



“Meaning Based” TRANSLATION




Dr. David Foris *Wycliffe Bible Translators*

As the current wave of new Bible translation projects, more will have begun in each language where there is a need by the year 2041. The average rate of documented new starts since the start of year is 21 languages per year. (Source: Adapted from the International Commission on Linguistics)

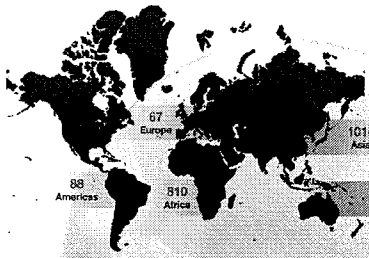
2,393* languages
with probable need of Bible translation



6.5 billion
World population
(Source: UN Population 2010)



6,969 languages
spoken in the world
(Source: Ethnologue 2009)



*Including 1,000 languages that are not documented. NOTE: Not all languages have speakers in every country.

The Status of Bible Translation

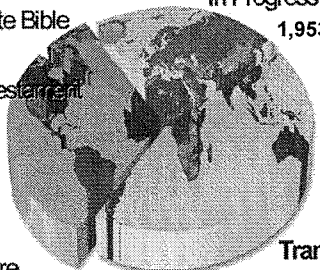
Complete Bible
429

New Testament
1,144

Some Scripture
853

In Progress
1,953

Need Translation
2393 languages
approx. 200 million speakers




The Goal of Translation:

Eugene Nida’s classical definition is a good starting point:



“...the reproduction of the closest natural equivalent of the source language message.”

Hagar



Where is meaning in a message?

- > In morphemes: (dog-s) (work-s)
- > In words
- > In the **context** of the words
 - The girl *dressed* her doll. / The chef *dressed* the chicken.
 - She *dressed* the salad as usual. / The cabinetmaker *dressed* the wood.
- > In sentences
- > In paragraphs
- > In the discourse structure (narrative, hortative, descriptive, etc.)
- > In the syntax (e.g. the order of the constituents):
 - Is Kelvin going to the store? / Kelvin is going to the store.
- > In the “cultural baggage” associated with the referent
 - To us “dog” = pet, companion, hunting assistant, guardian
 - In parts of Asia, “dog” = food
- > In tone of voice
- > In non-verbal gestures (body language)
- > In ...

Humorous mis-translations

In a Tel Aviv Hotel:

If you wish for breakfast lift the telephone and our waitress will arrive. This will be enough to bring your food up.



Hotel, Moscow:

If this is your first visit to the USSR, you are welcome to it.



The Translation Process:

I have a message:

M

It is contained in the Greek:



So first-century Christians reading the Greek got the message:



When the form is kept, often the meaning gets distorted:



When the meaning is the focus, the form will be what is natural for the receptor language:



The Translation Process:

Word for word?

If so, how should I translate...

"It's raining cats and dogs"?

Does the Greek NT offer us any such idioms to translate?



The Translation Process:

Rev. 2:23

ΚΑΙ ΤΗΜΟΡΤΗΤΑΙ
 ΗΩΣ ΟΥΡΩΣ
 ΤΗΣ ΚΑΡΔΙΑΣ
 ΑΥΤΟΥ

ΚΑΙ ΤΗΜΟΡΤΗΤΑΙ
 ΗΩΣ ΟΥΡΩΣ
 ΤΗΣ ΚΑΡΔΙΑΣ
 ΑΥΤΟΥ

Not a single English translation has used the word "kidneys" in their translation! Why?

- Note how Rev. 2:23 has been translated into English
- and all the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts (KJV)
- and all the churches shall know that I am he who searches the minds and hearts (KJV2000)
- and know shall all the assemblies that I am he who is searching reins and hearts (Young's Literal Translation)
- Then all the churches will know that I am he who searches hearts and minds (NIV)

Understanding the Target Language & Culture: both English and Greek treat "heart" as the emotional center

- | | |
|--|------------------------------------|
| 1. <i>My heart is broken</i> | 1. overcome with grief, sad |
| 2. <i>He is hard-hearted</i> | 2. unfeeling, cruel, pitiless |
| 3. <i>I love you from the bottom of my heart</i> | 3. a very sincere love of my heart |
| 4. <i>She's so soft-hearted</i> | 4. full of compassion, not strict |

Understanding the Target Language & Culture: Yakan idioms from Philippines: "liver" as emotional centre

- | | |
|------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1. <i>hap atey</i> = good liver | 1. happy, good |
| 2. <i>la'at atey</i> = bad liver | 2. easily hates |
| 3. <i>lumuk atey</i> = soft liver | 3. meek, follows teaching well |
| 4. <i>tuwas atey</i> = hard liver | 4. stubborn |
| 5. <i>peddi' atey</i> = hurt liver | 5. angry inside |

So how might we translate Rev 2:23?
 ...and all the churches shall know that I am he who searches the minds and hearts

Translation at the word level

In all languages we encounter individual words with multiple meanings.

(one form—several functions).

Translation at the word level

English to Spanish

case = caja (box & contents)
 case = estuche (for instruments)
 case = asunto (legal matter)
 case = caso (grammatical)
 case = vitrina (display area)

Spanish to English

caja = case
 caja = till (money)
 caja = cash, funds
 caja = stairwell
 caja = rib cage

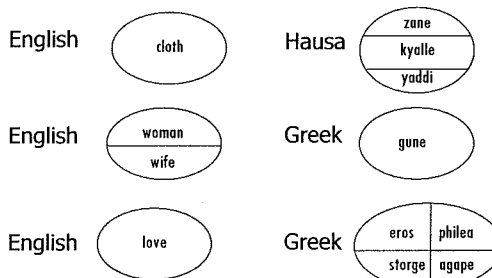
Translation at the word level

It would be amusing and largely unintelligible to consistently translate every instance of "case" with Spanish "caja".

WHY?

...there is only partial equivalence of the meaning conveyed by words.

There is only partial equivalence between languages, the same "reality" is divided differently



The Translation Process

- In reality, if we are seeking to transfer *meaning* from source language to receptor language, we must be aware that *meaning* is encoded not just in words (and their context), but also in syntax (grammatical structures such as clauses/propositions and even in the entire layout of the discourse—the introduction, body and conclusion).

Syntactic considerations: Translation at the clause level (proposition)

- Rhetorical questions...

illustrate how
 the FORM of the syntax must be changed
 so that
 the MEANING is not changed.

Syntactic considerations:

Translation at the clause level

A real question is asked to get information.

A rhetorical question has the same form as a real question, but is asked for other reasons [has other functions]. These include:

1. rebuke, exhortation Foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you? (Galatians 3:1)
2. summary What advantage then is there in being a Jew? (Romans 3:1)
3. reminder Surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace...? (Ephesians 3:2)
4. get attention To what can I liken the Kingdom of God? (Luke 13:20)

Rhetorical questions - cultural mismatch

When the Trique of Mexico hear Jesus say "To what can I liken the Kingdom of God...?" they think either:

1. It is a real question, Jesus doesn't know the answer and wants to know.

or:

2. It is a rhetorical question, Jesus is rebuking his listeners because they are stupid.

In Trique, rhetorical questions have only one function, **rebuke**.

There is only **partial equivalence** of meaning/function with the **syntactic structure** of "rhetorical question."

68% of the "questions" in the New Testament are rhetorical!

Syntactic considerations: Active & Passive Forms

Active: John built the house.

Passive: The house was built by John.



Many languages in the world do not have a passive form, so the translator simply has to use the active form.

The stone was rejected by you builders. Acts 4:11

The stone which you builders rejected.

Why was this ointment wasted? Mark 14:4

Why did she waste this ointment?

May you be strengthened with all power. Col 1:11
May God strengthen you with all power.

Syntactic considerations: Active & Passive Forms

- In English (as in Greek), the passive construction is often used because the subject is unimportant, suppressed or unknown.
- Many Southeast Asian languages such as Thai and Japanese have only the "adversative passive" – "to come in contact with or undergo an unpleasant experience" (Amara Prasithrathsint)
"Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you." (Mat 7:7)
"Ask, and God will give it to you; seek and you will find; knock and God will open the way for you."
- There is only **partial equivalence** of meaning/function with the **syntactic structure** of "passives."

Form and Meaning

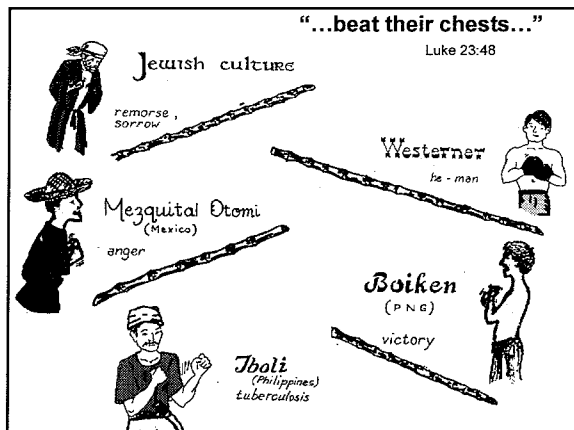
	NEW ZEALAND		ZANAKI, AFRICA		PAPUA NEW GUINEA
WORD:	KNOCK	=	KNOCK	=	KNOCK
MEANING:	SEEKING ENTRANCE	≠	THIEF	≠	∅

"HERE, I AM! I STAND AT THE DOOR AND KNOCK. IF ANYONE HEARS MY VOICE AND OPENS THE DOOR, I WILL COME IN AND EAT WITH HIM, AND HE WITH ME." (REVELATION 3:20 NIV)

	NEW ZEALAND		ZANAKI, AFRICA		PAPUA NEW GUINEA
MEANING:	SEEKING ENTRANCE	=	SEEKING ENTRANCE	=	SEEKING ENTRANCE
WORD:	KNOCK	≠	CALL	≠	COUGH

When the Source culture concepts are misunderstood by the Receptor culture

- Implicit information in the Source culture may need to be made explicit.



Figures of Speech

- Similes
- Metaphors
- Euphemisms
- Hyperbole
- Metonymy
- Synecdoche
- Idioms

Figures of Speech

We'll only have time to look at these three:

- Metaphors
- Euphemisms
- Hyperbole

Figures of Speech *Metaphors*

Both metaphors and similes make a **comparison**.

- In a simile, the comparison is **openly stated** usually by the words 'like' or 'as'.
- In a metaphor, the comparison is **implied—not stated**.

simile: He is like a weed.

metaphor: He is a weed.

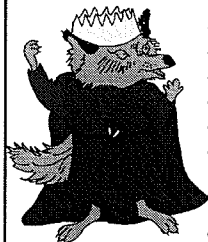
Metaphors - translatable ?

- She's a chicken! – meaning in English?
- In Chinantec, it means the person is a thief.
- In Thai, it means a woman is a prostitute.
- The understanding of metaphors is

culturally conditioned.

The understanding of metaphors is culturally conditioned...

“Go tell that fox...” (Luke 13:32)



- Tepeuxila Cuicatec, fox = homosexual
- Teutila Cuicatec, fox = a good hunter
- Zapotec, fox = one who cries much
- Otomi, fox = one who steals
- Chinantec, fox = one who steals chickens
- Pame, fox = heartless killer of domesticated animals
- Mayo, fox = a person belonging to the clan called "Fox"
- Hebrew, fox = a person who is malicious or destructive (see Song of Sol. 2:15)

What sort of person was Herod?

Figures of Speech *Euphemisms*

... the use of a word or phrase to refer indirectly to ideas considered to be offensive if talked about directly.

What do the following euphemisms mean?

- | | |
|---|--------------|
| 1. ...a woman of the city, who was a sinner | (Luke 7:37) |
| 2. ...you will be called the prophet of the Most High | (Luke 1:76) |
| 3. Mary...was with child | (Luke 2:5) |
| 4. he breathed his last | (Luke 24:46) |

Euphemisms translated literally into another language can be puzzling or misleading.

David...fell asleep and was laid with his fathers.
(Acts 13:36)

If you translated 'fell asleep' word for word into Mbembe, people would think David was buried while he was asleep!

The euphemism for 'die' in Mbembe is, 'he departed'.

One translation of the Bible was rejected by the church because of a lack of euphemisms – the vocabulary used was too direct and was considered improper.

Figures of Speech *Hyperbole:*

exaggeration for effect

- | | |
|--|--------------------|
| 1. John came neither eating nor drinking.
(Matt 11:18) | 1. not feasting |
| 2. This my son was dead, and is alive again.
(Luke 15:32) | 2. as good as dead |
| 3. Look, the world has gone after him.
(John 12:19) | 3. many people |

Figures of Speech *Hyperbole:*

exaggeration for effect

In some languages, if certain hyperboles are translated literally, they can be perceived as so blatantly false that the truth of the Scriptures is discredited.

God used **vivid language** to get His message across in the original languages to capture people's attention.

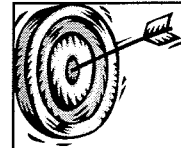
Where possible, shouldn't we do the same in a translation?

Eugene Nida points out that ...
"since no two languages are identical, there can be no absolute correspondence between languages. Hence, there can be no fully exact translations. The total impact of a translation may be reasonably close to the original, but there can be no identity in detail"

(Venuti 2000:127).

Translation is a Communicative Process

The Translator must use the text to retrace back to the intent of the Speaker and then communicate this same intent to a New Audience.



The goal of translation

The goal of translation is to convey the meaning of the source text to the receptor audience, cast in the mould of the receptor language, and taking into account the background knowledge available to the receptor audience: a "meaning based" translation.

Good Translation Characteristics

- Accurate** Should give the exact meaning as nearly as possible to the original message.
- Clear** Should make the meaning easy to understand—no confusing phrases.
- Natural** Should not sound like a translation, but the way the local people talk or write.

The message of God's love – the living **WORD** – became totally incarnate into the Jewish language and culture, and therefore comprehensible. A good translation will make His message – the written word – comprehensible to a new receptor audience.

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**‘Newbigin’s Trinitarian Missiology:
The Doctrine of the Trinity as Good News for Western Culture’**

by

Adam Dodds,

Teaching Fellow at the University of Otago and PhD candidate studying the Trinitarian
Missiology of Lesslie Newbigin

Abstract

In this paper I explore Newbigin’s trinitarian missiology by first evaluating its theological basis, and second looking at the practical implications for the Church’s mission within Western culture today. Newbigin claimed that ‘the doctrine of the Trinity... is the necessary starting point of preaching.’ This statement actually involves two mutually related claims which I discuss using the resources of recent trinitarian theology. First, evangelism begins with describing the Triune God, and second, the Triune nature of God is irreducibly bound up with the substance of the gospel. In my discussion I evaluate these bold claims using the resources of Trinitarian theology, taking the claims in reverse order since the second impinges upon the first. In the second part of my paper I apply the fruits of this discussion to the Church’s mission within Western culture. I briefly articulate a relational ontology based on the doctrine of the Trinity, and then describe a relational anthropology based on the *imago Dei*. Next I explore Newbigin’s theology of the inter-relatedness of all life as the clue to understanding missional election. In conclusion I shall indicate the practical implications this has for ecclesiology and missiology vis-à-vis Newbigin’s understanding of the congregation as the hermeneutic of the gospel. This shows the abiding significance of Lesslie Newbigin for continued theological, missiological, and practical reflection.

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Missiologists as Key-holders for Western Theological Education Reform

Rosemary Dewerse

Paper presented to the ANZAMS mini-symposium, October 2009, Auckland.

E te whanau a te Karaiti, tena koutou, tena koutou, tena tatou katoa.

I am grateful for the opportunity to deliver a paper this evening, and I want to thank John and Ian for the work they have put into organising this mini-symposium and giving us the opportunity to listen to each other and to some of the things that we are passionate about.

I have lived and I have taught in a seminary in Central Asia twice in recent years. My time there, operating in another language, getting to know a different culture and religious worldview and building relationships with people I count it a privilege to call my friends has, I recognise, completely altered the way in which I view the world and answer the question 'what does it mean to be human?', as well as the way in which I understand God and what it means to follow Christ. I have walked away transformed by my encounters with students and I have seen students transformed in their faith and life as a result of our classes together. Interestingly, the less I talked the deeper and broader was our engagement with each other, and in what became a richly intercultural environment we learned more.

Such experiences have, however, raised huge questions for me around theological education, the way in which it is done, the principles that underpin it and the dimensions of learning which I believe are not being explored as they need to be. Returning to NZ I found myself struggling with disjunctions between what had happened in Central Asia and what proved to be my limited ability to translate it into the theological education context here. I was successful sometimes but not often. Creative intuition I discovered was not enough and I became very conscious that if I couldn't articulate what it is I believe needs to be changed, why, and how we might go about it, it would be very difficult to initiate thorough-going change in my own praxis let alone be heard in the corridors of power.

Why seek change in Western theological education?

But why is something that I experienced in a classroom in Central Asia at all relevant to Western theological education settings, the context I feel I have the most right to speak to and do want to try to influence? Well, as missiologists have been pointing out for years our world is changing, and it is changing fast. It has been nearly forty years since the centre of gravity of the world church shifted numerically away from the West¹ Missiometrics notes that now 72% of world Christians live in Africa, Latin America and Asia.² Closer to home countries traditionally identified as 'Western' are

¹ This date for the shift in the centre of gravity of the world church is obtained from Harvey Cox, "Christianity," in *Global Religions: An Introduction*, ed. M Juergensmeyer (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 17.

² D. B. Barrett, T. M. Johnson, and P. F. Crossing, "Missiometrics 2008: Reality Checks for Christian World Communion," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 32, no. 1 (2008): 27. Worth noting also is that two-thirds of the church today are said to be women. See Dana L. Robert, "World Christianity as a Women's Movement," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 30/4 (2006): 180-188.

becoming so multicultural in their demographics the label is now highly problematic. It has been predicted that the United States of America will have no ethnic majorities by the year 2030.³ In 2006 a Radio New Zealand news announcement said that more brown babies were born in Auckland that year than white and the trend was only set to continue.

Despite these realities, however, if you look at our theological institutions in the West, long promoted as the standard-bearers for post-graduate study in particular, a monocultural paradigm persists. One only has to open promotional literature and turn to the page of faculty profiles to see this visibly displayed. In many ways it is not surprising. The Western, Caucasian, theological enterprise, long linked with the concept of Christendom and a belief in 'providential dominance,' wields a lot of power.⁴ And it is struggling for many reasons to accept that its theologising and praxis is, in fact, as John Mbiti a Kenyan theologian pointed out way back in 1976, contextual, not universal.⁵ This is something that it is crucial for 'Western' scholars and the academy to recognise if they are going to be able to engage meaningfully and equally with others in what is now our church and world.⁶

In the mid 1990s, more than twenty years after the Christian church became truly universal for the first time in its history, Andrew Walls, the eminent Scottish church missions' historian, wrote that 'the great advantage, the crowning excitement which our own era of Church history has over all others, is the possibility that we may be able to read [the Scriptures] together... Never before... has there been so much potentiality for mutual enrichment and self-criticism.'⁷ There is still, however, a long way to go towards realising this. As recently as 2007 Tité Tienou, a West African theologian who is Dean of Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in the United States, talked frustratedly of the 'dialogue of the deaf' that the West continues to hold with the rest of the world.⁸ The editorial decisions of the Sri Lankan theologian R.S. Sugirthirajah to maintain the title from the 1991 'Third World' (as he called it) biblical studies book *Voices from the Margin* in its 2006 edition and then name a 2008 work *Still at the Margins* are also telling. Meanwhile in Western theological education circles there are

³ Marvin Cetron, *Living: Press and Sun-Bulletin Sunday* (Binghamton, NY, October 22nd 1989).

⁴ See Tite Tienou, "Christian Theology in an Era of World Christianity," in *Globalizing Theology: Belief and Practice in an Era of World Christianity*, ed. Craig Ott and Harold A. Netland (Nottingham: Apollos, 2007), 46. For a fuller exploration of this see Jonathan Bonk, 'Followers of Jesus, Neo-Christendom and the Clash of Civilisations' (Asbury Theological Seminary, 2007).

⁵ John S. Mbiti, "Theological Impotence and the Universality of the Church," in *Mission Trends No 3: Third World Theologies*, ed. G. H. Anderson and T. F. Stransky (New York: Paulist, 1976), 8.

⁶ For an example of a discussion of this from another writer, for I acknowledge that I am certainly not the first or only voice to have said such a thing, see Joel A. Carpenter, "The Christian Scholar in an Age of World Christianity," in D.V. Henry and M.D. Beaty (eds.), *Christianity and the Soul of the University* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006): 65-84.

⁷ Andrew F. Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1996), 15.

⁸ Tienou, "Christian Theology," 44. This phrase he actually borrowed from Ali Mazrui, a Kenyan political writer and academic.

numerous stories of people who, because of their ethnic or racial background, as students or as faculty, have been expected to divest themselves of their cultural clothing and put on Eurocentric dress in order to interpret scripture or do theology.⁹ They've experienced, like Muriel Orevillo-Montenegro a Filipina theologian or Elizabeth Conde-Frazier a Puerto-Rican American theologian, a dislocation between theology and life;¹⁰ often, like Hwa Yung, a Malaysian theologian, a deep disappointment over the failure of their studies to address the burning questions from their context;¹¹ or even, as described by academics such as S. Steve Kang a Korean-American professor or Jenny Te Paa, a Maori theologian, systematic prejudice and institutional racism.¹² A warning to beware of 'theological tourism' enabling a 'slipping back into old habits of privilege' was the response of Fumitaka Matsuoka, a Japanese-American theologian, in the wake of the efforts across the 1990s in the United States to encourage theological schools to be more global in their engagement. When I spoke with him three weeks ago in Boston he expressed an ongoing scepticism over the ability of Western theological education to change enough to become truly intercultural without some fundamental and creative shifts in the way people think, theologise and operate.

According to Walls, the pattern of church history is that a shift in numerical dominance is eventually followed by a shift in theological dominance.¹³ In the time-between, however, he sees a great opportunity to sit down together and, as Ephesians puts it, 'speaking the truth in love [realise the vision of a united body of Christ, growing up]... in every way into him who is the head, into Christ' (Eph. 4:15). The test at these points is whether the group that has lost numerical dominance will be willing to acknowledge the coming theological changes and genuinely respect and dialogue with the new voices or whether they will instinctively work to protect their rule and insist stubbornly on its normative nature for all, or hole up in an enclave and refuse to interact with others at all. The onus in this particular time-between is on those of us who are Caucasian Westerners: will we genuinely engage or not? Can we find the qualities and creativity needed to open and ready ourselves for what is already, if not yet, a different world?

⁹ Fernando Segovia, "Racial and Ethnic Minorities in Biblical Studies," in *Ethnicity and the Bible*, ed. Mark G. Brett (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 479.

¹⁰ Muriel Orevillo-Montenegro, *The Jesus of Asian Women* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2006), xi. Elizabeth Conde-Frazier, S. Steve Kang, and Gary A. Parrett, *A Many Coloured Kingdom: Multicultural Dynamics for Spiritual Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 27.

¹¹ Hwa Yung, *Mangoes or Bananas? The Quest for an Authentic Asian Christian Theology* (Oxford: Regnum, 1997) ix.

¹² Conde-Frazier, Kang, and Parrett, *A Many Coloured Kingdom: Multicultural Dynamics for Spiritual Formation*, 35. Jenny Plane Te Paa, "How Diverse Is Contemporary Theological Education? Identity Politics and Theological Education," *Anglican Theological Review* (2008), http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa3818/is_200804/ai_n25501518/ Cited 22 May 2009. She has also spoken out about the injustices that Maori theological students have suffered over the decades. See ———, "Theology and the Politics of Exclusion: An Indigenous Woman's Perspective," in *Other Voices, Other Worlds: The Global Church Speaks out on Homosexuality*, ed. Terry Brown (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2006), 15.

¹³ See, Andrew F. Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2002), chapter 4.

Personally I am someone who likes to be proactive, to anticipate the future and try to innovatively make the most of opportunities. I also have the advantage of having lived as a minority, though a 'privileged other,'¹⁴ in a truly intercultural environment and experiencing just how rich that can be. Of course the great irony of this latest shift in the centre of gravity of the church is that it was precipitated by people like me who went to other lands with the gospel of Christ and who, according to the African commentator and mission historian Lamin Sanneh, seeking to translate and contextualise it happened to free the message up from the messenger, something which has enabled it to take root and grow in quite different soils.¹⁵ Across the twentieth century the missionary enterprise has received a lot of, often well-deserved, criticism for its methods and mistakes. However, it seems to me that criticism has been utilised by many Western scholars to ignore the consequences and implications of its successes. Through it all the Western missionary community in particular has learnt much and continues to learn and now, I would suggest, has much to offer to Western theological institutions in particular to help facilitate the realising of truly intercultural theological education.

Considering change

I began this paper with me realising my need to be able to articulate what it was that I believed needed to change in Western theological education settings, why and how we might go about it. After addressing something of the why, actually where I began my reading for what has become a PhD project, the 'what' and 'how' remain to be puzzled out.

For me it was a serendipitous find of the book *Marginality: The Key to Multicultural Theology*, by Jung Young Lee a Korean-American theologian, which lifted me out of what was threatening to become a quagmire.¹⁶ In it he claimed that the creative nexus for realising truly multicultural theology and its practical outworking in such contexts as church ministry and theological education lies with those whom he called 'new marginal' people, those born into one culture, living and working in another and able to live reflectively 'in-both,' 'in-between' and 'in-beyond.'¹⁷ His hermeneutic he carefully underpinned by examining Christ as the new marginal person par excellence.

Grateful to be offered a hermeneutic to work with I decided to try out his claim and find and interview self-reflective 'new marginal' people – focusing particularly on those currently working as faculty in Western institutions - and to ask them for their vision for the realising of truly intercultural

¹⁴ Eleazar S. Fernandez, "Confronting the White Noise: Mission from the Experience of the Marginalized," in *Beyond the White Noise: Mission in a Multicultural World*, ed. Tom Montgomery-Fate (St Louis: Chalice, 1997), 96.

¹⁵ Lamin Sanneh, *Encountering the West: Christianity and the Global Culture Process* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1993), ———, *Whose Religion Is Christianity? The Gospel Beyond the West* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003). In these books he also details some of the criticism that has been levelled at Western missionaries. See also Brian Stanley, *The Bible and the Flag: Protestant Missions and British Imperialism in the Nineteenth and Twentieth centuries* (Leicester: Apollon, 1990).

¹⁶ Jung Young Lee, *Marginality: The Key to Multicultural Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995).

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, chapters 2 and 3.

theological education in the West. My search has seen me talk with more than thirty people scattered across New Zealand, Australia, and the United States, with one in Canada and one in the United Kingdom. A group of them work in one particular seminary in Chicago recognised for its institution-wide efforts in this regard.¹⁸ The majority of those interviewed are people of colour but there are also white men and women. All of them have lived or still walk on the margins in some way whether because of the colour of their skin, their cross-cultural mission experiences, their gender, their sexual orientation or their cultural heritage and out of that have reflectively used their experiences to transform the way in which they teach and lead. Throughout the process I have been determined to listen well and to allow these people to guide me. It has become a matter of honour and integrity that I let them have their voice. They have been 'brutally' honest with me. What I was being let in on, as a Latina I interviewed told me, 'are the conversations we only have amongst ourselves... because nobody [else] asks.' Those answers have been very thorough, ranging, between them, over every aspect of a theological institution's life and operation, philosophy, pedagogy and leadership.

What needs to be changed in Western theological education settings to enable them to realise truly intercultural engagement? Pretty much everything to some degree or another, according to the people I have asked.

How we might go about bringing change

As I have reflected on the interviews I have conducted I have realised that my participants have been offering four areas needing attention in particular if intercultural theological education is to be realised.¹⁹ Between them they challenge theological assumptions, traditional pedagogical practices, faculty development and recruitment, and institutional systems. While they could be understood as a linear process they in fact operate more as a spiral drawn into a circle for the areas will need to be revisited again and again, in whatever order, for individuals and groups. The agreed goal of this process, repeated to me often in varying ways, which in my observation clashes with the way in which higher theological education is generally done in the West, is not so much an accumulation of factual knowledge, what one knows, but about who one becomes in the process of learning and thus what one is able to do with what one knows. This does not mean dumbing down academic rigour but in many ways requires a more profound rigorousness in learning though it may not look on the surface as if this is the case. In this environment, the *subject* is not a topic like 'Psalms,' 'Christology,' 'Pastoral Care' or 'Anthropology' etc but the learner themselves. This is an idea familiar to educationalists working in Transformative Education. Intriguing to me is the fact that all my

¹⁸ The seminary is McCormick Theological Seminary. Part of the story of McCormick can be read in David Esterline and Ogbu Kalu (eds.), *Shaping Beloved Community: Multicultural Theological Education* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006). It should be noted that in a recent interview, David Esterline (now the Director of the Institute for Cross-Cultural Theological Education at McCormick) registered his discomfort over the seminary being seen as a 'standard' for others as he feels there is still a long way to go before it can be considered 'intercultural'.

¹⁹ It is important to note that this paper barely scratches the surface of the material which these people offered me and these four areas, while broadly representing the themes of the conversations, do not cover all aspects. This will be explored in much greater depth in my PhD thesis and I intend there to speak much less in the generalities that are used here and more using my interviewees' actual words.

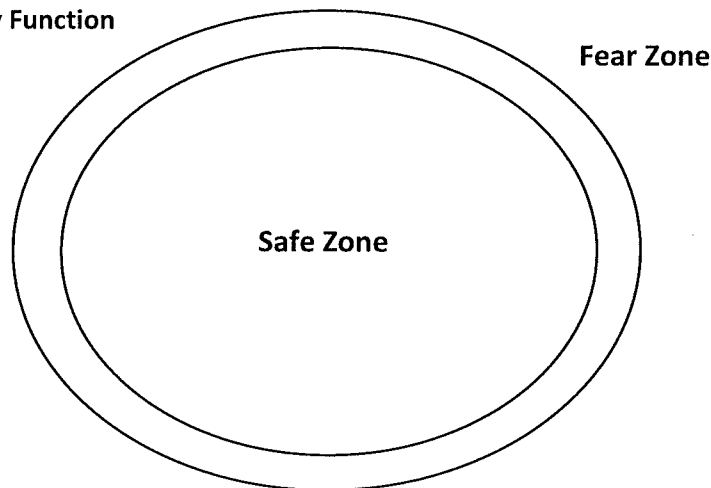
interviewees, experienced in this or not, identified it as crucial to the realising of intercultural theological education.

This emphasis is something which we who have been involved in cross-cultural mission I am sure will resonate with. Listen carefully for the further resonances in what these people had to say.

- Identity

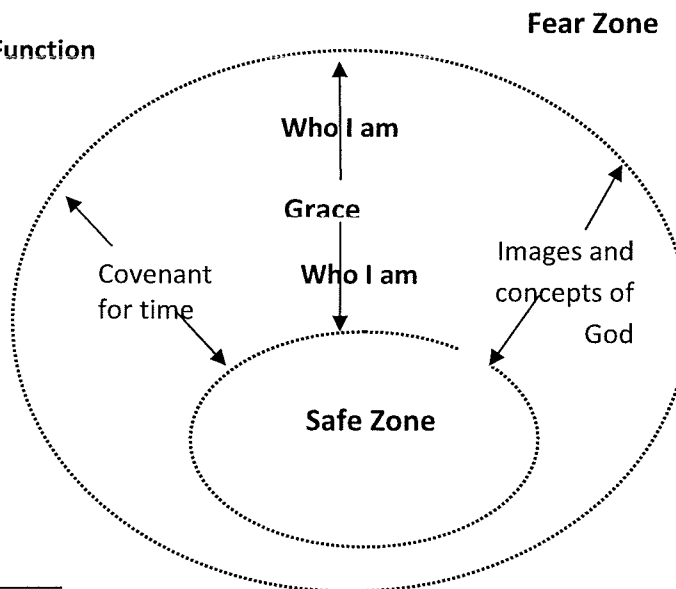
Jung Young Lee once said that ‘Theology is autobiographical, but it is not an autobiography.’²⁰ For him, knowing one’s own story and being able to critically reflect on it was vital to the theologising process. For my interviewees also an awareness of one’s own identity is vital for providing the necessary, if temporary, security from which a person can then venture out into an engagement with the ‘other.’ None of us are in fact really monocultural and often the discovery of our own hybridity creates space and curiosity for hearing the stories of others. A few people pointed out also that our identities, like our faith, are in fact fluid. We are a work in progress and it is important to help people embrace that and become intrigued by and excitedly anticipate that rather than feel threatened by it. If a person knows their own identity then the following happens:

Fig. 1: Exclusive Boundary Function



becomes

Fig. 2 Inclusive Boundary Function



²⁰ Lee, *Marginality: The Key to Multicultural Theology*, 7.

Now I am actually borrowing these diagrams, though adapting them for my purposes here, from the work of Eric Law, a Chinese-American Episcopalian priest who is highly respected for his work in facilitating intercultural dialogue and leading churches and other organisations into embracing and working with diversity.²¹ I have just spent time in the United States being trained in his processes and was struck by the way in which they echoed much of what my interviewees have been saying. Eric himself has worked with a number of theological institutions in this regard.

As you can see, in the first diagram, for the person who does not know themselves and their *whakapapa*²² well their need to feel safe tends to result in them growing a very strong exclusion boundary. A number of my interviewees said that such a person's self-ignorance often presents as a heightened sense of threat, defensiveness, knee-jerk reactions, black and white statements, dogmatism, fearfulness and/or an unwillingness to take risks. A Korean-Canadian woman observed that 'in Western culture something uneasy is not really welcomed' and yet said that in her experience growth and life occur at the point of risk. What we need to grow in ourselves and in others is a 'grace margin' (the second diagram). When we give ourselves time to articulate who it is we are and who it is we are not, as well as time to explore and enlarge our images and concepts of God by praying, storytelling and studying scripture together we in fact create a grace margin between the safe zone and the fear zone. In doing this, our boundaries gradually become permeable, inclusive. The paradox which people often do not understand until they are there is that the more permeable these become the stronger our identity in faith often becomes. A lecturer in Christian-Muslim interfaith dialogue whom I interviewed chose to do his PhD in Islamic Studies under a Muslim professor, counts an Imam as his spiritual mentor and spends a lot of time with Muslims and also Jews. He told me that his Christian faith and identity have in fact grown and strengthened as a result. And because he has genuine relationships with those of other faiths he has had opportunities to witness to his faith in Christ in some of the most seemingly closed environments.

Pedagogically the belief that knowing one's identity is vital to growing skills in being intercultural has led to many of my interviewees prioritising the telling of their own and students' life stories in the opening hours of their courses. A Latina and an African-American told me they do it for every one of their courses. There is then a deliberate weaving of those stories throughout, engaging them again and again in self-reflection as texts are explored. The life stories of the theologians or biblical scholars under study are also told and conversations encouraged regarding the perceived connections between stories, social location and theologising. Dr Ted Hiebert, a scholar in Old Testament working at McCormick Theological Seminary, the school I recently have been hosted by, this semester began one of his courses by asking his students to locate themselves, tell something of their faith stories and then choose the key self-descriptors they would use. Now, using exegetical and historical-critical tools they are comparing and contrasting what they wrote with the stories and descriptors told and used by the biblical writers across the Old Testament as they describe Israel's engagement with the 'other'. The class I sat in on was looking at the biblical story of Hagar, and referenced commentaries written by Westerners, a womanist, a Latina and others and, of

²¹ See Eric H. F. Law, *Modules 8 to 10* (Los Angeles: Kaleidoscope Institute, 2009), 4, 7. Also, ----- *Sacred Acts, Holy Change* (St Louis: Chalice, 2002).

²² Maori: *whakapapa* is genealogy and the stories that accompany it.

course, the student's own stories. The final assignment will ask them to reflectively engage and apply what they have learned to their contexts beyond their study, tracing any changes in their own self-understanding and faith.

An emphasis like this challenges a number of long-held assumptions within Western theological education circles. For one, the lecturer rather than being the fount of all knowledge becomes a facilitator of the learning environment, or as one person put it, a 'midwife' or a 'quilter.' For another, theologically and philosophically the Western modernist ideal of 'objectivity' and belief in propositional truth meets head on the argument that all theology is contextual, located, and as Lee said 'autobiography.' Grist for the mill.

- Listening to silenced voices

While at McCormick I was invited to attend their religious pluralism class. I arrived and was greeted by a smiling woman in hijab. The first half of the class she spent time engaging with each student, in the context of the group, regarding an assignment they had completed on the previous week's visit to a mosque. They had been asked to honestly and critically engage their faith understandings and practice with what they had experienced there. The students had already seen each other's work and the discussion was rich and challenging. As time went on I realised that she was a practising Muslim. As an advertisement for interreligious dialogue she proved a wonderful model. Comfortable in her own skin she respectfully listened to the students, often gave her own power as teacher away to them in a mutual give and take of questions and comments and by cultivating in this way an empowering environment provided space for students to ask quite personal and challenging questions of each other and of her. The students were interested; no one remained silent. In the second half of the class a Jewish woman came to speak about Jewish spirituality and began her class with what I realised, and double checked with subsequent interviewees, was a vital component of the realising of intercultural theological education: 'I hope you are taking this class in order to try to understand others as they understand themselves.'

Of course in order to be able to do this, one has to shut up, and practice genuine and active listening. Conversion of another to our point of view cannot be our main goal, either by overpowering the other or practising a quiet persistence deaf to their identity. The question 'what is mission?' I can see, will need careful revisiting, especially our understanding of God's role and thus ours in it.

One of my interviewees from New Zealand talked passionately to me of the ways in which she had often observed voices being sidelined or silenced in Western theological education, including those of faculty. Many times in her experience it was due to the legacy of ascribed shame wrought by Western colonialism and still lingering. Examples she gave me included course bibliographies speaking volumes by what has not been included as well as the nature of the books chosen as class texts, something endorsed by many other interviewees. Another was student assignments prioritising the written word, linear logic, 'accepted' structuring and the English language which favour those conversant in the dominant cultural paradigm, and fail to recognise giftedness and critical thinking in students better able to express it in other mediums and languages. In fact, most of my interviewees believe important for an intercultural environment is that faculty be at least bi-lingual, and not just in European languages, unless Spanish. In talking to another interviewee also I realised that institutional expectations can often fail to appreciate the relational demands of other

cultures or to recognise faculty displaying *mana*²³ expressed in different forms. He comes from a culture that values humility in its greatest leaders and mentioned the years of sacrifice and lack of communication he has had to endure because he serves rather than talks.

Listening, I was told, takes time, time to do it well and then time to carry out the necessary reconfiguring that we have discovered we will need to make if the voices we have heard and those others not yet heard from are not to be lost. It also means valuing mentoring and the open office door at least as highly as personal research projects, something not so welcome in a climate of PBRF.²⁴ Often faculty are told, implicitly or explicitly, that they do not have the time that such things require because it costs money and, potentially academic reputation, prices often considered too high to pay in the Western academy. But according to those I interviewed it is absolutely vital if we are to realise truly intercultural theological education.

- Re-conversion/An epistemic rupture/Mission-in-reverse/ Constant irritants

I was told that if we stop long enough to listen it is inevitable that we will experience what was variously called in the interviews a re-conversion, an epistemic rupture or 'mission-in-reverse'²⁵. True engagement will bring change in us.

I was told many stories of life-changing moments like these. Their common denominator was discomfort, inspiring sometimes a very reluctant, if later valued, response. One white man chose to talk of the need for constant irritants inspiring change to prevent the assumption that a one-off event might be enough. He himself teaches his students to look upon the prospect of intercultural engagement not as a vacation – timed and with an out-plan for the tourist which leaves the very real temptation to pay attention with only half an ear and walk away no different except perhaps for a tan. Instead he tells them to consider it an adventure. Adventures go anywhere, lessons come out of the blue, getting lost makes a great story, time is not so precious and relationships become more important and you probably will 'arrive' in a very different place than where you started.²⁶ Many of his classes send students out into the field and bring them back again to reflect. He himself has worked, besides his lecturing job, as a volunteer for many years at a shelter for homeless people and also as the male presence in a place of refuge for prostitutes who have humbled him and often been God's mouthpiece inspiring his own spiritual growth.

Discomfort, risk, openness, change... Much more was said about this and I was also told a few examples of how my interviewees have attempted to bring this about in their classrooms, including stories relating great anger expressed by students not ready, able or willing to walk that journey. Michel Andraos, a Lebanese-Canadian theologian, is puzzling right now over an article on how to

²³ Maori: *mana* is a descriptor of a person with authority born of great prestige and character.

²⁴ PBRF is a New Zealand tertiary measurement. 'The primary goal of the Performance-Based Research Fund (PBRF) is to ensure that excellent research in the tertiary education sector is encouraged and rewarded. This entails assessing the research performance of Tertiary Education Organisations (TEOs) and then funding them on the basis of their performance.' <http://www.tec.govt.nz/templates/standard.aspx?id=588>

²⁵ This particular phrase ('mission-in-reverse') was first coined by Claude-Marie Babour.

²⁶ These descriptions of an 'adventure' are mine, based on my conversation with him and my own reflection.

facilitate an 'epistemic rupture' – his phrase. Such a thing requires much innovation, wisdom, creativity, compassion and patience – in ourselves and for others.

- Naming racism, naming privilege: the ongoing battle to deconstruct power.

Fumitaka Matsuoka, who has just retired as the Dean of the Pacific School of Religion in San Francisco, told me that he considered racism to be the single most pressing issue needing to be addressed across the board in Western theological education. Others I have interviewed, and not just in the United States, have concurred. At McCormick, David Esterline, the new director of the Intercultural Institute there, and previous Academic Dean, called it the most difficult and most pressing aspect to address, and that in a seminary respected for its efforts in 'intercultural' education. White racism in particular, contentious as it is, exists in our institutions and until it is named, owned, dethroned and dismantled must be tackled head on. It is the expression and outworking of the cultural paradigm that dominates theology, church practice and theological education in Western settings. With it comes privilege that those of us with white skins are, I would guess, barely aware of. If you haven't read it already, Peggy McIntosh's 1988 paper 'White Privilege and Male Privilege: A Personal Account of Coming to See Correspondences Through Work in Women's Studies' illustrates just how pervasive the privilege those of us who are white enjoy and just how blind we can be to it no matter how conscientized we may think we are to injustices.²⁷ It would be an interesting exercise to compile our own lists of 'special circumstances and conditions [we] experience which [we] did not earn but which [we] have been made to feel are [ours] by birth,' as she did.²⁸ I wonder what we would discover if we did this exercise in the context of the church or a theological educational institution like this one.²⁹

Deborah Flemister Mullen, a Black American professor also at McCormick, agreed with Matsuoka but then quietly noted in interview that privilege and racism are not the preserve of white people alone and thus belong as something all must be called to name and deconstruct. Further to this Eric Law has noted that the deconstruction of power always works in Scripture to empower the powerless. Once empowered deconstruction then begins and so the cycle continues. He suggests that this requires of us all that we constantly practice the spirituality of the cross and the spirituality of the resurrection, becoming alert to and aware of which is most needed in a given situation.³⁰

²⁷ Peggy McIntosh, 'White Privilege and Male Privilege: A Personal Account of Coming to See Correspondences Through Work in Women's Studies,' Working Papers Series, No. 189 (1988). I would add to this that it is often easier to see racism at work in another Western country (if we are Caucasian and come from a 'Western' country) than it is to see it in our own society. In my experience, the eyes of an outsider are often more sensitive to existing dynamics.

I would note here that I have been challenged to consider renaming my 'Naming racism' title to use the word ethnocentrism instead. I am weighing up the arguments for and against but am conscious that 'racism' is the word my interviewees chose to use and I am committed here to honouring their words.

²⁸ Ibid., 5.

²⁹ The setting in which this paper was delivered was Laidlaw College, New Zealand.

³⁰ Eric Law, *The Wolf Shall Dwell With the Lamb: A Spirituality for Leadership in a Multicultural Community* (St Louis: Chalice, 1993). He draws from the story of Pentecost for his 'Cycle of Gospel Living.'

Practising the spirituality of the cross requires that those powerful give away their power and authority, choose to listen, die to self. Practising the spirituality of the resurrection encourages the powerless to claim the power of the empty tomb, choose to speak and know life.³¹

A role for missiologists

I am guessing that for those of you in this room who have had cross-cultural experience and been minoritised in some way much of what I have just outlined will have resonated and found parallels with the lessons you have learned in life. This has definitely been my experience. Yes the need to know one's own identity in order to build a grace margin with permeable boundaries in our relationships with others. Yes the need to consciously listen to silenced voices by moving to meet them more than half way. Yes, the necessity of the epistemic rupture, reconversion, mission-in-reverse and constant irritants. Yes, the naming of racism and privilege in ourselves and in the systems we are part of and the ongoing battle to particularly deconstruct power by practising the spirituality of the cross. (Some of you may recall the article by Kosuke Koyama in the 1970s entitled 'What Makes a Missionary? Toward Crucified Mind, Not Crusading Mind.'³²)

I have often found myself reflecting in past months on the fact that really some of the key holders for Western theological education reform necessary for the world that I described near the beginning of this paper are us: missiologists. We know these things. We can understand why they are important. We should be in the vanguard of those creatively seeking to realise intercultural theological education. And yet I don't see enough of us being as proactive or imaginative as we could be or demanding our place at the decision-making table in Western settings in order to offer our knowledge and skills born of our mistakes and our successes. Why is this?

I am aware that for years missiologists have been conscious of being 'second class citizens' within theological education. Those lucky enough to have been employed by Western theological institutions willing to concede that they might have something to offer to the educational enterprise are relatively few. Stories I have heard from returned missionaries (including my own) suggest to me that this is also true in the church. Have we allowed this descriptor and the implied condescension to define us and thereby silence us, whether we are a lecturer in missions, working in some other field or involved in a consultative, ministerial or lay role?

Have we perhaps, I wonder, in trying to be accepted and respected in the Western academy, ended up playing so much to the rules that we have lost any different and prophetic voice we might have had? I've discovered in my reading some missiologists who in my opinion are definitely guilty of this one. They claim, for example, to break new ground in bringing global theologies to the attention of the Western world and then smother those theologies under generalisations whose categories have

³¹ In the responses to this paper, Steve Maina, the General Secretary of CMS in New Zealand, and a black Kenyan, noted how his own theological education in Nairobi was presented very much within a Western framework and that, by not speaking up and protesting, students like him were complicit in its perpetuation. The challenge for those like him, he acknowledged, was to become aware and speak out.

³² Kosuke Koyama, 'What makes a missionary? Toward Crucified Mind, Not Crusading Mind' in Gerald H. Anderson and Thomas F. Stransky, *Mission Trends No 1: Critical Issues in Mission Today* (NY/Grand Rapids: Paulist /Eerdmans, 1974).

been born in the West, sacrifice depth for breadth, paraphrase voices out of existence in their text and almost completely ignore other ones, like theologians in Oceania, for example.³³ All this I find exceedingly disappointing. To add to this, 'mission studies' is a term which I find inherently contradictory, especially after experiencing the IAMS International Conference in Hungary last year where the talk over the dinner tables was far more stimulating than the official papers delivered in Western academy-speak. I wish we in missiology (and I include myself here) could exercise more imagination in our language, structures and methods in order to honour the risks, the curiosity, the humility and the growing appreciation for cultural richness in which our knowledge has been birthed.³⁴ How could we operate a constructive subversion of Western expectations of scholarly work that demands respect?

³³ A first example of this is Timothy C. Tennent, *Theology in the Context of World Christianity: How the Global Church Is Influencing the Way We Think About and Discuss Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007). While the book provides welcome international flavour to the themes of systemic theology, I find it disappointing that it so thoroughly paraphrases the words of others, writing for them. In one of the forewords which Tienou was invited to write he poignantly comments that 'the day is coming when there will be no need to make a case for the influence of Majority World Christians on theology. Until then, the ideas put forth in this book are necessary' (p xiii). I personally would have liked to have seen Tennent attempting to better pre-empt this 'day'.

In a similar vein a series of books written by Veli-Matti Karkkainen, a Finnish theologian, across 2002-2007 examining ecclesiology, pneumatology, Christology, the doctrine of God and the Trinity from a global perspective privilege the voice and filter of Karkkainen. Commendably, the books attempt to bring historical, global and ecumenical views on each of the topics together and do this one topic per book at a time which provides opportunity for a greater depth of treatment. However, the books suffer from a distinct bias towards Western thinkers and when featuring individual theologians again, like in Tennent's book, they are not given opportunity to speak in their own words.³³ Moreover, women's voices hardly appear and Oceanic voices not at all. Tellingly, he also chooses to remain with the terminology 'Christian theology' for that coming from the West and 'contextual theologies' for those coming from the Majority World. Despite stating in the Introduction to his book on the doctrine of God that 'during a time when the majority of Christians live outside Europe and North America, it is scandalous that African, Asian, and Latin American theologies are hardly mentioned in textbooks, let alone given fair treatment' Karkkainen has, in my opinion, only gone a small way towards redressing this. See especially V. Karkkainen, *Christology: A Global Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), -----, *The Doctrine of God: A Global Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004).

A third example is S. Kim and K. Kim, *Christianity as a World Religion* (London: Continuum, 2008), though they do give five pages to Oceania, as a subsection of Asia. The difficulty with this particular book is that it is designed as an 'introduction' and attempts to cover the whole world, necessitating brevity and paraphrasing. According to the acknowledgements page, the information was gleaned largely from Western institutional and organizational sources. It therefore dangerously already comes with its own inherent biases and means of expression. Interestingly, however, K. Kim's earlier book *The Holy Spirit in the World: A Global Conversation* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2007), provides a much better example of the engaging of a variety of different voices. In it Kim presents as facilitator of, and participant in, a genuinely diverse theological conversation, a much better model, in my opinion.

³⁴ For an earlier discussion of the contradictions, issues and challenges of 'mission studies' see Andrew F. Walls, 'Structural Problems in Mission Studies' *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 15/4, (October 1991): 146-155.

I wonder if we are perhaps not so proactive about bringing change to theological education because it's tiring. Perhaps we've worked for many years, tried again and again to speak up or work creatively and, exhausted by resistance or lack of recognition or the misunderstanding of others or overwork, have subsided into a resolve to simply 'get through this year...'

Have we perhaps underestimated the impact we could have on those who come to learn from us? If we can't influence change at higher levels have we forgotten that revolution often grows from below? Why not look at our own approaches in our pedagogy and presentations and resolve to become more creative facilitators committed to the change process I've described? Are our ways of teaching perpetuating a Western monologue or modelling dialogue and bringing reconversion to ourselves as well as our students? I am conscious that I stand before you this evening guilty of this one!

Are we perhaps not so proactive because we ourselves have lost what 'edge' we had? It's been too long since our last epistemic rupture? We've gotten comfortable, turned our focus inwards and not taken opportunities to provide for ourselves the constant irritants that keep us challenged and changing, taking risks and seeking life? It is easy to do, especially when we have family to provide for and taking risks could get dangerous for our career.

Have we forgotten, or not had time in the rush of life, to look around us and build relationships with those who will keep us accountable in our creativity, in our speaking out and in our commitment to becoming the kind of people who can help realise intercultural education in various settings? Are we not looking and listening widely enough? Sometimes such people can be found in the unlikelyst of places.

Have we perhaps already thought about all this, particularly those of us who are white and realised that if intercultural theological education actually took flight we might then have to sacrifice some of our own dreams and opportunities in order to give another a voice and we have decided that the price is just too high?

Deep down inside is it perhaps that these days we actually find the prospect of intercultural engagement frightening, threatening, easier to talk about than live... and we are scared that we might be found out as hypocrites?

Or is it simply that despite our experiences we have actually not reflected enough on the ongoing changes they require in us and so have nothing to feed into our praxis that will make us operate any differently from the norms of the paradigm we already live with?

I suspect as a group, and as individuals, that we are all guilty of at least some of what I have just asked. I am.

Look around at our demographic here. 'Culture' is of course a word that applies to more than just ethnic or racial difference. I am very conscious that there are other aspects of the 'intercultural' that I could have talked about and that are represented here. My question to us all this evening is: what would it take, beginning at home, for us to model here in ANZAMS the realising of intercultural mission studies? What resistances do we need to honestly address? What flights of imagination do we need to encourage? How much more effective, respected and prophetic might our own work as an organisation and as individuals sent from here into our respective education settings be if we did?

'For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name. I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that we may be strengthened in our inner being with power through his Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in our hearts through faith, as we are being rooted and grounded in love. I pray that we may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that we may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

(Ephesians 3: 14-21, paraphrased)

Contextual Mission: An Australian Perspective

(Reflections on the seventh study theme of Edinburgh 2010:

‘Christian Communities in Contemporary Contexts’)

ANZAMS mini-conference, Auckland, 30-31 October 2009

Dr Ross Langmead

Edinburgh 1910: Through European Glasses

Nearly all the 1215 delegates to the World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh in 1910 were white and western, from Britain, North America, Australia, New Zealand and white South Africa. There were eighteen from Asia and one from Africa.¹

One of the Chinese delegates was Cheng Jingyi, a twenty-eight year old pastor in a Beijing church. He was probably the youngest delegate at the conference.² Like other speakers he was given seven minutes during the debate on Commission VIII, on ‘Co-operation and the Promotion of Unity’. What he said was judged by one published report of the conference as ‘without question the best speech made at Edinburgh’.³

Cheng urged the mission leaders to form a united Protestant church in China, because denominationalism was a real obstacle to the spread of the Good News. He said Chinese people had no taste for the western divisions between Christians.

The way this was received demonstrates how strongly those present saw the world through European and American glasses. The official historian of the conference, W H T Gairdner, wrote that Cheng seemed quite unaware of how difficult this would be, and saw him as theologically naïve.⁴ And the chairman of Commission II, John Campbell Gibson wrote in the Commission report, rather condescendingly: “It is, we think, disappointing that the native mind ... has not made a deeper mark on church organization”.⁵

Looking back a hundred years and reading the reports of the Edinburgh 1910 conference, reminds me how much has changed in that short period. To illustrate how short it is, I received an email recently from someone whose father was an usher at Edinburgh 1910.

Discontinuity and Continuity

But to hear what western mission leaders were thinking in 1910 is to be keenly aware of both discontinuity and continuity.

As everyone knows, Edinburgh occurred at the peak of western optimism and confidence in European and American superiority. It was called the *World Missionary Conference* and yet it was a gathering of one part of the world—the Christian world—to talk about how to reach the

¹ Brian Stanley, *The World Missionary Conference, Edinburgh 1910* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 12-13.

² Stanley, *The World Missionary Conference*, 108.

³ In the *Missionary Herald* (Boston), 106 (1910): 354, cited in Stanley, *The World Missionary Conference*, 108.

⁴ W H T Gairdner, *Edinburgh 1910: An account and interpretation of the World Missionary Conference* (Edinburgh: Oliphant, Anderson & Ferrier, 1910), 184-186.

⁵ World Missionary Conference, *The church in the mission field: Report of Commission II*, World Missionary Conference, 1910, Vol. 2 (Edinburgh: Oliphant, Anderson & Ferrier, 1910), 12.

other part of the world—the non-Christian world. It was not even the whole of Christendom, but western Protestantism. And South America was avoided as a sensitive issue because although evangelicals wanted to evangelise there the Anglo-Catholics insisted that as a Roman Catholic continent it was already part of Christendom.

But, despite the things that seem strange from our perspective, those at Edinburgh were beginning to grapple with many of the issues that still occupy us today. The relationship to other faiths, the empowering of the non-western churches and the role of women in mission are just some examples. Here and there, in speeches or reports or submissions to the questionnaires that went out before the conference, we find progressive or prophetic statements, prodding the conference to see things differently. It is easy for us to judge the western missionary movement of a hundred years ago. I wonder how we will be judged in a hundred years' time for how we dealt with the issues facing us?

Contextual Theology

One thing that was hardly mentioned at Edinburgh 1910 but which, in the hundred years since, has become of the central concerns of missiology today is the concern to allow the gospel to take shape differently in different contexts. As Stephen Bevans says, "There is no such thing as "theology"; there is only contextual theology. ... The attempt to understand Christian faith in terms of a particular context ... is really a theological imperative."⁶

This shift shows an awareness of how much our own culture influences our understanding of God. No longer do we confidently assume that western theology, for example, is universally applicable or useful. A universal theology, as Robert Schreiter puts it, is actually a *universalising* theology, one which extends its own beliefs and ways to another setting, unaware of how it has been shaped by its own context.⁷

Contextualisation refers to the ongoing and multi-layered process of allowing the gospel to take shape in a particular context. We can immediately see how important contextualisation is for mission, because if the Good News is to become good news for particular people it needs to speak to them within their culture, in their language and addressing their experience.

Contextual mission goes beyond what the Edinburgh conference called 'accommodation' to native customs, or 'indigenisation' through training local leaders.⁸ It goes beyond helping every church to become self-supporting, self-governing and self-propagating and insists on every church self-theologising. Going beyond the split between Christendom and heathendom, or (to use the language of Edinburgh) so-called older churches and younger churches, a contextual approach expects every local church, the church in every culture and the church in every broad region to engage in contextual mission. That is, every contemporary Christian community needs to examine its context and critically interact with the gospel story in a deep and ongoing way, in a journey towards expressing God's Good News in ways that reflect our cultural identity.

A Shift Since 1910

This is a huge shift from the dominant assumptions of Edinburgh 1910.

⁶ Stephen B Bevans, *Models of contextual theology*, Rev. & Exp. ed. (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2002), 3.

⁷ Robert J Schreiter, *Constructing local theologies* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1985), 2.

⁸ World Missionary Conference, *Education in relation to the Christianization of national life: Report of Commission III*, World Missionary Conference, 1910, Vol. 3 (Edinburgh: Oliphant, Anderson & Ferrier, 1910), 240-241.

From the West to the rest

First, those at Edinburgh thought in geographical terms: from the West to the rest.⁹ It was ‘Christendom’ taking the gospel to ‘the non-Christian world’.¹⁰ It assumed that the West was Christian, that it understood the gospel, and that the West had the resources to reach the world. The job, it seemed, depended on western missionaries, and so most of the commissions concentrated on how the mission effort might become more effective. Context hardly came into it; it was a global job to be done by those who had the knowledge and the resources.

Within five years, with the onset of the First World War, the simple assumption that Europe was Christian was deeply challenged, as the evil and violence that was unleashed put a huge question mark against what it meant to be a Christian nation.¹¹ Since then, Europe has become post-Christian, and church attendance a minority activity. Since then, the centre of gravity for world Christianity has moved to Africa, Asia and Latin America. As Philip Jenkins puts it, ‘if we want to visualise a “typical” contemporary Christian, we should think of a woman living in Nigeria or in a Brazilian *favela*’.¹² Within decades of Edinburgh the Christendom mindset—and we need to remember that it had been cracking since the sixteenth century—was untenable. By the second half of the century mission was no longer from the West to the rest but ‘from everywhere to everywhere’.¹³

Cultures as regions

Second, those at Edinburgh thought in terms of continents (such as Africa), regions (such as East Asia), or countries (such as China or Japan). They had some sense of context but it was painted with an extremely broad brush. In the survey of world mission, published by the conference, indigenous Australians were discussed in one page and Maoris in a paragraph.¹⁴

Since then we have become aware how complex and multi-layered cultures are. As well as thinking in terms of the world’s 200 nations, or in terms of ‘peoples’, we now tend to pay attention to smaller cultural units, such as those labelled by the Lausanne Movement as ‘people groups’. There might be in the order of 15,000 of these and there might be 5,000 languages. To make things more complicated, in this post-colonial and globalised era, people move between cultures and assume hybrid identities. A student of mine introduced herself recently as Korean by birth, raised in Paraguay and now an Australian citizen. Even more common are Pakistanis in Britain or Moroccans in France, a legacy of colonialism.

The Edinburgh 1910 conference had eight commissions. The Edinburgh 2010 conference has nine themes for study. The seventh is ‘Christian Communities in Contemporary Contexts’, and is the focus of these reflections. The theme shows how central it is in missiology today to take into account communities—presumably much smaller than nations or regions—and contexts. The guidelines for study issued by Edinburgh 2010 suggest that the task is to examine the variety of Christian communities as they draw on different traditions and engage with specific

⁹ Anne-Marie Kool, ‘Changing images in the formation for mission: Commission Five in the light of current challenges—A world perspective’, in *Edinburgh 2010: Mission then and now*, eds. David A Kerr and Kenneth R Ross (Oxford: Regnum, 2009), 167.

¹⁰ World Missionary Conference, *Carrying the gospel to all the non-Christian world: Report of Commission I*, World Missionary Conference, 1910, Vol. 1 (Edinburgh: Oliphant, Anderson & Ferrier, 1910), 2.

¹¹ Stanley, *The World Missionary Conference*, 304.

¹² Philip Jenkins, *The next Christendom: The coming of global Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 2.

¹³ Michael Nazir-Ali, *From everywhere to everywhere* (London: Collins, 1991).

¹⁴ World Missionary Conference, *Carrying the gospel to all the non-Christian world*, 126–127.

communities. Engaging contextually involves exploring worldview, language, customs, traditions and what gospel transformation might mean in each context.¹⁵

The Australian Context

When we ask ourselves what it might mean to engage in contextual mission in the Australian context, the first thing to say is that there are many Australian contexts, just as there is not only one Australian culture.

I live in Melbourne's western suburbs, where, in the simple act of taking public transport, I am acutely aware of cultural complexity and hybridity every day. There are communities of Vietnamese, of Indians and of Burmese, and older communities of Greeks and Italians. At Yarraville the young upwardly-mobile professionals and those who like to be slightly bohemian (though not too much) get on the train.

These cultures are not simply geographical. At my local church, two Burmese ethnic groups, the Karen and the Chin, gather to worship from many suburbs around. Some worship in the English language service and several hundred worship in two other services in their own language. The context of my local church, then, is largely Karen and Chin, and our service is usually bi-lingual or tri-lingual in response. At a practical level, this is what it is to be a Christian community taking its contemporary context seriously.

There are, however, several aspects of Australia's national context which are important if Australian Christians are to engage with their contemporary context. We could list many, of course, but I want to focus briefly on five areas which largely frame the Australian national context. If Edinburgh 2010 serves the global church at all, it will be through prodding churches in different contexts to explore what it might mean for the gospel to take shape in each context. It could be argued that while the Australian church has for a long time been self-supporting, self-governing and self-propagating, it is still only beginning to self-theologise. That is, a distinctly Australian theology or understanding of its mission, is yet to take mature shape, although some attempts have been made to begin the conversation.

I'll be interested to learn the extent to which these dominant factors in Australian culture are found in New Zealand, and the extent to which your context differs.

Indigenous Reconciliation

First, a fundamental aspect of the Australian context is that we are a nation founded on an unacknowledged invasion and appalling treatment of the Indigenous peoples. I'm not sure that the average non-indigenous Australian Christian appreciates how deeply this affects who non-indigenous Australians are and whether they can feel at home in the Australian continent.

Speaking as a non-indigenous Christian, those of us who arrived after 1788 invaded the continent without a treaty, shot and killed Indigenous people when they resisted, moved them off their land, introduced diseases which wiped them out by the thousands, destroyed most of their culture, treated them as invisible, discriminated against them, led many of them to despair and hopelessness, introduced many of them to alcoholism and welfare dependence, let them languish in third-world conditions, removed their children and denied their claims to land. To

¹⁵ Edinburgh 2010, < <http://www.edinburgh2010.org/en/study-themes/7-christian-communities-in-contemporary-contexts.html>>. Accessed 31-7-09.

this day, despite the welcome apology given by the federal government in 2008 and a commitment to closing the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, government policies ride roughshod over Indigenous voices, discrimination still occurs and they remain the most disadvantaged group in Australian society.

I agree with Norman Habel that Australia will only find its soul as a nation when the long journey of reconciliation is taken, involving personal relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, symbolic actions of healing, justice, a treaty, compensation, and practical steps in health, education, housing and so on.¹⁶ The churches have a central role in this, because reconciliation is at the heart of the kingdom of God.¹⁷ But the challenge of this context to Australian churches is to come to terms with its mixed past in relating to Indigenous people; commit itself seriously to resourcing, training and listening to the voices of Indigenous people; and make sure that justice and reconciliation does not slip off the national agenda.

A Multicultural Vision

Second, there is probably nowhere more suited than Australia to aspire to a multicultural vision of the Kingdom of God, where the foreigner or stranger is welcomed (Deut 10:19), where we seek the welfare of the city (Jer 29:7), where we follow Jesus' call to love our neighbour, and where—as in the early church—ethnic barriers are relativised as we find unity in Christ despite our diversity (Gal 3:28).

Australia and Canada are the only two countries with a national policy of multiculturalism. Since 1945 nearly seven million migrants have arrived in Australia, which means that half of the population increase since 1945 (from seven to twenty-one million) has been due to migration.¹⁸ In Melbourne 29% were born overseas, and 25% speak a language other than English at home.¹⁹

With some exceptions, Anglo-Australians have tended to be over-represented in churches. Although most people don't use the term 'ethnic' this way, we could say that the most common 'ethnic churches' are Anglo-Australian churches. Fifty years ago, churches expected migrants to assimilate, reflecting national policies. Then various denominations catered for migrant ethnic congregations, meeting separately and often worshipping in languages other than English.

The current challenge is to discern when cultural diversity is best served by meeting separately—such as when new migrants can hardly speak any English and are keen to preserve their customs and culture—and when the multicultural vision of the gospel is best served by nurturing relationships between new migrants and other groups. At my local church we are actively cultivating friendships and relationships at every possible level, despite the Burmese groups needing to worship in their own way and in their own language. Why? Because their children are already Burmese-Australians, straddling cultures and wanting to live differently from their parents.

¹⁶ Norman C Habel, *Reconciliation: Searching for Australia's soul* (Sydney: HarperCollins, 1999).

¹⁷ Ross Langmead, 'Transformed relationships: Reconciliation as the central model for mission', *Mission Studies* 25.1 (June 2008), 5-20.

¹⁸ Department of Immigration and Citizenship, 'Fact Sheet 2: Key facts in immigration', Australian Government, <<http://www.immi.gov.au/media/fact-sheets/02key.htm>>, 2009

¹⁹ Victoria demographics, <www.about-australia.com/facts/victoria/demographics>. Accessed 31-7-09.

Mission in a Post-Christian Society

Third, if the Christendom assumptions of Edinburgh 1910 were soon to crumble in Europe, they have also crumbled in Australia. Despite attempts between 1788 and the 1830s to make the Church of England the established religion of the Australian colony, Australia has always been an irreligious nation as far as non-indigenous people are concerned, with low rates of church-going despite 96% of Australians claiming to be Christian in the 1901 census. That figure has now dropped to 64%.²⁰ Only about 10% of Australians go to church on any Sunday²¹ and about 20% say they go at least once a month, the lowest figures in about fifty years of counting.²²

In a post-Christian society the Christian church is not 'on the radar' for politicians, the media and the person on the street. Commitment as a follower of Jesus is a minority activity, seen as slightly odd. The stories of the Bible are not known or understood in literature or in daily language. The church is seen negatively, as 'yesterday's cause', tainted by past scandals and simply boring and irrelevant. As many commentators have observed, we are in some ways in a similar situation to the early church, competing in a marketplace of religious ideas. But in other ways, as Lesslie Newbigin often pointed out, mission to the post-Christian West is more challenging because of the legacy of Christendom and the failures of the church.

Newbigin's suggestion is a simple but profound one, something I've explored myself in various places. He suggests that in a post-Christian context we need to tell the story of Jesus again and to embody it in our lives.²³ Along with others I call it incarnational mission, integrating word and deed as we live into the kingdom, in the hope that in God's power the story will be heard freshly by an ignorant generation.

Engaging the Postmodern Mind

Fourth, the all-pervasive context of postmodernity provides a real challenge for Christian mission in Australia. Edinburgh 1910 occurred at the height of modernity, where faith in progress, reason, technology and universal solutions was at its peak. The twentieth century has seen a seismic shift that is still difficult to pinpoint. I won't try to define postmodernity here, except to say most of us recognise it, particularly amongst younger people, but also in ourselves.

We see it in acceptance of pluralism and relativism, and in a lack of interest in grand theories or overarching frameworks. We see it in the way people choose a bit of meaning from here and bit from there in an eclectic fashion. We see it in the dominance of style, media, virtual worlds, celebrity, irony, playfulness and architectural montages. We see it the fragmentation of life, and the desire, even passion, to connect, whether in person or by phone, email, Facebook or Twitter. We see it in the tendency of people to judge things, not by whether they are true or not, but whether it works for them.

Postmodernity is clearly neither to be totally rejected nor totally embraced. We could perhaps learn from the tendency of western Christianity to hook its wagon to the project of modernity. We need to work harder at discerning what aspects of postmodernity resonate with the gospel—such as the desire for community—and what aspects need to be challenged, such as the suspicion of over-arching frameworks of meaning. Newbigin's suggestion of telling and living

²⁰ Philip Hughes, 'What do the 2006 Census figures about religion mean?', *Pointers* 17.3 (September 2007), 1.

²¹ Peter Kaldor et al., *Build my church: Trends and possibilities for Australian churches* (Adelaide: Open Book, 1999), 15.

²² Ruth Powell, 'Why people don't go to church ... and what the churches can do about it', *Pointers* 12.2 (June 2002), 8.

²³ Lesslie Newbigin, *The gospel in a pluralist society* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 182.

the gospel story applies here as well as in the post-Christian context. Postmodern Australians seek a personal connection and want to see faith that works, faith with its sleeves rolled up.

The Asian Horizon

Fifth, and finally, the contemporary context for the Australian church includes its unique position as a predominantly western nation on the door step to South East Asia, and beyond to Asia in general.

While the previous comments take seriously the context within Australia of various contemporary communities, this contextual reality takes us back to the focus of Edinburgh 1910, which was global mission. A hundred years later, Australians need not feel that as a western nation they must take the gospel to the 'non-Christian world' to our north. Any mission engagement the Australian church undertakes in its region—and I would venture to suggest the New Zealand church as well—needs to occur within the context of global partnership, mission from all continents to all continents and regional co-operation.

As distinct from a typical European, my own roots and interests are in Asia. My mother was born in Beijing and I spent my childhood years in Hong Kong. I spent my student backpacking days in South East Asia and have taken an interest in Baptist mission in India and Bangladesh. I have visited Burmese friends on the Thai-Burma border, and have taught on more than one occasion at a theological college in Myanmar.

Western Christians have made mistakes in their missionary endeavours, but they should not prevent us from exploring more equal partnerships with Christians in Asia. In an increasingly global village, we are now close neighbours and South East Asia, in particular, is clearly part of the Australian context. I would be interested to learn whether, in your context, Asia looms as large as the Pacific in terms of its regional context.

Conclusion

The seventh study theme for Edinburgh 2010, 'Christian communities in contemporary contexts', highlights an awareness that was barely present at Edinburgh 1910: the importance of contextualising the gospel in Christian mission. As soon as we take context seriously, we become aware of the incredible variety of the communities around us. Like ordinary Australians, the churches in Australia can easily forget that their nation began by dispossessing those who were there already, or forget that multiculturalism asks more of the church than to enjoy a variety of cuisines. Christians can find the challenge of witness in a post-Christian society daunting, or feel disoriented by the huge shifts of the postmodern worldview. And finally the Australian church can forget to raise its eyes to the Asian horizons not far from Australia.

These are just some of the contextual factors that prod us to engage patiently, energetically and in an ongoing way with the communities and cultures all around us. I look forward to a conversation on which of these factors resonate with the contexts New Zealanders find themselves in, and how they might be similar or different.

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On the sense in which we can use the adjective 'Incarnational' in mission.

Jonathan Ryan

ABSTRACT: Use of the word “incarnational” to describe expressions of ministry or mission inevitably brings mixed response. While many contemporary practitioners speak enthusiastically about their “incarnational” praxis, others are dismissive of any such notion, observing that the incarnation is, by definition, an event *sui generis*. To be sure, in many respects this descriptor is inappropriate, and belies an inadequate appreciation of the unrepeatable, inimitable nature of the Incarnation. However, I contend that there is an important sense in which we can (and should) legitimately describe our ministry and mission as ‘Incarnational’, particularly in respect to our sacramental participation in Christ.

Although the adjective ‘incarnational’ is now common parlance in missional circles, we must remember that within the Christian tradition, it is a relatively recent addition. That is to say, only in the twentieth century (and really only in the last thirty years or so) has the word ‘incarnational’ been used to describe the mission and ministry of the church.¹ To be sure, this renewed interest in the Incarnation has been profoundly rejuvenative for Christian mission. Notably, where practitioners were once divided over priority of the proclamation of Jesus or his liberating deeds in missional praxis, emphasis on the Word-become-flesh has rendered such a dichotomy inappropriate. The reminder that God chose to express God’s love by dwelling among us has also helped counter the rampant pragmatism of Western culture; as advocates of incarnational mission have reminded us, ‘being with’ is often a more appropriate gospel expression than ‘doing’. Other important lessons we have learnt include the inherent value of the material world reflected in the Incarnation; the importance of context in mission; and the need for practitioners to ensure that their lifestyle is consistent with their message.

However, descriptions of Christian ministry and mission as ‘incarnational’ have also drawn significant critique in recent decades; some borne out of academic snobbery, but much of it legitimate.² For example, many have objected that advocates of incarnational mission display an inadequate appreciation of the inimitable nature of the Incarnation. Thus David Congdon’s critique:

The Incarnation is, by definition, *sui generis*, i.e., it is wholly unique and unrepeatable. In short, the incarnation is an event, not a idea that can be applied or a process that can be completed or a reality that can be replicated.³

An uncontroversial theological statement, and yet one that reveals a problematic assumption underlying popular slogans of incarnational mission.

¹ For a helpful overview of the introduction of the word “incarnational” to missiological vocabulary, see Daryl L. Guder, “Incarnation and the Church’s Evangelistic Mission,” *International Review of Mission* 83:330 (July 1994): 417-428.

² For a summary of recent criticism of ‘incarnational mission’, see J. Todd Billings, “Incarnational Ministry and Christology: A Reappropriation of the Way of Lowliness,” *Missiology* 32:2 (April 2004): 187-201.

³ “Emerging Church—Heretics or Heroes?” <<http://fireandrose.blogspot.com/2008/07/pet-viii-emerging-churchheretics-or.html>> (sourced 16 October, 2009). My thanks to Bruce Hamill for drawing my attention to this post.

Though we may sympathise with John Perkins when he describes the Incarnation as the “ultimate relocation,” we cannot agree when he states that the reverse is also true: that “relocation is incarnation” or, as others put it, that “the medium is the message.”⁴ We cannot equate even the most radical missional medium with the unique message of the Incarnation; such slogans quickly become anthropomorphic projections of our own praxis onto God’s unfathomable character. Because we do not know what it means to be God, we should not presume to understand “what it may or may not imply for God to be man.”⁵ To equate our faltering missional strategies with the ineffable message expressed in the Word-become-flesh is, if nothing else, embarrassing.

In some discussions of incarnational mission, one sometimes gets the sense that a new missional technology is on offer. This is a new method, a new model that supersedes all previous expressions of Christian mission, and is free from their failings. “Cultural imperialism,” results from “failing to practice mission *incarnationally*,” Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch argue.⁶ And yet, is this incarnational approach to mission really impervious to the temptation of egocentrism that previous generations of mission have wrestled with? Such practitioners can seem to suggest that because of their ‘incarnational’ relocation into a particular community, God is now finally present there. As John Perkins puts it, “when a fellowship of believers relocates into a community, Christ incarnate invades that community.” But is this not just a more subtle form of the cultural imperialism these practitioners seek to evade? Similarly, an emphasis on ‘identification’ often leads to the claim that practitioners “live like the people with all the struggles and problems that poverty creates for people without power and resources.” Here we can find both the negation of cultural difference, and also an “illusion of proximity,” as if relocating into a particular neighbourhood gives us access to the “unmediated reality” of our neighbours. As Ched Myers has urged, though our

⁴ John Perkins, *With Justice For All* (Ventura: Regal Books, 1982), 88.

⁵ Adrian Hastings, “Incarnation,” in *The Oxford Companion to Christian Thought*. Ed. Adrian Hastings (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 322.

⁶ Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come: Innovation and Mission for the 21st-Century Church* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2003), 38.

efforts of 'identification' are important, we must recognise that "we, as structurally entitled people, will only ever be approximate to the oppressed."⁷

In light of such critique, in what sense then can we speak confidently about incarnational mission? If the Incarnation is an event *sui generis*, then the only incarnational mission that we have to speak of is the mission expressed by God when "the Word became flesh and lived among us" (John 1.14). The authentic incarnational mission is that of the *missio Dei*, the Father sending the Son in the power of the Spirit. By its very nature, this is an unrepeatable, inimitable act. And yet, unbelievably, the people of God have been invited to participate in the mission expressed through this Incarnation event; in our life together, Christ continues to be present amidst the fleshly reality of our world.

From the outset, the nature of our participation seems somewhat paradoxical; the first disciples receive the call to "Follow me" (Mark 1.17) from someone "who was by nature unique and inimitable."⁸ However, as it turns out, what Jesus has in mind is much more than their fumbling attempts at imitation. This is made explicit in the Johannine dialogues, where the disciples are promised the gift of the same Spirit that has empowered Jesus (John 14.26); they are instructed to abide in Christ, with the promise that Christ will dwell in them (15.4); and then, after the resurrection, they become included in the sending of the Triune God: "as the Father has sent me, so I send you" (20.21). In the concluding gospel scene of ascension, Christ's drama becomes "opened up for all his fellow actors," as Hans Urs von Balthasar puts it, the ascension creating space on the stage for God's indwelling in humanity and our dwelling in him.⁹

That, upon this open stage, God might continue to dwell within the fleshly contingencies of human life is for Paul an unfathomable mystery (*mysterion*, Col 1.27). And yet, this mystery is central to Paul's proclamation:

⁷ Ched Myers, *Who Will Roll Away the Stone?: Discipleship Queries for First World Christians* (Maryknoll N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1994), 226-28.

⁸ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory, Volume 3: The Dramatis Personae, the Person of Christ* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992),

⁹ von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama Vol. 3*, 54.

an “acting area” has been created for us in Christ (*en Christoi*), and Christ is somehow at work within us: “it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me” (Gal 2.20). Paul is emphatic that this identity in Christ is solely God’s initiative; as von Balthasar summarises:

God takes the first step, in surpassing love and utterly free grace, by enabling [us] to act authentically in Christ’s acting area and so to respond to God’s prior action.... Paul warns his readers, repeating the points of earlier polemical writings: It is not because of you and from you, it is not through your own performance of a legal requirement; it is because you have been raised up together with, and in, Jesus, by the power of pure grace.¹⁰

Amidst the frailties and frustrations of our world, Christ remains present in his body, the church; not because of our efforts to resemble Christ, but because God is at work in us, in order that we might “be conformed to the image [*eikon*] of his Son” (Rom 8.29). Thus, Dietrich Bonhoeffer explains:

To be conformed to the image of Christ is not an ideal to be striven after. It is not as though we had to imitate him as well as we could. We cannot transform ourselves into his image; it is rather the form of Christ which seeks to be formed in us (Gal 4.19), and to be manifested in us.¹¹

Certainly, Paul speaks on occasion of ‘imitating’ or ‘following’ the example of Christ (e.g. 1Cor 11.1). However, as Michael Gorman insightfully observes, here Paul is speaking, “not about an option, but about a nonnegotiable mandate in which one does not *deny* but rather *exercises* one’s true identity... as a ‘Christian.’”¹²

This is the sense in which Paul’s injunction in Philippians 2 is best understood. Paul’s intention here is to remind the Philippian church of their identity as those “in Christ,” drawn together as Christ’s body through the work of the Spirit (Phil 2.1). Selfish ambition or conceit has no place within the body of Christ, for they are being conformed into the pattern of one who “humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross” (8). Their attitude and life together should reflect this pattern. As they “work out” these things, they can be encouraged that “it is God who is at work” in them (13).¹³

¹⁰ Ibid., 52-53.

¹¹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, (New York: Touchstone, 1995), 301.

¹² Michael Gorman, *Inhabiting the Cruciform God : Kenosis, Justification, and Theosis in Paul’s Narrative Soteriology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 23.

¹³ “The use of the hymn by Paul, given the problems at Philippi, is to enforce the church’s obedience to its calling as those “in Christ”... whose path to lordship is marked by humble

God is at work within us, transforming us through our sacramental participation in Christ. We are conformed into Christ's pattern through the proclamation of the Word, which crucifies our own desires, and re-forms us in the way of Christ. In our baptism, we become immersed into the body of Christ (1Cor 12.13), "soaked to our skin in the death of Christ," in order that we might be clothed in his new life (Rom 6.3-4; Gal 3.27).¹⁴ In the Eucharist, we participate in the body and blood of Christ, and are reminded of what we are called to become, "the fulfilment of Christ's body in history."¹⁵ Before and beyond us, the prevenient work of the Spirit, knitting together and forming the body of Christ. In and through all these things, the mission of the church becomes a "sharing in the life of the Son": the one who became flesh, that we might participate in his divine life.¹⁶

Admittedly, our observations of the fumbling fallibility of the Christian community will regularly seem to contradict this claim. However, the weakness of our human condition does not prohibit God from dwelling there. As Lesslie Newbigin reminds us,

the great Pauline words about the Church as the Body of Christ, the Bride of Christ, the Temple of God, are addressed to the actual visible and sinful congregations in Corinth and in Asia Minor, and indeed are spoken precisely in connection with the urgent need to correct the manifold sins and disorders which the Apostle found in them.¹⁷

Fortunately, as Newbigin observes elsewhere, the role of the church in mission is not its own self-propagation. Instead, mission "is something that is done by the Spirit, who is himself the witness, who changes both the world and the church, who always goes before the church in its missionary journey."¹⁸ Furthermore, we cannot lose sight of the eschatological dimension of the church: as sign, servant, and sacrament of the kingdom of God, the church

obedience. In that sense, the motif is "conformity," but not imitation understood as mimicry. The thrust is not 'here is a model to be followed' so much as 'here is a Master to be obeyed.' Gerald F. Hawthorne and Ralph P. Martin, *Philippians*, rev. ed. (Waco: Word, 2004), 135.

¹⁴ Michael Jinkins, *The Church Faces Death: Ecclesiology in a Post-modern Context* (New York: Oxford, 1999), 23.

¹⁵ William Cavanaugh, *Torture and Eucharist: Theology, Politics, and the Body of Christ* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 233.

¹⁶ Lesslie Newbigin, *The Open Secret: an Introduction to the Theology of Mission*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 40.

¹⁷ Lesslie Newbigin, *The Household of God: Lectures on the Nature of the Church* (London: SCM Press, 1953), 29.

¹⁸ Newbigin, *The Open Secret*, 56.

always points beyond itself, a foretaste of that which is yet to come. Thus Christ is not only the pioneer, but also the perfecter of our faith (Heb 12.2).

This is the sense in which we may speak of incarnational mission. That is, we can venture to describe the mission of the church as ‘incarnational’ inasmuch as this adjective denotes the mission of God expressed through the Incarnation event, and inasmuch as God invites us to participate in this ongoing mission, by continuing to be made flesh in our life together. In this sense, we can dare to speak of the church as being the “meeting place in the present time of [humanity] and the Incarnation.”¹⁹ Not that we have any choice in this matter, as if we could somehow make the church ‘incarnational’, nor can we speak of one community being “*more* incarnational” than another. The mission of the church in the world simply is incarnational.²⁰

To those committed to the costly discipleship often associated with incarnational mission, these observations may seem rather academic, in the worst sense of the word. However, be that as it may, they also have significant implications for the praxis of Christian mission and ministry. Firstly, it must be asserted that to describe incarnational mission in these terms is no dogmatic domestication. For the mission of God expressed through the Incarnation involved, amongst other things, God’s self-emptying, taking the form of a servant, and walking the path to the cross (Phil 2.7-8). In order to bear witness to this mission, we too are being conformed into this cruciform pattern; we are “always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies” (2Cor 4.10). We should not be surprised, then, when we find ourselves called to be present among the poor, to give sacrificially, or to set aside status and security. For though it is indeed God who is “transforming us into his likeness” (2Cor 3.18, NIV), our role is far from passive; indeed, it is *because* we are being shaped us into the likeness of Christ,

¹⁹ Gustaf Wingren, *Man and the Incarnation: a Study in the Biblical Theology of Irenaeus.*, trans. Ross Mackenzie (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1959), 147.

²⁰ John Zizioulas, *Being As Communion : Studies in Personhood and the Church* (London: Longman and Todd, 2004), 224.

that we are able to follow him in costly discipleship. “By being transformed into his image, we are enabled to model our lives on his.”²¹

Secondly, in the Incarnation, we are reminded of God’s profound commitment to the created world—an obvious corrective to otherworldly Christian spiritualities. However, it also corrects our tendency to describe mission “in terms of an attitude *vis-à-vis* the world.”²² Unlike God, we are flesh-made-flesh; even when entering into unfamiliar neighbourhoods, we are still subject to the same fundamental human contingencies as our neighbours. Thus John Zizioulas’s insistence that “the nature of mission is not to be found in the Church’s *addressing* the world but in its being fully in *com-passion* with it.”²³ Participating in the incarnational ministry of Christ is an invitation to ‘suffer with’; we are the body of Christ, broken for a broken world. The principle of ‘relocation’, so often associated with incarnational mission, has great meaning in this respect. To borrow the language of von Balthasar’s *Theo-Drama*, we might venture to say that, as those who have been invited into Christ’s “acting area,” we are required to be present on the part of the stage where Christ stands, to go to him “outside the city gate and bear the abuse he endured” (Heb 13.12-13).

An obvious third implication is that incarnational mission is the mission in which the whole church participates. This is not a mode of mission restricted to courageous individuals, for the work of the body of Christ is a communal reality. And if it is true that there is only “one holy apostolic church,” then this mission necessarily includes those expressions of church which we secretly scorn, be they radical or institutional, emerging or submerging. Crucially, it especially involves the body of Christ at work within neighbourhoods to which we arrive as outsiders. That is to say, the incarnational mission that is the body of Christ is likely to have been taking place in these neighbourhoods before our ‘incarnational’ arrival (an important corrective to the “cultural imperialism” discussed earlier). And of course, this

²¹ Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 304.

²² Zizioulas, *Being As Communion*, 224.

²³ *Ibid.*, 224.

mission involves the ongoing witness of the Church throughout history, in which we, as “new players... continually act [our] parts, appearing onstage and leaving it, without [our] personal acting... being condemned as an absurd and futile finitude.”²⁴ Transcending our divisions of creed, culture or chronology, the church is a communal and ongoing reality, God’s forming of a people in the pattern of the Incarnate One.

Finally, locating our witness within God’s mission expressed through the Incarnation, requires us to orient our mission within the wider schema of this same mission. David Bosch reminds us that,

in our mission, we proclaim the incarnate, crucified, resurrected, ascended Christ, present among us in the Spirit and taking us into his future.... Each of these events impinges on all the others. Unless we hold on to this, we will communicate to the world a truncated gospel.²⁵

It is typical for advocates of incarnational mission to emphasise only the first half of the Philippians 2 hymn with its downward movement (Phil 2.5-8), neglecting the upward parabolic thrust of the second half (9-11). If these later acts of resurrection, ascension and parousia are forgotten, Jürgen Moltmann warns, we are left with a “powerless historical recollection of a founder at the beginning of things.”²⁶ And yet, as Philippians 2.9-11 makes explicit, this is far from true. Though participating in the mission of Christ means we will bear an impression of his cruciform pattern, we do so with expectant hope, for the same one who “took the form of a slave” (Phil 2.7) has been exalted by God, with every knee on heaven and earth bending before him (9-10). This important outcome of God’s incarnational mission in Christ means that, while suffering with the least, we can be heartened by Christ’s victory over the forces of injustice and exploitation that appear to dominate. Thus, we are called not

²⁴ von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama Vol. 3*, 54,

²⁵ David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1991), 518. Newbigin writes similarly regarding the trinitarian dynamic of Christian mission: “This threefold way of understanding the church’s mission is rooted in the triune nature of God himself. If any one of these is taken in isolation as the clue to the understanding of mission, distortion follows.” *The Open Secret*, 65.

²⁶ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit : a Contribution to Messianic Ecclesiology*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 75.

only to ‘suffer with’, journeying alongside others in the struggle, but also to bear witness to the hope awakened by the mission of the Incarnation.²⁷

Though certainly in need of theological scrutiny, the concept of incarnational mission has reminded us that “the Word becoming flesh and making his dwelling among us” (John 1.14) is statement of fundamental importance for the mission of the church. This incomprehensible act of love is not something we are called to merely emulate; rather we have been invited to participate in the mission so profoundly expressed through the Incarnation event. Thus, the adjective ‘incarnational’ is appropriately used when describing our sharing in the life of the Son—our sacramental participation in the mission of the Incarnate One, in whose pattern we, the body of Christ, are being daily conformed into. This broader frame for incarnational mission is not so much about theological correctness as it is about locating ourselves correctly. To speak of our participation in Christ’s incarnational mission is a reminder that this mission is infinitely bigger than our own contribution, a de-centring of our self, so that we too can declare that “it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me” (Gal 2.20).

²⁷ Thus Paul can speak of the mystery of “Christ in you” as being “the hope of glory” (Col 1.27).