

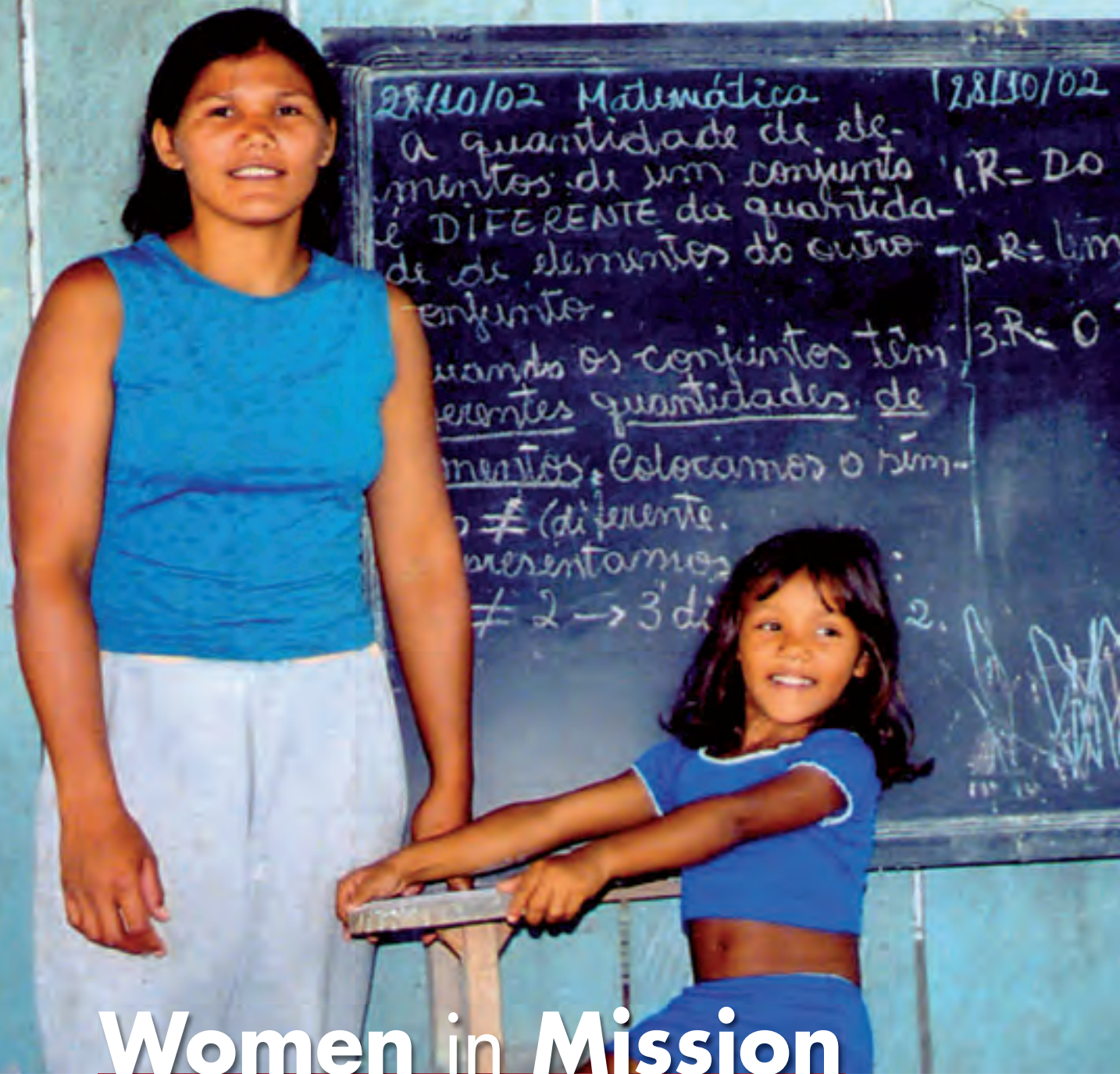
Connections

The Journal of the WEA Mission Commission

A GLOBAL WRITERS' ROUNDTABLE SPEAKING INTO
THE CHALLENGES OF WORLD MISSION TODAY

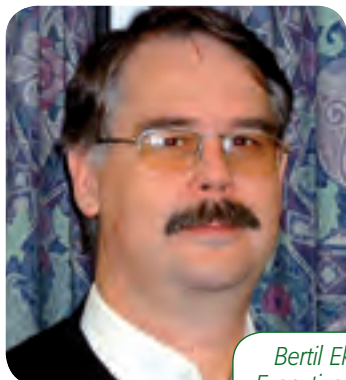
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Women in Mission

From my corner...



Bertil Ekström
Executive Director

Anna of Norway was known as “Indian Anna” among the indigenous Guarany tribes in the Northeast of Paraguay. She had been a missionary in the country for over twenty years, working with Guarany people in different places linked to one of the Pentecostal denominations. When she discovered that one tribal group in the Curuguaty region had not yet been evangelised, she decided to start working among them. Anna was not allowed to move into the tribe in the beginning, so she found a place in the forest just outside their area where she set up her camping tent. After fourteen months living without any comfort, she was invited by the chief to move into the tribe area and they built a house for her. As a nurse, she had quietly helped women and children and gained their confidence. After a few years, a church had been planted and many of the Guarany Indians had accepted Jesus Christ as their Saviour and Lord.

Najua of Brazil felt a strong call from God to go to Albania. After studies in the UK and some time living in the neighbouring country of Macedonia, she was eventually admitted into

Albania and started evangelising in Tirana. With a few converts, the first church was planted and slowly others were added to the small Christian community. When the civil war came, most missionaries and foreigners had to leave the country. However, Najua decided to stay with her new brothers and sisters, facing with them persecution and suffering. Her testimony was soon heard in many places and many more believed in the message about the love of God.

There are numerous heroines in the history of Christian missions. These are just two contemporaneous examples of women who have obeyed the call from God and dedicated their lives to serve Him. This issue of Connections focuses on the theme of Women and Mission in recognition of their tremendous contribution toward the advancement of the kingdom of God around the world.

Female missionaries have always been in greater number than male missionaries when we look at Protestant and Evangelical missions. The proportion has often been 50% more women working on the mission field than men. However, the history books insist on presenting men as the main champions of mission, often ignoring the decisive role of women. The historian Ruth Tucker is an encouraging exemption, together with a few others, who have highlighted the significant ministry they have accomplished.

Seldom are women in leadership positions in our mission organisations, associations or commissions. As director for the

Mission Commission, I regret to say that only 10% of our associates are women, reflecting the situation worldwide of few female mission leaders. Some would say that they are too smart to become COs, but I believe the reasons for the disproportion are deeper than that. Prejudices, male dominance in many societies and particularly in Evangelical churches, heavy workload combining profession, home and family, are certainly some explanations. Another possible factor could be that women prefer doing things over talking about them, while we men have a tendency to waste a lot of time discussing issues and never get the job done.

Independent of the real motives, it is crucial that we start dealing with this imbalance. Not primarily because women need leadership titles, but because the mission movements need their

headship and input. I am sure that our sending structures would be much more effective and people oriented if women were more often part of governance bodies or serving as executives. The contribution of women in mission today needs to be acknowledged and valued and their missionary ministry encouraged.

The texts presented in following pages should lead us to reflect on these matters and stimulate us to pray for women with vocation for leadership and for men with humble hearts. <<

“Every Friday afternoon I went the four- to five-hour bus journey, climbed up past the villages, through rice fields and jungle up the mountain to disciple these new believers. The news spread like wild-fire! As I went through the villages, I was spat upon, stones were thrown at me and I was ridiculed. Before long, I was called to see the Camat [the head of the district]. ‘What do you mean by coming into this area and pulling people from one religion into another?’ he asked. ‘But Sir, I didn’t do that,’ I answered. ‘All I did was to tell the people of my experiences of Jesus. In this country, based on the Pancasila [the foundation charter of Indonesia] anyone is free to follow Jesus if they wish, aren’t they, Sir?’ Then he said, ‘Oh well! Let things be as they are. Those who have decided to become Christian, let them be. But don’t you try to convert any more!’”

A young Indonesian woman

Then the Lord God made a woman

I'd have loved to have been a spectator when Adam woke from his deep sleep one Creation morning and opened his eyes on the vision of loveliness that was Eve. I'm sure he thought it was well worth sacrificing a rib to have such a "just right" companion: co-heir of life, partner in caring for all that God had created, and a complementary person made—just like himself—in the image of God, someone to share in the face-to-face conversations with God as they walked in the Garden of Eden in the cool of the evening.

Sadly, as we all know, things went badly wrong very soon after. The Fall marked the start of gender wars and struggles which, even more sadly, still spill over into the new creation life of God's people. But, whether we are male or female, we are all alike called to be missionary people, sent out into God's world just as the Father sent the Son, bearing testimony to the grace of the one who made us and the love of the one who died for our salvation.



Rose Dowsett is a member of OMF International, a member of the ExCo of WEA Mission Commission and co-leader of the Global Missiology Task Force.

Rose Dowsett

Down through the centuries, women have indeed carried the gospel to others, near and far, just as men have. Much of the debate of the last fifty years about the role of women in the church has been divisive, and at the end of it all evangelicals still have different convictions about exactly what they understand the Scriptures to teach. But, however that debate has played out, this is beyond question: the Lord has blessed and used and delighted in women in mission.

So, this issue of Connections is a celebration of this part of the grace of God down through the centuries, and especially as it is seen around the world today. The contributors come from many countries: India, Brazil, New Zealand, Uganda, South East Asia, Singapore/Hong Kong, and the United Kingdom. They come not only from different countries, but also from different vocations: medicine, evangelism, Bible teaching, home-making, church or mission agency leadership, the academic world. Some are married, some are single, some are old and some are young. They have different convictions about the exact nature of the role of women in the church, reflecting the different views held in various parts of the evangelical family worldwide. But they are united as they tell their stories, or the stories of others, in the love and grace of God and in their desire to see men and women, boys and girls, brought to faith. Here are "women in mission".

We invite you to join with us in celebrating what God is doing through and in women disciples around the world. And we invite you to pray that, in increasingly harmonious partnership, Christian men and women may join together in lifting up the Lord Jesus Christ as the one and only Saviour in our broken and needy world. <<

"Every Friday afternoon I went the four- to five-hour bus journey, climbed up past the villages, through rice fields and jungle up the mountain to disciple these new believers. The news spread like wild-fire! As I went through the villages, I was spat upon, stones were thrown at me and I was ridiculed. Before long, I was called to see the Camat [the head of the district]. 'What do you mean by coming into this area and pulling people from one religion into another?' he asked. 'But Sir, I didn't do that,' I answered. 'All I did was to tell the people of my experiences of Jesus. In this country, based on the Pancasila [the foundation charter of Indonesia] anyone is free to follow Jesus if they wish, aren't they, Sir?' Then he said, 'Oh well! Let things be as they are. Those who have decided to become Christian, let them be. But don't you try to convert any more!'"

A young Indonesian woman

In this introductory article we would like to set the scene for some of the issues women face all over the world. It does not matter whether it is the Western world or the Majority world, women believe that their gifts and skills are not being used as they could be for the glory of God. They experience the injustice of this and feel a range of emotions from disempowerment and alienation to deep sadness and profound disappointment.

Running the Race

“We have to run the race and running cannot be done just on one foot but with two, then it will be faster.”*

Introduction

We hope this article will begin to uncover some of the spoken and unspoken assumptions about the role and place of women in the church. All the quotations and stories have been gathered first-hand from women and men around the world. This is the first part of what will eventually be a book considering these issues in a more developed way.

The following story from the Solomon Islands introduces many of these issues well:

"I recall my mother, telling us as children how the gospel came to her area through one of our pioneering men, Peter Ambuofa. The women and children were his first converts. This was a cultural intention so that if Peter Ambuofa's God killed the women and children, the men would survive. It was when their superstitious beliefs were proved wrong, that they too became followers."

In this short episode, we see many of the themes that recur again and again when we think about women's involvement in the church and mission. It was the mother who kept the gospel heritage alive by telling it to her children. So often it is the mothers who keep the faith alive, who tell it and model it to their children, who keep the memories vivid by recounting the old stories to their families. It is the women who are the hub of the family and community, passing on vital information, keeping the valued traditions alive.

It was the women and children who became the first Christians. Did they know the tremendous risk they were taking on behalf of their men? Did they realize that they were endangering their lives – and not just their lives but the lives of their children also – in converting to this new faith? Whether they knew or not, they were willing to accept this previously unknown faith and they were courageous enough to commit themselves to this new God for the sake of their communities. It was the women who bravely shouldered this responsibility and so it was the women and children who, after surviving commitment to this new faith, brought their men to Christ.

As we have discovered by communicating with women from all over the world, this is an old, old story, but sadly still a largely untold story. Moreover, it is still the same story today. In many instances, it is the women who come to Christ more readily than their men, it is the women who struggle to keep the faith alive and vibrant, it is the women who model the faith to their families and communities, it is the women who easily outnumber men in the churches. It is women who, as one Ugandan woman expressed it, “are the backbone of the church.” And yet a poignant remark from a woman in the Philippines highlights our contemporary dilemma, “women are still regarded as a second minority and less capable than men.” The same lament emerges from Myanmar, where a Christian woman asks why, despite

the gospel having liberated the community from many harmful cultural practices, gender discrimination still exists in the Christian community.

This was a cry that we heard over and over again from different parts of the world. It does not seem to matter whether it is China, Uganda, Peru, Pakistan, Philippines, Britain or New Zealand, women in the church often feel undervalued, unrecognised and discouraged. At times, they bewail their seeming invisibility and express strong feelings about this injustice and the struggle to make their voices heard.

Despite this, women still continue in the church, generally in greater numbers than men, faithfully carrying out their tasks and ministries to the glory of God. As Rachel,¹ a Ugandan priest expressed it, “the church cannot be the church without women.” And that is the crux of the matter. We need two feet to run the race faster – we need each other to run this race of Christian discipleship, otherwise God's world misses out on what we can offer together as women and men created in God's image.

Women are like curry leaves

“Women are like curry leaves. Curry leaves are used in cooking to give a nice flavour and taste. When people eat food they throw the curry leaves away. Like this, women are fully used and thrown out.” A Roman Catholic sister from India grieves over

Cathy Ross

*This quotation is from an Ethiopian woman and refers to the necessity of both genders running the race together.

¹ All proper names are pseudonyms.



the plight of women – women are used for flavouring and are subsequently discarded as they have served their purpose. One Ethiopian woman claimed that there is an unequal view of the sexes and an undermining of the role of women in general. This was a common theme among the women we interviewed – that women are undervalued, their role undermined and that they are often exploited both in church and society.

"A Woman's Place is in the Kitchen"
(quotation from Kenya)

A Ugandan woman expressed it this way, "Women are taken as social objects. They are called on to give service in the home and family and to nurse the sick. But a woman's work is not valued." It seems that women do much of the work in a community – growing the food, looking after the children and the home, sometimes educating the children and of course many women work in paid employment outside the home as well. Statistics show that there is not a single country in the world where men are more involved in domestic work and childcare than women. Comments from the Ethiopian situation illustrate this: "There is an unfair household division of labour with women carrying the burden for water and fuel (wood or cow dung), food production and preparation, housekeeping and child-rearing." In many parts of Africa there is still the strong belief that only women should work in the kitchen. Male visitors do not want to pass through the kitchen and many husbands will not even know what to do in a kitchen. Lydia from Kenya told us of the "cultural stigma that a woman's place is in the kitchen" and of the powerful influence this cultural norm still exerts, even in the church. In Samoa, little girls are taught that "their role is to learn how to cook, keep the house clean, bear children and care for them."

Women feel this injustice that they carry the burden of the household chores. Abigail, a counsellor from Uganda, sums up the situation for many married women, "Women do most of the work in the home. Husbands just come home to eat and sleep." And this is not just the situation of the rural, uneducated woman. A woman church leader from the Philippines told us that "women are still expected to carry out all the domestic functions regardless if they are earning or have high positions in their workplace." These women work what is known as "a double shift." When they come home they still perform the major part of the domestic tasks in the home as well as carry out the child-rearing responsibilities. A Malaysian woman observed the real struggle it is for women to hold down a fulltime job when there is so little support with parenting and household responsibilities.

Statistics also show that women perform 62% of all work hours. So women work harder than men, both within the home and without, but often their work is neither valued nor appreciated. Unfortunately, this seems to be generally the case within the church also. All the women we interviewed were adamant that women work harder than men, especially at home and in performing domestic tasks, and that this work is not appreciated. Moreover, there seemed to be little expectation on the part of men that this could change. As one Ugandan woman firmly stated, "Boys need to be in the kitchen also – all roles need to be shared." Men like their women to remain as curry leaves – adding flavour to the home and family, but in the background unnoticed and unappreciated. As our Roman Catholic sister from India put it, "Women have no respect or voice and have to work at home and outside. Women don't have individual identity, their husband's or father's names will identify them."

However, let's conclude this section with a story of hope, to signal that at least some men are aware of these issues and are actively trying to improve things in their own families and communities. A male theologian told the following story at a conference for training pastors and their spouses in Uganda:

"Recently, I was at a conference for church leaders where the Bishop asked us to write down everything that our wives did from the moment they woke up until they went to bed. I began this task rather flippantly as I thought this was rather simple and self-evident. However, as I began to write down what she did during her day, I covered more and more paper and realised that my wife worked much harder than me every day. She would get up before me while I lay in bed and listened to the news on the radio. She would prepare breakfast for me and the children. Then she would prepare the children's lunches and my lunch. By this stage, I may be up eating my breakfast quietly at the table, possibly reading the newspaper or thinking about the day ahead. Meanwhile, my wife was shining shoes, organising children and herself because she also had to get ready to go to work. After work, I would come home tired and rest on the bed, again listening to the day's news on the radio. After work, my wife would do the shopping and then come home and prepare dinner. She would help the children with their homework, cook dinner, clear up and begin to organise the household for the next day. She would usually be in bed after me. After my rest and eating dinner, I would watch TV, read or maybe go out to a meeting. I realized, after writing down everything that my wife does in a day that I have been oppressing her. I did not mean to of course. I love my wife. But I was expecting her to do all the domestic work without sharing the load at all. I realized that this was wrong and I asked her forgiveness. But more than that, I now help with the children, help with the cooking and other domestic tasks so that we really are a partnership. And I encourage all you male clergy to help your wives also – they are not there to wait on us. They are our wives and partners made in the image of God."

"Women are 'feelers' not 'thinkers'"
(quotation from Malaysia)

This is a common allegation that men make about women. Over the centuries, women's souls are considered to develop later than men's, women's brains considered smaller and therefore less effective, and because of biology women are considered weaker, more emotional and less rational. It often means that women's ideas and perspectives are overlooked, under-

valued or even not heard. This has been the frequent experience of a Malaysian woman church leader, "I am often the only woman in a committee with decision making powers. I find that my opinions are not taken seriously. This undermines my confidence. The way meetings are run does not encourage my participation and stifles my creativity." Because women may express themselves more emotively or use different language and forms of expression from men, women find that they have to work harder to prove themselves and to be understood. This same Malaysian woman has received misplaced compliments such as, "You are as good as a man!" Incidentally, William Booth made a similar remark about women in the Salvation Army, famously claiming that "the best men in my army are women."

The Filipina church leader also pleads for equal recognition of women's capability so that women, especially women from a lower economic status, do not have to "strive more to be recognised." Normally, "they have to prove first their capabilities many times more than usual." Lydia from Kenya challenges the church leadership "to give a listening ear to every voice without discrimination of gender, class, age or race." A Singaporean woman in a position of leadership explains the situation in her context, "The men have leadership thrust upon them while women have to prove very hard that they are capable and gifted. Very few churches have a woman leading the evangelism, outreach and missions committee." A woman church leader from Prague just sums it up succinctly, "A woman has to work more than a man."



Cathy Ross completed an MA in French and German from Auckland University before studying with her husband at All Nations Christian College in the UK. They spent time in Rwanda and Belgium prior to working with the Anglican Church for three years in the Democratic Republic of Congo. From 1991 – 1998 she worked for the Church Missionary Society. She is married to Steve and they have three children. Cathy completed her doctorate in 2003 and spent the latter half of 2003 lecturing at Uganda Christian University with her family.

Women in church leadership in Uganda have heard it said that "ladies are weak, they cannot perform." Rachel, the Ugandan woman priest, comments on the feelings of inferiority that women may experience when working with men in the church. She has noticed that sometimes women will try to take a certain initiative but it is the man who takes the credit for it! Men need to allow women more freedom in decision-making. Of course, there is a great irony in all this as it is usually women who organise the church activities, women who are more numerous at church and faithful in church attendance and yet it is

women who have the least say in church life.

The invisibility of women

"We are the ones who first ploughed the earth when Modise (God) made it. We were the ones who made the food. We are the ones who look after the men when they are little boys, when they are young men, and when they are old and about to die. We are always there. But we are just women, and nobody sees us".²

This has always been a problem for women – that although women have always been there, they have been invisible. A sharp distinction was made between the public world of men and the private domain of women. Women were seen as incapable of causing events to happen and so their experience was either ignored or marginalised. A quotation from a New Zealand historian sums up this dilemma:

"As the story of the European settlement of Aotearoa [NZ] has been told, gold-diggers, missionaries, pastoralists, soldiers, adventurers and agricultural labourers have been brought into view. It is the men who settle the country and break in the land. Women are viewed only in terms of their relationship to men: 'The pioneers and their wives.' They are mute appendages, unnamed and therefore unidentified".³

The private space is still considered to be the sphere of women, while the more public arena belongs to the men. As a woman living in Egypt observed, "women are more dominant in the home, in private family space; but

public space belongs more to men still." She affirmed that women can share the public space "but are subject to physical harassment." This is a particular problem in Muslim societies. A woman in Pakistan drew our attention to the legal recognition of a woman's status in

Pakistan where a woman's voice is worth only half that of a man's.⁴ This is worked out in an especially horrifying way through the Hudood Ordinance, whereby a woman who has been raped may end up accused of adultery. If she admits to the act and cannot provide "four reliable adult witnesses of the event" (i.e., four Muslim men who witnessed the rape) she can be convicted of adultery. If this happens, the man may get off without conviction.

Now the kitchen is obviously private space and is primarily the domain of women – although men are always welcome! But for women who want to enter the public space of the world outside the home and hearth, it is not easy. The woman living in Egypt said, "We live with the threat of incurring physical harassment, simply by being in the street, etc., in a way that men are not subject to." This is worse in a Muslim context, but a woman from Albania also talked about the harassment she experienced. A woman living in Peru explained "that many women are forced into submission by the dominant attitudes and behaviour of men; be they husbands, brothers, fathers or male colleagues." And our Indian sister told us that many women do not even have their own identity as they are identified by the names of their husbands or fathers. Without your own identity it is very difficult to become the person God created you to be and to exercise your ministry in the public sphere. It is these kinds of attitudes which again reinforce the invisibility of women.

Moving into the public space usually requires some education and a certain degree of self-confidence. Girls generally receive less education than their brothers so this is another barrier to overcome. Most of the women interviewed noted this as a major problem that boys are given preference when it comes to education. In India, "there is discrimination in food, dress and education. If a male child is born, villagers make a joyful noise, but not for a female child." Many of the respondents commented that lack of education is a serious problem for girls. In most societies, it is boys who are favoured when it comes to education, especially if finances are tight. A woman from Samoa explained that "the thought here is that women will have children so that education is not necessary." In Ethiopia, one respondent cited a gender inequity in both primary and

2 An old Setswana poem from Botswana, quoted in Alexander McCall Smith, *The No 1 Ladies Detective Agency*, (London: Abacus, 2003), p 32-33.

3 Labrum, *A Short Guide to Researching and Writing Women's History in New Zealand* (Wellington: Bridget Williams Books, 1993), p 9-10.

4 A Christian's testimony is worth only half that of a Muslim's testimony so a Christian woman finds herself in a dangerous position indeed.

secondary education with 36% of males and 22% of females enrolled in primary education. Twenty-eight percent of males and only 12% of females complete grade six and female students represent only 14% of the country's total student population. These figures are based on the Ethiopian Ministry of Education's document, "Strategies for Promoting Girls' Education, 1997" which at least acknowledges the problem and is trying to address it. Similar figures could be cited from nearly all over the world. Nearly all our respondents highlighted not only lack of education, but also the preference for boys to receive education over girls as a major issue of concern.

So it is not easy for many women to gain a good level of education and it is a struggle for women to move into the public realm from the private (and sometimes secluded private) space that they are used to. What is women's experience in the church? Is church public sphere or private space? How do women feel about the church and their involvement in it?

Conclusion

In this brief overview we have seen that women struggle to feel that they are running the race together with men. Women feel marginalised and are generally underutilised in our churches. Women feel the injustice of this and want to change it. Everywhere in the world women are more numerous in church but are considered less significant.

Women want to be able to contribute and would like to be set free to do this. When we asked these women from all over the world what they would like to say to the church leadership in their countries, here is a sample of their responses:

- Allow women to exercise their gifts
- Teach men how to treat their wives
- Allow women in decision-making structures
- Place trained women in positions of responsibility
- Encourage leadership training for women
- Do not let the culture dictate the values
- Do not underestimate women
- Involve women from the beginning
- Take seriously the value of women

How well does your faith community match up to these responses? Do we affirm and encourage women so that they are no longer just like curry leaves, used for seasoning and discarded after use, but rather are appreciated for the full flavour they can bring to mission and ministry within our churches? <<

Scan the index of almost any church history volume, or history of mission, and you will discover a curious thing. Out of hundreds of names listed, you will find perhaps a dozen or so names of women. Further, read through the text, and more often than not women are more or less invisible.

Women in Mission

A Celebration—and a Summons

There are of course some happy exceptions, and even some history books (and many mission biographies) devoted exclusively to the role of women in world mission.¹ Yet the fact is that the history of world mission is quite as much the history of missionary women as it is of missionary men, and the advance of the Church in every century and on every continent has been achieved, humanly speaking, quite as much by women as by men.

But, the official story has rarely told us this particular truth. It is not the purpose of this article to engage in a blame-game, nor to resort to gender wars. Both of those are highly destructive. Nor is it the purpose of this article to address the discussion of the past thirty years as to the role of Christian women in the church, especially in relation to leadership and teaching. The arguments have been thoroughly aired, not always with grace and light by any of the participants, of whatever persuasion. No, the purpose of this article is simply to celebrate a few illustrative glimpses of what God has sovereignly chosen to do through Christian women, both “professional” missionaries and “ordinary” church women. Then, we will suggest some of the issues which tend to affect women more than they do men, and which perhaps in a predominantly male-led church have not always been addressed as carefully

as they should have been. Attention to them is important if mission today and tomorrow is to have credibility and effectiveness.

“Male and female he created them”

In the wisdom and kindness of God, human beings were created in two complementary genders, male and female. Alone among all Creation, we were made in the image of God, with a unique shared role as caretakers of the world as well as with unique shared capacity to fellowship with him. The Genesis emphasis is on partnership and completion through mutuality, so we need to be cautious about how we talk about women as distinct from men—or, for that matter, how we talk about men as distinct from women. Certainly we do not wish to talk about “women in mission” in a manner that marginalises men. God calls all Christians, of either gender, to reflect his missionary heart; to be visual aids showing an unbelieving world something of the character, the words and deeds of God himself; to worship him gladly and draw others also to worship him; and to demonstrate reconciled, loving relationships through the way in which we treat one another.

As far as we can tell, at most stages of world history there have been slightly

more female than male adults,² though some cultures have protected males more than females, especially in infancy and childhood. There are still some cultures where female infanticide is practised, even if illegally. However, again as far as we can tell (and statistics are incomplete), there are many more women than men in the world church. There is reasonable evidence that about two-thirds of the world's professing Christians are female.³ In some places, the proportion of women in the church is even higher; for example, in China and Mongolia, the church is probably around 80% female. You will find some reflections on this in another article in this issue, "Whatever happened to all the men? Reflections on gender imbalance in East Asian churches".

Despite this large majority being female, this is not reflected in formal roles in the church, and while in some Protestant mission agencies women significantly outnumber men, leadership roles are largely occupied by men.⁴ Evangelicals have very different convictions about which leadership roles are appropriate for women, and patterns also vary widely in different parts of the world, suggesting that culture as well as Scripture shapes conviction. It is not my intention here to argue for one position or another. But without a doubt there are many very gifted women whose gifts are not being fully used, to their frustration and to great loss for the Kingdom of God. And certainly there are many women missionaries whose mission leaders do not consult them properly or treat them with the respect they deserve. For that there can be no excuse. (And we thank God for all those male leaders whose treatment of women is wonderful! I have personally experienced both kinds....)

What is also beyond question is that God has often honoured and blessed women in mission, and often in ministries many men would deem unsuitable for them. That should give us pause, especially if we come from traditions where women's roles are more restrictive.

The contribution of "professional" women missionaries

Here I am using the term "professional" not necessarily to denote a person working in a recognised professional role, for example as a teacher or doctor, but rather a woman who is serving as an accredited member of a mission agency. Of course, many are professionals in both senses of the word. Whatever

their specific occupation, these are women who have dedicated themselves to bear witness to Christ, through word and deed, sometimes in some of the hardest places on earth to live as a Christian.

The whole of the so-called modern missionary movement—starting with the Moravians in the 18th century, and including up to the present day and the emergence of many new mission movements from the Global South—the whole of that movement has seen hundreds of thousands of women cross cultures and follow the Lord to carry the gospel to unevangelised people around the world. Single or married, they pioneered, worked with women and children, taught men, trained national evangelists and Bible women, established medical care especially for women and children, translated Scripture, cared for the poorest of the poor, travelled across deserts and over mountain ranges, established schools and orphanages, endured great danger and assault, wept and struggled, challenged the powers of darkness, buried their children, laid down their own lives. All this they did alongside men, or sometimes ahead of them. They are still doing it today. Whether or not they are remembered in church history annals, they are known to God. And whether or not they lived to see it, the promise of God is that their labour shall bear fruit that glorifies him.

But this is not just the truth about the past; it is also the truth about the present.

Some contemporary examples

Take Anna, for example.⁵ As a qualified surgeon, she could have had a lucrative, very comfortable life in her home country. Instead, she obeyed the Lord's call, and went to a country hostile to the gospel in order to bring medical help and compassion in his name. Though the little hospital where she worked mainly helped women who would otherwise have had no access to medical care, the small and rather beleaguered Christian community in the region has found great help and support from the witness of the hospital and the friendship of people like Anna. At an age when back home she would have been enjoying ease of retirement, Anna took her particular surgical skills to a succession of war-torn hotspots, transforming the lives of countless women who through abuse or problems in childbirth had become outcast from their societies.

Or take Elizabeth. She was teaching in a country with a tragic reputation for intense repression of minorities, including both ethnic groups and also Christians. She became aware of a group of refugees, and made friends with some of the women. Some were wives, some widows, whose pastor husbands had been targeted by the military. Even those who survived were not allowed to find work. The women were desperate to find some means of supporting themselves and their families. So Elizabeth bought some old but usable sewing machines, taught the women how to use them and also how to dye simple cloth into beautiful patterns, and then helped them set up a co-operative business and acquire good business skills. Now the project not only supports numerous families through the employed women, it is also able to help support other Christian projects. Elizabeth now works in another country, helping to re-establish an educational system shattered by war, but the sewing project remains a bright testimony to the loving care of a heavenly Father.

Rebecca has used her medical skills to pioneer bare-foot doctor schemes in several Asian countries and now works with a large minority group in another. All of these countries are "creative access" contexts, hostile to Christian mission, but Rebecca's quiet befriending, her compassionate commitment to the welfare of people previously well beyond the reach of medical care, and the teams she has drawn around her, have led to ongoing discipling communities. In each case she has had to work patiently to obtain permission from the governments, prepare simple textbooks and manuals appropriate to the context, train nationals to deliver fundamental but life-saving health care, encourage better farming and nutrition, get nationals to establish sustainable systems, travel constantly in very difficult terrain.

Ye Cho pioneered work among street children in an Asian city recently ravaged by war. Now there is a network of nearly twenty extended family homes, each caring for between ten and thirty children. Here the children have stability and much love to help heal their wounds. They are given schooling and skills training so that they do not have to resort to prostitution or drugs trafficking, which would otherwise have been their fate. There is no big funding organisation behind them, so the children along with the houseparents learn each day to trust the Lord to provide for them, and to find small ways of creating income. Increasingly, fledgling

Rose Dowsett

local churches are supporting the homes and integrating the children into a wider caring community. "It's such a small start," says Ye Cho rather sadly as she sees so many more children abandoned on the streets. But for every child who is now safe and secure, it is a miracle in Jesus' name. An observer commented, "Many of these children will become the Christian parents of the next generation, establishing Christian homes, and helping lead the churches. What a vital contribution!"

Bee Choo and Renate teamed up seven years ago on a Bible translation project, in a language not then in written form. Now, significant sections of Scripture have been translated and tested, and a vital tool provided for those seeking to establish the first churches among this people group. Marijke has helped an emerging church set up a literature programme, including training the first generation of Christian writers in that language. Lety worked initially with women and children in an area well-known for violent conflict between two religious and ethnic groups. Increasingly, though, local Christian male church leaders consulted her, valuing her wise advice and asking her to help them grow in their knowledge of Scripture. Later, she was asked to lead the mission team in the whole region, such was the high regard in which she was held by both nationals and expatriates. Hannah was ordained at the insistence of local denominational leaders, as they saw how valuable her ministry was and wanted her to have official access throughout all the associated churches. Now, many years beyond retirement age, her home is still among them, and she is regarded as one of God's treasures for that very large denomination.

All these are single women. They represent a tiny part of a great community of Spirit-gifted, committed-to-Jesus, professional missionary women all over the world. Alongside them are their married sisters. Many of these are mothers as well as wives, and so build natural bridges to other women through their children. This can lead very readily to informal gospel-sharing as well as to more formal ministries. Many share their husband's ministry on an equal footing, so that the couple together are engaged in evangelism and church planting, or Bible translation, or a huge variety of compassion ministries, for instance. Others spend a large portion of their time home-schooling children, either through conviction or through necessity, enabling their husbands to continue in a particular ministry which would not otherwise be possible. Others again follow

complementary but different callings from their husbands: Mary is a doctor, her husband a theologian; Izu is a student worker, her husband a church planter; Femi works among prostitutes and in AIDS education, while her husband is an itinerant evangelist; Juanita is Principal of a missionary training college for both men and women from a young mission movement, while her husband teaches literacy and employment skills in a nearby squatter community.

Married or single, these are women who express the love of God by their lives and their words. They are effective in drawing people to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, whether through formal ministry or through day-by-day informal friendship. They are not perfect, and sometimes struggle to stay on course (just like the men!). But, just like their male counterparts, they are truly "in mission". And God is building his church through them.

Women in mission in their own locality

Far more numerous than the women who are professional cross-cultural missionaries are the Christian women who remain in their own communities but are intentional missionaries right there.

Mother Teresa became an icon of loving compassion far beyond the boundaries of her own Roman Catholic church, and indeed far beyond the boundaries of the whole Christian church. She said: "Stay where you are. Find your own Calcutta. Find the sick, the suffering and the lonely right where you are—in your own homes and in your own families, in your workplaces and in your schools.... You can find Calcutta all over the world, if you have the eyes to see. Everywhere, wherever you go, you find people who are unwanted, unloved, uncared for, just rejected by society—completely forgotten, completely left alone."⁶ We should be very cautious about gender stereotypes, especially since the fruit of the Spirit ⁷ is to characterise Christian men just as much as Christian women; but often women seem especially gifted for caring ministries and in nurturing relationships. In many cultures, women suffer disproportionately, and are most likely to be abused, exploited, and marginalised; perhaps that also makes some Christian women especially sensitive to human suffering in all its many forms. Similarly, the relative powerlessness of women in many cultures may also partly explain why many women like to work through democratic peer groups rather than

seeking to exercise power in the way men in their culture do.

However that may be, many relief and development projects, including those under Christian auspices, successfully achieve their objectives if they work through women. Naomi is an AIDS worker in an African country ravaged by that terrible disease. Equally at home sitting under a tree among a group of village women or talking with city pastors, Naomi has become a passionate advocate of sexual faithfulness according to God's design, even though her culture encourages promiscuity. A co-ordinator of a Christian NGO (Non-Government Organisation) said, "We worked for several years without much success trying to change behavioural patterns. We provided plenty of information—but Naomi connected with their hearts. Once she took this work on, we saw real progress. And she was able to mobilise a whole army of other women...." Now the women's groups in many churches in that country are working together to change the future, while still caring lovingly for the sick, the dying, and the orphaned.

A Czech woman writes that in her country women are far more active in the church community than the men, and more committed to reaching unbelievers with the gospel. An Ethiopian writes that "women are the main instruments to start fellowships, home-churches, witnessing." From Peru, a woman writes, "Women have been faithful Sunday School teachers, giving a sound foundation to many young lives. Many pray and support their husbands. Probably the more dynamic male leaders in the congregations are those with capable, prayerful wives." From China: "It is often the case that the mother or wife became a Christian first and preached the gospel to her family members, leading her husband and children to her Lord. Even though the numbers of brothers have increased, most of the brothers still cannot concentrate their hearts, minds and souls on the Lord's work just because they have to face more challenges outside church and have more responsibilities to both families and society. Therefore, there are a lot of women joining in the church leadership." From Singapore: "The majority of church-goers are female and they are also the ones quietly doing the teaching and discipling of many new and young converts. The women are also the great one-to-one evangelists in their homes, having great impact on non-believing husbands. They are also the ones solely entrusted with the spiritual upbringing of the children."

From all over the world comes evidence that more often than not, in homes and neighbourhoods, women are the primary gospel-bearers. Where women are part of the workforce beyond the home, there too they chat the gospel. In the Muslim world, women often come to faith in Jesus through the loving friendship of Christian women, whether or not it is possible to confess conversion openly. Many women in difficult circumstances do not find it hard to admit their dependence upon the Lord and their own helplessness. That makes many of them very prayerful as they go about their daily tasks. And the Lord delights to answer prayer, and to pour grace into those who know their need of it.

Truly, there is much to celebrate!

Some issues for mission to address

“Women in mission” also applies to the issues especially affecting women that Christian mission needs to address more thoughtfully. Some of these are highlighted in Cathy Ross’s article in this journal, “Running the Race”. Her article also concludes with some of the most common themes arising from widespread research as to what Christian women would most like their male church leaders to hear. Ponder them, for they are the heart cry of many, from many lands, and addressing them could bring much progress in effective world mission.

In addition, what are some of the things that mission and church leaders sometimes overlook because they affect women more than men? Men may more easily look to develop strategies and programmes in mission and in the life of the church; women may prove that even more important is focus on relationships and building networks. Where it is embedded in their culture, Christian men may not notice that their women are marginalised from decision-making, even when those decisions impact the women more than the men. Where water has to be fetched from a distance, it is the women who have to carry it—and they do not have the power to establish a local well. In some cultures, women are forced to abort babies or neglect to death



newborn babies if they are female; in some cultures, men may beat or divorce their wives without any fear of punishment; in some cultures, girls are sold by their own fathers into prostitution, or trafficked by others for great gain. In many cultures, widows have no protection and women have no rights in law. Girls and women are less likely to have access to education, are more likely to be trapped in poverty, and are more likely to suffer violence. Even within the life of the church, females are much less likely to have access to formal Bible or theological training, or to have finances allocated for their work.

Sadly, these problems and many more besides are not all outside the church. Many are ignored within the church as well. It is hard for men to challenge cultural norms that advantage male power. But the church must be prophetic and clear-sighted about issues of justice, however difficult such action may seem to be. God created us for mutual love and respect and equal dignity and value. Our gospel message, and our gospel living, must surely reflect just that.

Yes, there are many things to celebrate about women in mission; and there are plenty of challenges, too. <<

Endnotes

- 1 See for example Ruth Tucker, *Guardians of the Great Commission*, (Zondervan, 1988); R. Pierce Beaver, *All Loves Excelling*, (Eerdmans, 1968); Valerie Griffiths, *Not Less than Everything: The courageous women who carried the Christian gospel to China*, (Monarch/OMF, 2004).
- 2 In many parts of the world, live male births outnumber live female births, but male infant/childhood mortality from natural causes is higher.
- 3 See for example Dana L. Robert, *World Christianity as a Women’s Movement* in *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* Vol. 30, No 4, (October 2006), pp 180-188.
- 4 Formal roles and leadership roles are of course easier to identify, and therefore more likely to appear in statistics and research. In Protestant organisations, most men are married, while women include both married women and single women. Some agencies do not count wives in their figures.
- 5 All personal names have been changed, since many of those mentioned work in politically sensitive areas.
- 6 Quoted by Archbishop Charles Chaput of Denver, USA, in October 2003 to the Catholic Daughters of the Americas, ©2003 Women for Faith & Family.
- 7 Galatians 5:22-23: “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.”

What are some of the challenges, opportunities and joys for Latin American women involved in mission? It may be helpful to start with some statistics to show the tremendous growth of the Latin American mission movement and the Brazilian mission movement more specifically. This growth is the fruit of enthusiasm, fueled by much prayer, especially by many women's prayer groups. and many missionary conferences—some of them very good ones, others poorer in content, but all helping a growing number of churches and leaders to become aware that we have a place to contribute and play our part in our missionary responsibility. Until some twenty-five years ago, the general idea in Latin America was that mission is what Christian leaders from the first world came to do in our midst.

Latin American Women in Mission

What is the proportion of Latin American women, married and single, serving on the mission field? According to COMIBAM data from 2001,¹ 73% of the missionaries are married, which means that 36.5% are married women. Fifteen percent are single women and 12% are single men. This proportion has become more balanced—there used to be many more single women. In Brazil, statistics from 2005² show a different proportion: 77% are married, so 38.5% are married women, 17% are single women, and only 6% are single men. But if we look at the most difficult fields—countries where there is war, tribal areas, and even in Muslim contexts—the proportion of single women is usually greater.

Where do Latin American cross-cultural missionaries serve? Twenty percent serve in their own country, which usually means with unreached tribal groups. Thirty-nine percent serve in other Latin American countries or in Portugal or Spain, which are countries with a very small evangelical minority. Fourteen percent serve in the 10/40 window and 27% in the rest of the world. Among Brazilian missionaries, 25% serve in cross-cultural ministry in their own country; 34% in Latin America,

Portugal or Spain; 20% in the 10/40 window; and 21% in other fields.

There has been tremendous growth in the number of Latin American cross-cultural missionaries: from 3,909 in 1996 to 6,455 in 2001. In Brazil, there were 880 cross-cultural missionaries in 1989 and there were 3,195 in 2005.

A survey to ascertain the sending agencies of Brazilian missionaries reveals an almost equal division into four basic categories. Twenty-five percent of missionaries are sent by native Brazilian mission agencies—some of which are mature and have learned how to prepare their ministers and to offer member care, while others are just starting. Twenty-four percent are sent by denominational Mission Boards, and these have the same diversity of mature missions and others still in the learning process. Twenty-six percent serve with international agencies under Brazilian leadership. Because of their longer experience and guidance from abroad when necessary, these usually have a more developed structure of preparation and care for their missionaries. But 25% are sent by their local churches. Most of these churches

have plenty of enthusiasm and a great desire to love and serve the Lord, but little knowledge about the mission fields or what kind of training is necessary (even though they may have a short-term training program), and usually not the slightest idea about member care. Preparation and member care will have a significant influence on all missionaries and maybe even more strongly on women as missionaries, who often feel more acutely the need for member care.

Special Challenges for Married Latin American Women

In Latin America, family ties are very strong. For a mother to live in a very different cultural context brings a lot of stress when she faces special issues like:

1. **Giving birth to a child**, especially a first child. At home, the grandmothers would come, usually one at a time, and stay with the young mother for a few weeks, helping her through the first weeks when she feels very tired or in pain and teaching her many practical things about bringing up her child. Also, uncles and aunts and good friends from the church would come to hold the child, to admire him or her, and to bring little but useful gifts. There is a lot of movement around the new-born baby and its mother.

I knew a mother who was living in the UK with a British family. First, even before the baby was born, they felt they were not



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welcome in the living room because the door was always closed; in Brazil you do not close the door, it stays open and people are invited to walk in. So they spent most of their time in their own bedroom. After the baby was born they were nervous and insecure, especially the young mother, feeling she was disturbing the family, afraid when her baby cried, trying to keep it quiet but passing her anxiety to the baby who started to cry much more. There was no one to give the mom useful tips about how to handle her little one. She felt fearful and unable to love her little girl freely. The tensions grew and started to cause troubles in her relationship with her husband. They went on to a very different third culture before the mother had overcome her shock and she became increasingly depressed and lonely, even though the local people obviously loved her little one.

I believe that young couples should have their first baby in their home culture, or provision should be made for the young mom's mother to visit her and stay with her for a month. Even with a second or third child there are still tensions because of the different ways of dealing with babies that cry: some cultures let the little one cry until it gets tired unless they know it may be hungry or need changing. But usually in Brazil people want to care very well for the little baby and when it starts to cry someone will pick it up, and hold it until it becomes quiet. And Brazilian babies learn this very quickly and cry loudly to express their need to be held. This may cause irritation to families from a different culture, or if the mother tries to adapt she may feel guilty.

2. *Schooling of children in a very different culture:*

a. Sending little children to a *boarding school* is a very drastic step for most Latin families. Children belong to their parents, and parents want to be with their children, so sending them off to be brought up by strangers seems very wrong. Some families who work in tribal areas in the midst of the Amazon rain forest do not have much of a choice and there are schools for M.K's. Many children adapt well and the mission will seek to care well for the children of missionary families, but other children find it very hard to cope with the distance from their parents. This makes their parents suffer very much as well.

I know a teenager, daughter of a missionary family, who felt so unhappy that she committed suicide. What pain and trauma for her family, how guilty her parents must have felt! I know another family whose 10-year-old son



Antonia Leonora van der Meer

was living and studying at a good boarding school, but when his parents came to visit he was desperate, he would cling to his mother and cry: "Do not leave me in this place, do not leave me alone." How should a couple react facing such a crisis? Especially if they have been brought up in a family with very strong ties and a feeling of responsibility to stay with their children? A very difficult issue arises with children who for one reason or another become the butt of mockery of the others. Children can be very cruel and if the school is big and the teachers and home parents very busy, they may not notice how unhappy such a child can be.

b. Yes, but what about *home schooling*? This may be a very useful way to treat this issue for European or North American families, but not as yet for Latin American families. There is a home school program available in Brazil, organized for children of diplomats, but it is very expensive; each child would cost as much as the support for the whole family. And again, there is the feeling of are we giving our child the best, or are we harming his or her future with this program? Will I be able to give my child the guidance he or she needs to follow such a program? More families are starting to adopt such a program, but it still causes a lot of anxiety, especially for the mothers.

c. Let the children go to a *local school*. This will work well in certain contexts, but not always. If the parents choose this option, which will help the children to integrate in their new society and make friends, they usually need to give complementary teaching at home so that the children can fit back into the system back in the home country. Sometimes there are problems; some teachers show prejudice against foreign children and will pinch or beat them and treat them with

contempt. Or sometimes the system of the country is one where there is a lot of physical punishment, but the child is not used to it and feels very miserable. So again, it may work, but needs wise monitoring from the parents, and the parents need help from their agency.

d. Go to an *international school*, if there is one available. Such schools usually have a good program. But they may be very expensive and out of the financial reach of Latin families. And it frequently happens that children, when they follow an American program for many years, want to study in the US and feel at home in the US and not in their parents' country. So there are special challenges again. Many missions do not have wise and experienced counselors to help the mothers face such issues.

3. **And how is the wife/mother herself?** If she has more than one little child she will be very housebound, with little opportunity to learn the language or integrate into the local culture. She may find it difficult to develop her ministry, even though she felt called to be a missionary. Some women feel very lonely; they see their husbands very integrated in their work, going on journeys, making local friends, being respected for their work. They often feel as if they are not even counted as missionaries and may fall into depression.

If there is wise and sensitive counsel available, these mothers can learn to understand that it is OK, it is good to spend time with their children, that this activity does not make them secondary missionaries, that they may be very useful in reaching out to local mothers, and that many doors to local families will open for them exactly because of their children.

There should be no pressure for when to start working in her own ministry outside her home, though it would be very helpful to find leaders who are sensitive and give mothers a space to serve without demanding full-time work. Ministry can be adapted to her available hours and some of it can be done from her home, especially hospitality, which is so important for making local friends.

4. **The need for a sensitive husband and sending agency.** In some countries, the wife is not expected to do anything outside her home, but most Latin missionary women will not feel happy to be seen only as the wife of the missionary. So the husband and the sending mission needs to be prepared to seek out

how the wife can be involved and where she can use her gifts so she may know that she is valued as a missionary as well.

5. Adaptation and language learning. This may be more difficult for married women who spend much of their time at home, but others will develop a good relationship with a home servant and learn to express themselves; some women have a real gift for learning languages and for adapting. Couples need to learn to be patient with the partner who has the greater difficulty, to be encouraging, and to show loving support.

6. Relationships between the husband and other women. Usually the husband develops relationships with other women in his ministry. Again, both partners need to be wise and sensitive so that both he and she may be free to develop good relationships in a way appropriate to the local culture, but always keeping faithful to their life partner as their first and best friend.

Special Needs of Latin Single Women Missionaries

Latin single women usually come from families where there is a lot of involvement, strong family ties, and where being an adult does not mean that you are supposed to leave your home—this usually happens when you get married or need to go elsewhere for your studies. It often happens that families, if they can, will move to another town or city to be with their daughter who is studying there. So leaving your family far behind and going to a very different culture where you do not have as yet new support structures is very hard indeed. There is also the social and usual family pressure that one should get married, besides the desire that the young women have themselves of forming a family. For such single women, the missionary field experience may be very difficult. They need member care from wise and sensitive people who keep in continual close contact.

I know a single missionary who went to a country at war and lived in a very precarious situation, having a tiny room in the church building, having to cook outside on coals, using the toilet facilities of the church where usually there was no water available. She had no car and spent most of her time in the church; she was active and gifted, but very lonely. A handsome young man came along and showed great interest in her ministry, in her faith, and especially in her as an attractive woman. She fell in love with him, and saw him as God's gift to her to compensate for her many lonely hours. But I and another mis-

sionary friend soon heard that this man was actually married and had several girlfriends. We tried to tell her, but she was in love and preferred to believe him. We were so bold as to contact her mission and ask them: please ask her to come home for a holiday, she needs it, if she stays she is in danger. We wrote without going into too many details. The mission called her home and as soon as she was with her family she recovered from her loneliness and understood that this man was not the right one for her. Her infatuation was over. As single missionaries, we need to be very careful with our friendships with local men.

"How we view women is important to the kind of vision, mission and strategy that we have in our churches and mission organisations. If women are not involved in every aspect of our programme or plan of action including decision-making bodies at all levels, what does that say about our biblical and theological understanding of mission?"

Leelah Manasseh, India

Single Latin missionaries need close friends, they need loving member care, they need friends at home who will listen to them, read their letters or messages, and help them overcome their loneliness. I have told my friends that we need to seek help on the field as well and that we can help each other by organizing prayer cells, times for being together for some leisure activities, etc. Also, friendships with missionary and local families can be a great blessing.

On the other hand, single missionaries are much more free to travel, go to dangerous places, integrate into the local culture and learn the local language. I was a single missionary for ten years in Angola, a country at war with a Marxist government, but I was happy and most of my single Brazilian friends were happy as well. We loved the local people and were loved by them. At first, there may have been some doubts about our contribution because we were just women and because we were single (a non-existent phenomenon in Angola!), but people learned to trust us and gave us great freedom to serve. We had a greater freedom even than our male colleagues, who were often felt as a possible threat to local leaders.

In our missions training center we speak and pray about these things, and when a single missionary comes from the field we ask her

to share some of her struggles. Most students hope and pray they will get married before going to the field, and many will do so. But I always encourage them to trust the Lord and not to be too anxious about solving this marriage problem because this anxiety may cause others problems, like deciding too quickly to get married and then discovering that your husband really is not interested in mission and has completely different goals for his life.

A great difficulty for some Brazilian single missionaries is that, because of Brazilian carnival and soap operas, there is a general opinion that Brazilian women are sexy and easy to conquer. When I was in Angola and went to see a Russian doctor about a young orphan boy who had adopted me as his "mother", he would always talk about samba, carnival, etc. and try to invite me to go out with him. But it is worse when missionaries from other nationalities clearly create barriers against our single Brazilian girls because the wives see them as dangerous. So, instead of giving them support, they keep their distance. This has happened on several occasions.

I do receive positive feed-back from our single former students—sometimes they do feel very lonely, but most are serving very well and coping with their singleness. Three are currently serving in East Timor in education. They are greatly respected by the country leaders, by the Minister of Education—who asked them to write a preschool curriculum—and by the President and his wife who have invited them into their home and asked for their prayers.

And I do receive positive feedback from married missionary women and mothers as well. Not all is easy—sometimes great stresses cause the couple suffering and difficulties on the field—but we keep in contact, we continue to pray and trust the Lord will help. And we seek to give advice or guidance about where to find help when necessary.

I believe that Latin American women, with their joy, their ability to adapt to a simple lifestyle, their love for the Lord and their desire to share his love with others, can make a significant contribution. At the same time, we still need to learn from our more experienced sisters elsewhere as well as from local women, who may have little formal training but a lot of practical wisdom and a living faith. <<

Endnotes

1 www.comibam.org/transpar/index.htm

2 www.comibam.org/transpar/_menus/por/09jogo-mb.htm

Seeing His Face through the Veil

In this age of increased mobility and multiplicity of options, the single female has become a familiar element in the composition of teams working in cross-cultural settings. Further, there are rising numbers of mission workers who are Asian and under thirty. I was one of them. At a young age, I was exposed to the world of mission and missionaries through my parents. After university, professional exams, and a few years spent in a budding career, I began to actively pursue the Lord's will for my life in cross-cultural mission. This led to a discovery of the heart to be part of building His Kingdom, particularly amongst a people loved—Muslims whom we long to call brothers and sisters in Christ.

For women focused on reaching Muslims, the sphere is mostly amongst the women of Islam. At least fifty percent of the world's 1.3 billion Muslims are women. As much as Muslim women are still associated with the veil, a significant number of them are exploring their identities apart from it. It never ceases to surprise me how it is culture and context that shapes these women more than religion.

I've seen women in areas struck by the Tsunami wearing prayer garments, fervently seeking a God whose apparent judgment has caused more death and destruction than can be imagined. In another small village in Asia, there is a young mother suffering from

Tabea (pseudonym) is from South East Asia and is linked with OMF Intl. She is currently studying at All Nations and loves being part of the kitchen chores team. She enjoys Asian food, sudoku, losing chess games, cooking experiments, and seeing strokes of genius in random things. She comes from a loving family and recently has become an aunt.

tuberculosis; she has a husband she has not seen in a year, and she ponders where people's spirits go when they die. In one city in Africa I remember seeing a mother in her head-covering walking with three daughters, two of whom have taken to fashions straight out of surfer girl posters while the third clutches tightly in her hand a book of special prayers.

In another city, I met a tutor in Arabic, fully veiled, telling me her favorite television show was *Desperate Housewives*.

In China, a Middle Eastern student pursues a graduate degree in chemistry at a Chinese state university.

Within the past five years alone, global politics, media, and the Internet have contributed to major paradigm shifts in worldview which also have changed the Muslim women. And it is this same shift that is calling more and more single Christian women, including myself, to work amongst them.

The challenges of single women in a Muslim context seem to be similar across fields. The pressures of living in male-dominated societies, more pronounced where Islam rules, proves to be an additional source of stress for the cross-cultural single woman. Organizations have as well identified cases of loneliness and longing for intimacy and protection as areas of vulnerability. These experiences are fairly common and I myself was not immune to these emotions. In the field, I was seen not only as a daughter and sister by the women, but also as a potential wife and even second wife by the men. In an isolated and stressful context, it is not uncommon for Christian women to find themselves drawn to compromise. These complications have even led some teams to refuse any more new single women.

Better understanding and recognition of women in mission is important because the range of faces of Muslim women calls for an

equal range of Christian women in mission able to bridge divides of faith, culture and context. This includes both single and married women of varying cultural and linguistic backgrounds, worldviews, and experiences as loving witnesses of Jesus Christ.

Tabea Mateo

I've discovered that with the growing distrust between Christians and Muslims, it is only genuine

love that comes from the Lord that can break down barriers. Love that is willing to sacrifice and listen to the heart cries of people is the fuel that will see people willing to listen to what we have to share about Jesus. Without love for Muslims, no vision or strategy to reach them will thrive.

However, love also needs to be genuinely expressed in ways that the local Muslim men and women are able to identify with and understand. In my own life, it has been contextual and incarnational witness which has been one of the strongest forms that the Lord has used. The ability to adapt and learn the heart language of the people group and listen to their stories, discerning the heart cries of women and being used as the Spirit prompts to speak and share in love have always borne fruit in developing relationships and have been keys into families and lives.

As a Southeast Asian in a Southeast Asian context, immersion into the local culture and language came very quickly. To the mothers, I was embraced as a daughter, to the younger girls as an older sister, to the older women as a younger sister and to those of my age group as a friend. What I discovered very quickly was that behind cultural and religious differences, these women with whom I've built relationships had hopes, concerns and dreams which were no different from my own.

I remember an incident with some young women who had just finished doing their

obligatory prayers for the evening. We were in my home, sitting in the room allocated for prayer. After they had done the required prostrations, I asked them what it was that they prayed for. One answered in tears that she prayed for her family. She prayed for Allah to guard her parent's health, for her to keep her job and provide for her family, and for her family to be safe. Clearly, her prayers were no different from my own, except for that assurance of relationship and salvation that I have in Jesus Christ. In my heart, I saw around me young women who prayed to a God, seeing only the back of His head and never His face.

My desire is for all these friends of mine to see a Father who turns His face towards them with loving eyes through Jesus who makes this possible. My desire is for the Lord to open the hearts of Muslims so that they will come to know the love, joy and freedom in life that they can experience in Jesus. My desire is to be used by God as one of His instruments for this to happen. <<

“In one regular country clinic where the nurse sat treating patients with chair and table on the verandah, I sat inside and preached to some twenty people. Men sat round the room cross-legged looking at Jawi Arabic Scriptures I brought in (I asked a man to pass them round), while I sat in the far doorway to the kitchen, at the forefront of the women's group, crowding in behind. I would demur and protest that it wasn't suitable for a woman to explain Scriptures to men and they would assure me, 'Go on, go on! You know the Book and we want to hear it explained!'”

A woman missionary working among Muslims



Behind the veil

"This culture is eating away my self-esteem. I need to step away and rediscover my identity."

"It is time for me to go home," a missionary colleague shared with tears in her eyes.

After serving in a Muslim country in South Asia for fourteen years, she felt the need to return home to rebuild her self-esteem. She shared a recent incidence.

"I was walking along the street the other day. I heard some footsteps behind me and some men talking. As usual, I stepped aside to let them pass, something that I have done almost daily for the past fourteen years. Yet, all through the years, I felt angry that I have to give way to men. But this time, it was different. I felt it was right to do so. Somehow, I had accepted my "lowly" position in the society and in life. I felt that I should give way to men because they were superior to me, a woman."

"This culture is eating away my self-esteem. I need to step away and rediscover my identity."



Dr. Jennie Fung with her husband, Dr. Patrick Fung, have served with OMF International since 1989. At present, Jennie serves as the chief editor for OMF Chinese publications and as a medical adviser in OMF. She also supports Patrick in his role as the General Director of OMF International.

My own pilgrimage

Her story caused me to reflect on my own pilgrimage, my experience of living and serving among the Muslim women.

During my first year in medical school, I heard about the need of women in Nepal. For cultural and religious reasons, these women would rather die than to see a male doctor. Indeed, many of them lost their lives during pregnancy and childbirth, as there was no female doctor to attend to them. These women were secluded in their home and rarely had the opportunity to meet people outside their family, let alone to hear the gospel.

God touched my heart. I committed my life to care for such women. I wanted them to know that they were precious to God. God cared about their physical needs as well as their spiritual wholeness. He cared enough to give His only Son to die for them.

After twelve years of preparations, I arrived in South Asia with my husband. During the time of preparations, I had come to learn that Nepali women were not the only group of people who could not see a male doctor. Women all over the Muslim world were under similar constraints, secluded from the outside world and from any Christian contacts.

In a hospital of 150 beds, I worked closely with local doctors and nurses. I found that most of the female doctors were knowledgeable and hard working, often more conscientious than the male doctors. Yet when asked, the female doctors would always claim that male doctors were brighter and better in studies and in work. From a young age, the girls were told that they were not as good as the boys and they would never be equal to them.

My realization

I never realized how living and working in such an environment

Jennie Fung

affected me until we went on Home Assignment. After two and a half years in South Asia, we returned home to prepare for the arrival of our first child.

Back in a society where men and women mingled freely, I found myself feeling very uncomfortable having to talk to men and to look them in the eyes. Getting on the bus, I would rather stand than to sit down next to a man. Yet the greatest surprise came on the day I decided to go out on my own to do some shopping for the baby.

I ventured into a department store and wandered around in the baby section for two hours and came out empty-handed. I was shocked by the abundance of choices but was embarrassed by my indecisiveness. I came to the daunting realization that I had lost the confidence of making decisions on my own!

In the country where we served, all business was done by men. My husband did the grocery shopping from the wet market for me. He also bought my clothes for me. All the shops and stores were run by men, including those selling women's clothes. As it was inappropriate for me to talk to the men managing the stores, my husband would do the bargaining and payment. He got more and more involved in choosing the various things we needed, including my clothes. In time, I grew to rely on his choice. I relinquished the choosing of my clothes to him. That eventually cost me the confidence in making any decisions. I doubted my judgement in even small things, like choosing a baby bottle!

As we prepared to return to the field after my daughter was born, there was another issue I needed to work through. For a long time, even before I considered marriage, I promised myself that if I ever had a child, I would choose to stay home to look after my baby. What I did not realize was what it would mean to give up my role as a doctor to become a full-time mom in a Muslim country

where the social status of women was so low.

In South Asia, the hospital was the only place where I was addressed by my name. In their society, a woman was usually addressed as the daughter of so and so, the wife of so and so or the mother of so and so. As the consultant gynaecologist, I was called Dr. Jennie, not the wife of Patrick. That helped me to maintain a sense of self, my being an independent individual. The hospital was also the only place where I had continued to make decisions, professional decisions for my patients, with confidence.

Having quit my job as a consultant gynaecologist, to return to the same environment with my newborn baby would mean new challenges. To be in that society without being in the respected role of a medical doctor was scary. How would people perceive me? How would I perceive myself? I struggled. I questioned God.

God answered me through my newborn child. One day, as I was cuddling little Elaine, God gently reminded me of His fatherly love. When I saw Elaine resting contentedly in my arms, I realized how deeply I loved her. She was not capable of doing much apart from feeding, sleeping and crying. She had no social status. Other people would not think much of her. Yet, she was precious to me. She was my daughter

and I loved her. In the same way, God loves me just as I am, His daughter. He loved me enough to allow Jesus die on the cross for me. He loved the gynaecologist Jennie just as much as the stay-home mom, Jennie. My identity as the “princess” of the King of Kings did not depend on my roles, what I did or how people perceived me, but on the accomplished work of Jesus on the cross.

My new frontiers

With my newfound confidence rooted in God’s love, we returned to South Asia as a family of three. However, there were more lessons to be learned.

Having stopped working fulltime in the hospital, I imagined that I would have the whole world of time to enjoy my daughter, to visit and spend time with my Muslim neighbours and to entertain visitors. However, my expectations were soon proven unrealistic. Elaine was an energetic baby who hardly needed any sleep in the daytime. How could I manage the house chores with a baby in my arms?

How was I to have meaningful conversations with my neighbours with the baby babbling away? How could I safely prepare meals for friends with a baby crawling around my feet?

The sense of incompetence as a mom and housewife plunged me into depression. In the

depth of my struggle, I came to see my pride. Slowly, I learned to accept that being competent in the hospital did not always translate into competence at home. It took me a long time to acknowledge my limitations and to accept help from my husband, from my teammates, my neighbours and a househelp.

Gradually, God taught me to look beyond my limitations to His grace. He led me to see different possibilities. Though I could not entertain at home, we could take friends out for meals to share together. When my husband went out to talk to his friends and hospital colleagues, I chose to pray for him rather than to ask why I could not join. Eventually, God led me to new areas of ministry, beyond what I initially thought I could do. Instead of working in the hospital, I gave medical care to missionary colleagues serving among the local people. During the small hours when Elaine was sleeping, I wrote. I shared with people back home the lives of women in South Asia. With my pen, I rallied prayers and concerns for these women, this unique group of women behind the veil.

Through the years of living and serving among the women behind the veil, God led me to see myself behind my own veil. He helped me to put aside some distorted views and to break-down some self-imposed boundaries. He brought me new freedom of serving Him as He designed, not as I thought I could. <<



It was God himself who guided me to do what I am doing. It is not because I am special – he is the only special One! I was very happy working as a doctor in a Christian hospital in Pune, working in obstetrics, family planning, and community health departments. I enjoyed delivering babies. Each time, I was awestruck at the wonder of God's creation.

An Indian Doctor's Story

In 1991, I changed my job and joined an international NGO (Non-Governmental Organisation) for a rural project called the "Integrated Child Development Project". While working there, I witnessed a young boy die of AIDS. That scene has never left me. At that time, we knew very little about AIDS in India. I started learning as much as I could about it. During holidays, I would travel to Mumbai which has always been the hub of AIDS, be it the number of infected, knowledge, research or hospitals treating the infected. I networked with doctors treating people infected with HIV and people involved with AIDS awareness.

I would then go back and teach the staff in the project and also work with schools and colleges. I conducted my own survey in the villages connected to the project. Some findings related to sexual knowledge, practices and attitudes were shocking. I also read through the Bible to acquire deeper knowledge about God's heart regarding his creation of human beings and sex.

By the time the project came to an end, I was given an option of starting an HIV project in Mumbai. As if served on a silver platter, I gladly accepted the offer. One year was enough for me to learn and see all that I wanted to. In 1995, I switched to another Christian NGO. I trained my staff in AIDS awareness, and pioneered home-based care for the infected and affected in Mumbai.

While I was involved intensely in all these activities, there was one section of the population which caught my attention, the youth. The organisation I worked with helped me start a project training teachers of various schools in Mumbai on sex and sexuality. I prepared a Bible-based sex-education for adolescents, especially boys. In India,

talking about sex even in the family is just not done. The girls are told a little about sex when they attain puberty, but boys are left to find out for themselves. Boys take counsel from their peers who teach them what they know.

I love little children. I enjoyed my posting in the paediatric ward while working in Pune hospital. However, I could never bring myself to inform a mother of her child's death. As I ventured into the field of HIV/AIDS, my thoughts were always on children. I counselled and many times battled with infected couples not to have children, because at that time the anti-retroviral drug



Lalita Edwards, a medical doctor, is the daughter of prayerful first generation Christians. After working in various hospitals and projects, she now works among AIDS sufferers. She is married, with three daughters, two sons-in-law [more like sons] and five grandchildren.

for pregnant women was not popular in India and it was very expensive also. However, women would share their longing to cuddle their own child, even if it is sick. I understand this desire and it bothered me no end.

In 2002, I returned to Pune, a fast growing city with many new colleges and educational institutions, and thus attracting many more young people. Pune has always been the centre for culture/art and education in Maharashtra. At that time, not many people were working in the field of HIV/AIDS. I started working with women in the "red light area" by conducting a clinic for them. I went on to help place their children in hostels where they could be protected and get some education. But, some children were HIV positive and none of the hostels wanted to admit them.

Lalita Edwards

At the same time, I was conducting a clinic with YWAM (Youth with a Mission) in a slum. In 2004, a nine-year-old girl would come each day on some pretext or the other and sit till I left the clinic. One day she came crying with a black eye. She told me that her maternal uncle, with whom she lived, had beaten her up. Another day she came asking for something to eat. I got her a cup of tea and a packet of biscuits. Before I turned round and examined another patient everything was cleaned up. She was an orphan, both parents died of AIDS. She now lived with her mother's siblings and her own brother.

Both her uncles were alcoholics, and the older one was HIV positive. Her aunt was the only earning member of the family. She left home at 8am to return at 8pm. One day I stayed late to ask her aunt if I could place the child in a hostel. She was more than happy to consent. I tried in three hostels that whole year till June 2005. I failed to place her in any of the hostels. I continued to pray for her.

One day I heard the Lord telling me to start a home and take care of this girl. I registered my organisation and called it "Santvana", meaning "comfort". My source of inspiration came from 2 Corinthians 1:3-4, with its repeated stress on God's comfort in our troubles, and our calling to pass that same comfort on to others. What greater need does an HIV/AIDS infected/affected per-

son have more than comfort, when family, friends and society shun them?

Thus began my present journey. I quickly found seven other girls in a similar situation. Five of them were HIV positive. My dilemma was where to find a house, staff to take care of the children, and funds? It was only a month till the new school year was due to start, and I wanted the children to be able to go to school.

However, when the Lord plans something, he does all the work; we just have to obey and follow. Isaiah 40: 4-5 came true in my life as the Lord dealt with each problem, mountain and valley, and showed his glory. Within days I got a house on rent, a couple to take care of the children, and as far as the funds were concerned, the Lord taught me an important lesson. Unless I give sacrificially I should not expect others to give. I said to myself, "There you go, Lalita, all the problems solved!"

Now, two years down the line, there are fourteen children in the home, including three of the original group. Santvana Home has two very nice girls and a couple to take care of the children. The children have a nice bungalow to live in with front and back yard and plenty of water. We live by faith and the Lord has not failed us on a single day. All the children go to school. They have all kept good health in spite of some of them being HIV positive. There is a church close by. Recently, we celebrated two years of God's faithfulness to us. We have needs but we ask the Lord and he provides. This is his agenda for me.

My reward? That all the children come running to me as I visit them on a daily basis and vie for my hand, my bag or even my scarf. They call me "Nani", meaning maternal grandmother, like my own grandchildren. Come and witness the joy that fills my heart. Each child knows the Lord personally and yes they pray very specific prayers. They pray for all those who help us. Though rejected by their family, the Lord has not rejected them and has a great plan for them. <<

Bible study reflection on Luke 10:38-42 on Hospitality

Martha and Mary

Introduction

Hospitality is a cultural issue in many societies. In Africa, for example in Uganda, there are many proverbs and stories that have been composed regarding hospitality. Ugandans believe that for any relationship to be strong, food must be served. Leaving someone's home without eating is very painful. Among the Samia of Uganda there is the proverb "olwiho luba munda", which is literally translated, "Relationship is in the stomach." In Luganda a tribe in central Uganda, the proverb is "olugenda enjala teruda", which means, "If a visitor leaves your home hungry he or she will never come back." This suggests that eating is a very integral part of hospitality in Uganda. Because of the importance of hospitality, emphasis is put on making sure things are done as culture demands. The focus of hospitality however, is directed towards meeting the needs of the guest.

Martha can be likened to a true and understanding Ugandan woman. She greets her guest and immediately disappears into a grass-thatched kitchen where the smoke becomes too much for the visitor to follow and engage in a conversation. All children will be called and each of them assigned responsibility just to make sure the meal gets ready faster. The visitor has to sit and wait until the meal is ready.

The story of Martha and Mary presents Jesus as a visitor in an intimate teaching relationship. The two sisters, Martha and Mary, loved Jesus so dearly. They wanted to give him the best. They were different. I have chosen to look at the essence of hospitality in this story. I will focus on three major issues: first, the duty of listening; secondly, setting priorities; thirdly, taking action upon the two above.

When Jesus entered Bethany, he was welcomed by Martha to a home he already knew.

According to the patriarchal society of that day, Martha was the ideal type of woman. She knew that a woman's place was in the home, taking care of the men of the family. Men were socially superior to women. Hence, she was worried about the details of cooking, and other tasks related to house keeping.

Rev. Rebecca
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Jesus is beginning to redirect Martha's focus from the comfort of the guest to listening to the guest (cf the welcome of a bishop in Uganda). Jesus is politely encouraging her to set priorities. With this cultural context in mind, Green, in his commentary on Luke,¹ says,

"With Jesus' presence the world is being reconstituted, with the result that Mary and those of low status accustomed to living on the margins of society need no longer be defined by socially determined roles. Martha and Mary and with them all must understand and act on the priority of attending to the guest before them, extending to Jesus and his messengers the sort of welcome in which the authentic hearing of discipleship is integral."

All must hear the gospel, irrespective of who they are and what culture says about them. Jesus transformed culture by allowing Mary, a woman, to sit and learn Scripture, which was not acceptable among the Jews. He similarly invites Martha to refocus her attention, not on faithfulness to culture, but on setting her priorities on Jesus. Jesus' encounter with Martha and Mary clarifies the nature of welcome he seeks, not only for himself but also for his messengers (and in this case, missionaries who actively participate in drawing people into God's kingdom). As a missionary, how have you refocused people's attention so that they can receive the gospel?

The duty of listening in hospitality

Mary sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. This listening here is a two-

way process. Mary is listening to Jesus and Jesus is listening to Mary. Mary was quiet, contemplative and still. There is a song that says “Be still and know that I am the Lord”; Mary’s desire was to know more of the Lord rather than looking at the unnecessary details of hospitality. In 1877, when the CMS arrived in Uganda, Ugandans had little to offer; they did not know what the white man wanted. One thing they realized was that the white man had words of life. He saved them from the elaborate sacrifices to different gods and pointed them to one God. The greatest hospitality they offered was to sit and listen to the missionaries. They were called *abasomi*, which means “learners.” Some of them escaped from their homes, some left their work in the King’s court and came to learn. It would have been hard for the gospel to spread in Uganda if the Ugandans never took a step to listen. Listening is a very important aspect of discipleship. As disciples of Jesus, we are called to be with Jesus. Jesus called the twelve to be with him, and they listened.

Jesus commends Mary for choosing to listen to him and will not allow Martha to deprive her of the opportunity to do so. Jesus here is transforming the culture of hospitality into attention to the guest rather than a domestic performance. The appropriate hospitality offered to any guest, and in this case a missionary, is listening to God’s Word. It can be very disappointing if a missionary went out to preach and had no one to listen to him or her. Recently, we hosted a missionary at the University and she requested us to mobilize the students so that she could present her story to them. She had been very successful in other places, but this time the students did not listen. Ugandan students are not used to one person’s performance. They did not understand the story, she did not explain it at the beginning, and instead of listening there was a lot of murmuring in the congregation. Despite all the other kind of hospitality, she left very disappointed because the students failed to listen to her.

Alternatively, lack of listening to other people by the one presenting can cause the message to become irrelevant. Recently, missionaries came to a place near Kampala; it was a rural area and the people explained to them their needs. The missionaries had made up their minds to give these people a ‘gas toilet’, which they actually did. To this day, the gas toilet is still there, yet people cannot use it. They can’t afford to buy the gas. It is true that as a missionary there is need to listen to God, but we must also listen to the people

in order for them to make sense out of the gospel. In mission, we wish to not only communicate, but to have fellowship, form relationships and also to encourage one another. There is a need to allow a proper flow of communication between the missionary and the listeners. Lack of proper communication hinders the progress of the gospel.

Mary in this text is depicted as one who has begun the journey of discipleship by acknowledging through her posture her submissiveness to Jesus, listening to his Word. She is found at Jesus’ feet. Being at the feet is a very necessary posture for learning and understanding. Paul himself said “*I am a Jew, born in Tarsus in Cilicia, but brought up in the city, educated at the feet of Gamaliel according to the strict manner of the law of our forefathers, being zealous for God as all of you are this day*” (Acts 22.3). Throughout Luke and Acts, “sitting at his feet” indicates acknowledgement of authority. See Luke 7:38, 8:35, 41, 17:16, Acts 4:35, 37, 5:2—all incidents where people had to submit and acknowledge the authority of others. For Luke, listening to the Word at the feet of Jesus is to have joined the road to discipleship. Jesus said, “*Everyone who comes to me and hears my words and does them, I will show you what he is like; he is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock. And when the flood arose, the stream broke against that house and could not shake it, because it had been well built*” (Luke 6:47-48). Listening deepens our faith. Jesus said, “*Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it*” (Luke 11:28).

Charles Wesley, on admiring Mary, said,

*“Oh that I could forever sit like
Mary, at the master’s feet: be this my
happy choice: my only care, delight and
bliss, my joy, my heaven on earth be
this, to hear the bridegroom’s voice.”*

Mary chose a fuller appreciation of the necessity of mystic communion with her Lord. It can be mysterious now that Jesus is not physically present with us, but we spiritually sit down as his guests and listen to him. In my country, most Christian families have a plaque on their walls with the words “Jesus is the head of this family, the unseen guest at every meal, the silent listener to every conversation.” We believe in his presence always. He listens to us, and we too listen to him.

Setting clear priorities

Jesus required only a few preparations, which did not need to take Mary away from

listening. Jesus said to Martha, “*You are worried and upset about many things, one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better and it will never be taken away from her.*” The “better” thing is to be understood as the teaching of Jesus or perhaps the blessing of the kingdom to which it testified. The psalmist in Psalms 16:5 says “*The Lord is my chosen portion and my cup; you hold my lot.*” Mary sought more grace and closer communion with God and Christ. For this portion, Mary was willing to suspend all the earthly cares. Those who seek this portion will never be disappointed and the portion will never be taken away.



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Mary acknowledges Jesus by listening to his Word rather than by providing excessively for his needs. In the gospel according to John 6:27, Jesus said, “*Do not labour for the food that perishes, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the son of man will give you. For on him God the father has set his seal.*” It was her inheritance. The portion that Mary chose was substantial, satisfying, real and long lasting. It was her inalienable right and possession, guaranteed by Jesus not to be taken away either by Martha or anyone else. Jesus is helping Martha to see the priority of issues which are not too much the details of hospitality, rather to be at the feet of the guest. Jesus’ meaning is emphasized by Howard Marshall in his commentary on Luke.²

“The welcome that Jesus seeks is not epitomized in distracted, worrisome domestic performance, but in attending to his guest whose very presence is a disclosure of the divine plan.”

Martha’s failure to set priorities is contrasted with Mary’s better choice of listening. Martha is engaged in many things, yet Mary is focused on only one thing. It is important to make priorities clear. Paul in Philippians 3:13 said, “*Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do; forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ.*” Jesus told the rich young ruler, “*One thing you still lack. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven; and*

come and follow me” (Luke 18:22). The Bible insists that God does not use people with divided attention.

The Greek term that Jesus uses for anxious means to be unduly concerned. It often expresses a worldly attitude due to unbelief and which can divert a person’s attention away from the proper things of God. Paul uses the same word in 1 Cor.7:32-35: *“I want you to be free from anxieties. The unmarried man is anxious about the things of the Lord. But the married man is anxious about the worldly things, how to please his wife and his interests are divided. And the unmarried or betrothed woman is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to be holy in body and spirit. But the married woman is anxious about worldly things, how to please her husband. I say this for your own benefit, not to lay any restraint upon you, but to promote good order and to secure your undivided attention.”* Paul is addressing people about issues less important in the kingdom of God. Similarly, Jesus uses the same word in Luke 12:26 and in Matthew 6:25-34 in order to draw people’s attention to the kingdom of God. We can be in a mission field but ever anxious about what is going to happen the following day back at home. We need to be focused and let those that we visit and those that visit us know that our priority is to present Jesus to them. Hospitality, practiced with the right focus, becomes a priority not because it is your culture but because it is a way of reaching people with the gospel.

Action

If we listen and set priorities, we also need to act according to the word heard. For instance, James 1:22-25 insists we must not only be hearers but also doers of the Word. In

Luke’s Gospel, hearing God’s Word and acting on it is of primary importance. For example, in Luke 8:1-21, there are three illustrations all concerned with hearing and doing: the parable of the sower, the lamp on the stand, and Jesus’ mother and brothers. In each case, hearing and doing is very crucial. In our recently ended annual University mission, students listened attentively and responded to the message by standing up and confessing their faith in Jesus Christ. One student said, “When the altar call was made I walked outside. Later, I heard the voice of the preacher calling me back. I walked to the altar, threw down the ring and found freedom.” Jesus called the disciples to be with him, but also that he might send them out. When we sit at the feet of Jesus, we must also be available to be sent. Obedience to act is very crucial here. Those who sat at the feet of missionaries as *abasomi*, “learners,” in Buganda turned out to be missionaries in their own country and beyond. They witnessed painfully, some died as martyrs, while others remained prominent native evangelists. The call to discipleship is a call to be sent. How are we preparing people to be sent?

In our service to the Lord, the story cautions us not to be anxious and agitated and dissatisfied with our fellow Christians or with our master; we should not busy ourselves with outward things so that we neglect the quiet worship of the Lord. It is very important to have spiritual communion with the Redeemer. Jesus invites us to a life of worship as well as practical service.

Conclusion

As we conclude, three things are crucial. First we must know the focus of our hospitality. What do we want people to understand

and what is our intention of going out? This will help to bring people’s minds to the Word of God more than other things.

As we set this focus, we need to understand why people behave the way they do. Martha was doing the right thing according to the Jewish culture. Although Jesus speaks positively about service and encourages a servant heart, it must be prioritized correctly. Jesus helped Martha to understand that his Word takes precedence over other family issues. He recommended that one thing was more important, and that was and is listening to his Word.

Secondly, we need to make our priorities clear. When I go out to the mission field, am I going with a double mind or a mind set on winning souls for Christ? Mary had her priorities clear and no one destabilized her concentration. We need to know our portion in the kingdom of God. Jesus as a guest had his priorities clear. He was not shaken by Martha’s request.

Finally, as we listen and set priorities, we must act accordingly. We need to allow God to transform our cultures for the glory and honour of his name.

Questions for discussion

1. How would you want to be welcomed when you go out for mission?
2. What are some of the issues that distract us from listening to God or other people?
3. What are some of the cross-cultural issues that would prevent people from listening to the gospel?
How has the culture of hospitality in whatever society hindered the reception of the gospel?
4. How do we help people who want to fulfill every aspect of their culture at the expense of listening to the gospel?
5. As a missionary, what comments can you make about both Martha and Mary’s hospitality to Jesus? <<

Endnotes

- 1 Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997).
- 2 Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A commentary on the Greek text*, (Aberdeen: Paternoster, 1978).



Ideas are at the root of every culture shift, and ideas in their raw form come out of the university.

Women in Student Ministry

If we want the gospel's aroma to permeate cultures as we work to bring God glory in his world, then we dare not neglect the university. The ideas generated in the university and the relationships formed in its common rooms and societies create a powerful partnership, perhaps the most powerful in human terms, in a nation. The church down the road from the campus, even if it is just a few metres away, will find the university community impenetrable from the outside. Those best placed to shake salt and shine light there are its Christian faculty and students.

As Charles Malik, one-time General Secretary of the UN General Assembly observed, "Change the university and you change the world," while there are notable exceptions in modern history, those most likely to wield influence in government, education and industry are university graduates. Malik continued: "The church can render no greater service to itself or to the cause of the gospel than to try to recapture the universities for Christ."¹ How true.

The International Fellowship of Evangelical Students (IFES) was founded in 1947 to serve the Church in the student world. As an evangelical and interdenominational movement, its aim was, and is, to proclaim Christ in the world's universities. Its largest founding member was the China Inter-Varsity Fellowship in which some ten percent of all China's students were then to be found. Its ministry, now



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with self-governing affiliates in 152 nations, is focused among undergraduates.²

One of the long-held values in IFES is that students should lead their own groups on campus, and that students should share in strategic planning for the ministry at the national level. This is a simple extension of the principle of indigenous leadership. The staff of IFES national movements would better be described as team coaches than team captains.

A compelling defense

There are many glorious descriptions of the Lord Jesus in Scripture—reflecting his Person, his role in the Godhead, and his character. The one to which I find myself turning often is found in a clause in Colossians 2:3. Paul is yearning to convey more of the mystery of God and he turns to Christ as a visual aid, describing him as the One "in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." What a description!

Universities are the places where wisdom and knowledge are deemed to be sought and taught, yet the Son of God is held in derision in the Academy. He is the One in whom all things hold together, the binding force of the atom; the One in whom the world finds its coherence; indeed, nothing is true or has any meaning but for his authority. We must be jealous for his glory in the world's universities—and equip students to love and to fight for truth on their campuses. To me, this has been and remains a compelling defense of student ministry.

The role of women staff

Women have played a vital role in IFES movements since its earliest days, serving on staff and as graduate volunteers. In the fragile economies of Africa, South Asia and Latin America, these movements depend heavily on

volunteers, as there isn't sufficient funding for an adequate staff team.

Largely, the women staff do the same as their male colleagues: helping students to think strategically in program planning; training leaders; giving a measure of pastoral care, but always working to establish the students in a local church, where this is possible, for their ongoing pastoral support. The scope of student ministry is wide, and every gift the staff worker can offer is fully engaged.

Julia Cameron

It has been a privilege to meet many women who have given sacrificial years of service to IFES movements. Some have remained single; others have married. They have had to spend much time away from base. They have pressed often considerable abilities into this work, when their education and talents could have commanded a comfortable lifestyle. And they have exercised patience, grace, and more patience and grace, in serving a generation who often think they know better. Readers of this journal who have been students will recall the staff who served them in this way. The names of those staff are probably not widely known, and will be remembered only by the students they served and the fellow workers they served with. But they are known to Christ.

What makes a good staff worker?

Koichi Ohtawa, a doyen of student work in East Asia, once described ministry among students in a term borrowed from construction engineering. He likened it to "piling". This work is invisible once the building is completed, for it was done below ground. Yet the foundations of the building in the long-term are only as secure as the quality of the piling. It is slow work, gradual, unglamorous and messy. Yet the finished product could not stand without it. Every student worker knows the joy of

meeting a graduate ten or twenty years later and seeing that person standing firm, and with a growing maturity to their faith.

Patience and long-sightedness are critical for staff, but there are many aspects of serving students which give great joy at the time as well as afterwards. Students have energy, creativity, a wonderful humour and a keenness of mind. In some of the toughest contexts, students have shown courage which is truly humbling. I learned much from the students I served as undergraduates.

As I write, I picture the faces of several gracious women around the world, staff of student movements, who have inspired me, and who have pressed on in demanding circumstances, walking with students and young graduates through their trials.³ It is not uncommon for movements struggling financially to be months behind in their payment of staff. But for all the demands of long hours and weary, sometimes dangerous travel, serving in this way is counted as a high privilege.

The need for good women staff

The third of the UN Millennium Development Goals is “promoting gender equality to empower women.” This includes giving more educational opportunities to women who have been unfairly denied them in the past: at primary and secondary level, and at tertiary level. We are already seeing the early results, and in common with the other goals, the plan is to reach fulfilment in 2015. The aim is good and healthy, but as often happens in a fallen world, the reaction to what has evidently been degrading and unjust is an overreaction. So whereas we naturally welcome this concern because men and women are created equal in God’s image, we may sense unease about the implications of the way it is being addressed.

In several nations, women take up more than 50% of university places. It is likely that the imbalance will grow further. Secular feminists may say: “Well about time too. Now men will know what it’s like to be in the minority.” But that would be an ill-judged response for a Christian.

Across the former Communist bloc we see homes and families kept together by the women. It seems for some reason that they have been able to weather the Communist regime better than the men. In areas of high unemployment, the men’s morale is low and that can lead to severe alcoholism and drug

abuse. The women become the breadwinners and the decision-makers; the boys grow up with weak male role models; and history repeats itself in the next generation.

What has this got to do with women staff workers in IFES movements? I believe it places an unusual responsibility on them, and it means we need women with particular gifts for the role.

Male headship is not the subject of this article and much excellent material has already been written on it. But to give context to what follows, I quote briefly from the British pastor theologian John Stott. In his characteristic style, he goes to the kernel of an issue with an economy of words:

*"Since it is mainly on the facts of creation that Paul bases his case for the husband's headship (Eph 5:22f.), his argument has permanent and universal validity, and is not to be dismissed as culturally limited. The cultural elements of his teaching are to be found in the applications of the principle. But the man's (and especially the husband's) 'headship' is not a cultural application of a principle; it is the foundation principle itself. This is not chauvinism, but creationism. The new creation in Christ frees us from the distortion of relations between the sexes caused by the fall (e.g., Gen 3:16), but it establishes the original intention of the creation. It was to this 'beginning' that Jesus himself went back (e.g., Matt 19:4-6). He confirmed the teaching of Genesis 1 and 2. So must we. What creation established, no culture is able to destroy."*⁴

In late adolescence, male students are often diffident, so we need women staff who will help the female students to encourage the male students to accept leadership, and not discourage or intimidate them. This calls for women staff who are themselves confi-

dent in their womanhood and not desirous of aping a man’s role; women staff who will model that assurance to the women students and whose teaching on gender and family issues will help those students to encourage their husbands to take leadership in the home in years to come. This is what will bring change in the next generation.

In short, the nation, as well as the national Church, needs men who will lead. Shrewd secularists and evangelicals will share this perspective, from different starting points.

Some vignettes

A central feature of IFES ministry is anchoring in Scripture; staff nurture students in applying the Bible to their lives and in developing a biblical worldview as a lens through which to approach their academic studies. This is the sine qua non of staff work across the world. Students are also taught how to use the Bible in evangelism, for what better place could there be to encounter the living Christ than in the pages of his living Word? Ada Lum, of Chinese descent, grew up in a large immigrant family in Hawaii. She has often observed how her childhood equipped her for an itinerant life in which she could make herself at home in any circumstances. She joined the staff of the IFES movement in Hong Kong in 1962; from 1968-1977 she served movements across East Asia. This was a time of particular turbulence politically, and her Asian roots were of real benefit as she merged in rather than stood out. From 1977 she became an IFES Bible study trainer, with a global ministry of training in the personal study of Scripture, and training trainers. Ada never married, and now aged 80 has still not retired. Her writing and travels have left an indelible mark on many generations of students and staff across the world.



Chris Davies (1948-1992) was another whose contribution, while hidden from the world's eyes, has been of lasting significance. In the 1980s, having first served on the staff of the British IFES movement (UCCF), Chris began travelling into Hungary to re-pioneer the evangelical student ministry there. It was a secret work, and denied Chris the kind of support friends can give when ministry is spoken of freely. With her eye of faith she could see the time when Communism would collapse and she urged IFES to prepare for it. Students who became Christians would need books to read, and so a network of Christian publishers should be drawn together, ready to mobilize as soon as the time came. The Eastern Europe Literary Advisory Committee (EELAC) was formed in 1985 with the aim "to cultivate national authors and produce books of enduring worth," and now there are indigenous publishing houses in eight Eastern European countries including Russia, Hungary, Albania and Romania.⁶

Let me trace one single thread of Chris's influence, down through the Hungarian movement, MEKDSZ. Krisztina Tóth's faith was nurtured through the work of MEKDSZ in her university and when she graduated she joined its staff. She grew in her skills as a Bible teacher and in 2003 was invited to give the Bible expositions at a student conference in the Caucasus. I include her account of that experience. It brought tears to my eyes when I first read it.⁷

"When you've been in IFES as long as I have, you expect people to spend their 'quiet time' alone and quietly before God. I'd been asked to prepare questions for the students to have their own quiet times following the Bible teaching. But I began to wonder why.

Most of us stayed near the stove, as it was very cold in the building. The noise level didn't drop. It seemed these students had no idea of personal study or prayer. Had they been listening? Did they want to grow spiritually? I felt discouraged.

Then I started to watch. I didn't understand what they were saying, but suddenly I realised the 'older' Christians (who had been converted a year or so) were explaining things to those who came to faith just weeks—or days—before!

They showed them how to approach a book of the Bible they had never read before; how to apply it to their own lives; how to pray in the light of what they had just read—what 'quiet time' really means.

As the week went on, I saw more and more clearly that they are learning to understand Paul's words better than I do: to share with him

in his sufferings, and not to be ashamed of the gospel. They were beginning to see that following Christ would not make them popular, maybe not even accepted; possibly despised.

As the 'quiet time' finished I sensed that the quiet place where the Lord speaks—in me and in them—had grown a little. I'm starting to understand why there's a celebration in heaven."

We have greater opportunity for the gospel in more countries in the world than the Church has ever had before. To invest in the lives of first-generation new Christians, students who are themselves already investing in the lives of other students, younger in the faith, is an urgent privilege. This encapsulates much of what is happening week by week in IFES movements around the world.

Now to briefly glimpse another aspect of women's ministry: corruption in universities has reached a new low in many parts of Africa and Latin America, where male students are required to pay a bribe to graduate, and female students to grant their lecturer sexual favours. The IFES movement in the Democratic Republic of Congo (GBU) urges Christian women not to give in and has been active in drawing public attention to this horrific scandal and lobbying the government to act. Families have often sacrificed dearly for children to have education. The women feel themselves in debt to their families and would feel shame in leaving without a degree; now they are subject to this degradation. In the University of Kinshasa alone, some twenty staff die of AIDS in a year and many more are HIV positive. Further agony is awaiting thousands of families in years to come.

Women students here, as in a growing number of countries, often resort to prostitution to pay their fees. Women friends of the GBU have formed a ministry "Mamans GBU" to teach women students—Christians and others—how to cook and sew to enable them to fund themselves through their studies. The need for godly women to serve these students has never been higher. God is giving us such women and I wish there were space to tell more of their stories.

Students and world mission—how they fit together

We have already seen the link between the university and world evangelization. I close with a more specific reference, linking IFES movements and mission agencies. Students and world evangelization just can't be pulled apart.

All IFES movements share the same three aims: (i) equipping students for evangelism

on campus: (ii) nurturing the spiritual growth of members; and (iii) helping students to grasp their place in world mission, whether as supporters or as cross-cultural workers. Thousands of missionaries have sensed their call into mission at student conventions. So, IFES movements feed workers to agencies. But the traffic is not one-way.

The synergy between mission, campus ministry and the building of the Church in the countries where missionaries serve is all bound together. If we are to see an effective bridgehead for the gospel in the Muslim world, the Buddhist world and the post-Christian West, we need salt to be shaken and light to be shone in the places of economic influence, in the fields of education, industry and foreign policy. The church will be established by strong partnerships of preachers and teachers, with evangelists in the workplace and those who can stem the tide of corruption in high places. This brings us back to the central place of the university in a nation's life and thought.

May God give us a new generation of able and gifted women to serve students; and please God may our student groups produce Deborahs and Lydias alongside Josephs and Daniels. <<

Endnotes

- 1 A Christian Critique of the University, Waterloo lectures, 1981. My quotations do not do justice to his treatment of the influence of the university. His central question, which reappears like a Greek chorus throughout the lectures, is 'What does Jesus Christ think of the university?'
- 2 In several countries, IFES national affiliates have extended their work among graduates and in the professions. Not all 152 nations have joined the global Fellowship formally. In some countries it is wiser to remain unaffiliated formally for political reasons; in others the movement is still very new, and in the process of developing its infrastructure under a national board, in preparation for affiliation. IFES staff serve all movements in the same way.
- 3 See Vivienne Stacey, Mission Ventured (IVP, 2001) for the stories of eight women who gave decades to student ministry. Many more could be recorded. The stories are not only a part of IFES history, but they are in a real sense part of 20th and 21st Century Church history.
- 4 John Stott, The Message of Ephesians, Bible Speaks Today Series, (Leicester: IVP, 1979), p 221. He cites veiling and keeping silence as cultural applications of the principle.
- 5 For further stories and background on IFES student ministry, see Lindsay Brown, Shining Like Stars, (IVP, 2006).
- 6 See Publish and be blessed! In IFES Special Report, Vol. 2 Issue 5, for a brief synopsis of IFES-linked publishing houses. The first was Inter-Varsity Press, founded by the British movement (then known as Inter-Varsity Fellowship) in 1936. It now has sister publishing houses in 33 nations, serving much of the world.
- 7 See Shining like Stars, p 148.

Whatever happened to all the men?

Reflections on gender imbalance in East Asian churches

Gender imbalance in the church – a problem encountered in East Asia

For a long time, the gender imbalance of the East Asian churches has been a matter of some concern. Mission leaders used to write to mobilisers telling them to stop recruiting single ladies as if it were their fault that the men were not being reached, as if we should stop reaching Asian women for Christ to solve this serious problem. Gender imbalance in its extreme form in East Asian churches causes suffering for Christian women. How is support being provided? It also challenges the way both missionaries and local believers have sought to reach men, the theological and missiological principles that define the way we work. This article is a plea for new biblical strategies that might, under God, improve the situation.

Korea

Some years ago, I was conducting a preaching seminar for pastors in Seoul, Korea. After one of the workshops, a group of pastors approached me with a problem. Some of the teaching of the New Testament (they said) was inappropriate for the Korean Church and could not be expounded to their congregations. One such passage was 2 Corinthians 6:14ff, normally interpreted, *inter alia*, to mean that Christians should not marry unbelievers. In Korea, I was told, there are many more Christian women than Christian men.¹ I sug-

gested that this was common in many parts of the world. But they claimed that in Korean society there is no place and no provision for the elderly single woman. I realised that the gender imbalance in the church was creating serious problems for women believers. I believed, and still do believe, that the pastors there should expound 2 Corinthians 6, precisely because it is part of God's Word. But the implications for the social welfare of the church are serious. If Christian women are not to marry unbelievers, then the church family should provide for their needs in old age. I do not know whether such provision is now available, or whether many Korean women still solve the problem by marrying unbelievers.

Mongolia

On my first visit to Mongolia, I was taken to a little church in a mining town. The building was fragile, but largely full of young worshippers. The pastor was a keen young man still completing his Bible College training. But there were remarkably few men in the congregation. On the bus journey back to Ulaan Baator, I prayed with the pastor. He had a remarkable missionary vision – for Kasaks, Russians, Muslims and Buddhists.

In October 2005, I returned and, to my amazement, bumped into the same pastor in the Bible College in Ulaan Baator. He is now a governor of the college. Again we prayed together, rejoicing that now six Kasaks in the town were believing. But this time his urgent prayer request was that he and his contemporaries would learn how to reach men for Christ. I was told that the cost of discipleship for young Mongolian women was stark: were

they prepared to stay single for the rest of their lives? 80% of the Mongolian church is female.

Some of course marry unbelievers out of ignorance of the Scriptures, out of desperation, out of preference, or out of a vain hope that this is the way to convert men. In fact, some of my British prayer partners have suggested a strategy of evangelistic marriages! While the Lord has been merciful to some, I have met many miserable Asian Christian women who have lived to regret their marriage to an unbelieving man.²

Dick Dowsett

China

Recently, in Durham, England, I met a bright Christian intellectual woman from China. She was anxious about her future in China because of the serious gender imbalance in the churches there – generally reckoned to be 80% female.³ “Who will we women marry if the men are not reached for Christ?” she asked. She was young enough to joke about it, but it clearly troubled her deeply.

2 Rebecca Lewis, *op cit*, argues that “One of the ways early believing women spread the church was by marrying non-Christian men.” But her use of 1 Peter 3:1-2 and 1 Corinthians 7:13-14 to support this is unconvincing since the texts more obviously refer to women converted after marriage. Lewis does not however recommend the practice as a church planting strategy!

3 David Aikman, *Jesus in Beijing: How Christianity is Transforming China and Changing the Global Balance of Power*, (Washington DC: Regnery Publishing, Inc., 2003), p 98. “No one from any quarter, official or unofficial, disputed the eighty per cent figure I was given.”

1 Korea's churches are 70% female. Rebecca Lewis, “Underground Church Movements: The Surprising Role of Women's Network,” *International Journal of Frontier Missions*, 21:4 Winter 2004.

A couple of years ago, I visited a friendly house church in a Chinese city, and was told to preach by the woman leading it. They were surprisingly responsive to this foreign preacher. Their questions were not the usual ones about the different life in the West, but urgent ones about living for Christ in their city. One woman began the questioning, angry with God because, following the death of one of her parents, her boyfriend had ended their relationship. It took much longer for the men in the congregation to open up at all. The next day I was asked to return to what turned out to be a women's meeting. Their leaders urged me to pray for the men: that they would take discipleship more seriously and that they would share in the leadership of the work of the church.⁴ They were relieved to bring this burden out into the open and pray about it. To my embarrassment, they wept when I left.

I did meet some fine Christian men in that city and plenty of male students and academics that were prepared to discuss the gospel and learn about the Christian faith. But the majority of those deeply committed to outreach were the women. Their standard of daring commitment was a challenge to me. Many of the Christian men seemed content to let them get on with it. But the women long for partnership in ministry: men and women working together with a shared commitment to the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

An elderly woman in Beijing once asked me "How should a woman submit to her husband if he asks her to do really stupid things?" We had fun exploring the apposite teaching of 1 Peter 3. The Scripture recognises that it may often be the case that only one of a married couple is converted. It faces the problems of divided loyalties when only one of the two responds to the gospel. But when the gender imbalance in the church is extreme, the problem is more widespread.

Japan

Occasionally, on my visits to Japan, I have met the husband of a believing woman who has been prepared to consider the gospel. I cannot remember ever having met a man whose wife was not yet converted. Prayer

4 Aikman, *op cit.*, believes that "the eighty percent female composition of China's Christian community as a whole is not reflected at the leadership level of the house churches." My impression is that while the leadership is often male, most of the work is done by the women!

letters are full of stories of women whose husbands have forbidden them to be baptised or to attend Christian meetings. But the majority of interested contacts in most reports are housewives.

Summary

In my limited experience, the gender imbalance in the churches of Mongolia, China and Japan, and possibly even Korea, increases the pressure on Christian women – marital stress, economic insecurity, spiritual loneliness and leadership burden. It also creates an extra barrier for younger women considering Christian commitment.

Questions needing research about support networks for Christian women

There are a number of questions that need to be answered.

1. Is there provision of care and finance in the East Asian churches for elderly single women? What is needed? Where is this most important?
2. Is there emotional support for young women with little prospect of marriage? How should this be given? For example, should we have the evangelical equivalent of nunneries (intentional religious communities for women), occasionally found in Europe, affirming the values of the single life for ministry to the church and to society?
3. Do the women who provide so much of the teaching and leadership in the churches feel affirmed in that ministry? Or do they have to bear the additional burden of beliefs that men would be better or even that women should not minister in gender-mixed congregations? Are they made to feel that their work is just a necessary evil rather than something the Lord values and upholds? Do the ministering women need better theological affirmation of their role?⁵
4. What sort of networks are in place to help converted women in their discipleship and in being good wives to unbelieving husbands? Where do they go for help when the pressures are too great for them to carry alone?

5 See for example Loren Cunningham and David Joel Hamilton with Janice Rogers, *Why Not Women? A Fresh Look at Scripture on Women in Missions, Ministry, and Leadership*, (YWAM Publishing: Seattle, 2000).

Questions about the Christian failure to reach East Asian men

Even in areas of huge responsiveness that some would call revival, like China and Korea, fewer men respond to the gospel. This raises questions about the nature of our gospel, the church culture and lifestyle, missionary penetration of the male world, the role of women in church and mission, and the priorities of the church and missions community.

1. The nature of our gospel

Some years ago Lish Eves, formerly working with OMF in Indonesia and subsequent missiologist at the London Bible College (now London School of Theology), introduced me to the concept of a female gospel. Although such a concept is open to serious criticism as sexist, I think it is worth raising. She argued that a need-orientated evangelism rarely reached any except weak and vulnerable males and that tough talk about the lordship of Christ and judgment was more likely to break through the macho shell of self-sufficiency. She argued that in many societies women are more used to admitting need and interdependence. So the need orientated "feminine gospel" drew out a response. Gender generalisations are relatively unreliable: the Bible makes far fewer than most societies do. But most cultures have gender stereotypes that are more or less normative for their people. In this respect, we need to ask whether our gospel presentations are properly contextualised for East Asian males. What is their religious starting point – their "altar to an unknown god"? Is it different from the East Asian women's starting point?⁶

Those who find the concept of male and female gospel presentations objectionable might perhaps consider the difference between a gospel for the exploited⁷ and a

6 Rebecca Lewis *op cit.* suggests that "In Korea and China, as well as in the Muslim world, women have traditionally practiced a much more animistic or folk version of the official religion." As such they are more likely to be searching for spiritual power.

7 Louise Edwards, "Women in the People's Republic of China: New challenges to the grand gender narrative," in Louise Edwards and Mina Roces, *Women in Asia: Tradition, Modernity and Globalisation*, (The University of Michigan Press: Ann Arbor, 2000). While many suppose that the traditional chauvinism of Chinese society was eradicated by Chinese communism, Edwards writes that it did "not necessarily equate to an improvement in women's status in the country. Indeed, the increasing diversity in economic and political power characteristic of the period has clearly widened the

gospel for exploiters. In John 4, Jesus brought the good news to a Samaritan woman. Although many preachers wax eloquent about her sexual sins, we are actually simply told that five men had had her and that her present partner had not made the marriage commitment to her. She, like the women in James Bond movies, had been used and discarded like a Kleenex tissue. Jesus did not criticise her lifestyle. Rather, he gently offered her living water, the sort of fulfilment that could never be found in a relationship with a sinful man. In contrast, in John 3, Jesus was far more confrontational with Nicodemus. If he were not born again, he could not begin to understand the kingdom of God let alone enter it. This was blunt talk to a teacher of Israel – someone who normally reckoned that he knew all the right answers. In Mark 10, the much loved rich young ruler was also confronted with a demanding challenge. He was ordered to leave Mammon, learn generosity, and follow Jesus. Self-made men were not offered a “what is your problem, come to Jesus” gospel by the Saviour.

Modern evangelism too often has a “one size fits all” approach. Some contemporary models are more confrontational about sin and repentance.⁸ But it may be fairly questioned whether even these begin where East Asian men are, or whether they are flexible enough to respond to the variety of individuals.

2. Church culture

Churches evolve their own culture and acceptable lifestyle. This may, or may not be biblical, but it becomes part of the cost for new believers joining the church and becoming part of the community of faith.

Mongolia

When I visited the church in a Mongolian mining village, the father of a Bible College student did not attend. He was a believer, and when we visited him in his ger, we learnt that he had a daily quiet time, reading his Bible and talking to the Lord. But he had not been to church for a long time,

gap between men and women's opportunities and expectations across a number of spheres”, p 81.

8 Since the mid-20th Century, various ABCs of salvation have been devised in the West: the Navigators' “Bridge”, Campus Crusade for Christ's “Four Spiritual Laws” and, with more emphasis on sin and judgment, “Two Ways to Live”. Though useful outlines for those learning to share the gospel, none of them starts from the worldview of the East Asian male.

leaving visitors with the impression that the Christian faith was for young women, not older men. After a while, during our visit, he excused himself for ten minutes, and my colleague realised why he no longer attended church. He was a smoker. And missionaries taught that converted people do not smoke cigarettes. Indeed, some missionaries forbade smokers from attending church, doubting that such people could be converted. Obviously, they had never encountered Dutch, Scandinavian and Indonesian chain-smoking saints. Personally, I dislike the smoking habit and believe it to be unhealthy. But it is not as dangerous as pride or gossip, lust or materialism. The Bible is clear on those issues. They are evil, and yet no one is kept out of church because they struggle with such sins. So my question is this: do the “thou shalt nots” of the church make unnecessary, or even unbiblical barriers to male discipleship?

Japan

The same issue has long worried me in Japan. Many Japanese businessmen tell you that they admire Christianity but they could never live it. I have long suspected that it is because they assume that as Christians they would have to abstain from alcohol completely, and they cannot see how to do that at times when the boss offers them a drink. There are painfully few businessmen in Japanese churches. One church I know is an exception. It does not teach mandatory total abstinence because the pastor does not believe that is biblical! After a visit to Germany and Holland where he met wine and beer drinking godly pastors, he re-examined the Scriptures and decided that he should now teach that it is wrong to get drunk or to force others to drink, and that all other rules in this matter are optional. The church has seen an unusual response among businessmen who, as believers, resolve to enjoy a drink where appropriate, but, in the power of Christ, not to get drunk. They have similarly seen a good response amongst teenage males since they decided that dyed hair and earrings were not serious issues for Christian discipleship.⁹

In writing this, I recognise that alcoholism is a terrible problem in both Japan and Mongolia, that smoking is a foul and unhealthy habit, and that teenage fashions

9 Katsumi Takagi of World Vision, Japan in an unpublished letter.

may create barriers with adult society. But I still wish to raise this issue: does church culture and lifestyle make it unnecessarily difficult for normal males to belong? Is the “holiness” that is taught biblical in its priorities, or is it “straining at gnats and swallowing camels” with man-made rules that exclude mainstream males?

3. Penetration of male society

Sometimes the problem of unreached people is a problem of missionary penetration of that society.

Japan

Recently some short-term workers in Japan have questioned how far male church-planters in Japan have penetrated male society there.¹⁰ Members of my mission receive a remittance. That means that they are released from the need to engage in other work in order to be full-time in the ministry of the Word. But this very lifestyle substantially cuts them off from Japanese male society. Men leave the housing area early in the morning to go to their companies. They return late at night since the day's work is often followed by almost compulsory time in the company club with their boss. If men are in management, they spend weekends visiting workers who are sick or bereaved or celebrating the birth of a child. The company absorbs an enormous amount of time. The missionary has no place in the company. He remains at home, like a housewife. And missionary letters are filled with news of male missionaries preaching at ladies' cookery classes. Occasionally men are reached, but they are usually the self-employed or those who are mentally or physically sick. These people all need to be reached and I rejoice that they are. But the mainstream males are not reached.

This challenges our concept of the ministry. Either men do it full-time or they do it in their spare time. But the main sphere of ministry and mission for most people should be at their workplace, integrated into their patterns of work. Do we not need a strategy of placing Christians in the male workplace as workers? There they should model Christian discipleship and teach it appropriately. I do not see such a role as replacing that of the full-time Bible teacher, but as working alongside it. If the male missionary model

10 From a discussion with staff workers and relay workers of Universities and Colleges Christian Fellowship at their annual leadership forum, 2004.

of Christianity looks rather like a Japanese housewife, we cannot expect males to be drawn in. Their wives, however, will find a faith that fits with staying at home and is good for them. Should mission agencies appoint a liaison officer with Japanese companies, and with schools and colleges that want to employ foreign workers? Maybe we should also explore openings in multi-national companies where most of the workforce is Japanese.

I am unsure what ways have been tried to build bridges into Japanese male society. A Jesuit ran an evangelistic whiskey bar!¹¹ I would not particularly recommend such a strategy. Sports ministry has built some bridges. The problem is not during the game but afterwards when drunkenness and visits to brothels are common, according to a Japanese rugby playing friend. Work with street dancers of Japan's counter-culture has been effective. It does not, however, give an answer for reaching main-stream males. We must continue to look for ways to belong where they belong, sharing in everything possible except sin.

China and Germany

In China, however, most Christian expatriates are employed, many as English teachers, and some in companies. But the problem of our failure to reach many men remains. A Chinese entrepreneur has formed a gathering for senior businessmen: a safe place for them to admit their needs and concerns. Others are working on sports ministry, building on the popularity of soccer. I recently raised this problem in Germany with male theological students who were preparing for Christian ministry. On a summer seaside mission they had spent most of their time chatting evangelistically with girls. With some embarrassment, they confessed they found that easier than trying to persuade men to commit themselves to Christ. Are we ourselves less than convinced that church is a suitable place for men? Is our gospel presentation so far removed from normal male chat that we are uncomfortable raising it?

4. The role of women in the problem

At one point in OMF history, it was seriously suggested that we should tackle the problem of gender imbalance by accepting

fewer women missionaries.¹² This was scandalous on two counts. It is immoral to argue that we should solve the problem by reaching fewer women. The speediest evangelisation of East Asia's millions means just that – the more women who are converted the better! It is also erroneous to suggest that men are more effective than women at reaching men. In a faith that began with women persuading men that Jesus had risen, this is outrageous.



Dick Dowsett became an OMF International missionary in 1968, initially working with students in the Philippines. For many years he has had an international Bible teaching ministry, and remains passionate about mobilizing for mission, discipling students, and making Asian friends.

However, in the last twenty years, there has been evidence within some agencies of pressure on many women to restrict their ministry to their own gender. This has arisen as Christians who believe that 1 Timothy 2:12 forbids women from ministering to men have become more aggressive in seeking to impose their point of view. In China, many of the most effective missionaries in discipling, training, mobilising and mentoring men were women. They were less threatening in nurturing male leadership development.¹³ They were acceptably direct in their evangelism. At present, in some areas, OMF has released women into a wide ministry among both sexes. The Indonesian synods to which some of our women have been seconded have been particularly good in this respect too. But there is increasing pressure in some places, from

¹² I received memos to this effect from some OMF field leaders in the early 1980s.

¹³ Valerie Griffiths, *Not Less than Everything. The courageous women who carried the Christian gospel to China*, (Oxford & Grand Rapids: Monarch Books, 2004), p 322.

some supporting churches and from other workers, to restrict women's ministry. There is no evidence that such restrictions have increased the outreach to men! OMF/CIM's tradition has been to release women for wide ministry. Perhaps this needs to be reaffirmed, for it has good theological foundations, even if there are some evangelicals who are unaware of that. If we are to reach the whole of East Asian society, we should not restrict the ministry of anyone who is both called and gifted for the task.

5. The focus of our ministry

Finally, we need to re-examine the focus of our ministry. When I went to the Philippines, it was to be seconded to student ministry. Older missionaries told me that such ministry did not build churches and that OMF was a church-planting mission. That was wrong. Today many of the best Bible teachers there came out of that student work. Leaders in Muslim outreach and in overseas mission were also nurtured through student ministry. Yet still the cry goes up: "We are a church-planting mission. We should not put people into student work." In some countries, our student workers have been under pressure to major in church-planting. But when is the best time to reach men for Christ? According to a Japanese pastor in Hirosaki, not himself a university graduate, the only time that male Japanese have space to learn about the Christian faith is when they are students. As high school pupils they are endlessly cramming; as company employees they work long hours. But students have time. Far from seeing student work as a threat to church planting, we should see it as a special opportunity for reaching men (and women for that matter) for Christ. Students have been so responsive in China that the government has attempted to ban campus ministry.¹⁴ This is the age group where men respond.

We need to watch out lest doctrinaire mission theory restricts our opportunity to reach men for Christ. The prejudice against student ministry is but one example.

Conclusion

I do not believe there is a simple solution to the problem of serious gender imbalance.

¹¹ Featured in the BBC series, "Missionaries" by Julian Pettifer.

¹⁴ For example, legislation forbidding Christian activities on university campuses was published in October 2004.

ance in the East Asian churches. But I am persuaded that we could do better if we address the issues contained in this paper. These include our theology of the gospel, our concept of holiness, our models of mission, our attitude to women in ministry and the foci of our work. Someone suggested to me that God in his sovereignty has chosen to have a church in East Asia that is predominately female. I do not believe it is his will that women should be harassed with the problems arising from our failure to reach men. And I cannot accept that we can use the doctrine of election to escape our responsibility to do a better job. <<

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Perhaps more worrying than the numbers is the quality of the men we are reaching. Not only are most male converts seen to be 'wimpish', with some sterling exceptions, they are usually not the type who would exercise leadership and exert influence even in the larger society. In contrast, most women converts tend to be high quality, reached and nurtured by strong women. There tends to be a strong outreach and discipling tradition among the women, but not an equally strong tradition among men. The result is a good deal of gender imbalance. This is particularly hard for high-calibre women who have enormous gifts for ministry yet are constrained within theological dogmas of male dominance to make way for men who can hardly hold a candle to them.

Melba Maggay, Philippines

This article is a reflection of one of the members of the Global Membercare Network, replacing the usual report, on the topic of this issue on Women in Mission.

Leaders and Women in Mission

How do women in missions think about their leaders? What kind of relationship usually exists between leaders and the women under their supervision? How can leaders serve their female workers? What can those women do for themselves? In this article I will describe the different kinds of women workers to be found on mission teams and the challenges they present for their supervisor. I will also illustrate what one woman did to become a productive, thriving contributor, even serving in leadership herself. Finally, I will offer some ideas to both leaders and women.

Married women are usually busy caring for their home, their family, their husband. They may be social and want time to interact with other wives. Some married women are partners with their husband in the work of ministry, but it is usually the husband who speaks in public, gives reports and answers questions about the program. Some wives have not experienced a call and find foreign living intolerable; they want to go home—wherever home is. Some married women only exist, many of them depressed and depending on medications for survival.

There are productive and committed married women who want to be fully involved in the ministry and they expect to (or hope to) have the appropriate reporting relationship with their leader. Sometimes, though, such women are married to insecure men who can't tolerate having their spouse carrying an equal role or earn equal recogni-

tion. A husband like this cannot allow his wife to participate in recognition-yielding work, let alone allow her to train for leadership. Perhaps this husband won't allow his wife to work in an area except one where he is the leader. Or maybe the husband is willing for her to be involved in preparation for leadership or a consultant role, and their supervisor refuses to deal with the woman as a competent colleague.

Then there are single women, many of them. Each one joined the mission organization because of a personal call, with the desire to engage fully in the work, and with access to the leader. Some of these women are sturdy and secure, able to speak for themselves, and can approach a leader without fear. Some single women have come from abusive backgrounds and continue to harbor a mistrust or fear of both leaders and men.

Some leaders head very conservative organizations that believe all leadership positions should be filled by men, even to the point where women must not speak or express their opinion. Imagine the dismay of a competent woman in such a setting!

How can a leader, male or female, understand this array of difference in the female membership? How can this leader encourage the producers, identify and strengthen the fearful, support the timid and bring healing to the wounded woman? How can he or she strengthen marriages and bring both members of the marriage to a place of mutual freedom, mutual involvement, and mutual con-

tribution? Is that even possible? What would a marriage look like that allowed a leader to treat husband and wife as separate and equal colleagues?

These are the kinds of women workers on most mission teams and the challenges they present for their supervisor. Now let's look at:

the perspective of women looking at leaders and leadership

Suppose a woman has gifts of administration and leadership, has the respect and appreciation of colleagues, and years to be involved at influential levels. However, she's married and has four small children. Fifteen years pass; the children are gone. She has spent these years raising her family, and now feels lost, out of date, ill equipped for any role. How can she become current on management matters, or administration issues and leadership skills?

Let me tell you of one young woman's journey. She grew up as an MK. Her parents gave her many responsibilities early in life which contributed to her confidence as a young adult. Her competencies showed up early in her linguistic skill as expressed in language-learning. By the time she returned to her sending country for higher education, she spoke three languages fluently and was at home anywhere. She finished college with honors, married a fine man who was also headed toward missions, and they accepted a field assignment in the land where she grew up. God gave this family four children, all of whom have completed college with distinction; of the four, two are moving into missions. Both husband and wife had significant administrative responsibilities which they accomplished well in addition to translating two New Testaments, the Jesus film, the Luke video and other supporting materials for these books. The husband completed a Ph.D. during a study furlough, and the wife some-

Dr. Laura Mae Gardner has served broadly in missions, first as translator of an unwritten language, then as counselor and director of Wycliffe's Counseling Department, as developer of Member Care, and finally as International Vice President for Personnel. Gardner's current role is International Personnel Consultant and Trainer. In all these roles, she worked alongside her husband, one of those secure men who cheered his wife on, supporting and encouraging her.

how found time to complete a Masters when their youngest was finishing high school. Now that all four children are well launched and the husband's leadership responsibilities are over, the wife has begun a Ph.D. program with her husband's full support and blessing.

Laura Mae Gardner

Why did this woman thrive in her missions tasks?

What made marriage and missions work for this couple?

Are there some lessons to be learned from the way they approached life?

I think so.

First, both the husband and the wife were secure in themselves. Each supported the other fully, without competition, without threat. Each allowed the other to be competent and each enjoyed and celebrated the other's successes. The husband had more confidence in his wife's abilities than she did and often encouraged her to take on new challenges. In the language work they shared responsibilities. He helped with childcare and home-schooling children so she could have continued involvement in language work. They looked for ways to complement each other's strengths and accepted each other's weaknesses. They were intentional at not criticizing but would find ways to talk about differences of opinions. God gave them humility to do this.

Secondly, both husband and wife honored the responsibilities that come with children; they loved their children and enjoyed the role of parents. They nurtured their children and did not expect these young adults to be like them but encouraged the individual bent of each child.

Thirdly, both husband and wife were deeply and strongly godly, nourishing their own spiritual life as well as that of their children. When the wife sent their small children off to childcare during a study assignment, she tucked Scripture verses in their pockets—and the childcare workers were blessed and challenged! This couple never had high support, but their trust in God to provide was honored. One day the family car needed new tires and there was no money. The wife gathered up the dry gourds in their yard and took as many as she could carry to a nearby market—and sold enough to buy four new tires for the car!

Fourth, the wife took initiative, took advantage of every opportunity to learn, to grow, to meet people, and to build connections and networks. She accepted responsibilities and said "yes" when asked to take some new role. She watched and learned from people she admired who were more mature and experienced.

This friend asked that I include the following:

"I only hope that you could somehow mention that any good that people see in my life is all due to God's goodness and love and blessing, and that I love Him with all my heart, soul, and mind, and my passion is to honor Him in everything I do and say for as long as each day He has planned for me on this earth."

What role did leaders play in the life of this couple? Early during training, the wife was told that the language staff had determined she had the capability to do an MA program and that she should keep that in mind. Twenty-five years later she went back to school—due in large part to her husband's encouragement and enthusiasm (and cheered on by her children!). Two entity leaders asked for her help and input when her children were still young—a confidence-building experience. At another point, an entity director asked her to be part of an important committee, whose decisions and actions still affect that group today. This invitation and subsequent experience was a huge boost to her. She felt she was finally seen by leadership as a fully competent member of that group, not "just" a mother and wife. Later, when a supervisor asked her to run a workshop, that person gave her permission to attempt something new and different, which is today not only working well in this entity, but is moving beyond that country. Those "votes of confidence" resulted in freedom for this woman to develop her competencies far beyond what she would have dreamed possible. Obviously, their leaders were fully supportive of this productive, cooperative team. And most leaders will be lenient and welcoming to new ideas when these ideas come from credible people.

However, probably not many field teams are as energetically contributory as this couple.

So, what can leaders do to carry out their responsibilities to the women under their care, women who are in unhappy marriages, or in restrictive marriages, or who are unchallenged in their assignment? Or women who are single and struggling?

I suggest that leaders should:

1. Pay attention to all their workers, whatever their gender, status, assignment, or location.
2. Be observant to nonverbal messages. People seldom lie with their bodies or their eyes. "Listen, or thy tongue will keep thee deaf" (Native American Proverb).
3. Be available and approachable. If a member wants to talk with you, consider this a high priority and take time to listen deeply.
4. Take initiative; invite people to try new things; welcome the quiet person on a committee or task force. Don't stereotype people. Just because a woman is a good secretary doesn't mean she is limited to those skills. And just because a woman is married with children doesn't mean she can't do something else.

What about a woman? Are there things an individual woman, married, widowed or single, can do to express herself and fulfill the giftedness God has placed in each person?

I think so. I suggest:

1. For married women, make your marriage and the raising of whatever children God sends you a happy responsibility. You will not always be changing diapers or overseeing homework. These little people will soon be adults. What kind of vision are you giving them for life? Your husband will, Lord permitting, be your one and only, with whom you will someday grow old. What kind of old folks do you want to be?
2. For single women, recognize the freedoms you have in your single state. You might take leadership or teaching roles that demand more time than a woman with small children can manage. You could bless and encourage colleagues through gifts of kindness, perhaps taking a turn at being auntie to someone else's children, or extending hospitality. And remember that just because the Lord has called you to singleness at this point in time, you may marry at a later point. I recognize, of course, that a single person doesn't have more time than a married woman. It just appears that way to a married, harried woman with a number of children.

3. Read! Keep a book in the bathroom, in your purse, wherever you are. Mark your books; listen to what others are reading. Pay attention when wise people talk.

"I am often the only woman in a committee with decision-making powers. I find that my opinions are not taken seriously. This undermines my confidence. The way meetings are run does not encourage my participation and stifles my creativity."

A Malaysian missionary

4. Know yourself. Take whatever self assessment instruments you can to discover your strengths and weaknesses. Invite feedback from people around you so you become accurately aware of your impact on others. Find out what your weaknesses are, own them, and work on them. Take advantage of opportunities to develop and utilize your strengths. Celebrate these strengths and use them for the benefit of others. Develop an attitude of gratitude. Learn to laugh at yourself and with others.
5. Develop a growth plan, one that includes mentors, coaches, prayer partners, advisors, and practical steps to reach a goal.
6. Watch people! Why is it that a group listens to one person and not another? What did that person do to achieve the goals he or she has obviously reached?
7. Be willing to pay the price. Sometimes women complain that they are not given leadership roles, but have they done the work of preparing themselves for such a role? Have they been faithful at their current task and have they developed credibility within their sphere of relationships? Responsibility and leadership will not be given to those who are unwilling to work hard or who have not earned credibility with others.

Women have a right to thrive in their missions calling. In order for them to thrive, both women and their leaders have a responsibility. The leaders are charged to "tend the flock of God" (I Peter 5:2) and women have a responsibility to be faithful stewards (I Cor. 4:2). One of the gifts they steward is their own giftedness in the context of their family setting. <<



The Christian church is notorious for its pendulum shifts. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, liberals began to emphasise the humanness of Christ. They focused on presenting the life of Christ and its example as the main challenges of the gospel. Evangelicals reacted by emphasising the atoning work of Christ (especially as explained by Paul) in their evangelism, almost to the exclusion of the life of Christ. The result was that the liberals concentrated on good deeds, especially expressed in social concern, and the Evangelicals on saving souls as the main feature of Christian mission.

Holistic Thinking and the Priority of Evangelism

Ajith Fernando

EVANGELICALS REDISCOVER THE WHOLE GOSPEL

Around the middle of the last century, Evangelicals realised that they were not presenting the whole biblical gospel and they began to include social concern as part of their agenda. Theologian Carl F. H. Henry's *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Day Fundamentalism*¹ was a clarion call to Evangelicals to return to this emphasis, which actually had played an important role in earlier Evangelical history.² The Lausanne Covenant of 1974 was a landmark document that advocated what began to be known as "the whole gospel"—where social concern was presented as an element of the mission of the church. I was one of the many Evangelicals greatly encouraged by this development.

One of the results of this trend was that Evangelicals gave greater weight than before to the Gospels when formulating their doctrine and understanding of the gospel. They rediscovered the vital teaching of the kingdom of God and realised that it

has some implications for our life in society. Theonomists (or Reconstructionists) began to call for a theocracy where the nation's life was fashioned by the laws in the Old and New Testaments. Others identified the right wing political agenda as the Christian agenda and advocated that agenda with the same authority and urgency that they advocated gospel truth. Still others within the Evangelical fold saw that the social teachings in the Bible demanded a greater solidarity with the poor and they began to emphasise what some considered as a left-wing socialist agenda.

There is some truth in all of these positions. Living in a fallen world within social structures that are severely corrupted by sin, we will always have devout Christians deciding that they will side with different political agendas according to what they see as the most urgent problems that need remedying. So it is not surprising that we have evangelical Christians who take the Bible as their supreme authority for faith and who align themselves with the theonomist position, the right wing capitalist position, or the socialist position.

With the discovery of the importance of the kingdom of God, Evangelicals also began to talk about the need for Christians to apply kingdom values in the societies in which they live. This is the group that I identify with most. Christians are encouraged to engage the culture and seek to demonstrate the Christian ethic in day-to-day life. We know that "*The kingdom of the world [will] become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever*" (Rev. 11:15). Biblical Christians are not agreed on how exactly this will happen. But we know that our work done for God here on earth will contribute to the final kingdom which God will set up at the end of time. So we go into society to be salt and light, to be a leaven which influences the whole of society.

It was an exciting day to live in. The old evangelism versus social action war was over and I for one devoted myself to raise up a "post-war" generation for whom social involvement and evangelism were natural outgrowths of commitment to Christ. I think we are still behind in our focus on social justice, but without a doubt great progress has been made.

NEGLECTING PROACTIVE EVANGELISM

But lately a sense of unease is developing in me as I see some disconcerting trends. I am hearing Evangelicals talking a lot of justice and kingdom values but not doing much to go proactively after those of other faiths in order to proclaim the gospel to them and win them for Christ. If someone comes and asks them about Christianity they will explain the gospel. As a result of this, some people will be converted to Christ through their witness. But that is a woefully inadequate strategy because the majority of the billions of people in the world who do not know Christ will not come and ask us about the gospel. We need to proactively go after the lost.

I fear that we may almost be coming to a situation where the old “presence versus proclamation” battle has come back to the church. Earlier Evangelicals emphasised proclamation and the liberals said that what is important is presence—living out Christianity among the people among whom we live. Now some Evangelicals are also doing the same thing, though they give lip service to evangelism and claim to believe in proclamation evangelism. I fear that with some Evangelicals there has been a pendulum swing away from proactive evangelism to a “Christian-presence-is-mission” approach.

This is why I am calling for a fresh commitment to *proactive* evangelism. Because of the urgent need of billions of people who don't know the Saviour, we can't wait for people to come to us; we must urgently go to them. We must look for ways to make contact with them and use all our creativity and determination in order to communicate the content of the gospel to them.

EVANGELISM WILL NEVER BE POPULAR

I praise God that Evangelicals have discovered the AIDS challenge and are really giving themselves to it. I am only sorry that it took us so long to realise that this is God's call to us. In biblical times there was a call to pay special attention to sojourners, widows, orphans and the oppressed. AIDS patients are the equivalent of such people today. I pray that many Evangelicals will devote themselves to life-long service with such marginalised groups. I would add the severely psychologically sick, the homeless and the neglected aged to the list of marginalised people the church needs to be reaching out to. And, as Moses and Jesus said, “*You always have the poor with you*” (Mark 14:7; Deut. 15:11),

indicating that we will have a responsibility to the poor as long as this world exists.

However, we must remember that today our society has accepted AIDS ministry and social development as attractive ways of service. Evangelism will never have that attraction (some justice issues also will not have that attraction). Those wanting to follow Christ in seeking and saving the lost will always be despised and accused of arrogance by the rest of society. In this post-colonial era, we Christians, who share a common religious heritage with the colonial rulers who thought they were superior to our people, get very sensitive when we are accused of being arrogant. We do not like to be associated with the colonial rulers who looked down on us and our cultures. And many people are saying that evangelism is an extension of colonialism.



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Laws are being enacted in our nations to make conversion through what is called “coercion” an illegal activity. And we know that even biblical persuasion could be interpreted by some as being coercion. Those doing evangelism among non-Christians are being persecuted quite severely in many places in the world. So there are a lot of factors that could cause us to lose the evangelistic momentum and replace evangelism with agendas the world agrees as being urgently important—like the AIDS agenda.

THE STARK REALITY OF LOSTNESS

We need to stem the tide that is taking Evangelicals away from proactive evangelising of those of other faiths. We must not stop emphasising the need to *live out the kingdom ethic* in society. But we must also keep before our eyes the need for individuals to *enter this kingdom*. This happens only when they are born again through faith in Christ Jesus (John 3:1-16). Without that, people are eternally lost—headed for hell. What if a person, who knew that the way back to the father's home was open, refused to tell the prodigal son this fact but kept feeding him while he was car-

ing for pigs in the far country? That would be downright wickedness!

We are in danger of doing the same thing. How could we be guilty of such negligence? I think the answer would be seen through a set of questions.

- In the recorded statements of Jesus, he talked more about heaven than hell. Yet, do we talk about hell at all today? If we don't talk about it, the generation after us won't believe it. One generation neglects the belief, the next generation rejects it. This may result in us being detracted from the hard work of evangelising the unreached.
- Jesus said, “What does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his life” (Mark 8:36). The context shows that the forfeiting spoken of is eternal destruction and that that is averted by denying self, taking up the cross and following Christ. Does this perspective colour the way we look at people?
- Why did the Holy Spirit ensure that there are seven statements of Christ's Great Commission in the New Testament—one each in Matthew, Mark and Luke, two each in John and Acts? Is it not because Jesus believed that before he left it was important for him to drill into the minds of his disciples the priority of the work of saving souls for eternity? This is why I still feel it is appropriate to refer to the call to evangelise as “the Great Commission.” Now the Great Commission would be meaningless if those who obeyed it did not also obey the Great Commandment to Love God and our neighbour. They are both important. And we must continue to challenge people with the dual responsibility to live the gospel in society and to take the gospel to the unreached.

Can we then say that evangelism must have priority over social concern? I have always been reluctant to use this priority language. I have felt that such talk of priority comes out of the western desire to have things nicely lined up in a logical progression (e.g., God-> family-> and ministry). I prefer to simply say that our calling is to be obedient to God totally. If God is in control of our life, he will lead us so that we will give the proper place to the whole will of God for us.

But Satan is also active; and he does not like to see the population of heaven increase. He will do all he can to prevent Christians from being obedient to the call to make disci-

ples by going to the nations, baptising people and teaching them the commands of the Lord (Matt. 28:19). I fear that many Evangelicals have fallen into Satan's trap of focussing so much on the need to be a presence in society upholding kingdom values that they have neglected the call to proactively go after the lost and proclaim the gospel.

I want to argue that we are called to be holistic, and that part of this is the stark and urgent reality of the statement of Christ that all the gain on earth would be of no value if a person loses his own life to eternal destruction. The stark fact of lostness places before us the urgency of evangelism. Such thinking is not common in some Evangelical circles today. A theological faculty of a University in Europe held a seminar a few years ago to discuss a book of mine. One of the presenters was an Evangelical scholar. He faulted me for using the supposedly confusing term "lostness" when referring to those who do not believe in Christ.

As for me, I will do all I can to encourage people to live the Christian life in society. But I will also follow Christ's example in placing before Christians the stark fact of eternal damnation and the glory of eternal salvation. And I will challenge them to follow the agenda of Jesus who "came to seek and to save the lost" (Luke 19:10) reminding them of the advice of Jude who said, "...save others by snatching them out of the fire" (Jude 23).

THE COMBINED WITNESS OF THE WHOLE CHURCH

I am reluctant to bring back the priority argument into the church's discussion on the mission of the church. But I think there is a need for some clarity on this issue. In the body of Christ, some faithful Christians cannot preach the gospel (of salvation through the work of Christ) because they are called to social work and government regulations prohibit combining social work with evangelism. Even though Youth for Christ is an evangelistic organisation, we did not do any overt verbal proclamation of the gospel while we were involved in a massive tsunami relief operation. We were permitted to come in and help several schools on condition that we would not preach. Integrity demanded that we do not do what we love to do—to seek to persuade people to receive Christ's salvation. I believe, however, that people were impressed by the gospel simply by seeing the way Christians helped them. But we would not call that evangelism.

As we are an evangelistic organisation, we decided to return to our primary call after about four months of almost total immersion in tsunami relief. Even after that, we worked to complete several projects. But we went back to our primary call, refusing millions of rupees offered to us for new tsunami-related relief projects.

This does not mean that we do not do any social work now. As a youth organisation we do a lot of things, especially in the field of education, to help youth from economically poor backgrounds to get a better chance for advancement in life. But we try not to tie that in too closely with evangelism so that people do not get the idea that this is a bait to convert them and also so that people do not become Christians simply to better their educational and economic prospects. I think Youth for Christ spends more money on education related projects than on evangelism related projects. This is because most of the evangelism is done free by volunteers.

In Nepal, Christian missionaries have been labouring faithfully for over fifty years doing social work in the name of Christ but not doing overt evangelism, as they were prohibited from doing that. They did not see much evangelistic fruit, but in the past twenty years or so there has been an amazing evangelistic harvest of hundreds of thousands of people coming to Christ through the work of local Nepali Christians. I believe the faithful witness of the missionaries had a major role to play in orienting people so that they would listen to the gospel proclaimed by Nepalese.

So there may be segments of the body of Christ who are called to do things that require that they do not overtly use verbal proclamation of the gospel of eternal salvation, though they would verbally advocate other aspects of the kingdom agenda—such as justice, fair-play and righteous values. Every individual Christian needs to be committed to the whole gospel. Therefore, every individual Christian must seek to be a personal witness through life and word. Christian social service organisations must ensure that their workers are not only committed to their social work but also to Christ as Lord of their life. So, even though they may not bear verbal witness in their job, they need to be committed to verbal witness as part of their personal lifestyle.

Let me also add that much of the church's witness through social engagement and in advocating for human rights will be done by lay people who go into the structures

of society and seek to live out Christianity in those spheres, just as William Wilberforce (1759-1833) and the Earl of Shaftesbury (1801-1885) did. Now, this has sometimes been done effectively by vocational Christian workers, like Toyohiko Kagawa (1888-1960) and Martin Luther King, Jr. (1929-1968), too. Lay people can be writers and journalists whose writings can highlight injustice and point the way forward to a solution. Lay people can work effectively in government, in social service organisations, in the legal sphere and in politics.

Here the role of the local church and Christian organisations could be that of teaching them the biblical approach to life that motivates them and guides them in their service. We must apply the Scriptures to the social issues of the day in our preaching and teaching. Pastors could pray for laypeople serving in society, they could pray with them, advise them and encourage them. They could praise them for their service and comfort them when they come under fire both from the world and from Christians who do not understand what they are trying to do. John Wesley's (1703-1791) last letter was to William Wilberforce, encouraging him in his anti-slavery campaign. Wilberforce was greatly encouraged by the members of his small group of spiritual friends, the Clapham Sect, and former slave-trader turned Anglican Priest and hymn-writer, John Newton (1725-1807). And the whole anti-slavery movement gained great momentum through the reports that missionary explorer David Livingstone (1813-1873) sent to England about what he saw in Africa.

So, because of practical realities, every segment of the church may not be involved in all forms of proactive evangelism and all forms of social engagement. Para-church organisations will specialise in their special call, while being committed to the whole mission of the church. Local churches will do a little of most aspects of the mission of the church. But when the total programme of the church is viewed from heaven, God should see that the body of Christ is engaged in the whole mission of the church. As the slogan formed by the Lausanne movement puts it, the whole church must take the whole gospel to the whole world. The whole church will be the body of Christ, where different members complete the different aspects of the kingdom agenda.

However, in times of extreme need, like the current war in Sri Lanka, it would be ideal if all churches and Christian organisa-

tions could get together to make joint declarations of what we see as the solution to the problem. Indeed, not all Christians will agree with the stand taken, but national umbrella Christian groups may be able to forge a consensus opinion which represents the vast majority of Christians. For example, I know several Christians who are in the military in Sri Lanka. Though they are fighting in the war, they all seem to agree that the final solution is a political and not a military solution. And this is at a time when many Sri Lankan citizens feel that a political solution is not possible. At such a time, the Christians could be a united voice helping influence the nation towards moderation and towards accepting the need for a permanent political solution to the problem.

BACK TO THE QUESTION OF PRIORITY

Having said all this, I believe that the developing tendency among some Evangelicals to downplay verbal proclamation—including persuading people to receive Christ’s salvation—demands a fresh call for Evangelicals to emphasize the urgency of proactive evangelism. And if talk of priority will help the church to a fresh commitment, then we may need to start using that method again. Maybe, one could argue that priority is implied in Christ’s statement: “*For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his life? Or what shall a man give in return for his life?*” (Matt. 16:26).

C. S. Lewis says, “*Christianity asserts that every individual human being is going to live forever, and this must be true or false. Now there are a good many things which would not be worth bothering about if I were going to live only seventy years, but which I had better bother about very seriously if I am going to live forever.*”³ <<

Endnotes

- 1 Carl F.H. Henry, *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Day Fundamentalism*, (Grand Rapids and Cambridge: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1947).
- 2 See Donald Dayton, *Discovering an Evangelical Heritage*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1976).
- 3 C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Macmillan, 1952), p 159.

Wheaton, October 1, 2007

IFMA CHANGES NAME TO CrossGlobal Linksm

The Interdenominational Foreign Mission Association of North America (IFMA) has changed its name to CrossGlobal Link. At the association’s Annual Business Meeting held September 29, 2007, the membership voted the name change. “This is more than just a cosmetic change to the association,” said Dr. Marvin Newell, Executive Director of CrossGlobal Link. “This is a change in function and direction for the association, intended to keep it on pace with the changing world of missions.” CrossGlobal Link will no longer be exclusively interdenominational as in the past; and it has opened the door to churches and mission pastors joining as associate members. It also signals a stronger intent to be involved on the greater global mission scene. The identity slogan of CrossGlobal Link, “Connecting in Mission” is descriptive of these relationships.

IFMA was founded in 1917 with the coming together of seven “faith missions.” It has grown today into an association of 86 mission organizations in the United States and Canada that together field over 15,500 North American missionaries around the globe. With its new identity as CrossGlobal Link, it positions itself in the forefront of the North American evangelical mission endeavor.

For more info: <http://www.crossgloballink.org/>

Learning, unlearning, and relearning

to be effective in God's mission

‘When the paradigm shifts, we all go back to the start.’ I once heard this in a management class, and the point seemed to be that those who could unlearn what they thought they knew under the old paradigm, and learn the challenges and opportunities of the new paradigm – and do so fast – would gain the advantage of effectiveness in a changed environment. World Christianity and world mission have changed so radically and so rapidly in the past few decades that there is a lot of learning and unlearning to do, especially for those of us now on the peripheries of the world church – in the west and north. For that indeed is where we must start our new learning

The New Shape of World Christianity

Learn the realities of majority world Christianity

At the start of the 20th century, only 10% of the world's Christians lived in the continents of the south and east. 90% lived in North America and Europe, along with Australia – New Zealand. At the start of the 21st century, at least 70% of all the world's Christians live in the non-western world – or the majority world as it would better be called. And the rate of growth in the

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south (especially among evangelical and charismatic Christians) far exceeds the more static or shrinking condition of the church in the west. There are more Christians worshipping in Anglican churches in Nigeria each week than in all the Episcopal and Anglican churches of Britain, Europe and North America combined. More Baptists in Congo than in Britain. More people in church every Sunday in communist China than all western Europe. Ten times more Assemblies of God members in Latin America than in the USA.

The whole centre of gravity of world Christianity has moved south and east. The old peripheries are now the centre. The old centres are now on the periphery. Philip Jenkins has brought all this to popular attention in *The Next Christendom*, telling the world what many of us were saying in Christian circles for decades. Except that Christian leaders of the global south rather resent the implication in the title. They have no desire to be another ‘Christendom’ – wielding monolithic territorial and political power. Nor do they wish to be any kind of threat to the west, but rather to help Christians there in the struggle to shift from survival mode to mission mode – in their own lands.

Unlearn our ethno-centric superiority

But can the west be re-evangelized? Only if we in the west unlearn our default ethno-centric assumptions about ‘real’ Christianity (our own), and unlearn the blindness that simply doesn't see the extent to which western Christianity is horrendously infected by the gods of cultural idolatry. It may be more blessed to give than to receive, but it is often

harder to receive than to give. That reverses the polarity of patron and client and makes us uncomfortably aware that perhaps what Jesus said to the Laodicean church might apply to us in the west (Rev. 3: 10). The church in the west needs the humility to accept that we can learn from (and actually need) the vigour of the majority world church.

Re-learn normal New Testament Christianity

But that new learning will actually be no more than re-learning the original nature of biblical Christianity, which very quickly became poly-centric. Because of Acts 1:8 we tend to think of the church spreading out in ripples from Jerusalem as the centre. But in fact Acts subverts that pattern: Antioch is where followers of Jesus are first called Christians, and it becomes the centre of westward-oriented missionary work. Paul sees Thessalonica as a radiating centre for the message in Macedonia and Achaia. Ephesus clearly became a key metropolis for Christian witness in Asia Minor. Paul was keen to make Rome a base for his planned work further to the west in Spain. Jerusalem is simply one centre among many. For in any case, *Christianity has no territorial centre* – whether land or city. Our centre is the person of Christ, and wherever he is carried, there is another potential centre of faith and witness. So, as Andrew Walls has said, the emergence of genuinely world Christianity and the ending of western assumptions of heartland hegemony, is simply a return to normal Christianity, which looks much more like the New Testament than ‘Christendom’ ever did. We must learn to live in the real world

Chr. J H Wright

The New Patterns of World Mission

Learn the multidirectional realities of mission

The growth of the multinational church has resulted in a swing to multi-directional mission. It is probably still true that the USA is the largest single contributor of Protestant cross-cultural missionaries. But which is the second largest? Not any other western country, but India. And it is very possible that India has already overtaken the States in the thousands of those involved in truly cross-cultural mission – within and beyond India. There are many more Korean missionaries than British, and some Nigerian evangelical mission organizations are larger in personnel than most western ones – and operate on budgets that are a fraction of western mission budgets. The fact is that already 50% of all Protestant missionaries in the world come from non-western countries, and the proportion is increasing annually. So you are as likely to meet a Brazilian missionary in North Africa, as a British missionary in Brazil. Indeed the ratio of Indian missionaries to western missionaries in India today is probably around 100 : 1. People involved in Christian mission of all kinds are criss-crossing the world in all directions in the most imaginative and creative forms of work and witness. Mission is from everywhere to everywhere.

Unlearn the ‘mission field’ paradigm

So another piece of un-learning we must do is the habit of using the term ‘mission field’ to refer to everywhere else in the world except our own home country (in the west). The language of ‘home’ and ‘mission field’ is still regularly used in many churches and agencies, and fundamentally mis-represents reality. Not only does it perpetuate the rather patronizing view of the rest of the world as always on the receiving end of our missionary largesse, but it also fails to recognize the maturity of the churches in many other lands. Christianity probably reached India before it reached Britain. There was a flourishing church in Ethiopia a century before Patrick evangelized Ireland. There were churches in eastern Europe centuries before Europeans reached the shores of North America. There have been large Christian communities in the Middle East for two thousand years (though sadly decimated by the impact of western policies there). So it is discourteous (at best) and damaging (at worst) when western mission activity ignores all such ancient expres-

sions of Christian tradition and lumps all lands abroad as ‘mission field’, in comfortable neglect of the fact that the rest of the world church sees the west itself as one of the toughest mission fields in the world today. This is not, of course, to suggest that countries of ancient Christian churches need no evangelism, any more than we would exclude nominal western Christians from the need to hear the true gospel. But the real mission boundary is not between ‘Christian countries’ and ‘the mission field’, but between faith and unbelief, and that is a boundary that runs through every land, and indeed runs down our local streets. Mission effort must therefore run in all directions; not as a uni-directional flow from one bright corner of our world maps to the darkened sectors or shaded ‘windows’ somewhere else.

Re-learn normal New Testament mission

And in this too we shall be re-learning the multi-directional nature of mission in the book of Acts. Once again, our pre-occupation with concentric circles drawn to illustrate Acts 1:8 have obscured the much more complex pattern of mission and movement that Luke shows us in Acts. For example:

- Philip goes from Jerusalem to Samaria, to Gaza, to Azotas and to Caesarea (8)
- Peter goes to Lydda, Joppa, Caesarea and then Antioch (9)
- People from Cyprus go to Antioch and initiate a multi-ethnic church there (11)
- Barnabas goes from Antioch to Tarsus to get Saul
- Timothy goes from Lystra to Ephesus, while Titus ends up in Crete (16, 1Tim., Titus)
- Priscilla and Aquila come from Italy and end up in Corinth (18)
- Apollos comes from Alexandria to Ephesus, and then ends up in Corinth (19).

There are criss-crossing lines of missionary movement all over the international Mediterranean world, and it is fascinating to see that the primary way it was all held together was a high commitment to relational trust. That is what lies behind the letters of recommendation, and the exhortations in 3 John to treat such travelling church-planters and church-teachers ‘in a manner worthy of God’ and to respect their self-sacrificing ‘going out’ for the sake of the name of Christ. (3 John is a much neglected missional tract for our times, by the way).

The Original Shape of God’s Mission

Learn that mission belongs to God

Perhaps what we most need to learn, since we so easily tend to forget, is that mission is and always has been God’s mission before it becomes ours. The whole Bible presents to us the God of missional activity, from his purposeful, goal-oriented act of creation through to the completion of his cosmic mission in the redemption of the whole of creation – a new heaven and a new earth. The Bible also presents to us, of course,

- *humanity with a mission* (to rule and care for the earth);
- *Israel with a mission* (to be the agent of God’s blessing to all nations);
- *Jesus with a mission* (to embody and fulfil the mission of Israel, bringing blessing to the nations through first bearing our sin on the cross and anticipating the new creation in his resurrection);
- *and the church with a mission* (to participate with God in the ingathering of the nations in fulfilment of the Old Testament scriptures, by going to them with the good news of what God has done in Christ).

But behind all this stands *God with a mission* (the redemption of his whole creation from the wreckage of human and satanic evil). The mission of God is what fills the Bible from the brokenness of the nations in Genesis 11 to the healing of the nations in Revelation 21-22. So any mission activity to which we are called must be seen as a humble participation in this vast sweep of the historical mission of God. All mission or missions which we initiate, or into which we invest our own vocation, gifts and energies, flow from the prior mission of God. God is on mission, and we, in that wonderful phrase of Paul, are ‘co-workers with God’.

Unlearn our obsession with our own agendas

This God-centred re-focusing of mission turns inside out a lot of our obsession with our own mission plans, agendas, goals, strategies and grand schemes.

- We ask, ‘Where does God fit into the story of my life?’ when the real question is where does my little life fit into this great story of God’s mission.
- We want to be driven by a purpose that has been tailored for our own individual lives when we should be seeing the

purpose of all life, including our own, wrapped up in the great mission of God for the whole of creation.

- We wrestle to ‘make the Gospel relevant to the world’. But God is about the mission of transforming the world to fit the shape of the Gospel.
- We argue about what can legitimately be included in the mission God expects from the church, when we should ask what kind of church God expects for his mission in all its comprehensive fullness.
- I may wonder what kind of mission God has for me, when I should ask what kind of me God wants for *his* mission.
- We invite God’s blessing on our human-centred mission strategies, but the only concept of mission into which God fits is the one of which he is the beginning, the centre and the end.

Re-learn a holistic missional theology of the cross

Most of all we need to go back to the cross and re-learn its comprehensive glory. For if we persist in a narrow individualistic view of the cross as a personal exit strategy to heaven we will fall short of its biblical connection to the mission purpose of God for the whole of creation, and thereby lose the cross-centred core of holistic mission.

Our mission flows from God’s mission, and God’s mission has many dimensions as we trace the theme of his saving purpose through the different strands of Scripture. But every dimension of that mission of God led inexorably to the cross of Christ. The cross was the unavoidable cost of God’s mission. *So we need a mission-centred theology of the cross.* Think for a moment of some of the contours of God’s redemptive purpose.

It was the purpose or mission of God:

- **to deal with the guilt of human sin**, which had to be punished for God’s own justice to be vindicated. And at the cross God accomplished this. God took that guilt and punishment upon himself in self-substitution through the person of his own Son. For ‘the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all’ (Isa. 53:6), and ‘Christ himself bore our sins in his own body on the tree’ (1 Pet. 2:24).
- **to defeat the powers of evil**, and all the forces (angelic, spiritual, ‘seen or unseen’), that oppress, crush, invade, spoil and destroy human life, whether

directly or by human agency. And at the cross God accomplished this, ‘having disarmed the powers and authorities, ... triumphing over them by the cross’ (Col. 2:15).

- **to destroy death**, the great invader and enemy of human life in God’s world. And at the cross God did so, when ‘by Christ’s death he destroyed the one who

holds the power of death – the devil’ (Heb. 2:14).

- **to remove the barrier of enmity and alienation between Jew and Gentile**, and by implication ultimately all forms of enmity and alienation. And at the cross God did so, ‘for he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier... to create one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility’ (Eph. 2:14-16).

- **to heal and reconcile his whole creation**, the cosmic mission of God. – And at the cross God made this ultimately possible. For it is God’s final will ‘through Christ to reconcile all things, whether things in heaven or things on earth, by making peace through his blood shed on the cross’ (Col. 1:20 – the ‘all things’ here must clearly mean the whole created cosmos, since that is what Paul says has been created by Christ and for Christ (vs. 15-16), and has now been reconciled by Christ (v. 20).

So then, all these huge dimensions of God’s redemptive mission are set before us in the Bible. God’s mission was that:

- sin should be punished and sinners forgiven
- evil should be defeated and humanity liberated
- death should be destroyed and life and immortality brought to light
- enemies should be reconciled, to one another and to God
- creation itself should be restored and reconciled to its creator

All of these together constitute the mission of God. *And all of these led to the cross of Christ.* The cross was the unavoidable cost of God’s holistic mission – as Jesus himself accepted, in his agony in Gethsemane: ‘not my will, but yours, be done’.

A full biblical understanding of the atonement (of which the above points are the merest sketch), goes far beyond the matter of personal guilt and individual forgiveness. That Jesus died in my place, bearing the guilt of my sin, as my voluntary substitute, is of course the most gloriously liberating truth, to which we cling in glad and grateful worship with tears of wonder. That I should long for others to know this truth and be saved and forgiven by casting their sins on the crucified Saviour in repentance and faith, is a most energising motive for evangelism. All of this must be maintained with total commitment and personal conviction. *But there is more in the biblical theology of the cross than individual salvation, and there is more to biblical mission than evangelism.* The Gospel is good news for the whole creation (to whom, according to the longer ending of Mark, it is to be preached, Mk. 16:15, cf. Eph. 3:10). To point out these wider dimensions of God’s redemptive mission (and therefore of our committed holistic participation in God’s mission), is *not* ‘watering down’ the gospel of personal salvation, (as is sometimes alleged). Rather, we set that precious good news for the individual firmly and affirmatively within its full biblical context of all that God has achieved, and will finally complete, through the cross of Christ for the whole of creation.

But it is equally true, and biblical, to say that the cross is the unavoidable centre of our mission. All Christian mission flows from the cross – as its source, its power, and as that which defines its scope. *We also need a cross-centred theology of holistic mission.*

It is vital that we see the cross as central to every aspect of holistic, biblical mission – that is, of all we do in the name of the crucified and risen Jesus. It is a mistake, in my view, to think that, while our evangelism must be centred on the cross (as of course it has to be), our social engagement has some other theological foundation or justification. Why is the cross just as important across the whole field of mission? Because in all forms of Christian mission in the name of Christ we are confronting the powers of evil and the kingdom of Satan – with all their dismal effects on human life and the wider creation. If we are to proclaim and demonstrate the reality of the reign of God in Christ - that is, if we are to proclaim that Jesus is king, in a world which likes still to chant ‘we have no king but Caesar’ and his many successors, including mammon – then we will be in direct conflict with the usurped reign of the evil one, in all its legion manifestations. This – the battle against the powers of evil - is the unanimous testimony of those who struggle for justice, for the needs of the poor and

oppressed, the sick and the ignorant, and even those who seek to care for and protect God's creation against exploiters and polluters, just as much as it is the experience of those (frequently the same people) who struggle evangelistically to bring people to faith in Christ as Saviour and Lord and plant churches. In all such work, social or evangelistic, we confront the reality of sin and Satan. In all such work we are challenging the darkness of the world with the light and good news of Jesus Christ and the reign of God through him.

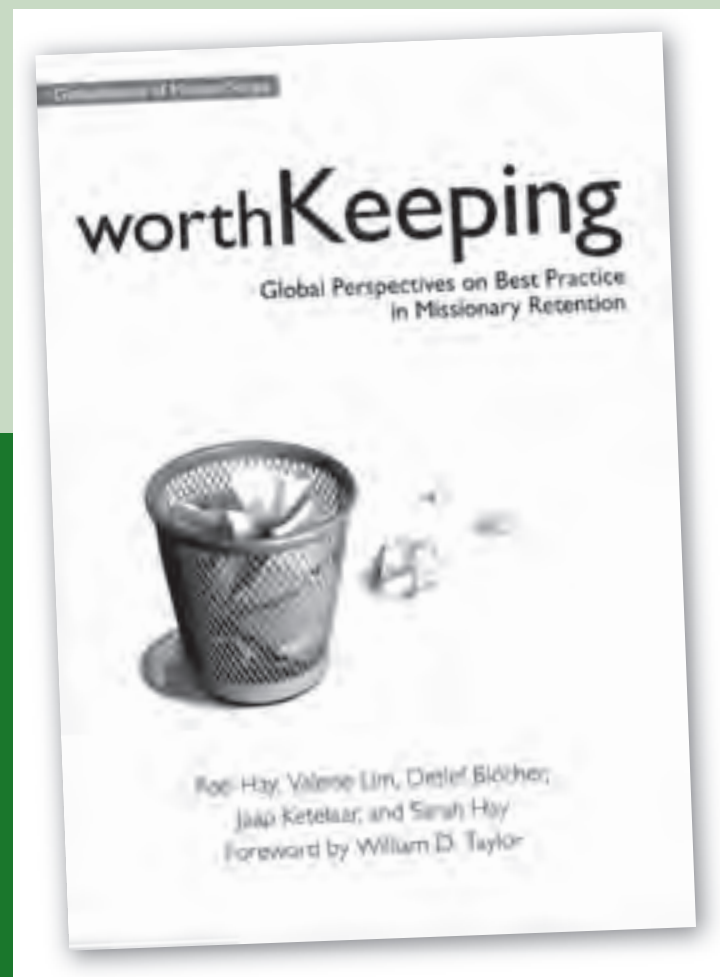
By what authority can we do so? With what power are we competent to engage the powers of evil? On what basis dare we challenge the chains of Satan, in word and deed, in people's spiritual, moral, physical and social lives? Only the cross. Only in the cross is there forgiveness, justification and cleansing for guilty sinners. Only in the cross stands the defeat of evil powers and all oppression and injustice. Only in the cross is there release from the fear of death and its ultimate destruction altogether. Only in the cross are even the most intractable of enemies reconciled. Only in the cross will we finally witness the healing of all creation.

The fact is that sin and evil constitute bad news in every area of life on this planet. The redemptive work of God through the cross of Christ is good news for every area of life on earth that has been touched by sin – which means every area of life. Bluntly, we need a holistic gospel because the world is in a holistic mess. And by God's incredible grace we have a gospel big enough to redeem all that sin and evil has touched. And every dimension of that good news is good news utterly and only because of the blood of Christ on the cross.

*Ultimately all that will be there in the new, redeemed creation will be there because of the cross. And conversely, all that will **not** be there (suffering, tears, sin, Satan, sickness, oppression, injustice, corruption, decay and death), will not be there because they will have been defeated and destroyed by the cross..*

So it is my passionate conviction that holistic mission must have a holistic theology of the cross. That includes the conviction that the cross must be as central to our social engagement as it is to our evangelism. There is no other power, no other resource, no other name, through which we can offer the whole Gospel to the whole person and the whole world, than Jesus Christ crucified and risen. <<

This article appeared earlier in another form in Christianity Today.



"Worth Keeping, the latest publication in the 'globalization of Mission series' of the WEA Mission Commission. This book is the result of the worldwide survey on missionary retention and follows in the track of 'too valuable to lose' that described missionary attrition. This is what people say about the book:

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Ethnê Initiative Report

by S. Kent Parks, Ph.D., Co-Facilitator



The Ethnê Initiative is focused on the 27.9% of the world who have almost no access to the Gospel in its many forms (e.g., word evangelism, deed evangelism, miracle evangelism). The Initiative continues to move forward in some exciting ways. The work of various strategy groups include:

Ethnê Prayer Initiative

After the Global Day (Week) of Prayer May 17-27, the Ethnê Prayer Initiative begins its second year with a new schedule of prayer/outreach. In the month of June, the focus is on the Least Reached of the South Pacific and Southeast Asia.

Various local, national, topical and regional prayer networks are formally involved (with a combined membership of 1.5 million intercessors). Joshua Project and Global Prayer Digest are especially helpful in providing online data and web access to daily prayer requests for each of the 365 days of this second cycle of the prayer initiative.

To link prayer and outreach, Ethnê presents a new e-tool. The e-tool will link specific prayer requests of up to ten lines, which can be submitted by anyone working among the Least Reached. Recipients indicate they are praying by hitting “reply” and may also subscribe for bi-weekly updates, thus creating two-way communication between workers and intercessors. Pray for this new tool and for our 2nd year of 1.5 million people who pray and reach out to Unreached People Groups (UPGs) globally!

Ethnê Member Care Initiative

This working group is seeking to connect workers among the Least Reached to any member care resources and member care professionals as they need. Connections

are being created through a monthly email update (see www.ethne.net/memberscare).

Ethnê Student Mission Movement Initiative (focused on the Least Reached)

This strategy group is continuing to link key Student/Young Professional mission mobilization movements together to create a global synergy. A meeting was held in Singapore in October 2006 with key leaders of such networks. They are helping to initiate a “Year of Prayer” for the Asian Student Mission Movement (July 07 to July 08). They will have a conference in tandem with Mission Korea Student Mission Conference, where they will bring together mobilizers from around Asia to envision next steps in the movement.

Ethnê Frontier Crisis Response Network

This network is working to connect with various UPG-focused Networks and Partnerships to increase collective readiness for a strategic response to major crises that will continue to occur among the Least Reached. The goal is to connect resources globally and provide professional training in order that such networks can respond quickly in major crises. The goal is not to become

a network of “first responders,” but to join together as quickly as possible, to work with professionalism and integrity, and to provide credibility for long-term ministry teams to remain among the affected people. Finally, this network’s main focus is to see church planting movements developed, but its main role will be the relief side, with long-term work handed over to local UPG-focused networks, churches and leaders. More information can be obtained by emailing the Frontier Crisis Response Network at fcrcn@ethne.net.

Transition to New Ethnê Steering Committee

We continue to move forward in reforming the Steering Committee for the next cycle. This transition is intentional. About half of the Steering Committee will be from the previous group and about half will be from COMIBAM (the Ibero-American Mission network) rather than from SEALINK (the SE Asia UPG Network)—who formed half of the group during the first cycle. This adjustment is in accordance with the original intent to allow the core of each Steering Committee to be from a different region of the world each time. <<



Kent Parks, and his wife Erika has served in SEAsia for 17 years, working mainly among Unreached People Groups and in helping develop UPG ministry networks, as well as nation-wide and region-wide UPG-focused networks. He served seven years as a Baptist pastor in the US before serving in SEAsia as a seminary professor (Ph.D. in missiology), and as a Strategy Coordinator focused on stimulating trans-denominational and trans-national efforts among UPGs. He is currently serving as SEAsia Regional Facilitator for the Network for Strategic Missions and as the Facilitator for SEALINK, and emerging SEAsia UPG network

Codes of Conduct and the Maker's instructions

From the Missiology Taskforce by Rose Dowsett

Last night I sat among a group of six friends to study 1 Timothy 3. Most of the chapter is devoted to the qualities and skills that Christian leaders, both men and women, need to exemplify if the church is to be nurtured healthily. In fact, almost everything that Paul lists refers to character and behaviour. As so often in Scripture, the emphasis is not so much on the tasks we are to perform, but on the kind of people that we are, and how we do what we do, how we relate to other people.

Codes of Best Practice are rather new—and very old. In their present form, they are rather new; among Christian ministries, the antecedents of our current Codes can be seen in the 1860's agreed Code of Conduct for the Evangelical Alliance and the "Principles and Practices" of some mission agencies. But it is only in the last twenty years or so that there has been a fresh generation of such documents, which now cover a huge range of professions and ministries. Some of them appear in this journal, and are providing valuable guidelines in very practical ways. They are currently far more widely familiar in Western cultures than elsewhere in the world, and this may be a reflection of the way they have become legally required in many secular settings as well as for charitable organisations and churches.

But Codes of Best Practice are also very old. The Bible has many examples, even though they do not have that exact title. The purpose of a Code of Best Practice is to provide guidelines, sometimes legal requirements, which people are to meet for their work to be officially approved. They set standards. Failure to meet those standards leads to punishment. From Genesis to Revelation, the Bible constantly describes the Maker's instructions: the standards he requires, and what they look like in every area of life and society. These are standards

built into the very fabric of Creation. Over and over again, those standards are spelled out in detail: "This is what this standard looks like in your relationship with the living God, with your family, with your neighbours, in the way you do your work..."

And ultimately, the standard is that of God himself: perfection. That's why we need grace, not just law, for there is no way that any one of us could reach that utter perfection in and of ourselves. That's why we need to stand "in Christ," hidden within and covered by his perfection. Further, although the laws and codes of Scripture are immensely practical guidelines as to what we need to seek to conform to (think for instance of the Ten Commandments, the Sermon on the Mount, the subversive adaptation of the classical Household Codes that Paul spells out in Ephesians 5 & 6 or Colossians 3 & 4), the Lord Jesus repeatedly made it clear that we need to go beyond outer conformity all the way to inner transformation so that there is integrity and alignment between the outward behaviour and the inward character. This is the new life of the Holy Spirit expressing himself in us and through us. Without that, we are like whitewashed graves: externally tidy, but still only containing dead skeletons.

So, by all means let us embrace good Codes of Practice; but let us also pray for such inner transformation and profound spiritual made-new life that what we sign up to moves from a document to Spirit-breathed fruitfulness. No wonder 1 Timothy 3 focuses on authentic godly character...<<