

United Church of Zambia Theological College

March 2004

The Conference "**Mission in the 21st Century. Mission as Evangelism in Tension with Mission as Development**", was held from 25 March to 1 April 2004 and was organised by the United Theological College of Zambia (UTCZ).

The **purpose** of the Conference was to explore and examine the commonalities and tensions between mission as evangelism and mission as development as it has been, and is being, experienced in many of the once politically colonised and the presently economically colonised countries of the south.

The **goals** were to understand and appreciate the gift of mission as evangelism and the gift of mission as development from a variety of contexts; to identify, and begin to understand and grapple with the complexities of the issues that we face as a world church; to hear from each of the continents, and begin to understand their focus for mission as evangelism, as we discern the relevance of this understanding for our own work and to interact with a wide variety of people and understandings of mission as evangelism.

The gathering also included preparation work for the 2005 Conference on World Mission and Evangelism (CWME), to be held in Athens, Greece. In order to accomplish this, information was provided to the participants in lectures and through panels, which focused on the previous conferences, and in particular on the Athens conference. The following document, prepared by one of the lecturers (Prof. Michael Kinnamon, from Eden Theological Seminary) summarises the lectures, focusing specifically on reconciliation and healing, the thematic focus of the 2005 Conference, as a contribution to its preparation process.

(Note: since the document refers to the authors of the paper, there is a list of participants at the end).

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Mission and Ecumenical Formation Team Co-ordinator.

Summary of Lectures

I. Shared understandings and affirmations

A. Common analysis of the contemporary world situation

1. The U.S. is now an Empire, seeking to impose a Pax Americana, with negative implications for all of the countries represented at the conference.
2. We face massive threats to the human future, including growing disparity between rich and poor, ecological destruction, and militarization (Joy).
3. Women are still subordinated, especially in the more traditional cultures.

4. Fundamentalism, understood as "escapist spirituality" without ethical content that creates dependence by promising security (Gebara), is spreading worldwide. Many of the rapidly-growing Christian communities in Africa are proclaiming a "prosperity gospel" that reduces mission to numerical increase and reinforces the often-oppressive status quo by focusing on personal salvation while ignoring economic and political injustice.

5. Most of the nations discussed are marked by increasing religious and cultural pluralism.

B. Common understanding of the gospel, e.g.,

1. "God is at work in the hearts and history of all people to overcome empires, break bondage, and free people" (Ferguson).

2. Christianity is heavily implicated in colonialism, racism, and sexism, but the gospel encourages the struggle for liberation and a self-critical church (Phiri).

3. The Bible has been and is used to oppress, but, properly understood, it is liberative - individually and socially. Jesus established a social movement that had, as its goal, the political economic, social, and religious renewal of Israel (Wanamaker). Paul also affirms struggle in this world if we reject de-historicized readings of him and, instead, locate him in the context of the Roman Empire (Tamez).

C. Common approach to mission

1. We properly speak of God's mission (missio Dei), a mission of tikkun olam (justice for God's creatures and healing for God's creation) in which the whole church is called to participate.

2. Historically, Christian mission has often been understood as bringing truth for civilizing alien cultures (Legge). We now see these parts of mission history as an arm of imperialism that confused the gospel with western culture.

3. Participation in God's mission must be "holistic" in the sense that it seeks to overcome dualism and spiritualization of the Good News (Tamez). Mission is incarnation, witness, liberation (A. Ham); formation, proclamation, healing (C. Ham); salvation and humanization (Selvanayagam, drawing on M. M. Thomas).

4. Participation in God's mission includes the healing of our own communities through solidarity with others and a willingness to be self-critical.

5. The Kingdom (Dominion) of God is the proper context and goal of the church's proclamation.

6. These changes in the theology of mission have, to a large extent, not affected local congregations (the church doesn't practice what it preaches - Mombo) and are now being challenged by fundamentalist forms of Christianity (Gebara).

7. In the West, many development workers appear to believe in development rather than the gospel (Plant). The mission work of the church needs a strong theological foundation.

II. Key Issues/Dialectics

A. Evangelism and Development

This, of course, was a thematic focus for the conference. The general approach, perhaps best summarized by Tamez, is that we need to overcome the dualism, not just "maintain the tension." The church must share the gospel, witnessing in word and deed; and it must work to enable a better life for those who live in poverty and fear, including the poor in western countries (Ross). Both words have been corrupted - "evangelism" by being equated with coercive or manipulative forms of proclamation, "development" by being identified with practices that perpetuate patterns of dependency. Properly understood, however, they are both essential to holistic mission.

B. Healing and Reconciliation

These terms will figure prominently in next year's world mission conference in Athens; and, again, both are problematic. Healing is often associated with magical cures, while reconciliation sounds to some ears like compromise with oppressors. At our meeting, however, "healing" was frequently used to define mission (e.g., Gnanadason), to signal the link between evangelism and development. Similarly, "reconciliation" was affirmed so long as it involves "not only listening to the suffering caused but evidence that it has been heard, the wrong-doing acknowledged, and steps of repentance and redress taken" (Legge). Both terms are prominent in contemporary African theology: reconciliation in the aftermath of apartheid, healing as a practice common in African religion (as well as Christian scripture).

C. Gospel and Culture

This dialectic was central to the last world mission conference (Salvador, 1996). Now, as then, speakers from the North (West) see the issues differently from those in the South. The former understandably call for the church to be a counter-cultural voice or presence in the midst of idolatrous societies; the latter understandably call for the church to be more at home in their various settings, working, for example, to ensure fair elections or to promote AIDS education.

D. Dialogue and Witness

The same kind of tension, though with somewhat different partners, surfaced over the issue of interfaith relations. Presenters from Europe, North America, and Asia (home to great religious plurality) tended to rail against the idolatry of their cultures but to affirm that God can and does speak through other faith traditions. Presenters from Africa, in particular, tended to affirm that God speaks through various cultures but to be more cautious about making such claims for other religions. (Nearly every speaker was more suspicious of right-wing Christians than of persons of other faiths.) If we had pressed for a theological consensus, it might have echoed the 1989 mission conference in San Antonio (as quoted by C. Ham): "We cannot point to any other salvation than Jesus Christ; at the same time, we cannot set limits on the saving power of God."

E. Solidarity and Diversity

There was broad agreement that the church should be marked by global partnership but should reject the promotion (let alone imposition) of a single theology or culture. We need, in the words of Musa Dube (as quoted by Legge), a "liberating interdependence," a "dialogical sharing among all the diverse experiences and expressions of the love of God in Christ" (Gnanadason), as an alternative to destructive forms of globalization. An obvious example of needed solidarity would be for western churches to press for affordable drugs to combat AIDS in Africa. The discussion got far more difficult, however, when the rights of homosexuals was added to the justice agenda by speakers from North America! The question of the limits of diversity (when solidarity breaks down) was left unanswered.

G. Unity and Mission

Many of the conference speakers came from churches formed by the union of confessional traditions (e.g., the United Church of Zambia, the Church of South India, and the United Church of Canada). As a result, there was some discussion of how our divisions serve the purposes of empire (Ferguson) and of the need for churches in the South, for the sake of mission, to repudiate divisions recycled from the West (Selvanayagam). Christianity, as Gebara put it, has become a source of fragmentation when its role should be to gather those whose community has been fragmented by the world.

F. Contextual and Universal

This is really another formulation of the previous dialectic. There was a great deal of talk about the importance of contextual theology and contextualized mission emphases. The conference agenda reinforced the significance of contextuality by inviting speakers to address the mission situation in their own particular settings. At the same time, however, the papers are filled with universal claims about God's will for justice, healing, reconciliation, and unity. This may argue in favor of what the South African mission scholar, David Bosch (referred to in several papers), called "bold humility" - bold in our witness to God's truth made known in Christ, humble in our recognition that our perceptions of that truth are necessarily limited by history and culture.

H. Hope and Realism

While the speakers realistically assessed the state of the world, the dominant theme of the conference was hope. Several speakers cited the World Social Forum's call "to believe that another world is possible" and/or defined mission as hope in action (Ferguson). Conversely, they noted the wide-spread lack of hope (A. Ham), saw the prosperity gospel as "cheap hope" (Phiri), and pointed out that much mission work is shaped by secular eschatologies rather than by scripture's vision of God's promised future (Plant).

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The speakers of the Conference included:

Elizabeth Joy from CWM Abraham Berinyuu from EDAN Charles Wanamaker from South Africa Elsa Tamez from Costa Rica (sent her paper) Carlos Ham from Cuba with WCC Peter Henriot, Jesuit from Zambia Israel Selvanayagam from India working in Cambridge Aruna

Gnanadason from India with WCC Charles Thomas from Mindolo Michael Kinnamon from the USA Maake Masango from South Africa Esther Mombo from Kenya Edwin Zulo from South Africa Lucy Kasanga from Zambia Ivone Gebara from Brazil Adolfo Ham from Cuba Jacques Thomson from Scotland Ernst Conradie from South Africa Stephen Plant from England Ken Ross from Scotland John Kafwanka from Zambia Caroline Wickens from England serving in Kenya Marilyn Legge from Canada Chris Ferguson from Canada Musonda Bwalya from Zambia Muimui Sinyama from Zambia Tobias Brandner from Switzerland serving in Hong Kong M Mahlangu-Ngeobo from South Africa serving in the USA Garth Mundle from Canada Isabel Phiri from Malawi serving in South Africa Japhet Ndhlovu from Zambia.