



## Challenges and opportunities in Global Mission:

### Trends:

#### The global context:

- The world getting better?
- Urbanisation and poverty
- Mass migration and displacement: war, disaster and economic disparity:
- Changing of global economic and military power & the rise of China
- Global socio-economic instability: See Kate Raworth, doughnut economics <sup>1</sup>
- Globalisation and internationalisation Vs nationalisation: A struggle for identity
- Rise of religious radicalism combined with nationalism
- Climate change: drought, storms, rising sea levels
- Technology and Artificial Intelligence
- Questions of what it means to be human: transhumanism, sexuality.

#### Within the church:

- Churches and Christian NGOs central players in poverty reduction
- Changing demographics:
- Diversity of the church: A church in every nation
- Diversity of denominations:
- Church on the move:
- Rise of the urban mega-church and church networks
- Greater dialogue between the main church divisions
- Persecution and the marginalisation of Christianity
- Vulnerable church: The struggle for contextualised discipleship

#### Within global mission:

Within the global cross-cultural mission movement:

- Mission 'from everywhere'.
- Mission to the 'post-Christian': reverse mission:
- The proliferation of mission agencies and Christian NGOS
- Multicultural organisations and teams
- Short-term: 2 years is long
- On the job training, if at all. The Macdonaldisation of cross-cultural mission.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.kateraworth.com/doughnut/>

Closing the gap between agency and church in Mission: from professionals to all God's people.

- Mission in the 'post-Christian':
- Direct local church sending

What is mission?

- Focus on UPGs/least reached & Focus on social transformation
- Battle over contextualisation & enculturation:
- Rethinking mission, for a number of reasons: Finances; short term commitment; visa difficulties; hostility in difficult places; missional need of the 'sending context'; effectiveness: is mission really what we say it is?

## Challenges:

### 1. The challenge of what shapes our understanding of mission?

Andrew Walls<sup>2</sup> and Michael J Stroope<sup>3</sup> have pointed out that the word only came into church use in the 15<sup>th</sup> & 16<sup>th</sup> century when the pope sanctioned Portuguese and Spanish colonial. The word 'mission' (Latin: to send) entered church vocabulary on the context of Christendom. Protestant missiology, developing some 2 centuries later, was shaped by the same contextual lens. William Carey made Matthew 28 verse 18-20 the key text justifying his arguments for mission. Alan and Eleanor Kreider have shown that the 'sending and going' model fitted within a broader Christendom paradigm in which four elements were tightly interwoven:

- Mission is geographically defined, with parts of the world 'Christian' and parts 'not yet Christian';
- mission is the responsibility of the church;
- special agents are required for mission;
- the goal of mission is the establishment of the church.<sup>4</sup>

Seeing participation in mission through sending and being **has become a major obstacle in the church's participation in the mission of God**. Whilst Christendom is long gone, its legacy continues to shape the way we understand mission.

**'Frontier Missions builds on Christendom assumptions.** A number of concepts have become associated with frontier mission including: 'People groups' 1974 Ralph Winter. 10/40 window. The slogan 'Finish the task'.

Two key worldview assumptions with this understanding of mission:

- a. **Mission is about the right strategy.** 'mission by management.' The world is defined in ways that appear to allow us to control it.
- b. **The outsider, the missionary, is the key human resource God will use in mission.**  
Mission still = sending

This is not entirely wrong. It's simply that it does not reflect fully what the Scriptures have to say about God's mission and how we participate in it. These two assumptions result in a number of serious problems in the understanding and practice of mission:

- i. It overemphasises the ethnic/linguistic barriers to the gospel.
- ii. It supports a reductionist understanding of the gospel of the kingdom and mission.
- iii. It is often supported by a faulty eschatology: Matthew 24 verse 14 misused.

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<sup>2</sup> Andrew Walls: The Cross-cultural Process in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission and Reception of Faith

<sup>3</sup> Michael Stroope, Transcending Mission

<sup>4</sup> Kreider A & Kreider E.(2009) Worship and Mission after Christendom. Milton Keynes. Paternoster (p16)

It encourages an 'homogeneous unit' understanding of the church through its focus on specific ethno-linguistic groups.

- iv. Encourages the idea of 'distant' and powerful cross-cultural workers as the primary means to reach those without access to the gospel.
- v. It marginalises most of the church and downplays their participation in God's mission in its own contexts.

It is vital that we revisit Scripture to reflect again on the nature of God's mission and how we participate in it. This will require new language.

## **2. The challenge of mission and power? (strategy, scale, speed)**

The relationship between mission and power is complex. The relationship changed dramatically in the middle of the 4<sup>th</sup> century when Christianity moved from the margins to be aligned with imperial power. The church in Europe today is moving to a place where for the first time in 1.600 years it is becoming marginal again.

Alex Araujo: the modern mission movement to a power boat: with engine and fuel, all that is needed is to plot the course and you are sure to arrive at the destination. We continue to expect of engage in mission from a position of power.

For example:

- Neo-colonial attitudes of cross-cultural workers.
- Fixation with strategy, speed and scale: Focus on movements. 'best practices' is, at least in part, driven by the same power mentality. Discipleship becomes the search for discipleship movements.
- We tend to ignore the presence of God already at work amongst a people. The missionary is the key player, who brings the gospel. Where truth is to be found in a culture, this is simply to be used as a bridge to bring the knowledge of the gospel. There is little thought as to how the host culture may contain resources that would enrich our own understanding of the good news in Christ.

## **2. The challenge of what is mission and how do we participate in it?**

Most pay at least lip-service to the statement that Mission belongs to God: The problem is that much of the ideas, language and practice of mission leads us to believe that it primarily our work. Stroope considers the word mission so corrupted by history and the reductions we have placed on it that it is now an obstacle rather than asset in our participation in the work of God. Replacing the word may not solve the problem.

The Scriptures make it clear that God has a purpose for human history: e.g.; Ephesians 1 verse 9-10: Rene Padilla: God's mission is to bring everyone and everything under the Lordship of Christ. This vision of God's mission challenges all our limited perspectives. Holding the mystery of divine purpose before us constantly can protect us from the reductions of mission as evangelism, or compassionate ministry, or work, or care for creation. It will protect us from the 'will to power', that driving need for success through strategy, speed and scale.

## **Opportunities:**

### **1. A deeper understanding and practice of mission:**

How do we, the people of God, participate in the all-embracing mission of God?

Through discipleship. Not discipleship as a programme but discipleship as a life long journey taken in community

- By being whole-life disciples, under the Lordship of Christ.
- By being witness through our transformed lives and making whole-life disciples.

'Being and making disciples' provides us with both the **lens to understand** and the **practical means to participate** in God's mission. This was the early church experience. Many have asked how the early church survived and grew?

Ramsey MacMullen: Power: exorcism and miracle, then state. Michael Green: evangelism and apologetics. Alan Kreider: the patient quality of discipleship.

For the early church, discipleship<sup>5</sup> was a process of behaving, believing & belonging.

Lives that were of such quality that they attracted others around them: non-violence, compassion, integrity, equality, purity: Cyprian: Ad Quirinium 3 (240AD): 120 statements to be taught to the catechumenate. None on evangelism. Yet the church grew. 'We do not speak great things; we live them' (Cyprian 210-258)

Mission as discipleship puts the local church at the centre of mission practice. Discipleship is fundamentally a communal way of life. Jesus and the NT writers remind us that the most powerful testimony to the reality of Jesus Christ is the quality of our lives together. 'See how they love each other'. (Tertullian)

## **2. A richer, integrated understanding and practice of mission:**

The complexity, movement and connectedness of people offers the opportunity to develop an integrated, rich understanding and practice of mission. This is an opportunity to integrate learning and practice together:

- church and agency
- local and cross-cultural
- gathered community and 'visible' church scattered in society

## **3. A humbler understanding and practice of mission:**

When sending becomes the primary way we participate in God's mission, it can make us think it's all about us. The Biblical narrative of participation is predicated at least as much on an invitation to come as it is a command to go.

We are invited to come to God, to know him and rest in him. We are invited to come and join him in what he is doing. Mark 3 verse 14

Even Paul has to be reminded of this twin movement of going and coming Acts 16 verse 9

If we are willing, there is an opportunity to let go of power and accept the way patience, marginality and weakness. Patience was a central virtue of the early church. While no virtue, love included, was written about in a thesis more than once, three people wrote theses on patience (Tertullian, Cyprian and Augustine). Patience was understood to be at the heart of the incarnation and Jesus' approach to mission. Kreider summarises patience in mission in the early church as:

- Rooted in God's character
- Revealed through the incarnation

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<sup>5</sup> Alan Kreider. The patient ferment of the early church (Baker Academic, Michigan, 2016)

- Trusting in God, without manipulation, freedom to take risk
- Not in a hurry
- Unconventional, reconfiguring life around Jesus' teaching in areas such as wealth, power and sex
- Non-violent
- Gives religious freedom as there is no compulsion in patience
- Hopeful: God is at work, in his time. We are a prophetic sign of the kingdom.

It is hard to engage in mission with patience and humility from a place of power. But if we accept that human power is not necessary for mission, then we can participate in what God is calling us to with freedom and joy.

**Paul Bendor-Samuel**

*Executive Director Oxford Centre of Mission Studies*