Reimagining Witness beyond Our Modern Mission Paradigm

by Michael W. Stroope

I recall, even after more than forty years, an awkward incident during our first months of language study in Sri Lanka. We had gone to a friend's house for dinner. A young girl was serving dinner. In an attempt to practice my new language, I thought, "I will tell her the food was good." I formed the sentence in my head and then spoke three words. She gasped, screamed, covered her mouth, and ran out of the room. I immediately jumped from the table and followed her into the kitchen, and desperately tried to find out what it was that I had said. She would not even look at me but kept waving me off. I learned later that I had said something extremely crude and thus terribly offensive. I had the right words and pronounced them decently, but my offense was in the way I had said what I said, and the tone in which I had spoken.

For those of us who have acquired another language, we know that it is a grave, deep undertaking. Language is more than the correct pronunciation of words. Language is a world of symbols, meanings, and assumptions that reside deep within the mind and forms a distinct way of viewing life. Successful language acquisition means breaking free of the bonds of one's own language world—one's epistemic reality—and entering another. The ultimate solution to my language mishap was not better vocabulary or getting my tongue to behave. It was no less than a conversion of my particular English linguistic categories and logic to a distinctively different world.

The focus of this essay is the use of terms and concepts. And yet, I am convinced this focus has more to do with the mental conception of reality, than with what words we actually use. So, I wish to explore the language of "mission," not just "mission" as a word, but "mission" as a mental frame that defines reality and thus orders our responses. First, I will discuss the origins of mission language, how the word has been used historically, and the ways it governs our understanding of and practice within the church-world encounter. This first section is a summation of a much longer argument found in my 2017 book, *Transcending Mission: The Eclipse of a Modern Tradition*.[1] Second, I will speak

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to how mission, as a logic or framework, produces a restricted view of reality that actually hinders rather than helps in our response to the world. Then third, I will advocate for a shift in language, one that is meant to liberate us to imagine and to act in new and fresh ways.

My beginning premise is that while there are problems within the mission enterprise with such matters as structure, strategy, and support, these are not the chief problem. Structure, strategy, and support certainly require careful and thoughtful attention, but there is a foundational, and thus more urgent, problem that must be addressed. It is not just that mission has problems, but mission itself is the problem. The conceptual and linguistic basis, upon which these other matters rest, is the problem. Put bluntly, mission, as a linguistic and conceptual framework, hampers our ability to address wider concerns. Thus, it is essential that we address the foundation that is mission. In my book, I explore a number of issues related to the problem of mission. I will mention five that are for me the most troublesome. To be clear, my aim in this first section is to unseat or disrupt mission's status as sacred, unassailable language. Only then will we be free to critique its power as a framing reality and be able to consider a shift to a new linguistic and conceptual paradigm.

Concern Number One: "Mission," as we use it today, is not, in the literal sense, biblical language.

An explicit lexical trail from the biblical languages to the English term "mission" cannot be established.[2] In the New Testament, we find two verbs that denote the act of sending— *pempo* and *apostellein.* Both are used throughout the New Testament to convey ordinary and commonplace kinds of sending—demons being sent into swine, workers being sent into the vineyard, Herod sending soldiers to kill male children, and the sending of a representative or envoy. The noun form, *apostolos,* specifies one who is sent as a messenger. Translators of Greek to Latin and English rarely rendered these "sending" verbs and noun as "mission" or "missionary." In fact, the Greek *apostolus* has usually been made into a loan word—especially for ecclesiastical references. In the case of Greek to modern English translations, translators have seldom rendered *apostolos* as "missionary."[3] When they have done so, it has usually been as a paraphrase, and not as actual translation, and thus as a dynamic or functional equivalent rather than a literal or formal translation of the Greek. So, while one might argue for equivalence in meaning, one cannot assert a direct or literal trail from one to the other. Mission might be inferred from Scripture but not literally established. Thus, we must acknowledge that "mission" is less than biblical or sacred language.

It is not just that mission has problems, but mission itself is the problem.

So, why is this a concern? The direction in which we read and interpret Scripture should be of great concern to all of us. If mission is not biblical language, then it should not be declared as the authoritative or decisive lens through which we read Scripture nor the governing hermeneutic by which Scripture is to be interpreted. The primacy of the Word of God demands we begin with the revelation of God rather than extra-biblical language freighted with modern ideas of organization, strategy, and funding. If we are not careful, we can make Paul and Silas into modern American missionaries or equate their preaching and imprisonment at Philippi with a youth mission trip to Haiti. This is called eisegesis—not exegesis. And while every interpreter brings his or her cultural and linguistic assumptions to the text, we must hold to the principle of *sola scriptura* and do our best to let Scripture form, shape, and critique the modern career missionary and the youth trip to Haiti and not the other way around. When mission is exalted to the status of biblical language, it becomes sacred language and thus beyond critique.

Concern Number Two: The witness of the people of God in Scripture and the early church was not a singular expression, such as we commonly think of mission, but it was a multifaceted phenomenon.

We read of activities such as proclaiming, teaching, confessing, telling, pleading, and testifying. Those involved in these activities were disciples, elders, bishops, saints, pastors, teachers, evangelists, apostles, bondservants, fishermen, tanners, sojourners, pilgrims, and martyrs. No one activity dominates or excludes others, and no one vocation or role negates other roles and vocations. Scripture reports that the advance of the gospel was wide-ranging and diverse. The same can be said of the church of the post-New Testament period. Activities and roles in the spread of the gospel expanded rather than consolidated or contracted. My study of primary sources of the early church and its growth reveals that "mission" was not the dominating terminology or frame. In fact, mission language is nonexistent in the writings and accounts of Patrick, Columba, Gregory the Great, Boniface, and the Nestorians, as well as the earliest historians of Christianity, such as Eusebius, Rufinus, and the Venerable Bede.[4]

We may feel the need to portray the activities of the early church as

"mission" and name its "missionaries," but to what end? Plainly stated, it is anachronistic to present church history or the expansion of Christianity as "mission history." Rather than compressing the multitude of realities and variety of actors into a single, aggregating reality called "mission," why not call activities and people by what they were? The historical record shows that methods, actions, and initiatives were socially located and situationally driven, and thus they were reported via a wide array of terms, processes, and agents. Compression of these into "mission" does not help our understanding and can in fact lead to erroneous conclusions. For example, reducing everything to "mission" leaves the impression that the expansion of Christianity was a professional endeavor that excluded, or excused, the majority of those in the church. From this, we might conclude that the Great Commission can be delegated or is the assignment of only a few.

Concern Number Three: The historical fact is that the rhetoric of mission, as used by the church today, is not ancient but modern.

Mission became the way to describe the activity of the church only in the sixteenth century. Prior to this time, mission was chiefly a term to describe the diplomatic and military activities of Spain and Portugal, as well as individuals who were political agents of these empires. The exception was early Christian writers who used the Latin *missio* to explain the inner workings of the Trinity. We find *missio* employed in this way by Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Augustine, and then later and more extensively by Thomas Aquinas. In their use, *missio* is restricted to the divine, inter-workings of the Son and Holy Spirit, and never refers to the church or to human agency.[5] But this changes in 1539, when Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Jesuits, introduces mission as a way to speak about vocation and human agency, as well as the Catholic Church's encounter with the wider world. The papal bull that establishes the Jesuits initiates the modern ecclesial use of "mission." Likewise, Ignatius creates "a special vow" that obligates the Jesuits to go wherever the Roman pontiff might send them. This unique Ignatian innovation becomes known as the "mission vow."[6] In a relatively short period of time, Ignatius' notion of obedience and mobility evolves into the sending of ecclesial agents to places near and far. One of the first of these agents was Frances Xavier who traveled to India as legate of the Portugal crown, as well as a representative of the Roman Church. This Ignatian linguistic appropriation of mission for the church is widely acknowledged by both Catholic and Protestant scholars, such as Paul Kollman, John O'Malley, and David Bosch.[7] Again, the concern is that the lineage of mission is modern and not ancient, and its current meaning and use is quite recent.

> *Early Christian writers used the Latin* missio *to explain the inner workings of the Trinity and never for the church or human agency.*

Concern Number Four: Mission rhetoric is historically linked to Spanish and Portuguese exploration and the establishment of colonies in India, the far East, Latin America, and the American Southwest.

These efforts were justified and fueled in large measure by ongoing Crusades against Muslims, as well the recent Reconquest of Spain and Portugal from Moorish control. Various attempts have been made to minimize this connection or to isolate them as exceptions, and yet, it is clear the rise of mission language coincides linguistically and politically with reconquest, conquistadors, expeditions, and colonialization. The Vasco de Gama era was at the same time the era of the Latin Rite, as mission agents of the Roman Catholic Church personified the advance of imperial Spain and Portugal.

Protestants did not immediately adopt the language of mission, mainly because of its implications. It was a Catholic word that implied the expansion of Iberian Catholic powers. This made the term especially difficult for Protestants, since they had often been the target of Catholic "mission" effort to reconvert Europe. Also, the term was tied to exploration and colonizing efforts, and as Protestants had no colonies, it made no sense to appropriate the word. For example, even though Matthew 28:19–20 was the centerpiece of Anabaptist theology and practice, mission language was not part of their early confessions or the language of leaders, such as Balthasar Hubmaier and Menno Simons.[8] The Great Commission was binding on all its members, and yet, Anabaptists self-identified as pilgrims and martyrs, not missionaries. For them, mission carried territorial implications. And since everyone, everywhere needed salvation, especially Catholics, the Great Commission was without territorial bounds.

The historical record shows that Protestants adopted the language of mission at the same time Protestant nations, such as the Netherlands, Denmark, Germany, and England, acquired their own colonies. The Danish-Halle Mission was one of the first Protestant societies with mission in its title. The back story is that the Danish Crown had established a presence in Tranquebar, India, nearly a century prior (1616) in the form of a trading company and a colony of Danish citizens. The Danish Crown supported the founding of the Mission in order to bring all the ruler's subjects, both Danes and Indians, under the ruler's religion. The king's action was also a move to supplant Portuguese Jesuits who were also present in Tranquebar.[9] Therefore, the founding of Danish-Halle Mission in

1704 followed the pattern and practices already established by Portuguese and Spanish Catholics.

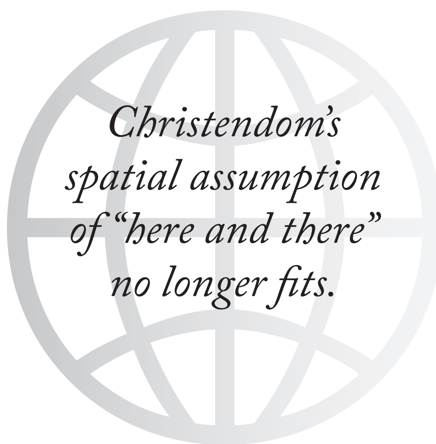
Just as Ignatius innovated mission language for the Roman Catholic Church, the Danish-Halle Mission initiated mission as ecclesial language for Protestants. In the course of the next century, mission moved from questionable language on the margins of the Protestant Church to a firmly established tradition.

The concern is that claiming mission as a distinctively Protestant or Evangelical endeavor is simply inaccurate. Its roots are located in sixteenth century Iberian, Catholic expansion.

Concern Number Five: In modern times, Protestant mission converges with the optimism of Western Christianity to create a spirit of triumph and a sense of manifest destiny.

The height of this optimism can be seen in the language of the Edinburgh Conference, 1910. From beginning to end, mission language saturated the conference addresses and reports. "Mission" and "missionary" modified ideas and concepts, qualified activities and actors, and quantified aims and objectives. The answer to the "modern missionary situation" was mission or missionary work, undergirded by a wide and varied list of actors, entities, actions, and arenas, all qualified by the missionary adjective—missionary standards, missionary intelligence, missionary buildings, missionary money, missionary spirit, and on and on. It was announced that mission was a modern enterprise whose time had come.[10] Mission progress and triumphs were lauded in military and crusade-like language of conquest, turning heathendom into Christendom, as well as the demeaning language of barbarian, uncivilized, and heathen. Along with optimism, modern notions of progress, consumption, and efficiency became defining ideals and goals in mission practice and planning. Mission epitomized the spirit of Western advance and modernization.

This unbridled optimism came undone immediately following the Edinburgh Conference, as the world erupted into war, with Christian nations slaughtering each other. The great depression followed. Then one after another colonial populations initiated their campaigns for independence. Simultaneously, the revival of world religions and nationalism surged among Buddhists, Muslims, and Hindus. All of this signaled a gathering storm for the mission enterprise. The hope of evangelizing the world in the current generation seemed unlikely. The colonial legacy of mission created a spirited backlash among newly liberated, former colonies. Access for missionaries retracted rather than expanded, and mission opportunities were no longer "unprecedented" but chaste and limited.



In the past half-century, a reevaluation of mission language in all its forms has commenced. The loss of confidence and optimism resulted in a rethinking, revisioning, and rehabilitating of mission that has been ongoing since the middle of the twentieth century. The result is that mission has become a conflated and often confusing term, taking on a wide array of competing meanings and uses. In a very real sense, Stephen Neill's quip, "If everything is mission, nothing is mission" sounds truer today than when first spoken in 1959.[11] If Neill were alive today, he might remark that because *nothing* is mission, *something* must take its place.

So, my five concerns in summary are—mission is not sacred, revealed language. Its origins lie in the power dynamics of 16th century Western expansion. Its original historical context is imbued with notions of conquest, manifest destiny, and colonialization. Rather than unencumbered or benign, mission is a weighted and burdensome term. And though the modern mission paradigm may have operated with a type of force in the Age of Discovery, and while it may have advanced the gospel by way of devout people and strategic means well into the twentieth century, that paradigm is now outdated and offers only a restricting framework. Mission is a modern linguistic innovation, and thus we should not feel duty-bound or obligated to maintain and uphold its use or its logic.

You may be thinking, "So what! Does any of this matter? It's only a matter of semantics. It's just words." Well, words matter, because they tell us who we are and they contain the content that forms our actions. "Mission" is like an old, comfortable house. In its rooms, hallways, and attic are the accumulated bits that represent the distinct ways of a former time.

The studs and drywall of this house are full of assumptions, built into its structure through the generations. And while once useful and workable, they are now unsound and even dangerous. For example, Christendom's spatial assumption of "here and there" no longer fits. Christianity cannot, and should not, be defined in terms of territory or distance. Because Christianity exists around the globe, witness no longer traffics in one direction but from anywhere to everywhere. For sure, this means that the mindset of exploration and colonization from which mission emerged does not address current realities. Such stark religious territorial differentiations have died. We live in neighborhoods in which racial, linguistic, and religious

mixing is taking place at a breakneck pace. At a workplace in Houston, it is likely that a Hindu is seated in the cubicle, next to a Christian. Cross-cultural witness is a daily possibility for every Christian. Coupled with this is the rapid decline of the church in the West. Nigerians, Koreans, and Chinese are making their way to our shores in hopes of converting us. "Mission" seems to be worn and tired language incapable of responding to global changes. It is a mental model for a time and world that no longer exist. The challenges of today require a different structural framework. The ethos and spirit of modernity, with its unexamined values of progress, individualism, cause and effect, and commodification, are hardwired into mission and limit our ability to imagine what could be.

Echoing through the rooms, hallways, and corners of this old house is identity. Identity is the way we see ourselves, present ourselves, and how others view us. Identity is central to our operating logic, as we move through life and encounter others. More than ever, how we identify ourselves is a primary concern. As the world becomes more and more polarized, it matters who we say we are. If our goal is to live faithfully and speak with clarity about Christ in these confusing days, we will want to identify ourselves clearly and publicly as fellow human beings who are devoted to Jesus Christ, who follow Christ's teachings and his distinct way of life. If we are to suffer rejection, persecution, or even death, it should be for the right reason, the highest calling—that is, identification with Christ. Mission and missionary are not sacred brands that must be emblazoned across our chest and defended to the death. Even more concerning is the internal tension many of us have to navigate when we are forced to identify ourselves one way at home among constituents and family and then another way in the places where we live and work. We know that in order to be undivided and authentic in our person and as

> *Rather than conveying that we are objectifying or conquering, people need to hear us address them as neighbors, fellow human beings, and friends.*

witnesses, we must live open lives in which people know us intimately, and the most precious parts of our lives are not hidden but on full display.

Above all, at the foundation of this modern abode is a pursuit that is less than ultimate. A passage often quoted to justify mission is John 20:21—"As the Father has sent me, so send I you." The argument is that in "sent" we find the biblical idea of "mission." And yet, Jesus' emphasis in these words is on something other than the operation of sending, something more than the pursuit of mission. In the previous verse, Jesus focuses the disciples' attention on his hands and side, on his wounds. He then says, "Peace be with you; as the Father has sent Me, I also send you." Jesus is saying, as, or for the same purpose, the Father has sent me, I am sending you. Sacrificial suffering is the point. Sending is only a modest means to the goals of love and sacrifice. When conveyance to these ends becomes the emphasis rather than ends themselves, the implications of Jesus' suffering and death become less than ultimate. Mission, at best, is a vehicle; it is a means to an end. We know that getting on a plane and flying over salt water does not change our character or turn us into witnesses. Sending and going are not enough. Our foundational call is to Christ—to a cruciform life—and not to mission.

So, what am I proposing? I suggest we speak in the sacred language of Scripture and that we embody the logic found in these holy words. Such words as love, covenant, reconciliation, witness, sojourner, and kingdom of God, should define our identity and determine our internal logic. Rather than a historically overworked and over-burdened word, such as missionary, it is far better to identify ourselves as followers of Christ, devotees of Jesus, disciples, or pilgrims in the Jesus Way. Rather than language that may convey that we are objectifying, conquering, or winning, people of this world need to hear us address them as neighbors, fellow human beings, and friends. The realities of the current age require language that invigorates our engagement with those who do not know Christ, words that include all believers, and language that allows us to reimagine witness beyond the boundaries of the modern mission paradigm.

So, you might be asking, "How exactly might we reimagine witness beyond the modern mission paradigm?" Well, as I see it, we have three options . . .

Option 1: Ban Mission Language

This, of course, is highly unlikely and really unreasonable. Mission, missionary, and missional are deeply embedded in the language of the church, literature, and history, and thus, these words are not going away anytime soon. And they should not. They are part of the historical discourse as we talk about a particular past and a historical tradition in the expansion of Christianity.

Option 2: Do Nothing About Mission Language

It is equally untenable to continue justifying and promoting mission language as if it is sacred language and a viable framework from which to operate. We must scrutinize the way we talk among ourselves about the church-world encounter, as well as to the people outside the church.

Option 3: Invite Others To Move Out of the Mission House, through Constructive Linguistic Variation

In my classes, in conversation with friends and colleagues, and in my work with churches, I make a concerted effort to speak with words that deviate from the mission norm. This may

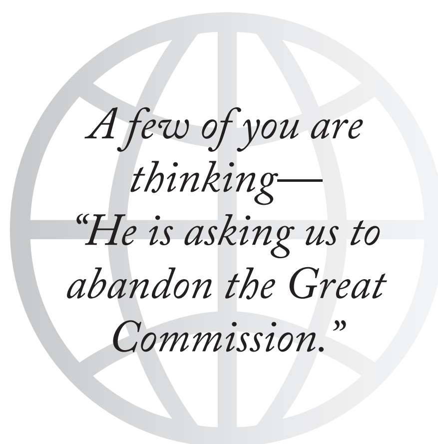
mean I speak in longer, more detailed sentences or with more situational or socially located speech. As I deviate, my hope is that people will question, either consciously or unconsciously, their own word choice, and change their speech. My rewording is an invitation—not a command. I do not correct someone when they use the M-word (that would be rude), but I am continually rewording witness aloud in the hearing of others. Then, I pray for an awakening of sorts. I pray that people discover ways of deviating from what has been their norm, not just linguistically but in terms of their mental model. My hope is they will discover a fresh framework for witness. I am finding that my own linguistic variations are forcing me to be a more intentional Christ follower and a better communicator. And my prayers for others have awakened me to my own issues of power and my need to be humble and clear in my intentions.

My words of choice have become "pilgrim witness" for how I self-identify and "pilgrim imagination" for the framework or logic from which I am to operate.[12] Pilgrim or sojourner is a rich biblical image that describes a host of Bible characters and highlights a number of important biblical ideals, such as: we are people on the way. We are to live alongside others in humility and service. We are weak and powerless. We, like Israel, are wandering exiles. We, like Jesus, are to sacrifice and suffer. And, of course, witness is rich, biblical language, as well.

So, how might this kind of rewording or deviating actually happen? Well, rather than merely stating that our church is taking the youth on a "mission trip," a more constructive and imaginative course would be to think through where we are going, why we are going, what we will actually do, and what we hope to accomplish. So, I would reword "mission trip" in this way:

> A group of our high schoolers will be in the Dominican Republic for two weeks, working alongside Christian brothers and sisters in the ministry of their local church in order to show love and give a witness to youth in the surrounding neighborhood through a sports camp. We pray that our high schoolers will see that Christ is at work in the Dominican Republic and that our high schoolers will receive a witness from Christians who live there.

This descriptive rewording communicates that this activity is more than about travel, it is reciprocal, the point is love and witness, and local Christians are the prime actors. Or rather than talking about the "mission field," we should do all we can to move away from objectifying language by calling people by who they are and how they describe themselves—Malays, Lebanese, or Sri Lankans. Or rather than speaking in the code of "missional church," or "missional living," we should give careful thought to what we are trying to communicate and then speak in clear, precise language. Rather than saying, "everyone is to be a missionary," why not lead people to move to more descriptive and richer language that affirms all work is God-given, every vocation is sacred, and witness to Christ is essential for all Christians. Or rather than operating from "mission," a modern paradigm, wedded to outdated ideas of distance and erroneous notions of power, we might choose to undertake the pioneering task of imagining life and witness anew from the perspective of a pilgrim who travels along the uncharted terrain of the boundless and coming reign of God.



A few of you are thinking—"He is asking us to abandon the Great Commission." No, it is quite the opposite. Faithfulness to Christ's commission means we clarify our words and includes a responsibility to lead others to adjust their mental framework to fit current realities. Hear my plea—it is only as we reimagine witness beyond the modern mission paradigm that we will be able to rise to the challenge of this cultural moment. For sure, reimagining is more than saying appropriate words in the right way. It is the deep, revolutionary work of deviating, rewording, and reimagining. Reimagining moves us to a different place, one from which we are free to reorder our participation in the gospel and to position ourselves for fresh and revolutionary witness. I invite you to join me in this pioneering venture. **IJFM**

Endnotes

[1] Michael W. Stroope, *Transcending Mission: The Eclipse of a Modern Tradition* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2017).

[2] For the full discussion, see Stroope, 58–66.

[3] See Stroope, 64–65.

[4] For the full discussion of these primary sources, see Stroope, 107–42.

[5] See Stroope, 245–46.

[6] The occasion and reasons for Ignatius' appropriation of "mission" are explored in Stroope, 238–48.

[7] See footnote 18 in Stroope, 243

[8] See Stroope, 300–302.

[9] See Stroope, 309–10.

[10] See Stroope, 329–38.

[11] Stephen Neill, *Christian Missions* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1964), 81.

[12] For a fuller description of a "pilgrim witness," see Stroope, 355–85.

Article Response

A Response to Michael Stroope

by Martin Accad

Reading Mike Stroope's thought-provoking thesis, it would be easy at first to think that he was making a big deal about a marginal semantic issue. But as one progresses through his thinking, one eventually realizes that he was serious when he says in his paper, "It is not just that mission has problems, but mission itself is the problem." (p. 164)

Over the past few weeks since I read Mike's book, I dropped the bomb a few times in conversations or seminars (always giving due credit to Mike of course), that "mission" and "missionary" are not biblical terms, and puzzlement was always the reaction. It puzzled me too at first. Often being taken by surprise is the beginning of a new learning moment. Mike does well at building on this by pointing out that the Bible uses other concepts, such as "witness," that this witness was carried out through a vast array of activities and types of proclamation, and that this was done by people with a multitude of various gifts and callings. In this way, Mike "de-specializes" and thus "demystifies" the function and role of mission work and of the missionary.

Most important, perhaps, is Mike's demonstration of how closely the whole concept and language of mission has flirted with the history of conquest, human power, and colonization; in a word, with "Christendom." To realize, for instance, that Protestants had no use of the language of mission (because they viewed it as a Catholic aberration) until Protestant nations emerged—such as the Netherlands, Denmark, Germany, and England—and after they acquired their own colonies, is rather incriminating and paradigm shifting.

At this point, it seems that Mike feels he has gone too far, so he tries to rescue his destabilized reader a little bit with these comforting words:

> And though the modern mission paradigm may have operated with a type of force in the Age of Discovery, and while it may have advanced the gospel by way of devout people and strategic means well into the twentieth century, that paradigm is now outdated and offers only a restricting framework. (p. 166)

But now that he has won me over to his thesis, I want to respond to these last words of caution.

Has the modern mission paradigm really "operated with effect and force" for the proclamation of the kingdom of God and its values and alternative vision of the world, or has it operated for the advance of western adventurism and economics? Has it really "certainly advanced the gospel," or rather advanced western cultures and values? Could it be that the progress and harvest of the gospel has happened—albeit weakly in the Muslim world—*despite,* rather than *thanks to,* the mission enterprise? Certainly, some good has happened because there were true disciples of Jesus who were drawn into the enterprise. But so much more happens if the patronizing colonial mission "enterprise" leaves faithful disciples of Jesus alone rather than dragging them into its political agenda of domination.

I remember, a few years ago, when I visited a so-called "slave castle" on the southern coast of Ghana. Right at the center of the castle was a little chapel. I could see in my mind's eye the slave masters gathering here regularly, morning and evening, to pledge once more their allegiance to their monstrous god after abusing another few hundred dehumanized fellow-human-beings. I was physically sick for half a day. I threw up multiple times. I wept uncontrollably for about four hours nearly non-stop. I was shivering like a leaf. Mercifully, a dear Ghanaian pastor graciously took me with him in his car, and away from the bus and the rest of the group. He prayed and grieved with me on the horrors of the colonial missionary enterprise. After a few days, when I was able to process what had happened to me, I wrote a blog entitled: "My Inner Journey to Hell and Back."[1]

Close to the end of Mike's important paper, he makes a statement which—it seems to me—might reveal the subconscious motivation that is getting western centers of missionary power to revisit the concept of mission:

> Nigerians, Koreans, and Chinese are making their way to our shores in hopes of converting us. "Mission" seems to be worn, tired language that cannot respond to these and other changes. It is a mental model for a time and world that no longer exists. The challenges of today require a different structural framework. (p. 167)

Could it be that the repentance of the missionary enterprise derives from the discomfort that the western "Christian" world is experiencing as a result of having become the object of mission? Is it so hard to be the object of a missionary enterprise?! Is it disturbing that people from the ends of the earth want to change and transform you before trying to understand you? If this is how the western church now feels, then perhaps it is finally able to understand how Orthodox and Maronite Christians in eastern parts of the world feel and have felt for nearly two centuries about Protestant missionaries, and about Latin Catholic missionaries before that.

Mike Stroope's revisiting of the whole concept and language of mission is very welcome indeed! But let us also ask

As an Arab Christian, as one from a "numerical minority" community, I find great inspiration in four metaphors of the kingdom from the Gospel according to Matthew: "salt," "light," "mustard seed," and "leaven."

ourselves critically: Are we changing the rules of the game now that we have become the object of the game?

Personally, Mike's book and paper make me feel like abandoning the language of mission altogether and to exchange it for more biblical language. I like his concept of "linguistic deviation." Just one example is the recent shift in mission quarters from the word MBB to describe a "Muslim Background Believer," to BMB, a "Believer from a Muslim Background." What semantic game are we playing? We are called to be "disciples" of Jesus, and all of us have a background. Sometimes it is helpful to refer to this background, but using the acronym jargon is more often than not terribly objectifying. I am "a disciple of Jesus from a Christian background." Some of my brothers and sisters in the body are "disciples of Jesus from a Muslim background." Others are "disciples from secularist backgrounds."

My favorite language is the language of the kingdom of God. And as an Arab Christian, as one belonging to what I have often referred to as a "numerical minority" community, rather than simply to a "minority," I find great inspiration in four metaphors of the kingdom from the Gospel according to Matthew: "salt," "light," "mustard seed," and "leaven." The first two have to do with the nature of who we are called to be in our context: less is more and too much is unpleasant. The last two have to do with the effect and impact of being children of the kingdom: the community of the kingdom is a shelter, a blessing, a home for a great variety of birds, a warm loaf of bread that can be shared joyfully with all those around us.

I hope that in a few years we will look back and be able to say that Mike's study has delivered the final blow to the concept of mission that has used the language of oppression and domination and conquest, and that it was the beginning of the rebirth of biblical metaphors of the entire body of children of the kingdom being a blessing to all those around. It is because we have lost this language that, I believe, we are unable to welcome the stranger and the migrant anymore. We happily get on a plane or a boat to go and "save" the Syrian, the Iraqi, the Afghan, or the Somali. But when they show up at our door, that is a different matter. The spirit of self-protective Christendom takes over from the spirit of conquering Christendom.

It is because of this language of Christendom that we have developed xenophobia instead of philoxenia. What will we do with the *xenos*—the foreigner? Will we show them xeno*phobia*—*fear* of foreigner? Or will we express to them *philo*xenia—*love* of foreigner? I believe that if we want to know if our church is calibrated properly with the biblical call to witness, we need to reflect on how our church responds and interacts with the *xenos* at its door: with *phobia*, or with *philos*? **IJFM**

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Endnotes

[1] Martin Accad, "My Inner Journey to Hell and Back," IMES blog, April 24, 2014 (last accessed Dec 2, 2019: https://abtslebanon.org/2014/04/24/my-inner-journey-to-hell-and-back/).