

Witness, Worship and Presence: On the Integrity of Mission in Contemporary Europe¹

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THE INS AND OUTS OF IT

"In it, not of it," the statement was made
As Christian One faced the world, much afraid.
"In it, not of it," the call was made clear,
But Christian One got something stuck in his ear.
"Not in it, or of it" was the thing that he heard.
And knowing the world was painfully absurd,
He welcomed the safety of pious retreat,
And went to the potluck for something to eat.

Now Christian Two, he knew what to do,
He'd show those funnies a thing or two!
How will the world ever give Christ a try
If we don't get in there and identify?
So "In it, and of it," he said in his car,
As he pulled in and stopped at a popular bar.
"I'll tell them the truth as soon as I'm able
To get myself out from under this table."

Now along comes Christian Three jogging for Jesus,
In witnessing sweats made of four matching pieces.
His earphones are playing a hot Christian tune
About how the Lord is coming back soon
"Not in it, but of it," he turns down the hill
And stops in for a bite at the Agape Grill
Like the gold on the chain of his God loves you bracelet,
He can have the world without having to face it.

While way up in heaven they lament these conditions
That come from changing a few prepositions
"Not in it, or of it," Christian One thought.
But who in the world will know that he's not
"In it, and of it," thought Christian Two.
But who in the world will know that he knew?
"Not in it, but of it," thought Christian Three.
But who in the world watches Christian TV?

And Jesus turns to Gabriel, shaking His head.
"In it, not of it," wasn't that what I said?"³

The integrity of mission is the integrity of Christian life, which, as Scriptures testify, is a life filled, transformed and guided by the Spirit of God. Christian life, Christian mission and Christian community are inseparable. Mission is not one of many options for ecclesial performance. Mission is a must!⁴ It is an inheritance and a birthmark of Christianity. And it is God's providential means for the redemption of the world. As the lines of the poet remind us, the issue at stake is not whether the church engages the world, but in the extent to which the life of the church is an embedded proclamation of the good news of the Kingdom of God anticipated by Isaiah and the prophets and inaugurated in the life and ministry of Jesus the

¹ Parts of this paper were previously discussed at the Baptist World Alliance Summit on Baptist Mission in the 21st Century held in the Swanwick, UK, May 05-09 2003 and published as "Presence and Witness: Facing the Challenges to Christian Mission Today" in *Journal of European Baptist Studies*, 4:2 (January 2004), 25-33.

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³ John Fischer, "Real Christians Dance!" (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1988). I am grateful to Gregory Nichols for pointing this poem to me.

⁴ According to Peter Nissen, the phrase was coined by the missiologist Father Rogier van Rossum, SSCC in his article "Mission is a Must ("Missie moet")" published in 1978 in *Kosmos en Oekumene*. For van Rossum, Nissen writes, "...mission is necessary not only for the health of the church, but also for the health of human coexistence in a globalizing world. The purpose of mission is not simply to propagate the Christian faith all over the world or to expand the church. Its task is to discover God's initiative in the human world, beyond all religious, cultural, social, political and economic borders and in the farthest corners of society. And in discovering, disclosing, and unveiling God's initiative, the church, through its missionary concern, renders a service to the human world. It can help to turn human existence to human coexistence." ("Mission is a Must". A missiologist profile of Rogier van Rossum," in Frans Wijssen and Peter Nissen (eds.), *Mission is a Must: Intercultural Theology and The Mission of the Church* (Amsterdam-New York, Rodopi, 2002), 3).

Christ. In my view, at the heart of the contemporary missiological debate is the intimate connection between ecclesiology and mission practices defined in terms of different theologies of culture.

The organizers of the conference invited us to reflect on “integrity of mission in the light of the Gospel: Bearing the witness of the Spirit.” I will approach this theme from the context of contemporary Europe. I will address the context first, then I will ask what defines the integrity of Christian mission in contemporary Europe. Finally, I will ask in what sense, and how, does authentic mission bear the witness of the Spirit.

But before going into the details of my argument, I have perhaps to address the issue relating to my own authenticity and integrity in dealing with this theme.

Particularistic Perspective on the Wider European Context. My understanding of the complexity of the European cultural scene is informed by my personal experience of living, working and teaching in different parts of Europe. It is also informed by my more than four years of intimate involvement in the life and ministry of the International Baptist Theological Seminary in Prague. The development and the spirit of this institution have a particular value for the theme of our reflections and I want to spend some time discussing the implications of the particular experience of IBTS for the witness of the larger Christian community in Europe and beyond.⁵

The Seminary was founded in September 1949 in Rüschnikon, Switzerland and is now fully owned and administered by the European Baptist Federation which consists of fifty one Baptist Unions and Conventions throughout Europe and the Middle East. It is a meeting place of students and scholars from cultures, ecclesial arrangements, socio-political realities and linguistic contexts from the British Isles to Siberian Far East and from Scandinavia to the Northern parts of Africa and the Middle East. Due to traditional links with North American and Australasian regions, their contextual and theological concerns have made important contributions to the missiological vision and the legacy of IBTS community. IBTS story is also important, in my view, as a testimony to the Spirit-led missionary vision that survives in spite of the shortcomings even of its founders.

As far as I know, no other continental Christian fellowship apart from the European Baptist Federation, has attempted to develop a deliberate multi-national, multi-cultural community such as the International Baptist Theological Seminary, now located in Jenerálka, Prague. At the end of the Second World War, the Baptist World Alliance called a consultation in London of Baptist mission organisations and unions to discuss work in post-war Europe. At that meeting the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board of the USA announced their intention to found a seminary for training pastors in southern Europe. In the light of all the problems of Europe and as the blanket of communism descended on Central and Eastern Europe, it was judged best to locate the seminary in a neutral country, and in 1948 the Bodmer estate in the village of Rüschnikon, Switzerland was purchased.⁶

⁵ For insights into IBTS history and development, I am in debt to the Rector of the institution, The Revd Keith Jones. For details, see his "The International Baptist Theological Seminary of the European Baptist Federation," in *American Baptist Quarterly*, Volume XVIII, Number 2 (June 1999), p. 191 ff. Updated in the unpublished submission to the University of Wales Validation Board Quinquennial Review, February 2004.

⁶ It is interesting to note that though the seminary was founded in Switzerland by SBC, Europeans had long talked about a European-wide seminary and Prague, the present home of IBTS, had been mentioned as a possible site by English Baptist, Dr J H Rushbrooke in 1920! However, the European Unions had never been strong

As it has been a pattern for most of the SBC missionary-founded schools, an academic team, consisting principally of North Americans, was recruited and on 4 September 1949 the seminary came into being with Dr George W Sadler serving as first President of IBTS. The newly formed Seminary in Switzerland developed essentially under the Presidency of Dr Josef Nordenhaug, a Swede, who gathered around him missionary personnel from the Foreign Mission Board and a group of young German scholars. Twenty-eight students from sixteen nations were enrolled in that first year. From the beginning the seminary drew students from a wide area throughout Europe, North America and Africa. Students who during the Second World War had stood on the opposing sides of the barricades were brought together in this Christian community and IBTS began its important work of bringing people together from across the nations and cultures in a setting of reconciliation.

The story of one of the first students, Walter Füllbrandt from Germany, to be enrolled at the Baptist Theological Hochschule in the converted chateau above the Zürichsee is a prime example of the fulfilled vision for the school. In 1997, at the official opening of the new IBTS premises in Prague, Professor Füllbrandt, who now lives in retirement in Hamburg, recalled arriving at the Swiss seminary to discover his fellow students came from countries which Germany had conquered during the Second World War. He was there from a defeated nation and these students represented the conquering communities. Working through those deep issues connected to nationalism and European history has been a key part of the life of IBTS from the beginning until the present day.

In 1988 the Foreign Mission Board, under the then President Keith Parks, took the key decision to hand over the responsibility and ownership of the Seminary to the European Baptist Federation. A new governing body, a Board of Trustees elected through the European Baptist Federation Council, was put in place. Now, the seminary was on the way of complete contextualization. It not only served all European region, but was owned and run by Europeans, though with a lecturing staff still predominantly North American.

At this first meeting of the newly Europeanised Board of Trustees, it became clear that the Seminary faced considerable financial pressures. The Foreign Mission Board had invested much in Rüslikon both in running the buildings and in providing personnel. Now, the challenge was acute. Though everyone believed in such an international endeavour, could the funds be generated to enable the work to continue?

Baptist life in Europe has changed beyond recognition with the collapse of communism as the European Unions themselves began to change. There has been a growth in the number of national Baptist Unions to over fifty. The early 1990's saw dramatic development of national seminaries in various countries. The earlier vision to have a seminary in Moscow became a reality and all across Central and Eastern Europe from Estonia to Bulgaria, from Poland to Siberia new institutions were established and sought to gain a link with a state University or to join an accrediting association. And yet IBTS remains unique in the world in its ownership and mission.

Within the EBF discussions took place about the future of IBTS, both regarding its location and the programmes to be offered. After much consultation across Europe the decision to

enough to carry forward such a plan and the Unions in North and West Europe had been committed to developing their own national seminaries.

relocate to the Czech Republic was taken by the member Unions of the EBF and work began to identify a suitable property in the capital city, Prague. Prague was thought to be most suitable because it was seen to stand in the heart of Europe, a Slavic culture, but at the same time had a history of looking to Western Europe. In the early 1990's it was estimated that fifty per cent of Baptists in Europe lived to the West of Prague and fifty per cent to the East. Thus in 1997 the EBF General Council meeting in Croatia set out a vision for the future of IBTS to give it a special place at the centre of the web of theological education throughout the whole EBF area.

The primary focus of the mission of IBTS is to serve the Unions and seminaries of the EBF by taking promising students and offering them higher degrees in theology, which will equip them as Union leaders, missiologists and seminary lecturers. In 1998 IBTS became a validated institution of the University of Wales, a large federal state university in Great Britain with now the right to teach several Master of Theology degrees in Applied Theology, Baptist and Anabaptist Studies, Biblical Studies and Contextual Missiology. Additionally, IBTS has been given validation by the University of Wales to supervise students for Master of Philosophy and Doctor of Philosophy degrees in these same general fields of theological research. This gives a special status amongst Christian schools on the mainland of Europe to IBTS. It addresses concerns from the past to have a place accessible to all and able to help students obtain advanced qualifications in theology.

A further development took place in 2000 when the Government of the Czech Republic granted IBTS accreditation as a higher education institution with the right to teach and award a degree of Magister in Theology which is recognised by the Czech State and thus, like the Wales degrees, throughout Europe. The ambition for formal international recognition of qualifications from IBTS, which has been a hope since the founding of the seminary in 1949 and was partially realised in Switzerland, is now fulfilled by having full recognition within the European Union. With its balanced and predominately European faculty and deep roots in the life of the church, IBTS is able to prepare Christians with a strong sense of identity, well integrated into their context and capable of conversing with the sophisticated European academic and intellectual culture on even grounds.

Now it is commonly acknowledged throughout Europe that IBTS is, indeed, at the centre of a web of Christian life. A constant stream of conference guests, students, visitors, those doing research⁷ and tourists, spending shorter or longer time on campus, means that the Seminary complex is always throbbing with life. This constant flow of new missiological insights helps to define a dynamic and very complex picture of the living realities of the churches' daily experience on the continent of Europe and beyond. In a very real sense, IBTS is a missiological laboratory examining the shifts in cultural and ecclesial life, particularly among free church traditions in Europe. Here is a brief and rather thin summary of the findings of IBTS academic community concerning European realities.⁸

The context of Christian mission in Europe broadly understood can be defined in three distinct cultural groupings of affluent and consumerist (Post – Christian) cultures; post-communist cultures; and cultures with dominant Muslim majority (Islamic). All groupings experience unusual epistemological and moral crises of a sort and are undergoing significant epistemic, metaphysical and linguistic shift of the traditional life form's paradigm of solving

⁷ The school owns one of the largest English language theological libraries in mainland Europe.

⁸ Based on my unpublished report for the meeting of IAMS executive committee held at IBTS in January 24 2002, Prague Czech Republic.

the crises.⁹ State authority, Enlightenment moral and judicial norms, ideological conceptual frameworks of thinking have been contested or are being replaced by increasing reliance on local community's moral standards. All of them experience a pressure of the globalization, particularly in terms of Anglo-American political perspective, and an influx of English language pop-culture and comers. All of them display some sort of sentiments or tendencies of holding back or toward restoring some of the conservative traditional forms of life (it is particularly true for the areas having gained independence anew after the collapse of communist governing).

My colleague, a Czech theologian Dr Ivana Noble (Dolejšová), gives a succinct description of the current socio-political changes in Europe. She considers them "marked by critique of the abuse of scientific and technical achievements; of colonial and totalitarian regimes of power and their violent ideologies; of attitudes or practices of national and racial or social or religious exclusivism. [They reflect] a general attitude that the modern ideals of universal progress, rationality and autonomy are abandoned as incapable of fulfilment, so that we are left with a plurality of partial solutions."¹⁰ While sharing the common features of this socio-cultural changes in Europe, each of the groupings exhibits dynamics of its own.

For the consumerist cultures, the process of cultural fragmentation is paralleled with diminishing role of the nation-state and increasing role of quasi-federal instruments of public policy and welfare (such as that of the European Union). The relative economic stability paired with an ageing population and slow change of the customs and habits and requiring increasing inflow of immigrants is paralleled with the rise of xenophobia.

Post-communist transition, particularly in fragmenting multi-national conglomerates of the former Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, is characterised with severe identity crisis causing the rise of violent nationalism. As a consequence, the freedom from suppression of some dominant ethnic or cultural forces and formation of miniature nation-states is paralleled with the eruption of numerous local conflicts for redistribution of power and land. The need for economic readjustments and the instability of newly elected governments are opening space for corruption and Mafia-like structures in public life and significant shifts in socio-economic fabric of the society (such as new-rich and the poor; collapse of social welfare system, etc.). In many areas of Eastern Europe there is an evidence of very rapid economic decline and dynamic change in life paradigms.¹¹

In spite of widespread popular opinion, Islamic cultures are not an exotic supplement to European life. A strong case can be made to claim that Islam from its incipience has been a formative force, even *via negativa*, for the formation of European identity. With the fragmentation of the former Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, cultural groupings with dominant Muslim population have been formed in Central Asia and on the Balkans. Through its

⁹ For a summary of an extended discussion on the practice of Christian ministry in this shifting context, see Parush R Parushev (comp.), "Practice of Ministry in the Post ... World: What is all about?" *Journal of European Baptist Studies*, 3:2 (January 2003), 33-49.

¹⁰ See her *Accounts of Hope: A Problem of Method in Post-modern Apologia*. In *European University Studies Series XXIII: Theology*, vol. 726 (Bern et al.: Peter Lang, 2001), 298.

¹¹ Central European and Baltic States have a mix features of the two groupings. It is interesting to observe how in the popular mentality the fear of being overcome by Russia again suppresses nationalism and encourages tendencies toward united Europe, which led to their current incorporation into EU structures. With the exception of Greece and Cyprus, current configuration of the European Union closely resembles traditional boundaries of the Western Christendom. Keeping fierce debates over the place of Turkey in New Europe in mind, one may consider this a puzzling expression of the postmodern appreciation for the traditional.

constituencies, EBF, and by implication the Seminary, is closely related to the developments in the Middle East as well. In most if not all areas of this cultural grouping Islamic fundamentalism is on rise in pair with isolationist and secessionist a tendency.¹² In line with the increasing role of the traditional, there are persistent attempts to reverse social moral life to traditional moral value systems (return to the precepts of the Islamic law, the spread of Islamic religious education and identity, etc.) in deliberate opposition to Judeo-Christian or Enlightenment humanist moral norms and political instruments. Socio-economic changes are not as rapid as they are violent and brutal.

It is time now to turn to the second question of my inquiry: what defines the integrity of Christian mission in the complex context of contemporary Europe. I will attempt answering the question from my own experience, for, as with most of you, my understanding of the nature of missionary activity is not purely academic. It is informed by my experience as much as by my reflections. Testimonial nature of this introspection is making my observations particularly relevant to the post-communist context.

The Power of Witness: An Introspect. In the estimation of others, I was considered to be a promising researcher in the field of ‘hard’ science in 70’s and 80’s. I had been invited to lecture to many international gatherings of scientists and academicians of different sorts. In the early 80’s, I visited Poland for the first time. It happened that I was in Krakow during the time of the graduation of that year’s class of young Roman Catholic priests and theologians of the Theological Faculty of Krakow University.¹³ Up to that point, my life was embedded in the experience of three generations of convinced communists and seemingly guided solely by rationality and reason. For the first time, I was forced to realize that there were a number of people who did not uphold the communist idea and who, while living in a socialist society, genuinely professed belief in a different reality. They believed so sincerely and so wholeheartedly over against all the rational arguments that their beliefs should not exist, that it was not easy to ignore their witness. They gathered in that city in large numbers, most of them coming on foot from the most distant parts of Poland in the chilly winter on this yearly pilgrimage to Krakow, as the utmost profession of their faith and as a sacrifice to God in whom they believed.

This event was also a public and political expression of the support for the Roman Catholic Church in one of the most difficult periods of Polish Post-World War II history. Genuine Christian belief or any belief is by its very nature a political statement.¹⁴ The beginning of 80’s was marked by the most violent and oppressive actions of the Communist government against the Polish trade-unionist freedom movement of *Solidarnost*. The movement developed largely within and through the structure of the Roman Catholic Church. It set a chain of events that culminated in the fall of Berlin wall and the developments in Post-Communist Eastern Europe. This vibrant and active Catholic community attracted my attention to a different and, as I discovered latter, more meaningful and morally appealing way of life than that of the rest of Communist society. It was a prime example of counter-cultural and at the

¹² Central Asian Islamic cultures expose features of both Post-communist and Islamic paradigm shift. In Central Asia there is a trend towards adoption of authoritarian and dictatorial political models of a “strong hand governments.”

¹³ On the details of this encounter with the believing community in Poland and its implications, see my reflections “Faith That Matters in the Culture of Ghosts,” in Mike Yakonelli (gen. ed.), *Stories of Emergence: Moving from Absolute to Authentic* (Grand Rapids, MI: Emergent YS with Zondervan, 2003), 204-18.

¹⁴ John Howard Yoder, *Discipleship as Political Responsibility*, forwarded by Stanley Hauerwas (Scottsdale, PA/Waterloo, Ontario: Herald Press, 2003, 1964). Cf. his *The Politics of Jesus: Behold the Man! Our Victorious Lamb* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, (1972) 1993), *passim*.

same time contextual corporate witness against the grain of the dominant public ideology: An exemplar of ecclesial witness coming close to “in it, not of it” type of the poem.

In a recent address, Argentinean born theologian Daniel Carro retold a depressive chapter of quite a different missionary undertaking of the same Church among Incas in sixteenth century Central America.¹⁵ It was a mission of conquest, oppression and destruction. What does it take for the structure which aligned itself with the most domineering and abusive powers in one part of the world to become a redemptive structure in another part of the world? What does it say about the church in power and the church under power? What is the lesson to be learned from the church’s need for continuing conversion¹⁶ and redemption from her own seduction to power before she can be an agent of liberation in the world?¹⁷ I will turn to this question later.

Powerful as it was for me, the corporate witness of Polish believers was not enough. There was a missing ingredient for me to make a leap of faith in the conversion process. The encounter planted the seeds, but the essence of faith came after a personal witness that made the biblical story alive and tangible to me in terms of immediate life-experience. Faith and mission always have a personal witnessing face. Even in a culturally Christian context, it takes time to discover and trust that face. In the case of my wife and myself it was a Bulgarian Baptist woman. She was living out her beliefs in spite of the odds in a way that was bringing new meaning in her life and making difference in the life of those around her. Through her witness we discovered the church not as a structure or institution but as a gathering and worshiping community intentional in its journey of discipleship and shared convictions.¹⁸ It was a warm and welcoming community, yet very little visible outside the church’s walls. Severe suppression of ideologically driven governmental structures had taken their toll on church’s life. Entrenched and secluded,¹⁹ it was focused almost exclusively on personal piety and righteousness: an exemplar of ecclesial life in tune with “not of it, or of it” verse in the poem. What does it take to open this warm and tight fellowship to the culture around? What would transform a convictional fellowship into a missional witnessing community?

Even the faithful witness of a genuine believer, as important as it is for adding to the credibility of the visible presence of the community of faith, is still not enough for the conversion process to begin its redeeming work. The pilgrimage of faith is guided by a series

¹⁵ Delivered at the BWA Summit on Baptist Mission in the 21st Century and published as “Challenges to the Christian Mission Today” in *Journal of European Baptist Studies*, 4:2 (January 2004), 14-24.

¹⁶ On the conversion of ecclesial community and the institutional church, see Darrell L. Guder, *The Continuing Conversion of the Church*, in Craig Van Gelder (gen. ed.) *The Gospel and our Culture Series* (Grand Rapids, MI/ Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans, 2000). 145-204.

¹⁷ For a theology of mission that takes a careful note on the liberating role of mission, see J. Andrew Kirk, *What is Mission? Theological Explorations* (London: Darton, Longman, and Todd, 1999), *passim*.

¹⁸ For the use of the term “gathering church” see James Wm. McClendon, Jr., *Systematic Theology: Doctrine, Volume II* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 327ff. For an extended treatment of the nature of gathering churches, see Keith G Jones, *A Believing Church: Learning from Some Contemporary Anabaptist and Baptist Perspectives* (Didcot: The Baptist Union of Great Britain, 1998), and his article, “Towards a Model of Mission for Gathering, Intentional, Convictional *Koinonia*” in the *Journal of European Baptist Studies*, 4:2 (January 2004), 5-13.

¹⁹ It seems it is a dominant model of ecclesial life of the majority of Post-Soviet evangelical communities in Eastern Europe. I am in debt to my younger colleagues Lina Andronoviene and Linas Andronovas for additional insights into the dynamics of gathering churches’ life in the former Soviet Union. For some elements of this dynamics and the need for radical transformation in relation to the Post-Soviet cultural realities, see Lina Andronoviene and Parush R Parushev, “Church, State, and Culture: On the Complexities of Post-Soviet Evangelical Social Involvement,” in *EAAA Journal of Theology*, 3:2 (July 2004), forthcoming.

of guideposts by which corporate and personal witness marks the preparation for conversion. It is the mysterious personal experience of the power of the Holy Spirit and the grace of God which imparts the new that comes in Christ (Christ (2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 6.15) into the believer's heart and mind – the *metanoia*, the conversion.²⁰ It makes possible the next steps in the Christian pilgrim's journey, the continuous transformation and growing in Christ-likeness, the discipleship and the witness. The repeating cycle of preparation for mission marked by personal and corporate witness to the culture, through conversion and nurturing of disciples, to maturing them for socially relevant witnessing is at the core of Christian mission, as I understand it.²¹

Now, moving from my personal and testimonial reflections to the theme of our conference, I would like to pose the question anew: What defines the integrity of Christian mission? Obviously, the vision of the Sender, Christ himself, is the place to start. I would call that 'biblical integrity.' Next, there is the integrity of the character of the sent—the follower of Christ. Finally, there is the integrity of the calling to witness the Kingdom vision to the culture. I will take all these elements of the integrity of Christian mission in turn.

What Is Christian about Mission?

It is amazing that two thousand years later committed followers of the Way of Jesus the Messiah are still trying to make sense of the Master's vision anew in every generation. I will not attempt even to map the quest. I would rather sketch a possible response following in the steps of those who walked the theological path before me, calling for a radical discipleship of Christ.²²

Christianity is both a vision and a reality. It is a vision acquired by faith and made real by the life and the witness²³ of those who hold it dear. It is the vision of the Kingdom of God and God's reign in Christ. The Hebrew prophets of God's people, most profoundly the prophet

²⁰ For some testimonies of the critical role of the examination of one's nominal or inherited convictions confronted by authentic Christian living and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, see in Yakonelli, *Stories of Emergence* 2003, *passim*. Regarding the need for orthopyre, "the fire of the Spirit," that draws a person or a community into the *Missio Dei*, see Jones, "Towards a Model of Mission..", *op. cit.*, 12.

²¹ For a somewhat similar holistic paradigm in the theology of mission, see Bernhard Ott, *Beyond Fragmentation: Integrating Mission and Theological Education. A Critical Assessment of some Recent Developments in Evangelical Theological Education* (Carslie, Cumbria: Regnum Books International with Paternoster Publishing, 2001), 103-149. Cf. "Mission as Witness," Chapter Three in Guder's *The Continuing Conversion of the Church*, *op. cit.*, 49-72.

²² In reference to this distinctive type of Christian theologising of the adherents of the Radical Reformation, see e.g. the works of Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, *op. cit.*; James Wm. McClendon, Jr. and James Smith, *Convictions: Defusing Religious Relativism* (Trinity Press International, 1994; revised version of *Understanding Religious Convictions* in Notre Dame, ILL: University Press, 1974); James Wm. McClendon, Jr., *Systematic Theology: Ethics, volume I; Doctrine, volume II; Witness, volume III* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1986-2002); Stanley Hauerwas, *A Community of Character* (Notre Dame, ILL: University Press, 1981) and his *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics* (Ibid., 1983) and *Performing the Faith: Bonhoeffer and the Practice of Nonviolence* (Grand rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2004); Glen H. Stassen, *Just Peacemaking: Transforming Initiatives for Justice and Peace* (Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992); Glen H Stassen, D. M. Yeager, and John Howard Yoder, *Authentic Transformation: A New Vision of Christ and Culture* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1996); Rodney Clapp, *A Peculiar People: The Church as Culture in a Post-Christian Society* (Downers Grove, ILL: InterVarsity Press, 1996).

²³ On mission as witness of the faithful and truthful church in the world, see McClendon, *Witness* 2000, 18 ff. and ch. 9, *passim*.

Isaiah, envisioned the Kingdom's distinctive features.²⁴ It is the vision and the experience of light and freedom in God's presence, under God's reign; it is the assurance of salvific power and newness that comes in Christ with a call for peace and justice; for love, care, and embrace for one's neighbor, created in the image of the King of the Kingdom, and for all God's creation.

Christianity is a living reality. It is a storied culture of itself, and its essence is best captured by the biblical metaphors listed above. The reality of the Kingdom is endorsed and enacted in the life and ministry of Jesus the Christ and is emphatically commanded to Christ's disciples. Christ's vision and the radical politics of the Kingdom are best captured in the Matthean and Lukan accounts of the teacher's public speeches – the Sermons.

For the radical followers of Christ, they are not a philosophical hermeneutical circle of endless interpretations in a search for meaning. They provide a bifocal linear perspective from the cross to the *eschaton*, the perspectivist vision of 'this is that' and 'then is now'.²⁵ One focus is in the biblical narrative of the crucified and resurrected Christ. The community now looks backward as in a mirror to find itself in the biblical narrative and to compare the life of the community today with the life of the primitive community. The community looks also forward to the eschatological future for an eschatological fulfillment or an eschatological verification of its present moral life and aspirations. This is the second focus that forms this hermeneutical trajectory. It is a hermeneutical perspective that has a verifier called the *parousia*, or the eternal Kingdom of God coming in Christ.²⁶ It is the "shared awareness of the present Christian community as the primitive community and the eschatological community. In a motto, the church now is the primitive church and the church on the judgment day."²⁷

This vision serves, therefore, as the hermeneutical key to both the church and the Bible. It is a reading strategy by which the Bible is understood and made alive in the church. This reading strategy provides for the stable meaning of the biblical narrative and presents to the believing community a way out of the relativism (or 'hermeneutical humiliation', to use Carro's terminology²⁸) of much of current philosophical hermeneutics.²⁹

²⁴ In their recent work *Kingdom Ethics: Following Jesus in Contemporary Context* (Downers Grove, ILL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 25-31, Glen Stassen and David Gushee provide for a persuasive analysis of the formative role of Isaiah's prophetic vision for Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount.

²⁵ On this expression of a baptistic vision, see McClendon, *Ethics* 2002, pp. 26-34. Specifics of the baptistic theological perspectivism, outlined in the works of John Howard Yoder and James Wm. McClendon, Jr., were discussed in Prague, Czech Republic at an IBTS annual Directors' conference in applied theology, "Doing Constructive Theologies in a baptistic Way," June 18-24, 2003, with Dr Parush Parushev and Dr Nigel Wright as conference moderators. A publication of proceedings of the conference papers is forthcoming.

²⁶ The concept of eschatological verification (and the significance of the Kingdom of God for that concept) stands in continuity with Basil Mitchell's line of thought on verification of religious experience (see his "Theology and Falsification," in *New Essays in Philosophical Theology*, eds. Antony Flew and Alasdair MacIntyre (London: SCM Press, 1955), 103 ff. It was further developed by John H. Hick originally in "Theology and Verification," *Theology Today*, XVII, No. 1 (April 1960), 18 ff. For a short account of eschatological verification, see his *Philosophy of Religion*, third edition (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1983), 100-6.

²⁷ McClendon, *Ethics* 2002, 30.

²⁸ "Challenges to Christian Mission Today," *op. cit.*, 20.

²⁹ On the satisfactory performance of McClendon's proposal of "baptist vision" as providing both stability of meaning of the biblical text and the access of the current interpretative community to that meaning, see Nancey Murphy "Textual Relativism, Philosophy of Language, and the baptist Vision," in Stanley Hauerwas, Nancey Murphy & Mark Nation (eds.), *Theology Without Foundation: Religious Practice and the Future of Theological Truth* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 245-70; cf. Nancey Murphy, *Anglo-American Postmodernity*:

The tension of living in these two realities, partially in the reality of the Kingdom now and partially in the expectations of the coming fullness of the Kingdom of God, marks the true life in the Spirit of Christ. Radical visionary living is confronted daily by a different and largely hostile reality of 'the world.' Mission then, properly understood, is a witness to that vision, to the reality of the Kingdom in the world without hope, enabled by the Holy Spirit and supported by the Word of God. This takes us to the point to ask: Where does mission begin?

The vision is informed and developed by the Spirit of God in the acts of worship.³⁰ But then the vision is extended and enacted in the messy realities of life. How is the presence of God's light in worship and in the life of a believing community to be extended beyond its own confine? It is the task of mission.

One possible way of considering missionary task is to see mission as liberation. The Liberating Christ is a capturing metaphor for the redemptive power of Christ, which goes as far back as Apostle Paul, and the experience of the early church. Christ does bring liberation—but what kind of liberation? A misperceived "liberation" has been a driving force behind the Christendom politics of crusades and colonization "to set the heathens free from their sin." It was reconsidered by the Liberation theologians as setting the oppressed free. Dr Daniel Carro presented one of the most recent summaries of this theological view.³¹ Here is a summary of the flow of his argument.

At the beginning of his paper he considers the violent, culturally intrusive and avaricious origins of "missionary" activity of the Spanish *conquistadores* and friars among Peruvian Incas. The narrative is instructive and does make a point: "the Bible can be misused as an instrument of oppression and distraction."³² That is one of the ways in which a community may grow: not by natural growth, conversion and persuasion, but by coercion, conquest and domination. The institutions of the church through the past two millennia have employed all of the above. Latin America was "Christianized" after all. Right from the start, Carro is confronting the reader with the question: Which ways are genuinely Christian?

Next he presents a general survey of the challenges of the hermeneutical turns in the church's history, especially at the dawn of modernity. Carro rightfully points out that the world seen through the eyes of Christian convictions and the world seen otherwise are two different realities.³³ Moreover, attempts to communicate the Christian worldview on purely epistemological grounds – by reason alone – so far have failed; and there is little hope that this can be done successfully. Staying on epistemological grounds alone, the church is always on the losing side. It does not mean that it is impossible to express, or communicate, or argue matters of faith in rational terms as in classical apologetics. What it does mean is that this is not all that the Christian faith is about. If this is true, what does it say about the nature of missionary task?

Philosophical Perspectives on Science, Religion, and Ethics (Boulder, CO/Oxford, UK: Westview Press, 1997), 141-9.

³⁰ For an attempt of hermeneutical appropriation of the ecclesial dynamics of worship, discipleship and evangelism at the heart of a missional church, see Robert E. Webber, *Journey to Jesus: The Worship, Evangelism, and Nurture Mission of the Church* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2001), 25-54 and *passim*.

³¹ "Challenges to the Christian Mission Today", *op. cit.*.

³² *Ibid.*, 18.

³³ *Ibid.*, 18 ff.

At the conclusion of his argument, Carro challenges the church's integrity in engaging with the missionary task, juxtaposing mission as domination and mission as liberation and siding with the latter.³⁴ At this point, in his view, 'Christian' and 'mission' converge. The question then is, how do the structure and the contents of the mission calling of the church relate to each other?

One may be surprised to find that there is scarcely any direct reference to 'mission' in the original languages of the Bible (it does not mean that the concept is lacking). It might be one reason why biblical scholars and academic theologians pay little attention to the intra-cultural and cross-cultural missiological emphases of the Kingdom's message. "This weakness, in its turn, determines the content of preaching and teaching in our churches, as well as the content of Bible-reading notes, devotional Christian books and other literature."³⁵

Instead, there is a lot of calling and commanding going on in the biblical narrative. Yet calling is not about a person on his or her own mission. Biblical heroes are men and women of faith commanded by God to perform certain tasks. It is not *our mission*; it is first and foremost *God's mission* in which we are co-missionaries with God in spreading the good news of the Kingdom.

At the biblical root of Christian mission is the well-known Great Commission of Mat 28:16-20. Maybe I am reading too much in this text, but I see it this way:

- A missionary church is first and foremost a worshipping community, recognizing the divine authority of Jesus the Christ.
- It is a dynamic community engaged in outreach. It is not a community for community's own sake.
- The purpose of the outreach is to proclaim the Good News and to make disciples by initiating them into the mysteries of the Trinity enacted by a gathering and worshipping community.
- The measure of true discipleship is incarnational observance of the Christian way of life. It is not about an intellectual appropriation of some counter-cultural teaching only. True Christian discipleship is an initiation into, and a willing embrace of, a certain form of life in obedience to God, most fully revealed in and through Jesus Christ.

I see a certain progression in the development of any church mission. When I think of mission, I think of integrity, witness, presence, and transformation in line with Mat 28:16-20. It begins with discipling, with *integrity* of the Christian character. Thus understood, "the first mission field is not 'they', it is 'we'."³⁶ As I have argued above, mission is inseparable from *witnessing* for the living reality of God's Kingdom and for the new creation in Christ. It expresses itself in the personal and corporate witness, in the "living out" of what a person or a community believes. Mission is about being an authentic living testimony – a *presence* of a Christian pilgrim and of the pilgrim's community in the midst of cultural despair.

³⁴ Ibid., 22 ff.

³⁵ Martin Goldsmith, *Good News for All Nations: Mission at the Heart of the New Testament* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2002), 5. On the problems related to the use of term mission, see Peter F. Penner, "Discerning and Following God's Mission," in *Journal of the European Baptist Studies*, 4:2 (January 2003), 34 ff.

³⁶ Carro, "Challenges to the Christian Mission Today", *op. cit.*, 22.

Mission is a transparent witness to the presence of the reality of the Kingdom for the watching world, “for the nations.”³⁷ Finally, mission is a ministry of involvement in *transformation* and redemption of the reality of the world by prophetic, apostolic, and pastoral work of the believing community.³⁸ Mission is holistic³⁹ and dynamic. It is embedded into the very practices of the community’s life.⁴⁰ Mission is liberating if it is incarnational.

Witnessing Presence: A Prospect. How does the church as a culture, defined by the corporate virtues of Christian character and the practices of formation and advance of those virtues, make itself truly known to the cultural context? In other words, what is the theology of Christian witness?

During the “golden age”⁴¹ of the Russian Orthodox cross-cultural mission in the second half of the nineteenth century, the Rector of the Russian Orthodox Theological Academy in Kazan (with a center of missionary training opened in 1854!) and a preacher among the Tartars, Nikolai Ilminskii (d. 1891) shared a profound missiological insight:

We believe that the evangelical word of our Saviour Jesus Christ, having become incarnate in the living tongue of the Tartars, and through it having associated itself most sincerely with their deepest thoughts and religious consciousness, would produce the Christian revival of this tribe.⁴²

As John Binns observes:

This model of incarnation describes the style of the Russian missions, and of the missionary method of the Orthodox churches, which set out to root the Christian church within the culture concerned, rather than — as has happened in some other examples of missionary work — supplying a complete cultural package of which the Christian message is simply the spiritual component.⁴³

In IBTS two of the major degree programmes of Practical studies are Applied Theology and Contextual Missiology. With my colleagues, we are involved in an ongoing discussion on what constitutes a proper believing community. Where is the emphasis? Is it on worship and discipleship (the inward aspect of mission) or is it on evangelism and outreach (the outward

³⁷ A theme argued by the late John Howard Yoder throughout his writings and most persuasively in *Body Politics: Five Practices of the Christian Community before the Watching World* (Nashville, TN: Discipleship Resources, 1994) and in the collection of his thought *For the Nations: Essays Public and Evangelical* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997).

³⁸ On the three-fold transforming mission of a believing community, see Glen H Stassen, D. M. Yeager, and John Howard Yoder, *Authentic Transformation: A New Vision of Christ and Culture* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1996), 222-246.

³⁹ For a comparable understanding of holism in mission, see Thomas H. McAlpine, *By Word, Work, and Wonder: Cases in Holistic Mission* (Monrovia, CA: MARC, 1995), 2 and *passim*; A. H. Mathias Zahnister, *Symbol and Ceremony: Making Disciples Across Cultures* (Monrovia, CA: MARC, 1997), 183-210.

⁴⁰ On the practices of witness of the radical Christian communities, see Yoder, *Body Politics* 1994, 28-46; McClendon, *Witness* 2000, 378-83; Nancey Murphy, “Using MacIntyre’s Method in Christian Ethics,” in *Virtues and Practices in the Christian Tradition* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity PressInternational, 1997), 35-6. On presence as witness, see McClendon, *Ethics* 2002, 77. Cf. Brad J. Kallenberg, *Live to Tell: Evangelism for a Postmodern Age* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2002).

⁴¹ I am in debt to John Binns for the term and the example. See his *An Introduction to the Christian Orthodox Churches* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 153.

⁴² Qtd. in George Florovsky, “Russian Missions, a Historical Sketch,” in his *Aspects of Church History* (Belmont, MA, 1987), 154 *via* Binns, *An Introduction...* 2002, 156.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

manifestations of mission)? In line with the previous discussions, a holistic ecclesial understanding will keep both in balance.⁴⁴ Isn't it time to give up on the Enlightenment division of atomic self-sufficient, subject-oriented disciplines and look at the holistic, integral picture of the church's life?⁴⁵ The integrity of the disciple's character is the ground for the authentic witness, and authentic witness calls for a committed discipleship.

Is our discussion so far a realistic paradigm of how to respond to contemporary challenges to Christian mission? Will it work only in the West, or is it also relevant for the cultures significantly different from the culturally christianized European and American contexts?⁴⁶ Or is it just a wishful theological construct? To back up my claim for the practicality of a genuine Christian witness, I want to share two short stories of Christian presence with integrity.

Recently I met a young man inquiring about studying at IBTS. Although obviously intelligent and able, he impressed me more with his authentic sense of Christian calling. Aided by friends from his native country, I learned that he is a son of one of his country's prominent politicians. He and his wife were promising and advancing dramatic actors, nominally Catholic and happily married with three children. They were living in a bohemian community in the capital of the country. After a dramatic conversion experience, they followed their understanding of Christ's co-missioning call and moved to witness to their newly-acquired faith in one of the toughest and religiously nationalistic areas of the country by simply being present and by living as they believed they should. They became a catalyst for a small community, which eventually emerged and soon may be constituted as an ecclesial unit in the area. The young man is pursuing further theological education not to excel academically or to progress in his pastoral career. He feels the need of it so that he will be a more adequate witness in the intellectually sophisticated secularized culture of his town.⁴⁷

One of our students recently reflected on a case in his home country of Albania. In the early 90's, a young Christian couple from rural Romania sensed a call to mission in Albania. Largely dependent on their own resources, they arrived and settled in a small Muslim village in the mountains. They learned Albanian and decided to immerse fully into the form of life of the Albanian villagers, making a living as the locals by farming. They did not press their faith

⁴⁴ Throughout his academic writings, the late Baptist theologian James McClendon has been reflecting on the three major tasks our churches are faced, their "three major reasons for existing. [They] lived to proclaim the word of God, yet also to constitute a living witness to that word, and finally to worship God in prayer and praise, (*Making Gospel Sense to a Troubled Church* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 1995), 85)." One place to connect with McClendon's thought on that matter is in a series of his interconnected sermons on holistic mission of the church; See Ibid. pp. 77-100. Drawing on the experience of Orthodox communities, Romanian theologian Ion Bria comes to the same conclusion in his insightful reflections on the challenges to the ecumenical dialogue collected in *The Liturgy after the Liturgy: Mission and Witness from an Orthodox Perspective* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1996), *passim*.

⁴⁵ On the need for integration of theological and missiological approaches and overcoming the 'academic apartheid' of different disciplines of theological studies, see Paul G. Hiebert and Tite Tiénou, "Missions and Doing of Theology," in Manuel Ortiz and Susan S. Baker (eds.), *The Urban face of Mission: Ministering the Gospel in a Diverse and Changing World. Harvie M. Conn and Others* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2002), 85-96.

⁴⁶ The need for the reassessment of the essence of the church's missionary witness is all the more important in this time of global pluralistic religious encounters and the explosive expansion of Christianity southward into the less chartered territories of new conceptualisations. The discernment of genuine Christian identity (and related paradigm of mission) is particularly significant for current global political realities, as religious identification begins to take precedence over allegiance to a secular nation-state or to an ethnic origin. For a fresh and provocative study of the changing face of global Christianity, see e.g. Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 2002).

⁴⁷ I am indebted to Linas Andronovas for the details of this story.

on the villagers. They lived day-by-day and side-by-side with them, simply being genuinely who they were – committed Christians. The local people got so used to them that they were considered the village's own people. In the mid-90's, a crew of fundamentalist Muslim missionaries came to the village and in exchange for substantial financial support for the village, they urged the locals to get rid of the Christian infidels. But instead, the village unanimously forced the Islamic fundamentalists to leave their place! Being there genuinely with the people and for the people, these Christian missionaries were loved and protected.⁴⁸

What do these examples teach us? For one thing, they teach us of the authenticity of the Christian life. For another, they teach us that this authenticity is made visible and meaningful for the cultural context. So, how the quality is sustained and how it is made available to those who do not immediately take part of the church's life is a key challenge. A challenge it may be, obviously, for the appeal of the Christian life lies in the holistic betterment of that life. It seems that there is no other way to answer the challenge of relating Christian culture to its cultural context except by being involved in it—in other words, “by making the structure of the Gospel visible.”⁴⁹

Obviously, to have social engagement, the church must actually be present in the immediate culture. Such presence of the church necessarily means a way of life that does not comply with all aspects of the culture and yet has enough points of connection to communicate with it. This is the ‘saltiness’ of the church's life. On the other hand, such presence requires transparency that undermines secrecy and sectarianism. Practising presence⁵⁰ forms a virtue⁵¹ that defines a positive attitude towards the surrounding culture.

Yet presence is the minimalist social engagement of the church. As a minimum, it is reductionist. At this point, I am reminded of my earliest experiences of the ‘Christian culture’ after the meaningful encounter with the Polish believers in the early 80's which ultimately led to my conversion. I remember a church in Amsterdam, beautiful situated in a rounded square (which is an oxymoron, I see!), surrounded by the bright-lightened brothels. The bell of the church was ringing for the evening mass, and few by-passers were entering the church while the girls were actively soliciting customers. It seemed that these two worlds had nothing in common—unless some of the churchgoers have been the customers.

Another story from the same time and the same place comes to my mind. Walking along the street in an active tourist area of the town, I saw a two-storey, rather shabby, building, obviously rented by its inhabitants. There was a striking contrast between the appearance of each of the floors. Glamorous multicoloured lights were illuminating the second floor. These were the studios of several prostitutes. The first floor was dark and desolate. After a closer look, one could read a plate telling that it served as a soup kitchen run by a Catholic convent for an orphanage. I saw a lined-up queue of youngsters goosing after a nun into the building in their habitual routine for the evening meal, quite disinterested of the girls on the top floor making desperate effort to expose every bit of their bodies to attract by-passers' attention and eventual favours. The life of the girls and the life of the religious institution were having their separate ways without intersecting.

⁴⁸ I express gratitude to Alfred Gollosi for this story.

⁴⁹ Quotation from Jürgen Roloff in Thorwald Lorenzen, “Mission and Discipleship,” in Tony Cuppit (ed.), *Baptist Faith & Witness*, Book 2: The papers of the Study and Research Division of the BWA 1995-2000 (BWA, 1999), 41-52, 49.

⁵⁰ McClendon, *Doctrine*, p. 155.

⁵¹ McClendon, *Ethics* (1986), p. 106.

How much of mission is in the life of the church if it is only present? The natural extension of presence, therefore, is pastoral involvement in practical terms with some (not all) aspects of the culture. Social assistance is not a goal of itself; it is a natural witness for the value of the Kingdom for the world as it is now. Well-measured involvement of the church with acute social problems, and a possible remedy from them, is perhaps the soundest way of the church doing mission. It might look as a very ambitious project for minority communities, but here is where the ecumenical extension of the worldwide Christian community comes into focus. Insignificant believing community may not have the necessary resources to engage with gross social problems, but it can always be a trustworthy channel or a connecting link of donors willing to share their resources and those who need them most, bypassing the corrupt secular bureaucratic structures.⁵² This is how the ‘light’ of the church can be shared with the culture.

The assessment of social care should include, in my opinion, measures to avoid strings attached to social help. Social help is exactly that: assistance, not a Constantinian attempt of forced evangelism or control over needy prospect church members. Unfortunately, the churches are very susceptible to such temptations. Yet being a witness, there is a natural evangelistic side to social assistance, which brings us to the third practice of social involvement: that of fellowship. The value of long-lasting fellowship expresses the true essence of Christian care for the world created by God, and inevitably leads to the sound witness as missional⁵³ engagement with the world. This is how the ‘world’ will see the deeds of the church and give glory to the Father in heaven (Mt 5:16). These three interrelated (and contextually balanced) practices—presence, assistance, and fellowship—define holistic social involvement.⁵⁴

If the church avoids social involvement because it values holiness more than compassion, church’s mission is on a straight road to legalism and formalism. But if mission starts from within, if the church attempts to put the social politics of the upside-down kingdom of the Sermon on the Mount to life first of all in practices of the believing community, then even the little projects it will attempt to do for the society will have a serious impact. Such a community will be an example of what the Kingdom of God is like: a living parable, so to speak, and therefore a powerful witness for the Kingdom as well as an influence for the changes in society. Since the church’s social engagement will have to start from within, this will also mean that the most important level of social involvement will be that of the local church, not that of denominational policies and strategies.

Conclusion

I have set myself to outline the integrity of Christian mission in three steps: biblical, transformative and witnessing. All three of these are bind with the work of the Spirit of God for informing the vision of the Kingdom through the acts of worship, transforming the

⁵² It is worth noticing that even liberal democracies with long history of charity and aid are using the church as the partner. For instance, several governments within the European Union have used ecumenical aid and development agencies in membership with the Association of Protestant Agencies (APRODEV) as channels of development assistance to countries in the Two-thirds world. The receiving agency in the developing country is generally an ecumenical agency of the indigenous churches. I am thankful to the Revd. Keith G. Jones for this helpful insight.

⁵³ Webber makes a brief but significant comment on the missional church as a “‘witness’ to God’s mission,” *Journey to Jesus, op. cit.*, 20.

⁵⁴ For more detailed account of holistic social involvement, see Andronoviene and Parushev, “Church, State, and Culture,” *Op. Cit.*

characters of the visionaries in the practices of discipleship and communal formation, and enabling their missionary witness for the betterment of life.

To conclude my reflections, I want to reiterate once again the concern of my paper: What is the Integrity of Mission in Contemporary Europe? In the light of the discussion outlined above, my understanding is that the integrity of mission is defined by a holistic involvement with the local context, personally and as a community of the followers of the Way of Jesus Christ, as an authentic witness for the Kingdom of God, bringing hope in cultures of fragmentation and despair.

Mission is not an option for the Church. It is an imperative. Mission is about transforming hearts and minds inside and outside the church. Speaking of the end-times, Jesus instructed us, his disciples: “And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come (Mat 24:14, ESV).” We still have a lot of work to do.