

## **Till They Have Homes: Christian Responsibilities in the Twenty-First Century**

Michael Nai-Chiu Poon

“God wants his church to grow up in maturity (not just in numbers)”, so begins Dr John Stott’s *Langham Logic*. More than thirty Christians from East Asia in the past thirty years have benefited from the Langham Scholarship programme that Dr Stott pioneered. They have since returned home and are serving in seminaries, churches and Christian organizations in the region. This essay is offered as a tribute to “Uncle John” (as we fondly call him) for his personal commitment to strengthen the church worldwide.<sup>1</sup>

My purpose in this essay is to explore the particular mission challenges and opportunities that churches in Asia, Latin America and Africa face, in order to help them to coordinate their efforts more effectively in the coming decades.

### **To see the world afresh: beyond east-west confrontations**

I begin with an oft-quoted remark from Andrew Walls. He noted the Christian centre of gravity has “steadily moved away from the West and towards the southern continents”.<sup>2</sup> Missiologists and mission practitioners have devoted much energy in reckoning this demographical shift. It captures the imagination even of popular writers.<sup>3</sup> Yet, discussions so far mainly focus on how churches and mission societies *in the West* should adapt to this new condition. Some speculated on its implications for the new world order. Yet so far hardly any discussion touches on the geopolitical contours in the non-Western world, and their impact on mission. This is not to suggest that mission scholars are to turn into political commentators. Rather, mission is not merely a series of fragmentary activities; it needs to be connected with the geopolitical realities. And at the same time, without proper theological conceptual understanding, we cannot come to a true understanding of geopolitical realities themselves.<sup>4</sup>

To some extent churches especially in Asia and Africa are responsible for this gap in understanding. Geopolitical issues are sensitive matters; people are reluctant to discuss them in public. Some make a radical separation between spiritual and secular affairs, and take the attitude that Christians should confine themselves with religious matters. After all, there is already more than enough on the immediate horizons to

---

<sup>1</sup> A fuller version of this paper will appear in a volume of essays by Langham scholars in East Asia in honour of John Stott in 2007.

<sup>2</sup> Andrew Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History* (Maryknoll: Orbis Press, 2002), 31.

<sup>3</sup> Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: the Rise of Global Christianity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); David Aikman, *Jesus in Beijing: How Christianity is Transforming China and Changing the Global Balance of Power* (Washington: Regnery, 2003).

<sup>4</sup> I am indebted to Oliver O’Donovan’s two-part work: *The Desire of the Nations* (1996) and *The Ways of Judgment* (2005). He puts it this way: ‘Earthly events of liberation, rule and community foundation provide s with partial indications of what Go is doing in human history; while, correspondingly, we must look to the horizons of God’s redemptive purposes if we are to grasp the full meaning of political events that pass before our eyes. Theology needs more than scattered political images; it needs a full political conceptuality. And politics, for its part, needs a theological conceptuality.’ *The Desire of the Nations: Discovering the roots of political theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 2.

absorb the energy of busy pastors, so such reasoning goes.

Yet, churches in the non-Western world should offer a coherent account of their work and priorities. Without this, their words and actions may appear fragmentary and reactionary, unable to link to an overall social vision. Mission is public and political in nature. This is what being “salt of the earth and light of the world” is about. What Christians have to say about societies is of huge interest to secular authorities and other faith communities. It offers a point of engagement with the wider society.<sup>5</sup>

It is important for the Global South to realize the West cannot do this work for them. Western mission scholars are increasingly unfamiliar with present-day politics outside their immediate horizons, unless they impact their daily life. Theological colleges in the West, generally speaking, do not educate their seminarians the histories of Christianity outside the Western world. So the newer generations of Christians in the West have little understanding of the histories and geographies of the non-Western world.

Take the present Anglican Communion crisis as a case in point. Some Christians in the West continue to misunderstand the Global South. To them, churches especially in the southern continents are conservative, reactionary, and harbour deep resentment against the West. Such views perhaps are not intentionally malicious. They simply show how unfamiliar they are with the wider world.

It remains the task of Christians in the non-Western world to give an account of the reason of their faith and hope. Can the Global South be positive in anything?

And yet, it is not helpful to interpret the present-day world along an East-West divide. The Global South is not homogeneous. I refer earlier how unfamiliar people who live in the West are with the geographies and histories of the rest of the world. The same applies to those who live in other continents. East Asians often do not know Africa and Latin America. I assume the case is the same for those who live in other parts of the world. More importantly, neighbouring nations, cultures and ethnic groups may pose more immediate dangers than the “imperialist” West. Take East Asia for example, Southeast Asian countries may see the resurgent China and India as posing greater threats to regional interests than America. Within Southeast Asia, neighbouring countries may be involved in long histories of bitter conflicts and rivalries, and still find it difficult to be reconciled with one another. And within a society, ethnic communities may hold deep fear and resentment over a dominant group. We find such scenarios in other parts of the world.

What can Christians contribute to the present-day world? Anglicans cannot avoid such question, though perhaps other Christian communities may brush this aside to be irrelevant. After all, Anglicans are a world-affirming catholic community. This much at least we learn from F D Maurice and William Temple.

---

<sup>5</sup> An example of such conversation between church leaders, theologians, civic leaders, and government officials in China and Singapore is the successful “Seek the Welfare of the City” Conference held in Singapore on 10-13 August 2005. See *Pilgrims and Citizens: Christian Social Engagement in East Asia Today*, ed. by Michael Nai-Chiu Poon (Hindmarsh: ATF Press, 2006).

## Four theses on missionary engagement

Let me propose four theses.

### 1. *Hermeneutic principle*

The Suffering Servant rather than the Davidic dynasties provide a more fruitful model for understanding mission today. It was as an exiled people that God's People rediscovered the mission to be a light to all nations (Isaiah 49: 6). The Abrahamic promise "that in [him] all the families of the earth shall be blessed" did not find its fulfillment when nations paid homage to Solomon. Rather, God's People became a blessing to all nations only when they – as exiles – sought "the welfare of the city" in distant lands (Jeremiah 29:7).

The challenge to God's People was to "sing the Lord's song in a foreign land (Psalm 137: 4)" when they were stripped of the familiar signs of God's presence – the land, the Temple and the City. They had to reinterpret what obedience to the Law meant in this new condition. This led to the long meditation in Psalm 119. They rediscovered the calling to move out to the world. "The earth, O Lord, is full of your steadfast love; teach me your statutes (Psalm 119: 64)."<sup>6</sup> Yahweh's word became lamp to their feet and a light to their path as they traveled through unfamiliar terrains in the world (Psalm 119: 105). Peter developed this approach to Christian life in 1 Peter.

### 2. *Space-time orientation*

We need to pay attention to intraregional undercurrents to understand the particular challenges in present-day mission. Post-Christendom, postcolonial and post-missionary categories can no longer provide a satisfactory pattern for understanding the Global South. Such categories still bind Christianity in southern continents to European experiences.

Churches in the Global South need to pay closer attention to the regional socio-historical interactions to interpret the rise of Christianity in the region. To take Southeast Asia as an example, it is helpful to study the interactions between nations and cultures within Asia itself to understand the character of local forms of Christianity.<sup>7</sup>

### 3. *Ecclesiological focus*

It follows that we need to restore the church to be the focal point in mission. Partnership between churches in different geographical locations becomes the driving force in mission. To a great extent, the days of Western mission societies are ending. Missionaries were once interpreters of cultures and societies. The *Chinese Repository* in the 19<sup>th</sup> century is a case in point. It opened new horizons for East-West exchanges. Such is no longer the case. The ease of air travel and information technology change all that.

---

<sup>6</sup> I owe this interpretation to Oliver O'Donovan, 'The Loss of a Sense of Place,' in Oliver O'Donovan and Joan Lockwood O'Donovan, *Bonds of Imperfection: Christian Politics, Past and Present* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 314. Commenting on Psalm 119: 57-64: he noted: '. . . the law, which conferred the national identity . . . was no longer established by residence. . . . Pilgrimage was unending, and so replaced inhabitation as the dominant metaphor for life.' I am grateful also to my colleague Dr Tan Yak-hwee for her comments on this theme.

<sup>7</sup> See for example Wang Gungwu's discussion on such interactions in East Asia in 'Nationalism in Asia' and 'Empires and Anti-Empires' in *Bind us in Time: Nation and Civilisation in Asia* (Singapore: Eastern Universities Press, 2003), 93-110, 154-179.

Missionary societies in the West try to adapt themselves to this changed time. Mission now takes place “from everywhere to everywhere”, so Michael Nazir-Ali suggested in the 1990s. Samuel Escobar picked up this theme to insist that the gospel is “from everywhere to everyone”<sup>8</sup>. Yet I do not think such proposals go far enough. They do not pay enough attention to the geopolitical challenges in particular places. To them, mission takes place within a “global context”. One can picture the world as a network with hubs “from everywhere to everywhere”. Yet, hubs are dispensable by definition. Therefore, such mission paradigm focuses on the flow processes. The geographical locations of Africa, Latin America and Asia become unimportant. Christians are simply faceless resources in the interchange. After all, the “traffic controllers” are still in the West. They hold the purse and propriety rights to information technology, and continue to manage the traffic as they like.

This is why I expressed elsewhere deep reservation for the so-called “global Christianity”.<sup>9</sup> It is a poor substitute for the universal Church in this age of globalization. Missiologists living in the West, however well-meaning they are, cannot interpret and speak for church worldwide. The so-called interfaith dialogues and cross-cultural engagements are abstracted from the geopolitical realities, and so lose their critical edges. They may help post-Christian societies in the West to grapple with their own multicultural issues. Yet they are far from able to embrace the multifacet human condition in the wider world.

#### *4. Meaning of mission engagement*

The Great Commission constrains Christians to effect reconciliation with peoples who were or still are hostile against their own nations.

Saint Paul announced: “Christ is our Peace . . . and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. . . . So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and members of the household of God (Ephesians 2: 14-19)”. He also depicted his apostolic ministry to be an “ambassador for Christ (2 Corinthians 5:20)”.

These words are of special significance for those in Asia and Africa. These continents consist of nation-states that are still grappling with histories of ethnic and religious conflicts. Colonial and imperialist policies have dictated national boundaries and political identities. I speak of course not simply of expansionist exploits from the West, but among ethnic groups and nations in Asia and Africa. All are involved in a web of atrocities. For example, in East Asia, we can think of China’s aggression against Vietnam, Japan against southeastern Asia and suchlike. It is ironic that most countries in these continents, perhaps on grounds of national security and economic interests, have made peace with the West since World War II. Yet, they are far from reconciling with one another. The Cold War legacy and the present-day American domination contribute to further conflicts among peoples within the continents.

---

<sup>8</sup> Michael Nazir-Ali, *From Everywhere to Everywhere* (London: Collins, 1990); Samuel Escobar, *The New Global Mission: the gospel from everywhere to everyone* (Downers Grove: Inter Varsity Press, 2003).

<sup>9</sup> See my review of S Bevan and R Schroeder, *Constant in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today* in *Mission Studies*, 22 (2005): 137-144. See also my comments on Dale Irvin and Scott Sunquist’s methodology in ‘Reflection on the Identity of the Church in Asia: An Ecumenical Dialogue,’ *Trinity Theological Journal*, 13 (2005): 1-26.

Most missiologists are not sensitive to such political undercurrents. True, they are mostly alert to the cultural, religious, and racial dimensions in mission. After all, societies in America and Britain are becoming such.

When the risen Lord commissioned his apostles to go and make disciples of all nations, he has in mind the need of carrying the message of reconciliation to old and present enemies. The story of Jonah is instructive. The messenger (and not just the message) himself is an offer of reconciliation and contrition. The act of receiving the messenger is equally a sign of hope. It offers hope to the eventual reconciliation among peoples who are bitterly divided. This is why the Love Commandment remains the most potent testimony of the Christian community.

It is unfortunate that Western Churches have all along misunderstood the Great Commission. They read the Commission as a call for civilizational changes. Christianity then stands for historical progress. Missionaries sought conversion of nations and kings to advance Christendom around the world. For example, Otis Cary of the Church Missionary Society wrote these astonishing words one hundred years ago:

“The influence of Japan upon the nations of the continent is becoming more and more marked. Unless all the signs are deceptive, much of the world’s history during the next century will centre about Eastern Asia. Great political, social, and religious changes are at hand. If Japan should be given over to materialism and infidelity, the Church will have lost a powerful ally and will have its difficulties increased. If Japan should speedily become a Christian nation, Korea, Siam, and the vast empire of China would be profoundly influenced by the event itself, while the Japanese Christians, imbued with a missionary spirit, would join the Churches of the West in hastening forward to bring about the redemption of Asia.<sup>10</sup>”

These words came in the heat of the Meiji reform period, when Japan sought to adopt the superior infrastructures in the West. With hindsight of Japan’s aggression in East Asia shortly afterwards, we may greet with anxiety Otis’ optimistic assessment. Yet he aptly summarized the mission tactics of Western churches: (1) targeting friendly nations as regional launch-pads; (2) expecting domino effects in the region; (3) equating Christianity with political reform. Is it not the time for missiologists to re-examine the legacies of such naïve attempts on peoples within the Global South?

### **The manner of love: Till they have homes**

To rebuild homes among peoples whom we have wronged is the practical task of love in present-day churches.

Earlier I refer to God’s dealing with his ancient People of Israel. How did God fulfill his promise to Abraham, that by him all families of the earth shall bless themselves (Genesis 12: 3)? How were the People of God to fulfill their calling? Surely the Old

---

<sup>10</sup> Otis Cary, *Japan and its Regeneration. Revised edition* (New York: Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions, 1904), 123.

Testament does not give us a story of the expansion of a Jewish Empire. As we trace the rise and fall of the Kingdoms of Israel and Judah, we find how they were chastised for their disobedience. They lived as sojourners, slaves, and exiles among powerful nations throughout. As they reflected their painful history, they came to see that they would fulfill their vocation in the manner of a Suffering Servant rather than as a conquering king. God re-commissioned his discouraged and exiled People to be light for the nations in a new way, in the role of a Suffering Servant (Isaiah 53: 2-3; 49: 3-6).

Jesus Christ fulfilled the role of the Suffering Servant. He accepted a life of homelessness so that he can restore this world to be a home for us all. Because he had nowhere to lay down his head, so we who were once strangers and aliens could have a share in the household of God. When Jesus charged his disciples to go the ends of the world, he has in mind that they were to leave their familiar homes and countries. He called them to venture to the far corners of the world that peoples may be reconciled and live together as one household that is built on the foundation of Jesus Christ.

We would no longer watch the war refugees, the aliens and the uprooted in the world in the safe distance before our computer monitor or television screen. God calls us to let go of protected surroundings and familiar suppositions to draw close to them in real life. This would challenge us to live in homeless conditions so that others may rebuild their homes again. Healing and restoration would come out of such endeavours, and provide the necessary conditions where peoples who were once enemies can live together in harmony.

This has special relevance for Christians who live in materially rich nations in the non-Western world. For example, South Korea, Japan, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore enjoy a living standard that is much higher than that of their immediate neighbours. It is important for Christians there to stand alongside their fellows in the wider region.

Such lines of approach lead to practical tasks that the entire Christian communities can undertake. Christians need to move from the natural instinct “till we have homes” to “till they have homes”. To a great extent, rebuilding homes was a global preoccupation since World War II.

I can think of my own parents’ generation who fled to Hong Kong and rebuild their lives there. Life was hard; yet there was relative social stability. They got on with practical tasks in raising the family with their meagre earnings, put the children through school, and hoped for the day when life would be better in their children’s generation.

I believe many can tell such a story. And we can count ourselves fortunate. There are many more children and parents who live in volatile societies. Home continues to be an elusive dream for many whose lives are shattered through famine, natural disasters, diseases, and fratricidal wars within families and societies.

Can we move from the political vision of nation-building to the social vision of home rebuilding, and from rebuilding our homes to those of others? Who are our

neighbours? Love calls us to discern such practical tasks.<sup>11</sup> For some, this may mean we need to discover fitting ways to serve those whom our forebears have wronged. For others, the form of Christian discipleship lies in welcoming children from broken families into their homes. Whatever form it takes, it contributes to reinforce the moral and spiritual fabrics of our communities, and make them increasingly stable. They are practical tasks in overcoming evil by good (Romans 12).

### **Beyond a defence of western missionary legacy**

To put the present discussion in sharper relief, we turn to Brian Stanley's recent "Defence of Mission". In his 2006 Ramsden Sermon in Cambridge University "In Defence of Mission", Stanley tried to answer two charges against mission. First, the conviction that mission is "inextricably tied to processes of domination [by the West]"; and second, the "Christian claim to be in receipt of revealed truth about God" is at odds with present-day cultural relativism.<sup>12</sup>

On the first charge, Stanley pointed out that missionaries were the ones who pioneered "the vernacularization of the Christian message". This carried "new cultural and even political significance" among the peoples who were touched by the gospel. "The Bible has far more often been a vehicle of liberation than one of domination." On the second accusation, the insistence on questions of truth and faith in fact provides "the most secure basis for insisting that no claim to religious knowledge should be suppressed or ridiculed". Stanley pointed out that all four gospel writers "record some form of commission by the risen Christ, instructing his followers on his authority to teach and make baptised disciples of all nations, that is from all cultural, ethnic and religious backgrounds. . . . It is a commission, not to dominate the world, but to serve it, not to divide the world, but to unite it".

These are fine words. It calls for three comments. First, Stanley saw the need to mount a "defence" of mission. This is necessary as Christianity retreats from Western societies; it is fast becoming a marginalized and privatized faith. Should Christianity remain as a credible academic discipline that receives public funding? Christian communities and the wider public may well ask. Stanley tried to instill a renewed sense of confidence in mission.

Second, Stanley's effort is more properly a "Defence of the Legacies of Western Missionary Movements", an apology of *Western* forms of missionary practice, past and present. But how successful is he? He refuted the charge that missionaries conspired with structures of empire against the indigenous peoples. The missionaries expressed the Gospel in local languages and sanctified them to be catalysts for cultural and political reform. Indeed, the Christian printing presses in Shanghai in the 19<sup>th</sup> century were instrumental to China's modernization. The work of John Fryer,

---

<sup>11</sup> I am indebted to Oliver O'Donovan for his plea: 'to draw the gifted and the able back from the great world capitals and universities to the regional and local communities from which they sprang, to put the gifts and skills which they possess at the service of their neighbours'. See 'The Loss of a Sense of Place' in Oliver O'Donovan and Joan Lockwood O'Donovan, *Bonds of Imperfection: Christian Politics, Past and Present* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 319. Those of us who live in wealthier parts in the Global South need to be inspired to extend this movement to our neighbouring countries till they too can live in secure homes.

<sup>12</sup> Brian Stanley, 'In Defence of Mission,' Fulcrum, <http://www.fulcrum-anglican.org.uk/page.cfm?ID=125>.

William A Martin, Timothy Richard and Allen Young are cases in point.

However, Stanley did not deal with a more fundamental issue in the first charge. Protestant missionaries on the whole linked Christianity with social and historical progress. What was new in colonial expansion from the 19<sup>th</sup> century was the ability to conquer distant lands. Africa and eastern Asia had to contend with a “West” that was structurally far superior to them. Japan was the first in Asia to adopt Western infrastructures, and used it with stunning success against her neighbours in the twentieth century.<sup>13</sup> Many missionaries might have dissociated themselves from the Western powers. However, the fundamental premise “Christianity is the catalyst of civilizational progress” stays unchallenged.<sup>14</sup>

We must ask: must Christian advances go hand in hand with liberal values as espoused in the West? If so, it follows Western democratic ideals would still shape mission practices. And such is still often the case. Many still confuse the Christian cause with Western cultures, American foreign policies and individual-rights issues. Now that Western societies have by and large lost a social vision in this post-Christendom era; mission becomes private, individual, and short-term pursuits. Mission trips can thus become no better than a niche market in the tourism trade.

I suggest it is important to rediscover the ways how Christians outside the Christendom world share their faith. Christians who live in political and social structures that are different from Western societies may have important lessons for us today. Churches in the non-Western world need urgently to begin fresh approaches to mission.

Third, it also follows that Stanley also did not fully meet the truth-claim criticism in the second half of his defence. Indeed, as Stanley put it: “Jesus Christ embodies the fullness of divine truth. . . . The Christian internationalism that was rooted in the missionary enterprise . . . was fuelled by a conviction that the Church is called to be a sign of God’s redemptive purposes for a divided humanity.” Yet what if cultural relativism is not the issue on hand? The charge against missionaries is that they sought to carve out the world along their denominational and doctrinal positions, and hence deprived churches in Asia, Africa and Latin America the whole truth and full inheritance of the Gospel. Here missionaries might have inadvertently replicate tactics of Western powers, whether in the form of a “Scramble for Africa” or “Christian Occupation in China”, made possible by the superior infrastructures of

---

<sup>13</sup> See Wang Gungwu’s comment: ‘The British led the way to total Western supremacy in Asia. It was a supremacy assured by a new kind of civilization built upon the Industrial Revolution, the liberation of bourgeois economic values and the cohesive nation state.’ *Bind us in Time*, 97.

<sup>14</sup> For example, George Smith, the first Bishop of Victoria, spoke in these terms. “Our work in China differs essentially from the course of Missionary operations among barbarian nations; . . . In such case a Missionary approaches a native tribe as a pioneer of civilization as well as a propagator of the Christian religion. But in China the newly-arrived Missionary enjoys no such prominence of vantage-ground. He finds himself in the midst of a reading, intelligent and ancient people. . . . Their civilization now diminished and waning to decay, can boast an antiquity which casts our comparatively modern period of national origin into the mere events of yesterday. . . . They need Christianity, and they need Christianity alone, to spread the blessings of the highest and truest civilization over the land; and to place China, now almost hopelessly decrepit and defunct, in the foremost rank of Oriental and Asiatic nations.” See *A Charge delivered to the Anglican Clergy in Trinity Church at Shanghai on March 16<sup>th</sup>, 1860* (Shanghai: North China Herald Press), 9-10.

Western civilization. Such practices to carve out spheres of influence still continue in subtle forms of financial aid to vulnerable churches and regions in the non-Western world. The world becomes no more than a theater of establishing Western power blocs, whether they be Anglo-catholic or evangelical, liberal or fundamentalist, this or that church growth technique from America, and suchlike. So, Western churches would not expect new voices from the Global South. Western models still dictate their view of truth.<sup>15</sup> For them, the world may as well just be viewed in terms of human resources and market opportunities.

I used Stanley's sermon for illustrative purposes. The "Defence" was within a short sermon and surely did not represent Stanley's fuller view on the matter.

At the same time, the above discussion shows that we Christians need to urgently understand world histories and geopolitical configurations if we are to be effective for mission in the new world-order of the twenty-first century. Stanley saw Jesus' commission embracing "all nations, that is from all cultural, ethnic and religious backgrounds". The "political" dimension is strangely missing. In Christian mission we announce the coming of the King: "the Kingdom of God is at hand". It challenges the ways that all secular powers organize their societies and nations in light of Christ's advent. Therefore, Christian message is always dangerous, and discipleship costly.

Theologians, mission scholars and historians across the world have a special responsibility to promote a theological understanding such understanding. It is disturbing that discussion on mission in the West over the past thirty years has become increasingly abstract, and increasingly become the preoccupation of the experts. For example, the Anglican Communion adopted the following five marks of mission in the Anglican Consultative Council in 1984 and 1990:

- i. to proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God;
- ii. to teach, baptize and nurture new believers;
- iii. to respond to human need by loving service;
- iv. to seek to transform the unjust structures of society;
- v. to strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth.<sup>16</sup>

Notice how such outlook arise from questions within Western Christianity. The five marks seek to bridge the evangelical and social activist divide; find new ways for the West to engage the rest of the world; and take up ecological concerns brought about by globalization. Yet, how can mission activities be concrete and effective if we do not have a theological understanding of geopolitical infrastructures that human communities are connected with?<sup>17</sup>

---

<sup>15</sup> This is why I expressed reservation to Andrew Goddard's quadrant model. It simply reflected the ecclesiological and theological concerns in American and Britain. So the Anglican Communion Institute sadly defended the status quo rather than truth. So it is becoming irrelevant to resolving the Communion crisis at hand. See my 'How much is the Global South worth? A Response to the Anglican Communion Institute on GC2006,' Global South Anglicans, [http://www.globalsouthanglican.org/index.php/comments/how\\_much\\_is\\_the\\_global\\_south\\_worth](http://www.globalsouthanglican.org/index.php/comments/how_much_is_the_global_south_worth).

<sup>16</sup> See *Anglicans in Mission: A Transforming Journey: Report of MISSIO, the Mission Commission of the Anglican Communion to the Anglican Consultative Council*, ed. by Eleanor Johnson and John Clark (London; SPCK, 2000).

<sup>17</sup> See Oliver O'Donovan's criticism of the baptismal liturgy of the Episcopal Church of the USA. "We

Nor do the evangelicals offer better insight. Samuel Escobar's influential treatment on mission is a case in point. In the Iguassu Dialogue, he identified global shifts towards the southern continents and Pentecostal forms of Christianity. He further discussed the impact of globalization and fundamentalism on the post-Christendom world-order. It was puzzling that he was silent on the particular geopolitical agenda of the Global South.<sup>18</sup> The Iguassu Dialogue dealt mainly with contextual and interfaith issues. There was little exploration on the tensions within the Global South.<sup>19</sup> It was as if the conversations were between the West and the rest of the world. Along similar lines, the Iguassu Affirmation touches on issues of gospel and culture, pluralism, the impact of globalization and ecological crisis. Yet there is little reflection on the particular political challenges of today except in the context of religious persecution and human rights.<sup>20</sup> This reveals how dominant the Christendom-mentality still takes hold of mission discussions. Such outlook tends to be abstract and idealist, and so unable to direct us to practical tasks.

### **An invitation to break into the real life of the people**

Let me end.

During World War II, Bishop R O Hall of South China wrote a small classic *The Art of the Missionary: Fellow-workers with the Church in China*. In one of the chapters he encouraged Western missionaries to move out of their protected life, the "concession areas" carved out in China where foreigners enjoyed consular protection. He pleaded: "To break through into the real life of the people is the task of the modern missionary."<sup>21</sup>

Despite the hype surrounding Wall's observations that "the Christian centre of gravity has moved to the southern continents". I contended above that there is little advance in mission thinking. In the West, mission studies are fast becoming professional, abstract, and remote from church life. The Christendom experience still dictates Christian outlooks. Christianity still confines itself, using Hall's analogy, within the concession areas in the world.

To break into the real life of the people – this is the mission task of the twenty-first century. Churches in Asia, Africa and Latin America need to wake up to their calling to shoulder this responsibility. Only then could the Christian faith become a truly universal faith, and indeed a world-affirming faith. The truth of the Gospel is more evangelical than what Evangelicals have understood it; more liberating than what the

---

are offered a vision of political responsibility in a vacuum, whereas in life it is mediated through the exercise of, and through obligation to, structures of political authority . . . ." *The Desire of the Nations*, 17.

<sup>18</sup> See Samuel Escobar, 'The global scenario at the turn of the century' and 'Evangelical missiology: peering into the future' in *Global Missiology for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. The Iguassu Dialogue*, ed. by William D Taylor (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 25-46, 101-122.

<sup>19</sup> One notable exception is Jon Bonk. He noted: "we need a missiology that forces us to think small . . . that recognizes that any gospel not made visible in the living flesh of another human being is no gospel at all. It is simply noise." See 'Engaging Escobar . . . and Beyond' in *Global Missiology for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, 54.

<sup>20</sup> See *Global Missiology*, 16-21.

<sup>21</sup> *The Art of the Missionary* (London; SCM Press, 1942), 65.

Liberals have insisted on; more catholic and historic than what the Anglo-Catholics have espoused. Churches in the Global South need to work towards extending our horizons of the Christian faith.

Such conviction carries practical implications. I suggested Christians to have a special responsibility in taking the lead to bring about reconciliation between peoples who are (still) locked in hostility against one another. Can we reenter the wider world to rebuild homes and stable societies for others without empire-building intents? Christians should blaze the way.

And there is a deeper meaning in such practical tasks of love. For they point to the One who for our sakes became poor and homeless, that we may have a place in the Father's house. For all those who "live as strangers and foreigners on the earth" for his sake, "God is not ashamed to be called their God; indeed, he has prepared a city for them (Hebrews 11: 13-16)."

Sixty-first Anniversary of the End of the Pacific War  
August 2006, Singapore