

REPORT ON THE BIBLE AND MISSION STUDY GROUP

IAMS XITH QUADRENNIAL CONFERENCE PORT DICKSON, JULY 29 – AUGUST 7, 2004

1. Preliminary

This report was first drafted by Klippias Kritzinger who took notes of the proceedings of our study sessions. He also presented parts of this report in the plenary session in “Reports from the Mission Study Groups”. The current report incorporates and supplements this draft report.

Teresa Okure, SHCJ, coordinated the group of sixteen participants. Their names are given in number point 3 below.

2. Procedure

The group had four study sessions. The first session at which more than 16 participants were present was devoted to self-introduction, clarification of the nature of the study sessions to arrive at a corporate decision on how we would proceed in the four sessions. As enjoined by the Executive Secretary, the group decided that no long papers would be presented or discussed during the sessions (only one member of the group had prepared and tabled in the conference hall such a paper on the conference theme). At the request of members, Teresa Okure presented the position paper which had been mailed to members and posted on the conference web site before the conference (though some did not get it). From the discussion of this paper (with copies were made for those who did not have it), the group agreed that we would:

- a) focus on what “the gospel” is as a prerequisite for understanding the integrity of mission in its light;
- b) operate with a hermeneutics of suspicion by not accepting a priori traditional interpretations of a text. Rather we would endeavor to hear the text anew and allow contemporary issues in mission to give us new insights into it;
- c) interpret every text chosen in our concrete situations;
- d) pay attention to the context of the text itself as an important data in the interpretation.

To offer opportunity for full participation of every member, it was agreed that we would work in five groups of four members each (though one group had four members). Each participant was to select a biblical passage that expressed the integrity of mission in his/her particular context, then “weave together” (a well known metaphor used by Leo Kleden in his plenary paper) the “stories” of that context with “the story” of the selected biblical passage. Selections could be made from the passages listed in the position paper of the Study Group or from any part of the Bible. Each participant would present this interpretation of his/her passage in the small group for discussion. Subsequently each group would report on the highlights of their discussion to the larger group.

Members were also asked to relate their interpretations to the following dimensions of the “integrity” of mission and to any other dimensions they may have heard during the proceedings of the conference:

- personal honesty; willingness to admit weakness or failure
- wholeness (inclusiveness) of and in mission
- faithfulness to the gospel as the heart of mission (holiness)
- relevance or credibility in concrete contexts

3. Selected Biblical Passages

Participants chose the following passages, which represent and inspired a fascinating variety of approaches to context analysis, theological reflection, awareness of contemporary challenges in Christian mission and personal involvement in ministry.

Kleden, Leo (Indonesia/Italy)	John 4
Kritzinger, Klippies (South Africa)	Jeremiah 3:15-18
McClymont, Allan (Malaysia)	John 17:14-19
Nissen, Johannes (Denmark)	Luke 4:1-30
Okure, Teresa (Nigeria)	Galatians 3:23-29; 5:1
Pachau, Lalsangkima (India)	2 Cor 4
Pagara, Bernabe (Philippines)	Matthew 28:16-20
Paterson, Robert (New Zealand)	Matthew 11:2-6
Prior, John (Indonesia)	Luke 4:14-30
Saravanam, Samuel (India)	Matthew 28:16-20
Sihombing, Batara (Indonesia)	John 4:31-38
Storstein Haug, Kari (Thailand/Norway)	John 4
Tauchner, Christian (Ecuador)	Matthew 1:23
Tienou, Tite (Senegal?/USA)	Galatians 3:1-9
Van Butselaar, Marijke (Netherlands)	Philippians 3:12-21
Varughese, John (India)	Philippians 2:5-11

Part of the last session of the study was devoted to discussing the emerging issues and possible ways forward with the rich variety of insights shared from the above studies.

4. Emerging Issues

The following issues came up in the discussion:

- 4.1 The need for deepening awareness of the interpretative methods we use and a thorough discussion of how useful or appropriate they are.
- 4.2 The need for ongoing studies of how the Bible is actually used in specific contexts by faith communities, an aspect of Bible and Mission Studies already proposed in the BISAM book, *To Cast Fire Upon the Earth*. These studies could be done in depth in one community or comparatively/dialogically across different communities.
- 4.3 The need for further work on the classical project of the “biblical foundation of mission”, especially as this is presented in programmes of theological education. The Old Testament may be an area of particular attention in this regard.

- 4.4 The need for the development of creative imagination in “weaving together” the story of Jesus with stories of people in a particular context.

5. Ongoing Process

- 5.1 A number of group members indicated their interest to develop further the passages they presented in small groups for a possible BISAM publication.
- 5.2 Some core members of BISAM felt that the workshop on the Bible and Mission Studies during an IAMS conference should be planned beforehand by the BISAM group, so that it would contribute to an ongoing BISAM project, and not be tied down to theme of the conference. In that case IAMS members who sign up for the Bible and Mission Studies workshop during a conference should be prepared to fit into the ongoing project of IAMS, whatever that might be.
- 5.3 It was also suggested that the IAMS executive committee should make provision in the conference programme for regular reporting of all IAMS Interest Groups as was done in the case of the Secretary’s, the Treasurer’s and the Editor of *Mission Studies* reports.

6. Evaluation of the Workshop by the Coordinator

A few members of the group (mainly the academicians) were disappointed that we missed the opportunity to present and discuss papers. Others (mainly those whose ministries are more directly involved with the people) found the process used at the workshop illuminating, empowering and affirming. They were happy with the opportunity and challenge “to cultivate their own gardens”, namely, to reflect on, present and discuss with colleagues their chosen texts in their particular contexts. Perhaps IAMS needs to give a more serious attention to how it can incorporate the latter approach into its way of doing mission studies. It may be a matter of coming to grips with the tension between text-centered and life-centered approaches in mission studies, though the two need not be set in opposition. It may also be a case of making substantial provision in mission studies for women approaches along with the “classical” (predominantly male) approaches. The need for “inter-methodologies” in mission studies (between the Northern and the Southern approaches) that was raised in an intervention during the conference also applies here. This issue may be deemed as indispensable for the “integrity of mission” in the twenty-first century.

After the conference, core members of the BISAM Interest Group present at the conference met, on a prior arrangement, for two days to map out the projects of the Interest Group during the next four years. John Prior, chosen as the new Coordinator of BISAM during the meeting, presents separately the report on this meeting.

Teresa Okure, SHCJ
 Coordinator of the Bible and Mission Study Group
 3 September 2003