by his inability to step out from Samuel's shadow.

Jemima Atieno Oluoch

**The Christian Political Theology of Dr. John Henry Okullu**

2006 / 1-870345-51-4 / 137pp

This book reconstructs the Christian political theology of Bishop John Henry Okullu, DD, through establishing what motivated him and the biblical basis for his socio-political activities. It also attempts to reconstruct the socio-political environment that nurtured Dr Okullu's prophetic ministry.

Richard Burgess

**Nigeria's Christian Revolution**

*The Civil War Revival and Its Pentecostal Progeny (1967-2006)*

2008 / 978-1-870345-63-7 / 347pp

This book describes the revival that occurred among the Igbo people of Eastern Nigeria and the new Pentecostal churches it generated, and documents the changes that have occurred as the movement has responded to global flows and local demands. As such, it explores the nature of revivalist and Pentecostal experience, but does so against the backdrop of local socio-political and economic developments, such as decolonisation and civil war, as well as broader processes, such as modernisation and globalisation.

David Emmanuel Singh & Bernard C Farr (Eds)

**Christianity and Cultures**

*Shaping Christian Thinking in Context*

2008 / 978-1-870345-69-9 / 260pp

This volume marks an important milestone, the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Oxford Centre for Mission Studies (OCMS). The papers here have been exclusively sourced from Transformation, a quarterly journal of OCMS, and seek to provide a tripartite view of Christianity's engagement with cultures by focusing on the question: how is Christian thinking being formed or reformed through its interaction with the varied contexts it encounters? The subject matters include different strands of theological-missiological thinking, socio-political engagements and forms of family relationships in interaction with the host cultures.

Tormod Engelsen, Ernst Harbakk, Rolv Olsen, Thor Strandenæs (Eds)

**Mission to the World**

*Communicating the Gospel in the 21st Century:*

*Essays in Honour of Knud Jørgensen*

2008 / 978-1-870345-64-4 / 472pp

Knud Jørgensen is Director of Areopagos and Associate Professor of Missiology at MF Norwegian School of Theology. This book reflects on the main areas of Jørgensen's commitment to mission. At the same time it focuses on the main frontier of mission, the world, the content of mission, the Gospel, the fact that the Gospel has to be communicated, and the context of contemporary mission in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Al Tizon

**Transformation after Lausanne**

*Radical Evangelical Mission in Global-Local Perspective*

2008 / 978-1-870345-68-2 / 281pp

After Lausanne '74, a worldwide network of radical evangelical mission theologians and practitioners use the notion of "Mission as Transformation" to integrate evangelism and social concern together, thus lifting theological voices from the Two Thirds World to places of prominence. This book documents the definitive gatherings, theological tensions, and social forces within and without evangelicalism that led up to Mission as Transformation. And it does so through a global-local grid that points the way toward greater holistic mission in the 21st century.

Bambang Budijanto

**Values and Participation**

*Development in Rural Indonesia*

2009 / 978-1-870345-70-4 / 237pp

Socio-religious values and socio-economic development are inter-dependant, inter-related and are constantly changing in the context of macro political structures, economic policy, religious organizations and globalization, and micro influences such as local affinities, identity, politics, leadership and beliefs. The book argues that the comprehensive approach in understanding the socio-religious values of each of the three local Lopait communities in Central Java is essential to accurately describing their respective identity.

Alan R. Johnson

**Leadership in a Slum**

*A Bangkok Case Study*

2009 / 978-1-870345-71-2 / 238pp

This book looks at leadership in the social context of a slum in Bangkok from a different perspective than traditional studies which measure well educated Thais on leadership scales derived in the West. Using both systematic data collection and participant observation, it develops a culturally preferred model as well as a set of models based in Thai concepts that reflect on-the-ground realities. It concludes by looking at the implications of the anthropological approach for those who are involved in leadership training in Thai settings and beyond.

Titre Ande  
**Leadership and Authority**  
*Bula Matari and Life - Community Ecclesiology in Congo*  
2010 / 978-1-870345-72-9 / 189pp

Christian theology in Africa can make significant development if a critical understanding of the socio-political context in contemporary Africa is taken seriously, particularly as Africa's post-colonial Christian leadership based its understanding and use of authority on the Bula Matari model. This has caused many problems and Titre proposes a Life-Community ecclesiology for liberating authority, here leadership is a function, not a status, and 'apostolic succession' belongs to all people of God.

Frank Kwesi Adams  
**Odwira and the Gospel**  
*A Study of the Asante Odwira Festival and its Significance for Christianity in Ghana*  
2010 / 978-1-870345-59-0 / 232pp

The study of the Odwira festival is the key to the understanding of Asante religious and political life in Ghana. The book explores the nature of the Odwira festival longitudinally - in pre-colonial, colonial and post-independence Ghana - and examines the Odwira ideology and its implications for understanding the Asante self-identity. Also discussed is how some elements of faith portrayed in the Odwira festival can provide a framework for Christianity to engage with Asante culture at a greater depth.

Bruce Carlton  
**Strategy Coordinator**  
*Changing the Course of Southern Baptist Missions*  
2010 / 978-1-870345-78-1 / 268pp

This is an outstanding, one-of-a-kind work addressing the influence of the non-residential missionary/strategy coordinator's role in Southern Baptist missions. This scholarly text examines the twentieth century global missiological currents that influenced the leadership of the International Mission Board, resulting in a new paradigm to assist in taking the gospel to the nations.

Julie Ma & Wonsuk Ma  
**Mission in the Spirit:**  
*Towards a Pentecostal/Charismatic Missiology*  
2010 / 978-1-870345-84-2 / 312pp

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