

## Articles and Sermons :: Recovering Mission: Majority World Missionâ€™A Return to Mission for the Majority

**Recovering Mission: Majority World Missionâ€™A Return to Mission for the Majority - posted by ArthurRosh, on: 2014/1**

Recovering Mission: Majority World Missionâ€™A Return to Mission for the Majority

By The Rev. Canon Mark Oxbrow

January / February 2014

In one city in the Arabian Peninsula, an Ethiopian pastor trains every one of his church members as a missionary. There are thirty-five thousand Ethiopians working in that country; ninety-six percent of them are young, female, domestic workers living on a few dollars a week. The Christians among them come (like every other young Ethiopian woman working in that country) hoping to send home a little money to support their families. They discover, however, that God has placed them in a key mission context.

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In just eleven months these young women have taken the JESUS film and Arabic New Testaments into eight hundred Arab homes where they are able to share the film with children and read the Bible with their mothers. Sadly, these women (who are actively engaged in evangelism in one of the most closed mission contexts in the world) will never appear in any statistics of â€œforeign missionaries.â€ They will attract little prayer or financial support from Minority World (Western) churches so concerned to â€œreach the unreached.â€

I start with this story of Ethiopian missionaries because we need to radically revise our understanding of who a missionary is in the contemporary, globalised world. In fact, we also need to revise much of our mission history in order to take a much more realistic account of who really have been the â€œmidwives of the gospelâ€ over the past two thousand years. Samuel Escobar writes,

Another missionary force is also at work today, although it does not appear in the records of missionary activity or the databanks of specialists. It is the transcultural witnessing for Christ that takes place as people move around as migrants or refugees, just as in New Testament daysâ€ They are missionaries â€œfrom belowâ€™ who do not have the power, the prestige, or the money from a developed nation, and are not part of a missionary organisation. They are vulnerable in many ways, but have learnt the art of survival, supported by their faith in Jesus Christ.<sup>1</sup>

Although I would argue that â€œmission from belowâ€ has always been a highly significant aspect of Christian mission, it becomes more significant in the twenty-first century for three reasons.

As a result of the rapid shift in Christian demography, powerfully illustrated by Philip Jenkins,<sup>2</sup> most Christians today are financially poor, politically marginalised, and socially restricted by their gender, age, or ethnicity.

The increasing prevalence of migration has radically increased the opportunities for migrant Christians to be effective in cross-cultural mission. Migration continues to take place as a result of war, natural disaster, and persecution; however, increasingly, Christians are migrating due to education, employment, financial security, and family unity.

In a world in which international travel, and to an even greater degree, international communication, are becoming easier, even Christians with very modest financial resources are able to be in touch withâ€ and therefore potentially able to share the gospel withâ€ those without faith in very different parts of the world. One example of this is the â€œevangelisingâ€ effect one student or migrant worker who comes to faith while abroad can have on his or her extended family through emails, texts, and telephone calls back home. I heard of a case where a Malaysian student at college in Singapore saw several of her family and friends embrace her newfound faith in Jesus before she finished her course. All of them were evangelised by email.

The Professional vs. the Voluntary Missionary?

It has been almost a century since Rowland Allen completed his seminal comparative study of the missionary methods of St. Paul and those of the twentieth-century Church<sup>3</sup> and encouraged us to look more closely at the â€œspontaneous expansion of the churchâ€<sup>4</sup> and the place of â€œnon-professional missionaries.â€<sup>5</sup>

Allen, of course, was not the first to suggest that it is through the rite of baptism that we are ordained as missionaries' participants in the mission of God' and that we do not need to wait to be selected, trained, and commissioned as professionals in mission before sharing in the privilege of being co-missioners with God. Perhaps the major shift we are currently seeing toward mission from the Majority World will help us recover a deeper, more ancient, understanding of who a missionary is. Some historical reflections might help.

David Bosch, Stephen Bevans, Roger Schroeder, and others have provided us with helpful historical reviews of how mission has been understood and developed over the centuries. Bosch<sup>6</sup> speaks of six epochs, while Bevans and Schroeder<sup>7</sup> talk of periods during which different primary models of mission dominate.

In his much earlier work, Kenneth Latourette helps us to understand the changing roles of 'professional' and 'voluntary' Christians in the mission of the Church.<sup>8</sup> For our purposes here, it may be more helpful to focus on the actors rather than the history, and to see that, in fact, although one band of actors might have predominated or been 'historically visible' during particular periods, they have all engaged in effective mission side by side. The five groups of 'missioners' I identify (although there are obviously more) are:

refugee evangelists,  
witnessing traders and entrepreneurs,  
monastic communities in mission,  
imperial philanthropists, and  
professional missionaries.

Those who have known suffering and found God to be faithful are often the best evangelists.

As already suggested, these five groups can represent stages in Christian history; however, they also represent significant movements in mission which can and do co-exist within the contemporary Church. My contention here is that the experience of Majority World Christians in mission today could help us recover this much broader understanding of what our missionary God is doing among and through his people today.

#### Refugee Evangelists and Business as Mission

Reading the accounts of the early Church (e.g., Acts 8:4), it is clear that some of the very first cross-cultural missionaries were fleeing for their lives. In each century, faith in Jesus Christ has been taught by those fleeing from persecution, war, ethnic cleansing, famine, and drought. It seems that those who have known suffering and found God to be faithful are often the best evangelists. The challenge for the global Christian community is to discover how we might best support, equip, and encourage 'refugee evangelists' today.

Business as mission<sup>9</sup> has become a popular concept in recent decades and a way in which those with entrepreneurial skill and business acumen can discover their vocation in mission serving the holistic needs of communities who lack employment or faith.

The idea of Christian business people in mission, however, is hardly new. In the early centuries the news of salvation in Jesus was carried along the 'silk roads' of Central Asia and into China. Nestorian Christians were especially effective at planting churches while engaged in bringing communities the advantages of international trade.<sup>10</sup> Entrepreneurs, traders, business executives, and skilled workers often find it difficult to be recognised as missionaries by their churches; however, by sharing the work of our creator God, they have many opportunities to witness to his son, Jesus.

For many centuries, it was the religious communities who carried the Christian faith from village to village, tribe to tribe, to India, China, and beyond. Today, we see the rise of a new monasticism<sup>11</sup> and renewed interest in missional communities. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, European empires, rising from the heart of Christendom, brought religiously-motivated philanthropy (as well as other things considered destructive and evil). Civil servants, ship owners, and school teachers saw the gospel as part of their 'civilising' programme for subject peoples. Only in the last two centuries have we seen the rise of what I call 'professional missionaries' who are recruited, trained, deployed, and financially-supported for a life of full-time mission.

#### A New Kind of Dance

I have taken some time to rehearse this mission history because it is not only Western Christians who forget that refugees, merchants, monks, and civil servants can also be missionaries. Addressing the mission community of the World Evangelical Alliance in 2006, Duncan Olumbe, director of Kenyan-based Mission Together Africa, warned his Majority World colleagues of the dangers of seeking to join the European-choreographed 'power dance,' 'imitation dance,'

and â€œposition dance.â€ In other words, the â€œprofessional missionaryâ€ paradigm has become so pervasive that even those who today have a much stronger missional rhythm in their â€œspiritual bonesâ€ feel constrained to do mission in the European style.

Duncan Olumbe, director of Mission Together Africa, warns his Majority World colleagues of the dangers of seeking to join the European-choreographed dance.

Many Majority World churches would struggle to support one traditional, â€œprofessional,â€ missionary family, but how many of their members could be resourced as refugees, migrants, business women, overseas students, or traders in cross-cultural mission? Olumbe continues, â€œI long for a different dance! However, how can we allow space for the different dancersâ€™ African, Asian, European, American, etc.â€ with all their different rhythms, beats, and paraphernalia?â€

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Olumbeâ€™s question is addressed to mission leaders in North America and Europe, as well as those in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. While rejoicing in all that â€œprofessionalâ€ missionaries continue to achieve for Christâ€™s kingdom, we need to create space for the other dancers. This will involve reallocating resources, for example, to fund the training of the 400,000 Filipino Christians currently working as migrants around the world.

It will mean rethinking training, as Christian entrepreneurs and business people seek to be fully equipped gospel carriers as they move cross-culturally. It could also mean a Minority World church reassigning funds which were intended for a missionary family so that Congolese and Rwandan asylum seekers entering European countries are equipped to bring gospel hope to those arid soils.

All of this requires partnership on a global scale where power relationships are renegotiated and resources are pooled. My greatest hope, however, is that as the Majority World begins to control the dance tune and discover new steps and rhythms, and that we in the Minority World will at last escape our blinkered professionalization of mission. My hope is we will again see clearly that every baptized believer is a missionary; that most of them are women; most are poor; and the monk, the diplomat, the refugee, the trader, and the overseas student are all in this together. Godâ€™s mission comes in all shapes and sizes.

#### Endnotes

1. 2003. The New Global Mission. Downers Grove, Illinois, USA: InterVarsity Press, 17-18.
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3. 1912. Missionary Methods: St. Paulâ€™s or Ours? London: World Dominion Press.
4. 1927. The Spontaneous Expansion of the Church. London: World Dominion Press.
5. 1964. â€œNon-Professional Missionariesâ€ in Missionary Principles. Ed. Rowland Allen. London: World Dominion Press.
6. 1992. Transforming Mission. Maryknoll, New York, USA: Orbis Books.
7. 2004. Constants in Context. Maryknoll, New York, USA.: Orbis Books.
8. 1937. A History of the Expansion of Christianity (seven volumes). New York: Harper and Row.
9. See, for example, 2004. "Business as Mission," Lausanne Occasional Paper No. 59. Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization.
10. Stewart, John. 1961. Nestorian Missionary Enterprise. Piscataway, New Jersey, USA: Gorgias Press.
11. See, for example, 2008. Wilson-Hartgrove, Jonathan. New Monasticism: What It Has to Say to Todayâ€™s Church. Houston, Texas, USA: Brazos Books.

12. 2006. "Dancing a Different Dance" in Connections 5(2&3). WEA Mission Commission, 17.

The Rev. Canon Mark Oxbrow is international coordinator of the Faith2Share network and previously served as assistant general secretary of the Church Mission Society (CMS). During his twenty years with CMS, he had a particular responsibility for building missional relationships with churches in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union.

<http://www.lausanneworldpulse.com/1071?pg=all>

**Re: Recovering Mission: Majority World Missionâ€™A Return to Mission for the Majority - posted by a-servant, on: 2014/1/17 0:15**

Very interesting article. May I ask you a personal question, Arthur.

What do you think about a written word and articles ministry delivered by email? I already have previous experience with that. However was thinking about to get some funding to put it on a larger platform.

What would mean very quick and open ended subscriber growth, accomplished by targeted opt-in acquisitions. So the audience could potentially grow by 100k+ subscribers per week.

Is that still feasible in your opinion? Who would most likely partner with a project like that?

**Re: - posted by ArthurRosh, on: 2014/1/17 0:15**

I am sorry but I am unable to understand your question clearly. Can you re-state or explain your question or email me at [a.roshkovski@gmail.com](mailto:a.roshkovski@gmail.com)

**Re: Recovering Mission: Majority World Missionâ€™A Return to Mission for the Majority, on: 2014/1/18 16:58**

I am surprised this article not has generated more responses. According to the Open Doors Watch List Saudi Arabia ranks #6 as a restricted nation. For all practical intents and purposes Saudi Arabia is closed to gospel penetration by traditional means.

Yet God is finding ways to penetrate the Islamic veil. The fact that 800 Arabic families have been impacted by the gospel through young Ethiopian sisters. Domestic servants. Unknown except to God Himself testifies that God is using the foolish things of the world to shame the wise. I wonder how many times this is being duplicated across Saudi Arabia and the rest of the Middle East.

These Ethiopian sisters were able to do something that our parachurch and denominational ministries have not been able to do. They have penetrated the veil of Islam. God indeed has chosen the foolish things, unknown, perhaps illiterate servants to get the gospel into Saudi Arabia.

God is working among the Moslems. Jesus is appearing to the Moslems in dreams and visions. Moslems are coming to Christ on a daily basis. The harvest is plentiful. I only pray we do not miss it.

Posted by Blaine Scogin