

Mission Round Table

The OMF Journal for Reflective Practitioners



Race, Ethnicity, the Bible, and Mission

“Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth.” (Revelation 5:9–10)

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Cover image: “Every Tribe Every Nation” by Marsha Vosburg (circa) 2018. All rights reserved. The intent of this painting is to depict the variety and diversity that is and will be present in the kingdom of God. The figures represent people from all walks and stages of life. Many of the faces were painted with various shades of brown to indicate that our earthly heritage may be uniquely comprised of multiple ethnicities and cultures. The grid of silver squares in the upper right-hand corner may represent the city foursquare—a heavenly destination for a royal priesthood from every tribe and every nation.

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Printing: Yung Shung Printrade Pte Ltd



Mission Round Table is published by the Mission Research Department
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Editorial

Walter McConnell

From 29 May–1 June of this year, OMF hosted its regular Mission Research Consultation, focusing on the theme of Race, Ethnicity, the Bible, and Mission. Twelve papers were read by a worldwide group of reflective practitioners who sensitively approached the topic from a variety of perspectives. The papers will be published in this and the next two issues of *Mission Round Table* to make them available for a wider audience. Please make use of the questions following each paper as you engage this important missiological theme through personal reflection or group discussion.

The breadth of the theme of race, ethnicity, the Bible, and mission, and the difficulty of adequately addressing it, reminded me of the Apostle Peter who, while trying to row across the lake at night, faced both an impossible wind and the terrifying sight of what he and his fellow disciples took to be a phantom walking toward them across the surface of the water. And though Jesus was there and could enable him to walk upon the stormy waves, Peter's horrifying context turned his eyes from the Lord to his fears. In a similar manner, anyone who tries to comprehend the complexities and multitudinous approaches surrounding race and ethnicity as understood in the world today faces a formidable challenge. This difficulty is compounded when one attempts to apply these concepts to missional outreach.

Just what are “race” and “ethnicity”? How can one avoid being swallowed up by the waves of contemporary scholarship that make the terms impossible to define in a way that all find acceptable? Whose understanding should one follow and why? How does one work with those who maintain different positions?

How can one remain upright while facing shifting winds of interpretation with vast social and political ramifications? And how does one negotiate such diverse views in the light of a Bible that was written in a different age to people who may have thought differently on these things, if they thought about them at all. While I would like to say one does this by keeping his eyes on Jesus,

Peter's short stroll on the stormy sea demonstrates that this can be more easily said than done. The papers in this issue cut different paths through the waves as they express various understandings of the terms under discussion. Readers are reminded to reflect on the statement that is always written inside the front cover of the journal: “The editorial content of *Mission Round Table* reflects the opinions of the various authors and should not be interpreted as necessarily representing the views of OMF International.” The authors' various ideas give us a lot to think about. Let's learn what we can from them.

This issue, as with the two following, will open with a devotional David Eastwood presented during the consultation. Christians who want to know the mind of God should begin with Scripture, and David does an excellent job opening James 2:1–13 so that we can understand and apply principles that the Holy Spirit wanted the first-century church to learn as they interacted with people that they identified as “other”.

Three papers from the consultation follow. Kirsteen Kim addresses the relationship between “colorblindness and missiology,” concluding that, since the status quo is so entrenched, any attempt to overlook differences between people of different races is doomed to failure, whether in national, church, seminary, or mission settings. She concludes by offering “an anti-racism agenda for missiology” to reverse the shortcomings of colorblindness.

Peter Rowan responds to a question that was raised by members of a diverse, urban, evangelical church in the UK that has been examining how intercultural issues impact the local and global witness of the church: “Should white people be missionaries overseas?”. His ten “yes/no” answers—focusing on topics such as agency, reciprocity, power, indigeneity, and solidarity—demonstrate the need for careful, nuanced reflection in the light of our global context whether one is white or not.

As an Asian Christian who has immigrated to Australia, Endian reflects upon his experience facing both overt

and systemic racism, and that, as a minority, he could feel powerless, if not invisible, even while serving in Christian ministry. His paper evaluates how social location can influence biblical interpretation and reveals how reading scholars from multiple backgrounds helps us better understand the common theme of status reversal in Luke's Gospel. He further shows how Paul's repeated discussion of Christ's crucifixion knocks down all hierarchical mindsets and systems by elevating weakness over power, a truth that should guide our relations with everyone today.

The next article is set in the context of the early 1960s when OMF opened the door for non-Caucasians and Asians to be admitted into full membership. Tze and Cao take us back to those momentous days as they highlight issues the Fellowship faced when it formed a home council to guide mission activities emanating from Hong Kong. The inauguration of the Hong Kong home council in 1966 and its operating fully under local leadership in 1970 didn't ensure smooth sailing. Finding a suitable home council chairman and home director, and working through differences of opinion between local leaders and the broader organization over selection of candidates and use of funds required great personal humility and continual seeking of the Savior's face.

Followers of Jesus often find themselves sinking in waves of various kinds. One of these is just plain busyness. If the Lord needed to get away from the crowds to find rest for his soul, how much more do we. Rose Scott notes that despite working in a world that extols extra effort and an organization that often seems to promote work as a sacrifice made to God, we all desperately need to find rest to truly draw near to him. She lists four practical ways in which she hopes to attain true rest in years to come and challenges us to join her or even identify other paths that we will find more helpful. In a world where winds of change can stir up waves of exhaustion, wouldn't it be good to look up and see the face and reach out to take the hand of the One who said, “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest”?

James 2:1–13

Favouritism Is Forbidden

David Eastwood



David Eastwood has served for thirty-one years in Taiwan with OMF International. During that time, his ministry has included Bible teaching, preaching, and church planting, and, for the last eight years, he has served as the Field Director. David initially trained at All Nations Christian College in the UK but has since completed further studies with Singapore Bible College and Spurgeon's College in the UK. He is studying for a Doctorate in Practical Theology with the Cambridge Theological Federation, investigating the experiences of the Taiwanese working class as they become part of a local church.

My brothers and sisters, believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ must not show favoritism. ² Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in filthy old clothes also comes in. ³ If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, "Here's a good seat for you," but say to the poor man, "You stand there" or "Sit on the floor by my feet," ⁴ have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?

⁵ Listen, my dear brothers and sisters: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him? ⁶ But you have dishonored the poor. Is it not the rich who are exploiting you? Are they not the ones who are dragging you into court? ⁷ Are they not the ones who are blaspheming the noble name of him to whom you belong?

⁸ If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, "Love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing right. ⁹ But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers. ¹⁰ For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it. ¹¹ For he who said, "You shall not commit adultery," also said, "You shall not murder." If you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you have become a lawbreaker.

¹² Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, ¹³ because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment. (NIV)

In an online conference that I listened to recently, Lusa Nsenga-Ngoy, currently the Bishop of Willesden, was speaking about how mission needs to confront the symbols of imperialism and colonialism in Western countries.¹ He said some words that resonated very much with my own research interests. He described how that at the heart of the colonial mentality was the ascribing of worth to individuals based on categories to which they belong. These categories affect how one relates to self, the other, and the world. "De-colonisation is the undoing of an approach that ascribes intrinsic value to self and not the other. It is a desecration of the image of God in humanity. This is both a theological and missiological task of the church." This caught my attention because my own research focus is on social class in Taiwan and how hierarchies of value leading to social inequalities of power are maintained even within churches. I had found myself using the very same language about social class as people use in the discussion of racism. I also find I am dealing with a similar problem, because a lot of the values and ways of looking at people are so tied up with culture and identity and so unacknowledged as personal choices, that many are unaware of their bias or

prejudice. If they are Christians, they may even fervently deny its existence and maintain that they love dearly the people that they are, in fact, marginalising.

This passage of Scripture in James is powerful in that it challenges us both at the level of action and deeper levels of our values and even our source of self-identity. This is the first of the so-called Catholic or General Epistles, a letter not written to a named church. The context of this passage, Chapter 1, has been James' definition of "Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless" (1:27). In Chapter 1, he has stated clearly that this religion is not merely an intellectual acceptance of Christian teaching, but one that leads to self-examination (1:23–25), self-control (1:26), and practical demonstrations of love to those with obvious needs, such as widows and orphans. James is concerned that his readers should not be merely those who listen to the word, but who do what it says (1:22). He is not proposing a salvation by works—in fact, he is going much deeper than surface behaviour. Just as the evil desires of our sinful nature give birth to sin which leads to death (1:14–15), so, in contrast, it is the word of God through which God gives

us birth to a new life in Christ. As we accept God's word, he plants it within us, and this brings about our salvation. For James, this living faith, which brings about both self-understanding of the sinful nature and freedom from bondage, is demonstrated by self-control of the tongue (1:26), the exercising of compassion towards society's marginalised, and keeping oneself from being polluted by the world (1:27).

The next section (2:1–13), by including as an example of how the church can so easily adopt the standards of the world in the context of social inequality, shows that James is continuing his definition of how he expects to see the church demonstrating that the law—the word of God—has been planted inside. He wants their “religion” to reflect a true relationship with God in Christ and not merely reflect religious cultural practice, superstition, or membership of a self-serving community created for the benefit of its participants.

There are lots of debates about both the authorship of James and if the recipients are Jewish background believers (as suggested by the opening address) or just Christians in general,² but James addresses his audience as “Brothers” (1:3, 19 and 2:1). In doing so, he is not speaking of some common humanity—the brotherhood of mankind based on God's creation. As true as that is, it is also true that such equality is damaged and threatened by the sin that has tainted both individuals and also human cultures and social structures. James is speaking of an even more important truth: that it is the brotherhood and sisterhood which all people experience when they, through faith in Christ, become children of God. This family relationship makes meaningless the negative dividing values that sinful humans attach to class, culture, and race.

The language of this first verse in Chapter 2 is a bit complex. In it, James is urging his readers not to show favouritism—prejudice. And he reminds them of their faith in “our Lord Jesus Christ—the Glorious.” Translators are not too sure what the word “glory” applies to here.³ Is it the Lordship of Christ or the person of Christ? It certainly makes us ponder that when God the Son chose to leave the glory of heaven and make his dwelling among fallen humanity, he chose a very inglorious incarnation by the world's standards. A glory clothed in a humble appearance.

James has chosen a very interesting case study to move his readers to examine themselves to see just how much they have allowed the word of God to transform them inwardly—because he is challenging them about their attitudes towards others. Literally the “other”, the person different to themselves. And this is something to which the Scriptures speak directly. The very word used—prejudice, favouritism, partiality, respect of persons⁴—is one Paul uses a few times (cf. Rom 2:11; Eph 6:9; Col 3:25) to assert that God does not show favouritism when it comes to racial or social divisions. The equivalent word is frequently used in the Old Testament as a term linked to legal cases—so much so that some scholars have proposed the assembly James is talking of here is some kind of church court rather than just a worship meeting.⁵

Let's look at two verses from the Old Testament.

In Deuteronomy 1:17, Moses charges the Judges he appointed to share the burden of leadership.

Do not show partiality in judging; hear both small and great alike. Do not be afraid of anyone, for judgment belongs to God.



“They shall show you the sentence of judgment.” Deuteronomy 17:9, David Paul Frederick Hardy (Public domain), via Wikimedia Commons.

“Both small and great” here is speaking of social power and is a warning against being intimidated when it comes to the exercising of justice because the basis and authority for judgement is not derived from the human realm: “judgment belongs to God.” Another really interesting verse is Leviticus 19:15, where the Lord's words to Moses were:

Do not pervert justice; do not show partiality to the poor or favouritism to the great but judge your neighbour fairly.

Not only does God warn Moses against favouritism towards those in power, he also warns him against a reverse favouritism. This is something to take note of in our current age. The way to reverse prejudice and injustice is not a reverse form of prejudice or injustice against those who have benefited from it in the past. As tempting as it may be to want to reverse the results of injustice that way, the old adage is true that two wrongs do not make a right! And that is especially true if those wrongs are at the surface level and there is no change in people's hearts.

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James wants to expose our worldly value systems that we may either be unconscious of or in denial of, and the illustration that he gives is a timeless one because we can imagine this scenario working out in any age and in our churches today. The well-dressed businessman pulls up to the church in his BMW wearing his smart suit, handmade shoes, and Rolex watch. The unkempt, poor man with cheap, soiled clothes, and greasy hair walks into the church. We know the relevance of this challenge to each of us. And if we are honest with ourselves, it is a valid challenge.

We are so conscious of the need to not be prejudiced with regard to ethnicity that it is easy to convince ourselves that we are not prejudiced against others. Last year, when I was visiting a church in London, I noticed a black couple who were visiting. Though it was a large London church, the congregation was still mostly white. I wouldn't have known the couple were visitors except a steward came up and handed them a visitor's card as they sat down. So, when it came to the end of the service, I found myself thinking, "I hope someone goes and speaks to them. I wouldn't want them to think they were not welcome in the church." And after the service, I noticed that no one was speaking to them and so

I made a point of doing so. Afterwards, I found myself considering why had I particularly thought about their colour, and whether I would have done the same if they had been white? And was my concern more with welcoming them or more embarrassment at the lack of welcome from the other church members? These were good questions to ponder, but either way I was sure that I genuinely wanted them in church and wanted them to be welcomed. But what if the visitor had been a smelly, unkempt, homeless guy? Would I have been as concerned and as welcoming?

The church in London was mainly upper middle-class professionals. You have to be well off to live in London. But the church in James' day was mainly made up of people from poorer backgrounds and even included slaves. If a rich and affluent person walked into the church, their reaction would not only reflect how they valued that person but also perhaps reflect how they valued themselves within society.

James, in asserting that it is wrong for "believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ" to show favouritism, is asserting that Christians must hold to a different scale of values than those of the world. If we do not, James asks in verse 4, "have

you not *discriminated* among yourselves?" The word translated "discriminated" or "divided"—*diakrinethai*—is not active but passive, so a better translation might be: "are you not discriminated (divided) among yourselves."⁶ This seems to suggest the church is divided among themselves as regards the treatment of rich and poor. This also suggests that James is not entirely speaking about a hypothetical situation but possibly what he has seen happening in the church. We should not be surprised at this, as Paul also criticises the church in Corinth over how similar divisions had ruined their love feasts (1 Cor 11:21–22). The sin here is judgement—judgement of the worth and value of others—and James says it comes from "evil thoughts." This is the same word used in 1:6 to describe doubting in contrast to believing. There, it refers to an inner conflict—someone who is in conflict between their loyalties to God and the world. Here, in 2:4, it is again used to reflect a wavering between the values and priorities of God and those of the world. James warns his readers in 1:8 and 4:8 of the dangers of being "double minded", failing to serve and obey God wholeheartedly because we are wavering between adopting the values of the world and the priorities of God. The "*double-minded*" Christian (1:7) is one who "fails to love and obey Christ wholeheartedly" and "such a mind is evidenced by the different treatment given to visitors along the lines of social class."⁷

The illustration would be equally true if the root of the discrimination had been nationality or race. Except James goes on in verse 5 to point out that, in fact, the church is made up of the very people that they are looking down upon. It is mainly from the poor in the world's eyes that God has chosen those who will inherit the kingdom (2:5). By insulting this person who they perceived as poorer than themselves, they are reflecting the values of the very people who oppress and take advantage of them. In unduly honouring the rich man, they are doing so to someone who comes from the class that is exploiting them. Some scholars feel these may be Jewish money lenders who, on becoming Christians, felt released from laws preventing them from extorting interest from fellow Jews or taking them to court.⁸

The details are not so important as the root of the problem—that the church is reflecting the world's hierarchy based on



Ancient Corinth. George E. Koronaivos (Public domain, CC0), via Wikimedia Commons.

power. Fawning over the rich, adopting or living as if you have adopted the values of the world, either to gain favour with the powerful or to avoid being associated with the marginalised, is a cowardly compromise of the gospel, a failure to trust in God. It is not so much a change of belief, but rather a failure to let that belief work out in your life so that you end up damaging the way the gospel is presented to the world. How often has the church been guilty of demonstrating prejudice by practice or failure to act while publicly claiming that the gospel values all people and that Christ shows no prejudice based on race, gender, or social status?

In my studies of the latest thinking about social class, I found that it is hard to define the term “working class” in the modern academic environment. The classical Marxist definition of the working class being the producers in contrast to the owners of capital has largely disappeared with the arrival of post-Industrial societies. Despite the existence of a group of scholars who want to announce the death of class in postmodern society, class identity can still be seen, though there is little sense of class consciousness.⁹

A newer generation of class theorists have changed the scope and analytical framework of class analysis, including social and cultural factors other than just economics.¹⁰ They focus instead on individualised hierarchical differentiation, suggesting that individuals define their identity based on relational comparisons with people around them. People subconsciously construct unconscious hierarchies that can create feelings of shame or superiority, which can oppress others or hand power over to them.

Hierarchy is decisive in shaping our opportunities and our sense of ourselves and others, but there is not always a reflective awareness of it. It is something we just accept as normal. It reflects the thinking that being a doctor is better than being a plumber, that owning a new car is better than owning an old one, that a certain accent, way of dressing, even choice of diet or supermarket makes a

person seem “better”. People’s lack of awareness of hierarchy is because the activities that produce the hierarchy are “so ubiquitous and mundane that they are often not intended or experienced as [class] conflict or struggle.”¹¹ Instead, we just experience them as “the way things are.” The results of our ordinary everyday activities are the continuations of inequality, but because these ordinary activities generate this inequality, it is hard to eradicate. Hierarchy is produced simply by the values and behaviours that are a part of our daily lives and social inequality is reproduced without any conscious attempt to do so.

If that is true, and I think to some extent it is, then it describes the way in which the world, made up of sinful people living in sin-soaked environments, infuses our minds with ways of thinking about both ourselves and others that are not from God and don’t reflect God’s values. That is why it is so hard to eradicate not just class prejudice but any prejudice. Even when we try our best to do so, even if we genuinely try in our minds to love our neighbour as ourselves (Jas 2:8), and we understand that “neighbour” crosses social and cultural barriers, we can still fail, because we unconsciously listen to the world. We are double minded with double standards, and when we stumble at even one point, we have failed to keep God’s law.

So where does that leave us? In verse 12, James tells us it leaves us as convicted sinners before the mercy seat of God—knowing we are deserving of the full wrath of God and yet knowing also that mercy will triumph over judgement. James will go on to argue that it should leave us with a determination to show the love that our minds tell us we should have for our neighbour in practical demonstrations of care (chapter 2) and careful control of our tongues (chapter 3). He will warn us to shun friendship with the world and submit ourselves to God.

How often do we engage in self-reflection about our values and our ways of looking at others to see if they are a product of our environment or interaction with others? How often,

instead of affirming to ourselves that we are not prejudiced against others, do we actually take practical steps to show to ourselves and others that this is actually the case? When we change our interactions with people, we actually genuinely challenge the hierarchical views that we may subconsciously be repressing in our hearts and minds.

When I was a new Christian, I would have affirmed that God loves all people regardless of race or class. But living with people of other races—spending time listening to and showing care for working class people in Taiwan—is what genuinely challenged my inner prejudices.

Paul gives us a good guide for challenging the unconscious values that James says make us double minded, discriminated, or divided not only among ourselves but within ourselves. Paul says in Romans 12:1–2:

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

Allowing God to slowly purge us of the prejudices and favouritism—the heretical view of others that the world has infused into our subconscious—that is an act of worship! **MRT**

¹ The British and Irish Association for Practical Theology (Mission Studies Special Interest Group), “Mission, Race and Colonialism,” 26 May 2021.

² Ralph P. Martin, *James*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, TX: Thomas Nelson, 1988), 5–11, J. A. Motyer, *The Message of James*, Bible Speaks Today (Leicester: IVP, 1985), 17–24.

³ Martin, *James*, 60.

⁴ *Prosōpolēmpsis*, προσωπολημπΐσις.

⁵ Motyer, *The Message of James*, 82; Martin, *James*, 59.

⁶ Martin, *James*, 63.

⁷ Martin, *James*, 63.

⁸ Martin, *James*, 66.

⁹ Jan Pakulski and Malcolm Waters, *The Death of Class* (London: SAGE, 1996).

¹⁰ See, for example, Wendy Bottero “Class Identities and the Identity of Class,” *Sociology* 38, no. 5 (December 2004): 985–1003.

¹¹ Bottero, “Class Identities and the Identity of Class,” 994–5.

Hierarchy is decisive in shaping our opportunities and our sense of ourselves and others, but there is not always a reflective awareness of it.

Time to Talk about Race: Colorblindness and Missiology

Kirsteen Kim



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Introduction

1968 was a tumultuous year in the US that has resonances with the current era. Among many other issues, race relations were front and center, especially after Dr. Martin Luther King was assassinated. Although brought up in England of white British parents, in 1967–1968 I lived for a year in Princeton, New Jersey, while my mathematician father had a sabbatical at the University. On CBS news and in *Time* magazine, we saw pictures of police setting dogs on unarmed black protestors, people giving the black power salute, and peaceful protests by black and white people together. I remember once being driven through a predominantly African American area of Philadelphia when my parents took a wrong turn. They were scared, but from the back seat I noticed that almost every window of the row houses held a black-framed photograph of the deceased civil rights leader who eschewed violence. Through our church, I learnt how Princeton was a segregated city, realized that the so-called public pool we swam in was for whites only, and that the famed university had hardly any African-American students or faculty to date.

To continue briefly with my personal experience to illustrate the main theme of the paper, my late parents were white British first-generation university graduates from the early 1950s who held a cosmopolitan outlook and made friends with people of many different cultures. They adopted the prevalent liberal approach to race in the civil rights era, which was colorblindness. In other words, they told me before we arrived in the US that we should integrate—not segregate, treat black people in the same way as white people, and not make any comments about racial differences. I carried this advice into my adult life. Although I embraced people of other races—to the extent of marrying one—and protested racism, I avoided using race as a category to refer to people. Instead, I used other categories like

culture, religion, and wealth/poverty. Now living in the US again, since 2017 under the Trump presidency with racist innuendos and encouragement of race hatred, including the shocking murder of George Floyd, I have had to look at my teaching and research again from a race perspective. I have concluded that it is time for me at last to talk about race.

In this paper, I will trace some key developments in dealing with race issues internationally and among US evangelicals since 1968. My thesis is that after years of using concepts of culture, religion, and poverty as synonyms for race,¹ the time has come for missions and missiologists to address issues of race specifically and to move beyond colorblind approaches. First, I will identify problems with colorblindness. Then I will discuss how mission and missiology have been complicit with racialized agendas. Finally, I will put forward an agenda for missiology and missiological education and training in light of contemporary thinking about race.

Racism and the problem with colorblindness

In mid-twentieth century America, race was something you were born with, that defined you, and that determined your life experience. Moreover, the discussion was about only two categories of race: black and white. Racism was a legacy of centuries of slavery of Africans in the Americas, the fall-out from the US Civil War fought over slavery, and the repression of freed slaves by the Jim Crow system of segregation. The rhetoric of the freedom of the slaves was belied by the doctrine of the purity of whiteness—that you could only be white if you had two white parents. The children of interracial unions (which were illegal in many states until 1967) were automatically assigned to the black category (unless they could pass as white), although they might not find acceptance in the black community either. In other

words, whiteness was deemed—by the whites who held political, economic, administrative, and cultural power—to be superior to blackness, and segregation arrangements always reflected that status quo. The white majority did not recognize that the blame for the state of affairs that perpetuated the suffering of black people a century after the end of slavery must lie with them because they held that power; instead, most blamed black people themselves for their problems and for race conflict.



Participants marching in the civil rights march from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama in 1965. Photograph by Peter Pettus, <https://www.loc.gov/item/2003675345/>.

Colorblindness was endorsed by Martin Luther King Jr. himself, for example, in his famous prayer that his children would not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character, and it was the foundation of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 that granted equal access to public places, schools, and other public facilities, and to employment regardless of race, as well as other categories. The anti-discrimination argument was built on the tradition of liberalism enshrined in the US constitution that was now expanded beyond the category of white males. From a colorblindness perspective, it seemed that the race problem would be solved if, from now on, people behaved as if racial differences did not exist. However, in the nearly sixty years since then, racism and its consequences have not gone away. In the US, although African Americans get more opportunities than before, and a black man, Barack Obama, even became president, the statistics for black Americans of poverty, infant mortality, low education, subjection to police searches, deaths in custody, and so on continue to be alarming. Over the last six decades, other communities—especially Hispanic and Asian—have grown significantly, and they too suffer discrimination, lack of opportunity, and marginalization.² This continuing reality of racialization has caused scholars of race to question the colorblind approach and propose alternatives.

Colorblindness was challenged first by African Americans, like King's rival in the 1960s, Malcolm X, who saw deep-seated structural issues that could not be solved by legal or educational changes alone,

and perhaps could not be solved at all. The phrase “institutional racism” was coined by a Black Power activist and an academic in 1967.³ Progressive legal scholars, such as John Rawls, argued that justice should be blind, including colorblind,⁴ but critical race theorists argued that colorblindness could address only the most blatant forms of racism,⁵ and other legal scholars pointed out that people are necessarily encumbered by their heritage and connections.⁶ Political theorists posited that, because a society is not homogeneous, it is impossible to eliminate bias in social administration.⁷ Seeing that differences between people and groups lead to different treatment and life experiences, social scientists argued that what was needed was not equality but equity, which takes account of disadvantage and instigates affirmative action to help persons or groups who are struggling. In terms of race, an equity approach gives opportunities to African Americans, especially those descended from slaves, on the grounds that their families and communities have been systemically prevented from social advancement and accumulating wealth compared to white families. For the black activists from the 1960s, the affirmative action required is not only legal and economic but also cultural. They coined the phrase “Black is beautiful” as an expression of pride in their identity and insisted on the study of black history as a means of uncovering the contribution of black people to building the USA and educating their fellow Americans about their heritage.

Yet, despite their efforts, African Americans and other “people of color” exist as second-class citizens in a country in which “whiteness” is the norm.⁸ Eduardo Bonilla-Silva describes colorblindness as another form of racism that he calls “racism without racists.” It may be less overt but it effectively props up the status quo of the inequality and inequity faced by people of color.⁹ He and others argue that unless and until racial inequities are addressed, racism will be a permanent feature of US society. Yet many US churches, especially evangelical ones, are resistant to ideas of equity and affirmative action. In fact, Jesse Curtis argues that colorblindness is embraced by evangelicals to defend the racial hierarchy in the US.¹⁰ His point is that evangelicals—both in the US and globally—promote an inclusive gospel while simultaneously marginalizing leaders of color and refusing to hear their challenges to evangelical norms.

Missiology, race, and colorblindness

Although reference to race was taboo or suppressed in the West after the 1960s, the category did not disappear; instead, colorblind people tended to find other covert or euphemistic ways to refer to it. In this section, I shall argue that culture, religion, and poverty can also serve as ways of categorizing people of different races in ways that are respectable but can be as essentialist or deterministic as the category of race, and just as damaging.

The emergence of European race theories coincided with the appearance

of the modern missionary enterprise. Both were features of European colonialism.¹¹ Not only were the two movements concurrent but the entwining of racist colonialism and Christian mission has been well documented.¹² It can be traced back further to a series of papal bulls in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries that deemed that Christians—specifically the rulers of Portugal and Spain—who “discovered” non-Christian lands should enslave any non-Christians there and further authorized them to take their wealth. Not only did this “doctrine of discovery” bring untold suffering for indigenous peoples but it also began the transatlantic slave trade. The worldwide systems that developed from those teachings were largely kept in place as global power passed into the hands of the peoples of Northern Europe and to the US.¹³ Although, in this century, the rights of indigenous peoples have been acknowledged by all the countries of the UN and the “doctrine” has been repudiated by many churches, its impact is still felt today.¹⁴

Race at Edinburgh 1910

The famous World Missionary Conference held in Edinburgh, Scotland in 1910, to which some look as the high point of world mission, certainly did not suffer from colorblindness. The prevalence of “race” as a category in the Edinburgh 1910 reports is indisputable, as Brian Stanley shows in his history of the conference.¹⁵ The influence of the doctrine of discovery and the colonial context was apparent in the way that the world beyond the West was defined negatively as the “non-Christian world.” Moreover, the Christian mission of “carrying the Gospel” to these other races was described in the Edinburgh reports in the threatening, militaristic terminology of “forces,” “campaign,” “power,” and “comprehensive and aggressive policy.”¹⁶ The word “missionary” was reserved for white people; so missionaries of any other color were not invited. Mission organizations responded poorly to the suggestion that they include in their



1910 World Missionary Conference Assembly Hall, University of Edinburgh (public domain), via Wikimedia Commons.

delegations leaders of native churches. In the end, out of 1,200 delegates, fewer than eighteen were non-white. Most were not invited to stay in homes in Edinburgh like the white delegates and at least one traveled third class. Stanley further recounts how white supremacist attitudes prevented the conference from receiving what these leaders had to share, which included comments on race relations.

Although the category of race predominated at Edinburgh 1910, it was not the only category used to describe the “non-Christian world;” three other pervasive taxonomies are found in the Edinburgh documents: culture,¹⁷ religion, and economic status. Regarding culture, many European missionaries conducted ethnographic studies of native peoples and these became foundational to the discipline of cultural anthropology. The reports of Edinburgh 1910 cite the leading ethnographer and anthropologist, E. B. Tylor.¹⁸ Tylor replaced racial hierarchies with ranking according to culture or civilization that largely followed racial hierarchies, although he argued that cultural status could be changed through education, unlike race. This progressive view predominated at the conference, which was hopeful that the leadership of some “more advanced” nations, like Japan, China, and India, would soon become Christian, but expected that, in the case of “the more backward races,” especially in Africa, it would be at least a century before they could become part of the expanded Christian society of the

West. Edinburgh 1910 demonstrated that the modern concept of culture can, and is, used by the dominant group to define and confine others just as race is.¹⁹ For example, before the Second World War, German missiologists (following Gustav Warneck) emphasized the difference between Christian civilization and Enlightenment culture, which they criticized, and encouraged the *Volkskirche*—church of the people—approach. That is, they fostered respect for local cultures and opposed the link between mission and the expansion of the white race. Although it honored other cultures, *Volkskirche* missiology also employed the same essentialist language about other peoples as Nazism and was condemned by postwar continental missiologists for complicity with it.²⁰

Tylor’s evolutionary understanding of culture was closely related to religion in that he understood animism to represent the first stage in the evolution of religion. The conditions of Western colonialism constructed other religions as pale images of Christianity, encouraged their systematization and unification, and classified them in relation to Christianity.²¹ As part of struggles for independence, these religions were provoked into defining themselves over against Christianity, and so—not surprisingly—they now challenge Christianity as a global power and often make life difficult for minority Christian communities. At Edinburgh, various cultures and religions

Edinburgh 1910 demonstrated that the modern concept of culture can, and is, used by the dominant group to define and confine others just as race is.

were ascribed to people of different races so that there was little difference between the two categories. In the atlas that was prepared for the event, religions were classified hierarchically as Christian, “Mohammedan” (an older and incorrect word for Muslim), Buddhist, Hindu, and Heathen.²² Racialized classifications according to religion persist, for example, in Samuel Huntington’s division of the world into mutually opposed religio-cultural blocs.²³

Of all the hierarchies at Edinburgh, the most obvious one was economic power and this was accompanied by the idea of development. The conference delegates represented the world’s most powerful nations. Although some, like Japan, China, and India, were considered more highly developed, it was thought that none of them could rival the Western powers. At this point of high imperialism, westerners regarded other peoples as lower in status than themselves because they lacked the wealth, technology, and goods that the West enjoyed. The lower a people were on the race ladder, the lower their economic status was likely to be. Although this attitude of material superiority was common to westerners, speakers at Edinburgh additionally claimed for Christian missionaries a moral superiority.²⁴ On the one hand, imperial power bestowed a duty on Christians to deal justly and keep colonial governments in check. On the other hand, this mandate was also a form of paternalism that assumed that Christians knew what was best for the other races and could justify colonial intervention. In sum, race, culture, religion, and stage of development were mostly parallel and overlapping categories.

Race debates in world mission from 1910 to 1975

The International Missionary Council that was formed in 1921 in the wake of Edinburgh 1910 perceived “race conflict,” especially in the US and South Africa, to be an issue for missions and commissioned a report on the matter for its first large meeting in Jerusalem in 1928.²⁵ At that consultation, two African Americans—the educationalist

John Hope and a missionary to South Africa, Max Yergan—spoke powerfully and challenged the delegates about their un-Christian attitudes to race. The conference adopted a statement on “Racial Relationships” that condemned discrimination, exploitation, and oppression and committed the IMC to pursuing inter-racial unity.²⁶ Until it became part of the World Council of Churches in 1961, the IMC continued to make such pronouncements. However, these were belied by its own racialized structures as shown by the commonly used designations of “older” and “younger” churches, the “mission field,” “non-Christians,” and so on. Throughout the history of the IMC, such euphemisms were used instead of addressing the racism they represented.²⁷

As the World Council of Churches (WCC) internationalized by receiving into membership newly independent churches in former colonial countries, its structure of membership by national churches offered a more level playing field that enabled black people to rise to leadership, from which they could strongly challenge white Christians. After its second assembly in Evanston, Illinois in 1954, the WCC adopted a statement that denounced segregation and discrimination. Seeing that they could be expelled, the Dutch Reformed Church of South Africa left the Council.²⁸ No US denominations left because the churches that overtly supported segregation, mostly in the Southern states, had not joined in the first place. Eventually, by the end of the 1960s, the WCC approach to race issues had shifted decisively from seeing them as a problem of black people to being caused by white supremacy.²⁹ Had he not been assassinated beforehand, Martin Luther King would have been a plenary speaker at the WCC general assembly in Uppsala, Sweden in 1968. Soon after that event, the Council launched its Programme to Combat Racism, which controversially supported the African National Congress in South Africa. One of the main reasons for the WCC’s emphasis on humanization and social action in those years was the white supremacy of Euro-American churches.³⁰ For their part, US evangelical

leaders strongly criticized the WCC for its neglect of evangelism in “The Great Debate in Missions.”³¹ A key advocate of humanization within the WCC in the 1960s and 70s was Philip Potter, a man of African descent from the Caribbean who took over from Newbigin as secretary of the IMC’s successor body with the Council, the Commission for World Mission and Evangelism (CWME), and became the WCC general secretary in 1972. As a black theologian/missiologist, Potter regarded those who “vaunt their Christian heritage but deny by their attitudes and acts the very heart of the gospel” as those most in need of evangelism.³²

Evangelicalism and race

To a large extent, evangelicals bypassed the challenges of racism that were being raised in the IMC and WCC for several reasons. First, the strength of evangelicalism was in the US which, unlike Europe, gained, rather than lost, global hegemony in 1945, so world missions could continue as before. Second, evangelicals often belonged to independent churches or faith missions that either did not participate in 1910 or, like the China Inland Mission, chose not to join the International Missionary Council, partly because they were not theologically inclined to work with governments or be involved in development work. Third, fearing “liberalism,” evangelicals did not sympathetically engage with local people who challenged their understanding of mission and evangelism. After the civil rights era, evangelicals avoided using race as a descriptor of other peoples but took up instead the other categories used at Edinburgh 1910—culture, religion, and poverty—as substitutes for race.

As evangelicals forged a post-fundamentalist identity in the US and became major players in global missions, they founded institutions and organizations that inevitably perpetuated the racism of prewar missions and reflected their segregationist tendencies. One such was Fuller Theological Seminary, which was founded in 1947 by Charles E. Fuller and Harold Ockenga. Fuller and Ockenga were also founding members of the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) that aimed to revive the nineteenth-century category of “evangelical,” with its legacy of revival, world mission, and socio-political engagement. They envisaged a

flagship seminary on the West Coast that would rival the most elite of the older establishments in the East and prepare young men to evangelize the world and defend conservative Christianity in a secularizing society. As it developed, Fuller also reformed its stance to be more open to other Christians, more engaged in wider society, and less defensive vis-à-vis other streams of thought.³³ Needless to say, the founders were white and they likely did not consider that their students would include people of color. Although some of Fuller's earliest students were international, there was little or no attempt to recruit from minority communities in the US before the 1960s.

African Americans at white-founded seminaries were measured in handfuls until civil rights activism encouraged black Christians to test colorblindness by applying for admission. Apart from possible opposition by wealthy donors and white students, the main headache for white administrators in admitting black students was how to avoid the possibility of interracial dating.³⁴ In the 1960s, many white evangelical seminaries began to actively recruit African American students, but by the mid-seventies, in most cases, black enrolment had declined. The reasons for this included the refusal of the NAE to support the civil rights movement for the sake of the unity of the organization, which included segregated churches. In the polarized political atmosphere of the times, this was effectively siding

with white supremacists.³⁵ Nevertheless, at Fuller, William E. Pannell became the first black faculty member in 1974, although his role was mainly to work with African American pastors.

Although racially segregated at home, US foreign policy did not follow the British use of race as the chief descriptor of other peoples. Instead, it adopted a cultural anthropological approach that understood the world as made up of peoples of different cultures. Fuller's School of World Mission, founded by Donald McGavran, was heavily influenced by anthropologists like Alan Tippet, Charles Kraft, and Paul Hiebert. So much so that, at the turn of the century, when the word "mission" was perceived as inhibiting access to many countries, the new name Intercultural Studies was a natural choice.³⁶ Kraft was influential in encouraging the Lausanne Congress in 1974 to adopt a relativist approach to cultures as possible vehicles of the gospel, as reflected in the *Lausanne Covenant* (paragraph 10)³⁷ and later in promoting contextualization at the Lausanne consultation in Willowbank, Bermuda in 1978.³⁸ However, by the 1970s, the anthropology taught at Fuller and other evangelical institutions was already out of touch with secular developments.³⁹ Most pertinent to this article is that it maintained a structuralist understanding in which cultures were understood as homogeneous and discrete so that they determined people's actions and attitudes. Such an essentialist

conception of culture persists in mission documents even in the twenty-first century.⁴⁰ In other words, as at Edinburgh 1910, culture was used to label people in much the same way as race.

It was from the School of World Mission that some of the most influential evangelical mission strategies emerged and were disseminated globally. McGavran's strategy for church growth encouraged utilizing existing sociologically "homogeneous units." He used studies of the mass conversion of caste groups in India in the 1930s as a model for missionaries to use in other societies in the Third World.⁴¹ Later, McGavran worked with Peter Wagner to apply these same principles to growing churches in the US as well.⁴² Ralph Winter developed the "Homogeneous Unit Principle" (HUP) into the concept of "people groups" as the equivalent of the "all nations" of Matthew 28:19 that he believed, for a strategic approach, all "Unreached People Groups" (UPGs) needed to be reached—by achieving a critical mass of believers necessary to become self-evangelizing—in order to fulfil the Great Commission (Matt 24:14).⁴³

It is worth noting that both McGavran and Winter expressed a debt to the missiology of *Volkskirche*⁴⁴ and neither understood why it had been abandoned by German missiologists as racist.⁴⁵ However, other evangelicals were better informed. Newbigin pointed out that

if it was suggested to the Christians of India that they should organize themselves into caste groups in order to grow quicker, they "would reject this on ethical grounds" and he rebutted church growth theory as "both historically naive and theologically intolerable."⁴⁶ David Bosch, who struggled against apartheid, criticized church growth as sacralizing the segregationist "American way of life."⁴⁷ At the first Lausanne Consultation, which was called in Pasadena in 1977 to debate the issue, Pannell was invited only as an observer. McGavran used racist tropes and he and his colleagues—including Wagner, who was already in charge of Lausanne's



Lausanne II in Manila, 1989. Source: Lausanne Movement.

strategy group—showed little respect for the views of their critics. The report both censured the idea of homogeneous units as contrary to Scripture and simultaneously gave Church Growth Theory a bigger platform.⁴⁸ As Curtis summarizes, at a time when evangelical churches and organizations in the US were uncomfortable with church segregation but faced considerable difficulties with becoming multiracial, Donald McGavran and Ralph Winter made life easier for white pastors by developing strategies of church growth that relied on converting racially homogeneous groups.⁴⁹

The 10/40 Window is another construction of the world used by evangelical mission agencies that defines other groups of people in ways that are rigid and negative. Coined by Luis Bush as part of the launch of the AD2000 campaign at Lausanne II in Manila in 1989, this map and accompanying rhetoric uses religion and poverty as motivators for mission. The map, which shows the influence of the UPG approach, consists of the rectangle formed by the 10th and 40th parallels of latitude north and by the Atlantic and Pacific—covering Northern Africa, the Middle East, and South East Asia. Bush mobilized missions by claiming that thirty-seven of the world's fifty most unreached countries lay within the window, which also comprised the main concentrations of people of three of the world's major religions—Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism—and countries where Christians are severely persecuted. Further support for missions targeting this region was garnered by pointing out that it also included ninety percent of the world's poor.⁵⁰ The map was and still is used globally among evangelicals to motivate what Peter Wagner called “spiritual warfare” in this most non-Christian part of the globe.⁵¹ The vocabulary may be different but it still bears the imprint of the territorial and racial mission approach of Edinburgh 1910. Moreover, the 10/40 Window displayed that world mission was still largely a white-led enterprise towards people of color.

An agenda for missiology and missiological education/training

Given the reality that colorblindness disguises racism, which is still largely unaddressed in evangelical circles,



what can and should missiologists and those involved in missiological education and training do?

2017 Missiology Lectures at Fuller

Returning briefly to the story of Fuller Seminary, successive Fuller administrators were slow to realize that successful integration of black and white students on campus required the institutions to move beyond colorblindness and face the attitudes, curricula, and faculty composition that made campus life so stressful for black students. Although, by the 1980s, Fuller had multiple programs for ethnic minorities, which then became “ethnic centers,” these existed to support programs and students of that ethnicity but were, for the most part, marginal to the seminary. However, the election of Donald Trump as president, largely because of the support of white evangelicals, caused a great deal of soul-searching. To students and faculty of color, it seemed obvious that the election of someone who encouraged white supremacy was part of a white backlash against the presidency of Barack Obama, a black man. In Fall 2017, the annual Missiology Lectures treated the topic of race for the first time since they began under McGavran in 1966. Led by three faculty of color—Love L. Sechrest, Johnny Ramirez-Johnson, and Amos Yong—the provocative title was “Can ‘White’ People Be Saved?” The organizers defined race as “a socially constructed category that has been used to divide humanity based on physical, cultural, and socio-

economic realities”⁵² and they defined the controversial term “whiteness” as not identical with European ancestry but “an idolatrous way of being in the world” that “orders global systems of dominance [in ways] that favor Whites and that have in turn nurtured racism, white supremacy, and patriarchy.”⁵³ They firmly rejected a colorblind approach on the grounds that to ignore race as an issue simply perpetuated the inequities and even rendered them permanent. The lectures encouraged student action, especially by African American students, at the following year's baccalaureate that led to significant changes by the seminary to address the grievances, oppose racism, and achieve a more equitable campus that are still ongoing. These include cluster hires of faculty of color, promotion of people of color to senior leadership, relocating the “ethnic centers” (including Pannell's black church center) to the center of campus and giving their leaders seniority over leaders of programs, auditing all syllabi for racial (and other) diversity, educating faculty, staff, and students on race issues, inviting visiting faculty from the Majority World, and appointing an African American, David Goatley, as seminary president.

An anti-racism agenda for missiology

Ibram X. Kendi explains that “The opposite of ‘racist’ isn't ‘not racist.’ It's ‘anti-racist.’” Anti-racism refuses to turn a blind eye to attitudes and policies that deny black people equity and even locate the problem in people of color themselves. Instead, it names those inequities and strives to dismantle the structures that perpetuate them.⁵⁴ How would an anti-racist approach impact missiology in the US and the West more generally? My colleague Dwight Radcliff has recently shown how predominantly white US missiological discourse is. Missiological texts, curricula, and journals rarely address race explicitly and include few African American contributions, even though black theology manifestly deals with evangelistic and social issues.⁵⁵ By way of conclusion, I list below some of the learning for missiology from this study for overcoming colorblindness, talking about race, and opposing racism:

1. Name racism as a problem and condemn it. Raise consciousness of racism as an issue that blights the lives of millions of people and take action

Anti-racism refuses to turn a blind eye to attitudes and policies that deny black people equity and even locate the problem in people of color themselves. Instead, it names those inequities and strives to dismantle the structures that perpetuate them.

to challenge it. Check discussions of culture, religion, and power for disguised racialization and racism.

2. Decenter the West and whiteness using resources from the Majority World. The growing field of “world Christianity” is a deliberate attempt to do this. It shows how Christianity is not in origin a Western religion but arose in West Asia and has roots in Africa⁵⁶ and how it has always been globally widespread, locally rooted, polycentric, and interconnected as it is now.⁵⁷
3. Acknowledge and teach the history of supremacism, racism, and colonialism in the West and its ongoing practice and impact. Today’s pluralistic societies in the West, with their internal issues of racism, together with the inequities of economic globalization, can be understood as a direct result of slavery, empire, and global exploitation by the West especially. (Increasingly, Fuller students from the Majority World and US minorities see that and want faculty to name and renounce “the doctrine of discovery.”)
4. Be prepared to accept criticism of white missions. Defense of colonial mission by a white person will only be heard by people of color as a justification of white racism. If there are good things to be said about colonial missions, let those who received the gospel that way say so. Only they can do so with credibility.
5. Participate in the rethinking of missions and mission in the West that has been going on since the mid-twentieth century. In this endeavor, highlighting white supremacy as an underlying premise of empire may be more effective in helping other white people to understand the problem than discussions

about the complicity of missions with empire more generally.

6. Apply race theory for analysis of mission practices and issues. One example of race theory is “critical race theory,” which is closely related to postcolonial studies and black thought. It has exposed how endemic and insidious are ideas about race by drawing attention to the systemic nature of racism, to white privilege and entitlement, to implicit biases, microaggressions, and other manifestations of it.⁵⁸ Another source of critical reflection on race is black theology, which draws on black experience and resistance and has flowered since the 1960s. It typically pays close attention to biblical texts but may read them very differently from the dominant interpretations. In the US, James Cone is regarded as the founder. *Black Theology and Black Power* reflected the impact of post-civil rights black activism on theology. A more recent work, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* (2015) is a moving reflection on the persistence of violence against black bodies.⁵⁹
7. Give people who have been on the receiving end of missions a safe space to share their experience. However much white people claim to understand what it is like to be on the other side of white supremacy, only the voice of people of color can be authentic. Appoint, and adequately support, people of color to posts based in the West or as leaders of formerly white-led organizations. Reach out for collaboration to scholars of color who raise issues of race and who are dealing with topics related to evangelism and mission, whether or not they are comfortable with those terms.
8. Restructure missions and reframe missiology to recognize that “the God

of mission does not regard race as a prerequisite for engagement.”⁶⁰ In this worldwide and multidirectional mission, the West is also a mission field and an integral component of the dynamics of world Christian mission. Furthermore, world mission cannot be limited to those who come from countries wealthy enough to be able to send missionaries. As Jehu Hanciles has written, “every Christian migrant is a potential missionary,” although white churches have struggled to see and receive their gifts. Historically, “the migration of Christians [whatever the reason] has typically contributed to the spread of Christianity and represents a predominant element in the globalization of the faith.”⁶¹ Including studies of migration in missiology challenges fixed ideas of who is evangelizing. **MRT**

Questions for Reflection

1. What do you understand by white supremacy? Can you point to personal or historical examples of it? To what extent have Christian missions exhibited it?
2. In light of white racism, what are the problems with popular mission constructs such as homogeneous units, people groups, and the 10/40 window?
3. Identify the problems that could be caused by a colorblind approach to race, for example in a Western-led mission organization.
4. What is the difference in practice between not being racist and being antiracist?

¹ The vocabulary of race varies over the historical period considered in the paper. Race has shifting definitions and synonyms, which I shall discuss. The term racialization has been used from early twentieth century to describe the structuring of societies according to race, and racialism as the attendant philosophy. Racism—originally a contraction of racialism—was used to criticize Nazi ideology and has largely succeeded racialism since the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 60s. For a discussion, see, Albert Memmi, *Racism*, trans. Steve Martinot (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000).

² Data can be found in Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, *Racism Without Racists: Color-blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in America*, 5th ed.

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- ⁴ John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971).
- ⁵ Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction*, 3rd ed. (New York: New York University Press, 2017), 8–9.
- ⁶ Michael Sandel, *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1982).
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- ⁸ For the concept of “whiteness,” see Love L. Sechrest, Johnny Ramírez-Johnson, and Amos Yong, eds., *Can “White” People Be Saved? Triangulating Race, Theology, and Mission* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2018).
- ⁹ Bonilla-Silva, *Racism Without Racists*.
- ¹⁰ Jesse Curtis, *The Myth of Colorblind Christians: Evangelicals and White Supremacy in the Civil Rights Era* (New York: New York University Press, 2021), 8.
- ¹¹ Michael Banton, *Racial Theories*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).
- ¹² For an example, see Hilary M. Carey, *God’s Empire: Religion and Colonialism in the British World, c. 1801–1908* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).
- ¹³ See Mark Charles and Soong-Chan Rah, *Unsettling Truths: The Ongoing, Dehumanizing Legacy of the Doctrine of Discovery* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2019).
- ¹⁴ The most recent repudiation is by the Catholic Church itself, which states that the papal bulls have never been considered “doctrine” in the sense of an expression of the Catholic faith. Nevertheless, it recognizes that they were used by political powers “in order to justify immoral acts against indigenous peoples” that the church authorities did not always oppose. Pope Francis asked for a pardon from indigenous peoples and urged that “Never again can the Christian community allow itself to be infected by the idea that one culture is superior to others, or that it is legitimate to employ ways of coercing others.” Holy See, “Joint Statement of the Dicastries for Culture and Education and for Promoting Integral Human Development on the ‘Doctrine of Discovery,’” *Bulletin of the Holy See Press Office*, 30 March 2023, paragraph 6, <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2023/03/30/230330b.html> (accessed 5 May 2023).
- ¹⁵ Brian Stanley, *The World Missionary Conference, Edinburgh 1910* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 91–131.
- ¹⁶ For example, World Missionary Conference, 1910, *Report of Commission I: Carrying the Gospel to All the Non-Christian World* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1910), 1–2.
- ¹⁷ See Kirsteen Kim, “Racism Awareness in Mission: Touchstone or Cultural Blindspot?” *International Bulletin of Mission Research* 45, no. 4 (2021): 376–386.
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- ¹⁹ Stanley, *The World Missionary Conference*, 307–309.
- ²⁰ Werner Ustorf, *Sailing on the Next Tide: Missions, Missiology, and the Third Reich* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2000).
- ²¹ For example, Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions: Or, How European Universalism Was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).
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- ²³ Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of the World Order* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996).
- ²⁴ The Archbishop of York, “The Duty of the Christian Nations I,” 272–77; The Honorable Seth Low, “The Duty of the Christian Nations II,” 278–82, in *World Missionary Conference, 1910, Volume IX: History and Records of the Conference* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1910).
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- ²⁶ International Missionary Council, *The Christian Mission*, 237–45.
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“Should White People Be Missionaries Overseas?”

Absurd Question or Pathway to Reimagining Missional Faithfulness in a Postcolonial World?¹ 10 Answers for a Conversation Starter

Peter Rowan



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Introduction

The title of this paper provokes various responses. A friend on Twitter said: “the question posed is absurd, very much ‘of this time’ in the worst way.” Others argue for its relevance for Christian witness, especially in intercultural settings where white missionaries serve as outsiders.

With the benefit of some added context, I am hoping readers will see the question as “very much ‘of this time’” in the *best* way. The question was asked in January 2022 by someone in a diverse, urban, evangelical church in the UK that has been examining intercultural issues within the congregation, including diversity and racism, and how these have impacted the witness of the church locally and globally. Here is the question in full:

Given the historical associations of overseas mission with colonialism and “white savior” mentality, is it appropriate for white people to be missionaries *today*? (Particularly in countries with a background of racial oppression.) If there is a role for white people in overseas mission, what considerations should they take to mitigate historical harm done?

Almost a year after the original series of seminars were held, a further gathering was organized to explore this question. The Revd. Dr. Israel Olofinjana and I were invited to respond in a special evening service seminar held on 15 January 2023.²

The broader context for this question is also important to consider.

1. The UK context.

Recent years have seen events and issues arise in the UK which provide an important backdrop to understanding why this question is relevant. In the runup to the *Brexit* vote in 2016, there were often toxic debates around migration, in which migrants were blamed for many of the problems facing UK communities. Beginning in 2017, the *Windrush scandal* began to emerge when it was revealed that hundreds of Commonwealth citizens who had arrived in the UK between 1948 and 1973 from Caribbean countries had experienced detainment and deportation. Sadly, churches participated in discrimination against the Windrush generation.³ During the *COVID-19* pandemic, Black and Minority Ethnic communities suffered disproportionately,



Windrush photograph (1962) by Howard Grey. www.howardgrey.com/windrush

including experiencing higher death rates and incidents of racial abuse.

2. A blind spot in evangelical churches and mission agencies.

Although much has been written on colonialism and Christian mission, according to Kirsteen Kim, race and racism receive little attention in evangelical missiology. Kim cites possible reasons for this, referencing the work of Dwight Radcliff that shows the lack of African American and Black church representation in missiology as a discipline.⁴ Kim also points to the problem of the historical framework that evangelicals typically work from within missiology.

The book *Transforming Mission*, published in 1991, is still one of the most important texts on mission theology, mission history, and mission strategy. It was written by David Bosch, who stood against racism in his home country of South Africa. But in this mission-focused book of over 500 pages, race is discussed on only two. Bosch's book remains hugely influential, not least because of the way he frames successive chunks of church and mission history as *paradigms* or eras. This is helpful to a certain extent, but it also means that if white Europeans read mission history as a series of paradigm shifts, the temptation is to see the racialism of the colonial period as being part of a previous paradigm and therefore something that is now in the past.⁵

3. The death of George Floyd as a catalyst for an overdue conversation.

George Floyd's death on 25 May 2020 generated a fresh look at racism and post-colonial issues, including their impact on the witness of the church. In the UK, this was true not only at the academic level but in local churches, and among the staff and membership of mission agencies like OMF.

Christian leaders began to reflect afresh on colonialism and White supremacy and to ask, as Willie James Jennings puts it, "How might we overturn this racial architecture that is built inside Christian life and practice in the West?"⁶ For instance, Patrick Mitchel makes the connections that might explain why someone would ask a question about white people engaging in overseas mission:



Paul Mathole, Peter Rowan, and Israel Olofinjana. Holy Trinity Platt Church, January 2023.

Over the last few weeks I've begun to read up on slavery and the bloody history of white colonialism in Africa (too many atrocities to name but we could start with Britain in multiple places, German genocide in Namibia and millions dying in the Congo under Belgian rule). And then there are the tens of millions more men, women and children kidnapped and transported to lives of unimaginable brutality in a global slave trade designed to prop up the developing economies of the colonial powers. And this doesn't even include the violent suppression, and local exterminations, of indigenous populations in places like Australia and the United States. To this you can add Apartheid in South Africa and the appalling more recent history of deliberate systematised racism in America post-Lincoln ... *And white Christianity has been, and is, deeply implicated in this toxic history. Yes, that's a sweeping statement but one, I think, that is impossible to deny. White supremacy isn't a delusion of the radical left, it's a defining assumption of modern Western history.* Underneath it is an ability of those claiming the name of Christ to detach political and economic activity from what they profess to believe. In other words, to read the words of Galatians 3:28 but leave their radical implications conveniently behind in favour of power and money.⁷

The sense that this is all part of an unfinished and overdue conversation is hard to escape in the UK, especially if one spends any time in diverse church and mission settings where participants are present from majority world contexts.

4. Reimagining missional faithfulness in a postcolonial world.

Through initiatives such as the series of seminars held at the church in Manchester where the original question was asked, a greater diversity of voices is now heard and safe spaces created for difficult conversations to take place. Greater diversity in UK evangelical churches and mission agencies will facilitate better engagement with this topic, leading (hopefully) to a transformation in practice.

It is often the case that evangelical congregations in urban settings demonstrate diversity in their pews, but less so in their leadership, which is usually white and male. It is also generally the case that the kind of global mission engagement that has characterized UK evangelical churches and models of sending missionaries overseas—usually in partnership with mission agencies—is a predominantly white space. The gatherings of mission agency leaders under Global Connections illustrates this very clearly. Greater diversity is essential if blind spots are to be identified and if UK churches and mission agency communities, in Harvey Kwiyani's words, are to be able to "reimagine missional faithfulness in a postcolonial world."⁸

5. The pervasive theme of race.

Racial issues lie at the heart of the original seminar question, and race pervades the ten answers below. Before we look at those answers, let me make two brief points.

Firstly, as this paper was first read at a consultation held in Singapore attended

by participants from various parts of the world and is now published in an international journal, I want to stress that the racial landscape of Britain is different from that of other places, for example the USA. Each context must be examined in order to understand the historical, social, and religious landscape that has shaped issues surrounding race.

Secondly, Britain has had a significant role in shaping ideas about racism. In an important contribution to the debate about how the church should respond to the issues of race and class that continue to divide British society, Jason Roach and Jessamin Birdsall note the past role of British Christians and missionaries:

[W]e should not underestimate the role that Britain has played in developing the ideas that allowed racism to become entrenched all around the world. During the colonial era, Britain, along with other European powers, developed and spread the idea that Black people were inferior to white people. They used this idea to justify colonial exploitation and slavery. The profits from the transatlantic slave trade contributed substantially to Britain's economy. Unfortunately, some Christian missionaries provided theological

backing for these ideas about "racial hierarchy". They argued that white Europeans were God's chosen ambassadors to bring civilization to primitive, dark-skinned people. They claimed that Black people were inferior culturally and intellectually to white people, and that they therefore should be under white rule. Colonial powers, supported by bogus scientific and theological ideas, constructed a "hierarchy of races" with white people at the top and Black people at the bottom. In colonies like Trinidad and Fiji, where the British brought indentured labourers from India to work alongside enslaved Africans or dark-skinned indigenous people, Indians were placed in a middle position in the racial hierarchy. Centuries later the legacy of those practices, and the ideas that made them possible, live on.⁹

"Should white people be missionaries overseas?"

I will answer this question with ten *yes/no* answers. Although the focus of the question is very much on "white people", it will become clear that the issues being highlighted can apply to anyone, of any color and context, who engages in intercultural witness—

particularly if coming from a place of power and privilege. However, the context of the original questioner must not be forgotten—that white Christians in particular have been involved in shaping certain attitudes and actions that have had long-lasting effects in how the gospel and "mission" is perceived in cross-cultural settings.

Before laying out the ten *yes/no* answers, I will begin with one broad *YES* answer and one specific *NO* answer to the question: "Should white people be missionaries overseas?"

—**Yes**, because white followers of Jesus have been embraced into his multicultural, global community and, as part of that diverse new humanity, are called to participate with others in a faithful witness to that radical, transformative, life-giving kingdom.

—**No**, when the presence of white (obviously outsider) Christians in a particular context would clearly draw unhelpful attention and potentially jeopardize the work and witness of the local Christian community.

The following responses will focus on ten specific topics. The choice of topics is based on themes that have been

Beyond Colorblind: Redeeming Our Ethnic Journey

Sarah Shin. Downers Grove: IVP, 2017. ISBN 978-0-8308-4515-6. 204pp.

Reviewed by Nathan Keller



Responses to this book will be varied. Some will lament that woke, liberal, ethnicity-centric ideology has maneuvered its way into evangelical belief and practice. Others will celebrate that the message of this book is a much needed prophetic voice calling the church to wake up to the reality of the brokenness of our world manifested in ethnic/racial conflicts and to the beautiful hope that the gospel has in bringing healing and reconciliation in this area. Others, like myself, will frequently alternate back and forth between both of these responses, at times being convicted and inspired, and at other times critically doubting some of the assumptions and conclusions presented within.

In the first half of the book the author calls readers to redeem their ethnic stories. She does this by encouraging readers to focus on both the positive and negative cultural traits and histories associated with the ethnic groups that they are part of. She then notes how the gospel is the source of healing and transformation

that all ethnicities need. In the second half of the book, the author provides a blueprint for how people whose ethnicities have been redeemed by the gospel can then be stewards of their ethnic identities to help others, culminating in the call to be culture re-creators.

This book is a good read for anyone who would like to critically engage with an issue that is extremely relevant in today's world. There are many ways that the gospel can speak into the broken areas of our lives, and our ethnic/racial identity is one of those areas, a theme mentioned many times in the Bible. However, ethnicity is not the ultimate need that the gospel addresses. Our sinful rebellion, in all of its varied manifestations, is the ultimate issue. I would caution those who read this book to do so with biblical discernment as you think about social, relational, and pastoral implications of the content and the calls to action promoted.

prominent in the literature on race, colonialism, and mission, as well as in seminars and conversations that I have been part of in recent years.¹⁰

1. Agency

“Should white people be missionaries overseas?”

No, if we think white people have been, or still are, the key agents in mission.

Yes, if we recognize that any transformation is about what God is doing by his Spirit, and that local people are the *key agents* in the emergence of Christlike communities and long-term kingdom witness. Western missionaries have been catalysts in planting the seed of the gospel among peoples globally. However, local, indigenous Christians have been the most successful evangelists and crucial for the continuation of gospel work and the development of the theology, discipleship, worship, and mission appropriate for that local context. As the historian David Killingray has observed:

The spread of the Christian Gospel and the growth of the church across the world over two thousand years have largely been due to the work of countless unnamed Christians who gossiped the good news in their own language and among peoples of their own culture. They are in the records of God, rarely noted in the register of man.¹¹

“We each have a role to play in this broken world, but when God calls us to serve, God isn’t asking us to become outsider heroes in the middle of an insider’s story. God is already the hero, and God is inviting us to walk alongside local insiders as sidekicks rather than superheroes. Our role is to amplify the voices of local leaders, to strengthen their hands, and to place them at the front and center.”¹²

CRAIG GREENFIELD

2. Reciprocity

“Should white people be missionaries overseas?”

No, if we think mission is a one-directional task in which *our* capacity, *our* resources, and *our* culture is being brought to help transform the “other”.

Yes, if there is an openness to *receiving* from those among whom we live and serve, and an understanding that in any authentic intercultural encounters, no one is left unchanged. For the Apostle Paul, ministry was a two-way street. He writes to the Romans in 1:11–12: “I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong—that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other’s faith.” Christian service for Paul was marked by reciprocity and mutual transformation.

As Willie James Jennings points out, “Christianity is a teaching faith. It carries in its heart the making of disciples through teaching”¹³ (Matthew 28:19). But that call to teach has often become distorted by what Jennings describes as “our pedagogical imperialism.” He describes “European settlers in the new worlds”:

European Christians saw themselves as the bearers of the true faith and therefore as destined by God to be the teachers of the world. Teaching is important for the Christian faith, but it is not the first thing. The first thing is being a learner. We must remember this truth from Scripture: We joined the story of another people, of Israel, and in this way learned of our God.¹⁴

Being a learner applies to organizations as well as to individuals. If mission organizations are to adapt to a changing landscape in what is now increasingly understood as an era of World Christianity, and if OMF is to respond as fully as we should to the issues raised in this research consultation, then it is critical that we become learning organizations.

We often think faithfulness to the gospel means living in historic structures, time-honored systems, and fixed (usually hierarchical) relationships. A learning organization is one that will question these notions of fidelity and foster a culture in which questioning, listening, adapting, and testing are encouraged and rewarded. This kind of learning culture produces an agility that allows the organization to experiment, sets people free to fail, and addresses real needs.

“Properly understood, the history of missions is not only the history of expansion of Christianity but also the history of its own many conversions—of what the church

has learned and discovered as its faith becomes incarnate in various times, places and cultures.”¹⁵

**CARLOS F. CORDOZA-ORLANDI
and JUSTO GONZALEZ**

3. Power

“Should white people be missionaries overseas?”

No, if we think we are in charge, or demonstrate an attitude that we are in control.

Yes, if we are ready to be guests in the presence of the “other” and are prepared to acknowledge and are sensitive to the dynamics of *power* that are at work in mission contexts.

“The gospel calls us and sends us out... The colonial enterprise put us in charge of God’s sending rather than allowing us to be carried by the sending God. The latter involves our really attending to the voice of the ‘other’... allowing ourselves as people of mission to be invited into the space of the ‘other’.”¹⁶

AMOS YONG

Andrew Draper, one of the contributors to *Can “White” People be Saved?*, “explores the vulnerability necessary for the White body to be joined with others” and recommends “five spiritual disciplines that Whites may use in building an antiracist identity,” one of which is to “choose to locate their lives in places and structures in which they are necessarily guests.”¹⁷

As Michael A. Rynkiewicz says, “we must always ask questions about power.”¹⁸ The Edinburgh 2010 Common Call did just that:

Disturbed by the asymmetries and imbalances of power that divide and trouble us in church and world, we are called to repentance, to critical reflection on systems of power, and to accountable use of power structures. We are called to find practical ways to live as members of One Body in full awareness that God resists the proud, Christ welcomes and empowers the poor and afflicted, and the power of the Holy Spirit is manifested in our vulnerability.¹⁹

In the Regnum Edinburgh Centenary Series, volume 33 looks at *Mission and Power: History, Relevance and Perils*. This is an outstanding piece of work (as is

the whole multi-volume project), but as a student at the Oxford Centre for Mission Studies recently pointed out:

of the 20 essays, the focus of 13 could be described as touching on aspects of the exercise of power in a positive sense ('power to'). Many of the remaining 7 essayists, even when touching on power in missions as 'power over', do not directly implicate Christian mission in their discussions of power as domination.²⁰

This perhaps indicates a reticence to ask the deeper questions about power.

The notion of "using power in the service of others" sounds innocuous until we think a little deeper about power and privilege from the perspective of the New Testament.²¹

Jesus did not use his power at the cross. It is precisely in Christ's refusal to use his privilege to overcome the Jews or Romans (Matt 26:53) that God defeated death by raising Jesus from the dead. Likewise, Paul speaks of God's power in human weakness. A word study on "power" and "authority" in the Greek shows that the vast majority of the usages of those words in the New Testament are references to God's power and authority, not the power and authority of the disciples or Jesus-followers.

Christians should not be afraid of losing power. Indeed, it is in our refusal to use power (e.g., when we are in positions of social or economic power) that we bear witness to God who has triumphed over sin and death. The language of "empowering" others, although commonly used in Christian mission circles, is problematic. The problem is this: only those with power can empower others—and if I can empower, I can also take power away.²²

"Intentional powerlessness is in fact a radical criticism of the world's power. It expresses God's true nature, our dependence on God and the lifestyle of the kingdom."²³

JAYAKUMAR CHRISTIAN

4. Indigeneity

"Should white people be missionaries overseas?"

No, if we think mission is about taking our theological categories and

church structures and transplanting them somewhere else—with the underlying notion that *our* theology and church structures are "normative" and we therefore need to teach new Christians how to adopt them.

Yes, if we understand the contextual nature of theological reflection and that understanding the gospel, expressions of faith, and the emergence of Christlike communities will take a different shape in different parts of the world. And that by reading the Bible *with* the other, we will ourselves be transformed.²⁴

Given the importance of the Bible in evangelical missions, spending a little more time on the questions of context is crucial.

It is not uncommon to encounter UK Christians who believe that how they read and interpret the Bible is the way anyone else in any other part of the world should read and interpret it. There are biblical theologians who may say that biblical theology is normative and the contextual factor only comes into play when the message of the Bible is worked out in the world through systematic, practical, pastoral, and other forms of theology. The realities are surely more complex, and the social locatedness of the Bible reader comes into play more than is often acknowledged.

For instance, to assist students in understanding how our social location influences what we see as important in the biblical text, I often use the IVP *New Bible Dictionary* as an illustration, asking them to look up the entry for "Poverty". There they find approximately one-and-a-half columns of text, with one bibliographical entry. I then direct them to the entry for "Pottery", where in sharp contrast they find about three columns of text, plus a two-page chart showing the development of pottery from the Archaeological Period through to the Roman Period, along with five bibliographical entries. For Majority World Christian readers, what will have the higher importance for their research? What the Bible says about pottery or poverty? The priority given to "pottery" reflects the social location of the editors.

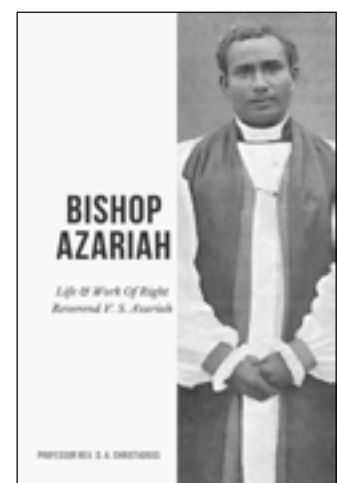
In his book *Reading While Black*, Esau McCaulley discusses Black biblical interpretation, illustrating the differences between the enslaved person's biblical reading and that of the slave owner's. In

what is an extremely important book, McCaulley not only unpacks Black biblical interpretation, he also opens the Scriptures from that perspective for the benefit of all readers, especially on topics often overlooked by white interpreters. McCaulley notes: yes, "everybody has been reading the Bible from their locations." But he is also clear that although we must all engage in a dialogue with the text, "ultimately the Word of God speaks the final word."²⁵ What McCaulley lays out in terms of a broad framework for biblical interpretation, can be applied to all other local, indigenous, specific communities and groups. As he says:

My claim then is that Black biblical interpretation has been and can be

- unapologetically *canonical* and *theological*.
- socially located, in that it clearly arises out of the particular *context* of Black Americans.
- willing to *listen* to the ways in which the Scriptures themselves respond to and redirect Black issues and concerns.
- willing to exercise *patience* with the text trusting that a careful and sympathetic reading of the text brings a blessing.
- willing to listen to and enter dialogue with Black and white critiques of the Bible in the hopes of achieving a better reading of the text.²⁶

Mindful of those who come with "questions of theological orthodoxy and syncretism," Jay Matenga has joined his voice to many Majority World



theologians in calling for a centering of the local, so that local believers have the space to read Scripture in ways that allow the emergence of a localized faith that connects with the lived reality of daily experience. Local churches have the freedom to theologize and express their experience of God in ways that may not look orthodox to outsiders. Yet, at the same time, a local church will seek to handle Scripture correctly and in conversation with the global church.²⁷ This applies just as much to the UK as it does to any Majority World church context—it is important that local churches and Bible colleges in the UK recognize the value of being in conversation with the global church.²⁸

5. Friendship

“Should white people be missionaries overseas?”

No, if we haven’t been invited or haven’t consulted local Christians. This results in a form of doing mission *to* and *for*, but not *with*, which can be detrimental to the long-term health of the church and its sense of ownership of missional initiatives.

Yes, if we have taken the time to develop relationships and have listened to local Christians in order to discern if it is appropriate for foreign Christians to come alongside, and in what capacity we should serve together with local believers.

Rather than proposing an already constructed agenda, outsiders must be willing to wait for the invitation to co-create missional initiatives. Collaboration is essential and it must begin with friendship.

Of the 1,215 delegates that attended The World Missionary Conference at Edinburgh in 1910, only nineteen were from the majority world. One of those non-Western delegates gave two speeches—one, largely forgotten, the other, the most quoted and studied speech of the entire event. Few reading this paper will be unfamiliar with this voice from the past.

V. S. Azariah was an Anglican clergyman from south India, and like many who followed Christ in that part of the world, Azariah was from one of the lower groups in India’s caste hierarchy. He had been a very effective evangelist and was instrumental in setting up the first two indigenous missionary societies run solely



CIM Headquarters, Shanghai, China, 1905, Gelatin silver print, Dr. W. T. Clark Collection; gift of Patricia Kennedy. Courtesy of ROM (Royal Ontario Museum), Toronto, Canada. ©ROM

by Indians. So Azariah, according to historian Brian Stanley, was “the pioneer of a trend—the growth of mission from non-western countries.” This is significant, given the prevailing attitude that believed “native Christian workers” to be incapable of working independently of European supervision. Such workers were “regarded as mere machines in the employment of European missionary agencies in which they had no voice.”²⁹

In his second and most famous speech, Azariah began with an opening line as explosive in 2023 as it was in 1910: “*The problem of race relationships is one of the most serious problems confronting the Church today.*”³⁰ The speech reached a climax with this now famous plea:

We ought to be willing to learn from one another and to help one another. Through all the ages to come the Indian Church will rise up in gratitude to attest the heroism and self-denying labours of the missionary body. You have given your goods to feed the poor. You have given your bodies to be burned. We also ask for *love*. Give us FRIENDS.³¹

Companionship, collaboration, and co-creation of missional initiatives—these must be the hallmarks of mission in a global church paradigm.

“Friendship is intimate and ordinary. It can also be revolutionary: it points to God’s kingdom.”³²

DANA ROBERT

6. History

“Should white people be missionaries overseas?”

No, if we haven’t reckoned with the history of colonialism and/or demonstrated a sensitivity to the lasting effects of it in many contexts, including in the West, for example among First Nations peoples or in relation to slavery and racism.

Yes, if we have an awareness of the issues that surround colonialism, the complexities of the relationship between colonialism and mission, and are seeking to better understand what it means to engage in mission in a postcolonial world with humility and in solidarity with Majority World churches—many of which are found in post-colonial contexts of inequality and powerlessness.³³

“...we Western Christians are complicit—not all of us, of course, and not everywhere, but the majority. Going back perhaps as far as Constantine and the Christendom project, most of us have sided with power and the political establishment. A little Christian post-colonialism is called for.”³⁴

JONATHAN INGELBY

In addition to being aware of the history surrounding colonialism and mission, consideration must also be given to how mission agencies record their histories and tell their stories. Agencies have typically written mission history from the perspective of the missionary, giving priority to “missionary transmission and direction” rather than to “indigenous response and appropriation.”³⁵

According to Andrew Atherstone and David Ceri Jones, there has been “a radical transformation since the 1960s” in the way historians have written about evangelicalism:

... there is a growing emphasis on the need to amplify local voices and those from the margins in order to tell the stories of how Christianity was received and transmitted in a given context. It is imperative, therefore, that we pay attention to the silences in our archives and, in our popular literature, de-center the role and voice of the missionary to allow a fuller picture to emerge.

Previously dominated by what David Bebbington calls “denominational apologias, edifying biographies and missionary hagiographies,” evangelicalism has more recently begun to figure in mainstream historical literature and academic research. Nonetheless the older forms still endure, as ministers, clergy and missionaries narrate evangelical history for a popular audience, to teach and encourage the contemporary church.³⁶

With the emergence of the discipline described as the “history of histories”—in which “proponents pay closer attention not only to the content of historical writing but also the philosophical ideals and worldviews which have shaped such literature”³⁷—and the impact of the discipline of World Christianity, there is a growing emphasis on the need to amplify local voices and those from the margins in order to tell the stories of how Christianity was received and transmitted in a given context. It is imperative, therefore, that we pay attention to the silences in our archives and, in our popular literature, de-center the role and voice of the missionary to allow a fuller picture to emerge.³⁸

7. Solidarity

“Should white people be missionaries overseas?”

No, if we think Christianity is a Western religion and fail to realize that World Christianity is normative and that we have much to learn and receive from the global church.

Yes, if there is an understanding that “Christianity is and always has been a global religion” (Gen 12:3; Matt 1:2–16; Acts 13:1; Rom 16:1–16; Eph 2:14–18; 3:2–6; Rev 7:9–10). “For this reason, it is important never to think of Christianity as *becoming* global.”³⁹ Any follower of Christ involved in bringing

the gospel to the nations does so as part of the diverse global body of Christ.

While it is true that Christianity has always been a global religion, we are now living in an era of World Christianity in which the global expression of the faith, in its rich diversity, is now more accessible and closer to hand than ever before. What this means for theological reflection and relationships across the wider Body of Christ is described well by T. D. Gener and L. Bautista:

Times have changed. With the collapse of Euro-American (Western) dominance in Christian theology there is an increased recognition of a polycentric world and a polycentric world Christianity, with emphasis on many theological centres... The future beckons for truly catholic Christianity that honours unity-in-diversity in both church and theology.⁴⁰

“Christianity is a multicoloured fabric where each new thread, chosen and refined at the Designer’s hand, adds lustre and strength to the whole. ... we should stress the importance of interwoven solidarity with fellow believers, past, present and future.”⁴¹

LAMIN SANNEH

That “inter-woven solidarity” means UK Christians looking carefully at how local actions can have global impact, for instance, being willing to advocate for Christians in Asia where, as Gina Zurlo observes, they “suffer from a lack of political recognition, social inequality, and faith-based persecution.”⁴²

8. Training

“Should white people be missionaries overseas?”

No, if we are unaware of the extent to which racism impacts people’s lives and how much of a blind spot racism is for many churches and mission agencies.

Yes, if racism awareness is being built into our preparations and orientation for Christian service in intercultural contexts both local and global, and if we have demonstrated a willingness to listen to the experiences of those who have encountered racism, and are humble enough to do the work of learning, unlearning, and relearning that will equip us for serving in mission.

Kirsteen Kim concludes her article “Racism Awareness in Mission” with several recommendations related to training and education:

- racism awareness should be integral to mission education and even a touchstone for authentic missiology.
- examine the use of “culture” in missiology.⁴³
- the link between colonialism and contemporary racism needs to be made explicit in missiology.
- mission theology should be interrogated for White supremacist thinking.
- read the scholarship of people of color.
- Individuals and communities who have received mission claim space in missiology to speak for themselves and to speak back to those who preached to them.
- White missiologists should not generalize about Christians of other regions and communities but hear and promote their views.
- not to actively work against racism is to let it go unchecked.⁴⁴

More broadly (or perhaps at a deeper level), barriers exist to tackling the above points in relation to race and to other areas covered in this paper because of the gap that exists between theology and missiology. For Willie James Jennings, this gap has meant that the “colonial wound ... remains untheorized within Western Christian theology.” He urges theologians to “reject the current pedagogical schemas that separate missionary texts from theological texts, missiology from theology, both historical, and systematic.”⁴⁵ Theology and missiology must be brought together to ensure a properly comprehensive theoretical framework is in place that can facilitate robust theological reflection on the “colonial wound”.

9. Reconciliation

“Should white people be missionaries overseas?”

No, if our understanding of the gospel is individualistic and we lack a robust theology of reconciliation.

Yes, if we understand the social dimensions of the gospel. As individual followers of Jesus, we are called to work out the gospel so that, as part of the new society the gospel creates, we are breaking down the barriers that divide and building visible unity that demonstrates that the gospel reconciles people with God and with one another. This requires proclaiming and embodying the gospel of peace—the wholistic gift of shalom that applies to all dimensions of life—political, economic, social, and spiritual.⁴⁶

Reconciliation and peacemaking are neglected aspects of mission for many evangelical churches and missionaries. Yet, it is impossible to miss the biblical emphasis on how the people of God are called to be peacemakers and how the gospel of reconciliation is at the heart of Paul’s theology of mission. Working out a commitment to peacebuilding and reconciliation cannot be done without attending to questions of justice and forgiveness. The Cape Town Commitment expresses this well:

True and lasting reconciliation requires acknowledgement of past and present sin, repentance before God, confession to the injured one, and the seeking and receiving of forgiveness. It also includes commitment by the Church to seeking justice or reparation, where appropriate, for those who have been harmed by violence and oppression.⁴⁷

There is such a thing as “cheap reconciliation”. Summarizing the contributions of Desmond Tutu and David Bosch at the National Initiative for Reconciliation that took place in South Africa before the dismantling of apartheid, Michael Cassidy described how “Cheap reconciliation ... means tearing faith and justice asunder, driving a wedge between the vertical and the horizontal dimensions: it suggests that we can have peace with God without having justice in our mutual relationships.”⁴⁸ Actions aimed at achieving racial reconciliation must include actions that seek justice (Micah 6:8). Peacemakers will seek to address the

socio-political and structural dynamics that hinder reconciliation because if the structural issues that have caused division and tension are not addressed, we are left with a superficial peace.

“At the heart of Jesus’ teaching is a message of equality and reconciliation. Though there have been moments when the Church has been at the forefront of social progress (the role of Christians in the abolition movement, for example), the Church must also confront its own complicity in the building of racial structures that still exist today.”⁴⁹

BEN LINDSAY

10. Motivation

“Should white people be missionaries overseas?”

No, if going on missions is motivated by a form of “*White Savior complex*”—trying to fix someone else’s situation so that we can “make a difference”.

Yes, if we have reflected on our motivations “to go on missions” and have sought the input and wisdom of others to humbly discern our place in participating in the mission of God. This will involve recognizing that those we go to serve among are not simply objects of mission or recipients of charity, but women and men created in God’s image, in whom we encounter Christ. Our role is to walk alongside, share our resources with them, and proclaim the good news of Jesus along the way.

“If we are going to interfere in the lives of others, a little due diligence is a minimum requirement.”⁵⁰

TEJU COLE

In an extract from her book, *The Good Ally: A Guided Anti-Racism Journey from Bystander to Changemaker*, author Nova Reid writes in *The Observer* about the “white savior complex”:

Actions aimed at achieving racial reconciliation must include actions that seek justice (Micah 6:8).

Peacemakers will seek to address the socio-political and structural dynamics that hinder reconciliation because if the structural issues that have caused division and tension are not addressed, we are left with a superficial peace.

There’s an impulsive desire to fix, to be the hero of the story, to swoop in and rescue and, for some, it also comes from a place of superiority and/or a desire to be forgiven. It feeds into something called the “White Savior Industrial Complex”—a term first coined by Harvard professor and novelist Teju Cole in 2012. “White Savior Industrial Complex is not about justice, it’s about having a big emotional experience that validates privilege... There is much more to doing good work than “making a difference”. There is the principle of first do no harm. There is the idea that those who are being helped ought to be consulted over the matters that concern them,” explains Cole.⁵¹

This can be difficult to understand, and to get right. People really do think they are doing the right thing, but without understanding the consequences.

Of course, charities and aid organizations are important, but how aid is presented is key. Any charity that does not have a core mission to empower the communities they are serving is problematic. Instead of showcasing “poverty and trauma porn”, charities could intentionally choose to centre Black voices and share news about the inspiring work being done by people in the community.

Don’t underestimate the power of one-dimensional storytelling and representation and how it can inform your worldview. I still recall noticing, as a seven-year-old, that the only people who looked like me on television were in charity idents, with flies buzzing round their faces, with the white English man with the sombre sad voice as a backdrop. That’s improved, but there’s still a long way to go. There is a fine line between helping and being performative, but nevertheless there is a line.

... although the issues highlighted in the ten responses speak to those of us who are white and share in that stream of Christian mission that coincided with, and was often facilitated by, the colonial expansion of European powers, the same issues highlighted are applicable to Christians from across the global church who attempt to engage in Christian mission from a position of power and privilege.

To go back to Teju Cole: “first do no harm”. That means acknowledging and getting curious about where this innate desire to rescue Black people and be one of the “good white people” is coming from. That means being conscious of your motivations to help—it means being honest.⁵²

It is at this point that we need to state what has by now become obvious—namely, that although the issues highlighted in the ten responses speak to those of us who are white and share in that stream of Christian mission that coincided with, and was often facilitated by, the colonial expansion of European powers, *the same issues highlighted above are applicable to Christians from across the global church who attempt to engage in Christian mission from a position of power and privilege.*⁵³

We must therefore be aware of how “whiteness” operates as a concept beyond the color of white skin and the geography of the West. This way of understanding the world, oneself, what is required, and how it can be achieved, is just as prevalent in East Asian societies, including church communities among those colloquially known as “fancy Asians”. Willie James Jennings describes “whiteness” in this way:

Whiteness was and is a way of being in the world and a way of seeing the world at the same time. Whiteness is determined by the aspiration to and acceptance of this way of being and seeing in the world. Whiteness is not the equal and opposite of blackness... Whiteness is a way of imaging oneself as part of the central facilitating reality, the reality that makes sense of, interprets, organizes, and narrates the world.⁵⁴

Meanwhile, Martin Munyao further describes how “whiteness” obscures the richness of specific theologies:

Whiteness makes universal claims of what is needed. It claims a universal understanding of what is needed, what is beautiful, what is normal, and what is acceptable. This means that there are theologies or a theology that is acceptable, that is normal, that is universal in standard. Whiteness puts a face of neutrality that obscures the specific theologies of other people.⁵⁵

Some may argue that those serving in a mission organization and familiar with living in cross-cultural situations would be sensitive to the “whiteness” factors being described by these theologians. One would hope that this would be the case but there is no guarantee, and there are plenty of examples to the contrary.

Conclusion

In his 1968 book, *Christianity in World Perspective*, Kenneth Cragg discusses three significant consequences of the European and Christendom origins of the missionary movement. The three are “the fact of empire”, “the white factor”, and the “managerial”. On the second of these, Cragg writes:

It is, in perspective, one of the sorest liabilities of modern Christian mission that it has been so exclusively pursued by white humanity and served by white initiatives.⁵⁶

That was in 1968, and Cragg is commenting on “modern Christian mission”—that movement or movements that emerged especially in the nineteenth century and which, after the Second World War, developed into a way of

engaging in global mission that has been described as the “Christian-industrial complex.”⁵⁷ Cragg’s analysis powerfully captures the way the three factors combine and shape Christian witness:

These considerations of “imperial” circumstance and “white” aegis were reinforced by a third general factor implicit in the very nature of mission, for which one might well borrow the term “managerial”. It was not only that sanctions of power, welcome or unwelcome, lay behind the Christian presence and that there were painful and inexorable antitheses of racial origin: it was, further, that western Christianity found itself for ever “organizing” and “officiating” in every context of its coming ... It was all too easy for the Christian faith, like busy Martha in an uncaring world, to give its very seriousness and sacrifice a compromising tone of condescension.⁵⁸

How these three factors have intersected over the decades has led to calls for the decolonizing of theology and mission.⁵⁹ Yes, the world has changed since 1968, but in the era of World Christianity that we are now living in, it still needs to be said that any pursuit of Christian mission that retains the residue of empire, “whiteness,” and managerial missiology, is to be rejected because it runs counter to the kingdom witness the church is called to embody and proclaim.

This brings us back to the topic of power as perhaps the most urgent issue for mission agencies and missionaries to consider because it lies at the heart of so many of the issues we now find ourselves wrestling with:

- money and resources—where does the money come from and who gets to spend it?;
- strategy and ministry—who calls the shots on strategy?;
- leadership—what does it mean to lead from a place of vulnerability and weakness, who should be doing the leading, and are we prepared *not* to lead?; a Christlikeness is required, and this takes us back to Azariah and his call for Friends.

There is still much work to be done among churches and mission organizations in the global North if, in Harvey Kwiyan’s words, we are to “reimagine faithful witness in a postcolonial world.”⁶⁰ But I am hopeful,

not least because of the context that gave birth to the “absurd question” in the title of this paper: an authentic dialogue in a diverse church congregation where leaders are prepared to create safe spaces for people to engage with honesty and vulnerability; to ask the hard questions and together seek discernment for their ongoing witness to the nations—within the church, down the street, and across the world. If we can replicate this in our churches and agencies, then there is hope for reimagining faithful witness. **MRT**

Questions for Reflection

1. In the light of your personal experience and the points raised in this paper, how would you respond to someone who asks whether it is appropriate for white people to serve as missionaries today? What are the main socio-political and theological supports for your position?
2. The paper lists a number of reasons why this issue needs to be addressed in the present moment of history. Just how valid do you feel they are? Are there any other reasons that you would like to add to these?
3. Yes/no answers are given to ten different topics regarding whether white people should serve as missionaries or not. What did you find helpful in the manner this question was approached? What in the answers did you find helpful and why? What did you disagree with and why? What other perspectives do you think should influence our understanding of the issues involved?
4. Toward the end of the paper, we read that “We must ... be aware of how ‘whiteness’ operates as a concept beyond the color of white skin and the geography of the West.” How do you respond to this idea? How do the issues raised in this paper apply to people who are not from the West or have white skin? How should this impact the way you and your coworkers do mission?

¹ The author of this paper is a white, male, Northern Irish Christian in his mid-fifties who has served as a missionary in various overseas contexts, including ten years in Malaysia with OMF International.

² Israel Olofinjana is the Director of the One People Commission at the Evangelical Alliance, UK, <https://www.eauk.org/what-we-do/networks/one-people-commission>. Details of his work and publications can be found at <https://israelolofinjana.wordpress.com>. The event was held at Holy Trinity Platt Church, Manchester, and was facilitated by Grace Robinson (Intercultural Worker) and Rev. Dr. Paul Mathole (Rector).

³ The Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants, “Windrush Scandal Explained,” <https://www.jcwi.org.uk/windrush-scandal-explained> (accessed 20 January 2023). 22 June 2023 marked 75 years since the arrival of the HMT Empire Windrush at London’s Tilbury Docks. For a series of articles that celebrate the “Windrush generation” and that look at the injustices still being faced by these people and their descendants, see <https://theconversation.com/topics/windrush-75-139220> (accessed 6 June 2023).

⁴ Kirsteen Kim, “Racism Awareness in Mission: Touchstone or Cultural Blind Spot?,” *International Bulletin of Mission Research* 45, no. 4 (2021): 383. Kim notes the two reasons Dwight Radcliffe gives for why African American and Black church perspectives are largely absent from missiology: “(1) the structure and epistemology of missiology as a discipline, which does not connect with Black thought, and (2) the related failure to acknowledge existing African American scholarship in the field.” See Dwight A. Radcliffe Jr., “Black-ish Missiology: A Critique of Mission Studies and Appeal for Inclusion in the United States Context,” *Mission Studies* 37, no. 2 (2020): 169–92.

⁵ See Kim, “Racism Awareness in Mission, 376–86.

⁶ Willie James Jennings, “Overcoming Racial Faith: How Christianity Became Entangled with Racism,” *Divinity* 14, no. 2 (Spring 2015): 5, https://divinity.duke.edu/sites/divinity.duke.edu/files/divinity-magazine/DukeDivinityMag_Spring15.WEB_.compressed.pdf (accessed 13 June 2023).

⁷ Patrick Mitchel, “Thinking about the Colour of My Skin,” Faith in Ireland (blog), 29 August 2020, <https://faithinireland.wordpress.com/2020/08/29/thinking-about-the-colour-of-my-skin/> (accessed 24 May 2023). Italics mine.

⁸ Harvey Kwiyan, Global Connections Network News January 2023, “Mission in the Age of Modern Christianity.” See also Harvey Kwiyan’s weekly newsletter: *Global Witness, Globally Reimagined*, <https://harveykwiyan.substack.com>.

⁹ Jason Roach and Jessamin Birdsall, *Healing the Divides: How Every Christian Can Advance God’s Vision for Racial Unity and Justice* (London: The Good Book Company, 2022), 24–25. In a chapter on nineteenth-century missions, Charles Taber offers this assessment: “The love of Christ, which undeniably motivated the missionaries powerfully, did much to mitigate racism, but it never really eliminated it. Missionaries often protested the worst effects of racism when translated into colonial policies but few indeed were themselves free from the taint of racist attitudes.” Charles R. Taber, *The World is Too Much With Us: “Culture” in Modern Protestant Missions* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1991), 62.

¹⁰ A list must stop somewhere but among possible contenders for an additional slot is the topic of Sin, particularly our understanding of its individual and structural dimensions. For an accessible treatment of this, see Roach and Birdsall, *Healing the Divides*, chapter 5, “Barriers Within the Church,” 97–115. Also helpful is Michael Gorman, *Romans: A Theological and Pastoral Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2022). See his treatment of how Paul

“characterises the human condition as one marked by both sins (or transgressions) and Sin, a cosmic power that holds humanity captive” (11). And see the excellent little book by Richard J. Mouw, *When the Kings Come Marching in: Isaiah and the New Jerusalem*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002): “Sin may have originated in the rebellious designs of individual wills, but human rebellion has institutionalised sin... ‘Changed hearts’ will not ‘change society’ if the efforts at change are not also directed toward the structures and patterns of human interaction” (110).

¹¹ David Killingray, “The Role of Indigenous Christians in the Global Church,” in *Shaping Christianity in Greater China: Indigenous Christians in Focus*, ed. Paul Woods (Oxford: Regnum, 2017), 9.

¹² Craig Greenfield, *Subversive Mission: Serving as Outsiders in a World of Need* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2022), 45.

¹³ Willie James Jennings, *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2010), 106. Jennings goes on to say that “its pedagogical vision is inside its Christological horizon and embodiment, inside its *participatio Christi* and its *imitatio Christi*. The colonialist moment indicates the loss of that horizon and embodiment through its enclosure in exaggerated judgment, hyperevaluation tied to a racial optic. Pedagogical evaluation in the New World set the context within which the theological imagination functioned. Theology was inverted with pedagogy. Teaching was not envisioned inside discipleship, but discipleship was envisioned inside teaching.”

¹⁴ Jennings, “Overcoming Racial Faith,” 8.

¹⁵ Carlos F. Cardoza-Orlandi and Justo L. Gonzalez, *To All Nations from All Nations: A History of the Christian Missionary Movement* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2013), 3.

¹⁶ “An Interview with Amos Yong,” YouTube video, 18:33, posted by Wipf & Stock, 21 January 2017, <https://youtu.be/T6gnlwVUPeo> (accessed 19 May 2023).

¹⁷ Andrew Draper, “The End of ‘Mission’: Christian Witness and the Decentering of White Identity,” in *Can White People Be Saved?: Triangulating Race, Theology, and Mission*, ed. Love L. Sechrest, Johnny Ramírez-Johnson, and Amos Yong (Downers Grove: IVP, 2018), Kindle Location 469.

¹⁸ Michael A. Rynkiewicz, “Do Not Remember the Former Things,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 40, no. 4 (2016): 311.

¹⁹ “Edinburgh 2010: Common Call,” *International Bulletin of Mission Research* 35, no. 1 (January 2011): 3. “The Edinburgh 2010 Common Call emerged from the Edinburgh 2010 study process and conference to mark the centenary of the World Missionary Conference, Edinburgh 1910. The Common Call was affirmed in the Church of Scotland Assembly Hall in Edinburgh on 5 June 2010, by representatives of world Christianity, including Catholic, Evangelical, Orthodox, Pentecostal, and Protestant churches.”

²⁰ Comments made by Yvette Koh, PhD candidate with the Oxford Centre for Mission Studies. The author is one of Yvette’s supervisors.

²¹ I am indebted to Dr. Siu Fung Wu for perspectives shared in personal correspondence on the topic of power in the New Testament.

²² I am grateful to Walter McConnell for sharing insights gained in conversations at the WEA Missions Global Consultation, Chiang Mai, Thailand, 30 January–3 February 2023.

²³ Jayakumar Christian, *God of the Empty Handed: Poverty, Power and the Kingdom of God* (n.p.: World Vision: 1999), 210.

²⁴ See, for instance, Jangkhoham Haokip and David W. Smith, *Voices from the Margins: Wisdom of Primal Peoples in the Era of World Christianity* (Carlisle: Langham Global Library, 2022) and Peter Rowan,

“Trusting Local Agency: Discerning our Future in Mission,” *Billions* (May–August 2023): 24–25.

²⁵ Esau McCauley, *Reading While Black: African American Biblical Interpretation as an Exercise in Hope* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2020), 20.

²⁶ McCauley, *Reading While Black*, 21, italics original.

²⁷ Jay Matenga, “Centring the Local: The Indigenous Future of Missions,” a seminar originally presented at the Wycliffe Global Alliance/SIL

“Together in Christ 2021” conference, https://jaymatenga.com/pdfs/MatengaJ_CentringLocal.pdf (accessed 12 June 2023).

²⁸ It is particularly urgent that global North churches and mission agencies look for opportunities to read the Bible *with* the poor and those on the margins, for it is in such communities that Christianity is growing. Harvey Conn called for this in his 1984 work *Eternal Word and Changing Worlds*. “Where shall we begin this identification? By sitting where the poor and disenfranchised sit, in the ghettos of our cities, in the waiting rooms of public health clinics, in the unemployment lines and welfare offices. By bringing to life in our inner cities those features of the Base Ecclesial Communities that have been an important part of the Roman Catholic renewal movement in Latin America—Bible Study with the poor and not simply for the poor. Bible study in communities seeking to understand the injustice and racial animosity that has desecralized their lives, and commitment to hope together.” Harvey Conn, *Eternal Word and Changing Worlds: Theology, Anthropology, and Mission in Dialogue* (Grand Rapids: Academic, 1984), 255–56.

²⁹ Brian Stanley, *The World Missionary Conference: Edinburgh 1910* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), Kindle Location 1562.

³⁰ Stanley, *The World Missionary Conference*, Kindle Location 1583.

³¹ Stanley, *The World Missionary Conference*, Kindle Location 1602.

³² Dana L. Robert, *Faithful Friendships: Embracing Diversity in Christian Community* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2019), Kindle Location 163.

³³ As Kim points out: “In the main, the communities and nations who were ranked lowest by the colonists still suffer the greatest oppression. Colonialism itself also continues in the form of neocolonialism, which is better known as economic globalization.” Kim, “Racism Awareness in Mission,” 383. An important aspect of the history of colonialism is understanding the development of the concept of culture and how it has influenced missions. See Taber, *The World is Too Much with Us*.

³⁴ Jonathan Ingelby, *Beyond Empire: Postcolonialism and Mission in a Global Context* (Milton Keynes: Authorhouse, 2010), xix. See also Nigel Biggar, *Colonialism: A Moral Reckoning* (London: William Collins, 2023). In the opinion of one reviewer of Biggar’s work: “In his ‘moral reckoning’ on colonialism Biggar concludes ‘It was not essentially racist, exploitative or wantonly violent’ (p 297), but perhaps he is doing the ‘over-egging’ here... Virtually all writers on colonialism agree that you cannot draw up a credit/debit balance sheet, and then surreptitiously seem to be doing so. In the current academic, and increasingly popular, environment where the debit side is seen to be incontestably correct, Biggar’s articulate, scholarly, fully researched and largely unpolemical counter lands its impressive weight very largely on the credit side.” John Root, “Can We Give Colonialism a Moral Reckoning?” <https://www.psephizo.com/reviews/can-we-give-colonialism-a-moral-reckoning/> (accessed 6 June 2023).

³⁵ Lamin Sanneh, *Whose Religion Is Christianity? The Gospel Beyond the West* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 10. In his book, Sanneh gives priority to “the indigenous discovery of Christianity rather than the Christian discovery of indigenous societies.”

³⁶ Andrew Atherstone and David Ceri Jones, eds.,

Making Evangelical History: Faith, Scholarship and the Evangelical Past (London and New York: Routledge, 2019), 1.

³⁷ Atherstone and Jones, *Making Evangelical History*, 1.

³⁸ For a fascinating account of how local communities contribute to how history is told, see Aamna Mohdin, “How the Fall of Edward Colston’s Statue Revolutionised the Way British History Is Told,” *The Guardian*, 5 May 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2023/may/05/how-the-fall-of-edward-colstons-statue-revolutionised-the-way-british-history-is-told> (accessed 5 May 2023). Mohdin points out that in the UK “[a]rchiving is overwhelmingly white, and as a result one of the least representative professions. This inevitably impacts which stories are valued and where they come from ...” Unlike most archival institutions or libraries where the people who do the archiving and collecting are the same people who decide on what is archived, this University of Manchester based Centre is a community-led archive.

³⁹ Vince L. Bantu, *A Multitude of All Peoples: Engaging Ancient Christianity’s Global Identity* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2020), 9.

⁴⁰ T. D. Gener and L. Bautista, “Theological Method,” in *Global Dictionary of Theology*, ed. William Dryness and Veli-Matti Karkkainen (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2008), 890.

⁴¹ Lamin Sanneh, *Whose Religion Is Christianity? The Gospel Beyond the West* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 56.

⁴² Gina Zurlo, *Global Christianity: A Guide to the World’s Largest Religion from Afghanistan to Zimbabwe* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2022), Location 692.

⁴³ For more on this, see Taber, *The World is Too Much with Us*.

⁴⁴ Kim, “Racism Awareness in Mission,” 383.

⁴⁵ Jennings, *The Christian Imagination*, 115.

⁴⁶ It is important to note that in Paul’s theology of reconciliation we must hold together the practices of peace and justice. This is seen “especially in relations between Gentiles and Jews and between the haves and the have-nots. These two interests coalesce in Paul’s ongoing interest in the collection for the poor, especially the poor in Jerusalem (Rom. 15:22–32...)” Michael Gorman, *Becoming the Gospel: Paul, Participation, and Mission* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 164. See also: Arend van Dorp, *Ethnic Diversity and Reconciliation: A Missional Model for the Church in Myanmar* (Carlisle: Langham Global Library, 2022); Peter Rowan, *Proclaiming the Peacemaker: The Malaysian Church as an Agent for Reconciliation in a Multicultural Society* (Oxford: Regnum, 2012), “Proclaiming Reconciliation in our Being, Doing, and Telling” in *Mission Round Table* 13, no. 1 (2018): 4–11, <https://omf.org/proclaiming-reconciliation-in-our-being-doing-and-telling> (accessed 30 May 2023); and John W. de Gruchy, *Reconciliation: Restoring Justice* (London: SCM, 2002).

⁴⁷ The Lausanne Movement, *The Cape Town Commitment: A Confession of Faith and a Call to Action* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2011), 40.

⁴⁸ Michael Cassidy, *The Passing Summer: A South African Pilgrimage in the Politics of Love* (London: Hodder & Stoughton 1989), 283. For Cassidy, reconciliation in the context of South African apartheid was both grim and glorious—“grim because so many white Christians see reconciliation as political and therefore to be shunned, and most black Christians see reconciliation as cheap and therefore to be ignored.” Glorious “because it is central to the heart of Jesus, pivotal to the New Testament, and inescapable for South Africa.” *The Passing Summer* (1989), 261. The National Initiative for Reconciliation took place in Pietermaritzburg in September 1985.

⁴⁹ Ben Lindsay, *We Need to Talk About Race: Understanding the Black Experience in White Majority Churches* (London: SPCK, 2019), Kindle Location 158.

⁵⁰ Teju Cole, “The White-Savior Industrial Complex,” *The Atlantic*, 21 March 2012, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2012/03/the-white-savior-industrial-complex/254843/> (accessed 2 May 2023).

⁵¹ Cole, “The White-Savior Industrial Complex.”

⁵² Nova Reid, “No More White Saviors, Thanks: How to Be a True Anti-racist Ally,” *The Observer*, 19 September 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/sep/19/no-more-white-saviours-thanks-how-to-be-a-true-anti-racist-ally> (accessed 24 May 2023).

⁵³ On White Saviourism, see also Harvey Kwiyan, “What Is Wrong with White Saviourism?,” *Global Witness, Globally Reimagined*, 9 March 2023, <https://harveykwiyan.substack.com/p/what-is-wrong-with-white-saviourism?> (accessed 24 May 2023).

⁵⁴ Jennings, “Overcoming Racial Faith,” 7.

⁵⁵ Martin Munyao, “Whiteness in Christianity and Decoloniality of the African Experience: Developing a Political Theology for ‘Shalom’ in Kenya,” *INFEMIT*, <https://infemit.org/whiteness-christianity-decoloniality/> (accessed 17 February 2023).

⁵⁶ Kenneth Cragg, *Christianity in World Perspective* (London: Lutterworth, 1968), 24, <https://archive.org/details/christianityinwo0000kenn> (accessed 19 June 2023).

⁵⁷ See Scott A. Bessenecker, *Overturning Tables: Freeing Missions from the Christian-Industrial Complex* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2014) and Michael Stroope, *Transcending Mission: The Eclipse of a Modern Tradition* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2017).

⁵⁸ Cragg, *Christianity in World Perspective*, 26–27.

⁵⁹ For instance, see the Stott-Bediako Forum 2022, “Jesus and Empire: Christian Witness in the Context of Power,” Arad, Romania, 29–31 October 2022, <https://infemit.org/sb2022/> (accessed 23 May 2023). See also Israel Olofinjana, “Decolonising Mission: Learning from the Majority World Template of Suffering and Sacrifice,” *Lausanne Global Analysis* 9, no. 5 (September 2020), <https://lausanne.org/content/lga/2020-09/decolonizing-mission> (accessed 19 May 2023); Harvey Kwiyan, “The Rise of World Christianity and the Decolonising of Mission,” William Temple Foundation (blog), 22 October 2021, <https://williamtemplefoundation.org.uk/blog-decolonising-mission/> (accessed 19 May 2023); Michael Marten points out the difference between “decolonisation” and “decolonising”: “decolonising is not a process that ever ends, but is something that we continually engage with and reflect upon, perpetually developing and transforming our understandings and our discourses (we might in this context reflect particularly upon Pierre Bourdieu’s understanding of the way in which scholarly exploration should also be self-reflective and involve “radical questioning”, as we continually recreate and develop discourse, in an awareness of the social space that we occupy as scholars).” Michael Marten, “Decolonising Missions and Preaching: The Implicated Self and the Reframing of the Missionary Phenomenon,” in *Missions and Preaching: Connected and Decolonial Perspectives from the Middle East and North Africa (19th–21st Century)* (Leiden: Brill, 2022), 418.

⁶⁰ Kwiyan, “Mission in the Age of Modern Christianity.” See also his newsletter: *Global Witness, Globally Reimagined*, <https://harveykwiyan.substack.com>.

Power, Weakness, and Status Reversal

Endian

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Experience as an ethnic minority person

Life for ethnic minorities in Australia can be challenging. Even so, I didn't think too much about it until the death of George Floyd in 2020. The event prompted me to reflect on my experiences as a Christian indebted to Western missionaries and as a first-generation migrant. This paper is very much about my journey of engaging with Scripture and people living at the intersection between faith and culture.

I came to faith in Christ when I was a teenager in East Asia. At the time, I went to a school founded by the well-known missionary and Bible translator, Robert Morrison. I am grateful for the Christian tradition of the school. One of the first books I read as a new Christian was the Chinese version of the biography of Hudson Taylor, whose extraordinary sacrifices for the gospel and exemplary life of God's-power-in-human-weakness had a profound impact on me. Of course, stories of the sacrifice of missionaries abound. An Anglo-Australian friend, Tom, recently recounted to me his parents' labour for the gospel among Indigenous Australians in north Queensland.¹ Tom cares for First Nations people deeply and spends a lot of time with them. He is well aware of the powers and privileges he has as a white Australian, but he also

shared with me how disempowering the popular rhetoric against white middle-class males is for him. Understandably, it doesn't give him hope, because he cannot change his ethnicity or gender.

My conversation with Tom highlights the complexity of the issues around race and ethnicity in Australia. However, in this paper I will discuss one aspect of the issue, namely, power and weakness, and the related biblical concept of status reversal. The important place of power in the issues around race and ethnicity is aptly highlighted by Stan Grant, an award-winning Aboriginal journalist, who wrote in a recent article:

Racism? Another word that white people hear differently to us. To white people, racism is something we — Black people — experience. To us it is something other people inflict on us.

Racism is not simply discrimination or bigotry. It is not just an abusive comment. Racism is structural. It is built in.

It is abuse of power.²

Injustice against First Nations people started when Europeans took their lands by force. And it is perpetuated when social and economic policy decisions are made by white-dominated parliamentarians who have little first-

hand understanding of Indigenous culture and way of life. As an Asian-Australian, I endured more racist remarks when Senator Pauline Hanson infamously said that Australia was in danger of being swamped by Asians.³ In the church context, I first experienced powerlessness as an Asian when I was the only person of colour on a thirteen-person pastoral team, even though the congregation was very culturally diverse. One Sunday, my superior said in a sermon that Jesus couldn't possibly be black. Sometime later, a church member from Nigeria told me that he was very disturbed by that remark. I then related the matter to my superior, but sadly, he flatly disregarded the complaint. Of course, Jesus was a Jew and hence the preacher was technically correct. But his dismissal of the church member's feeling was appalling, and I felt powerless because my voice was not heard.

My experience in theological settings is no better. I have worked in five theological colleges—on faculty, as an adjunct, and as a tutor. Not infrequently, I find myself to be the only non-white person in academic meetings. In my experience, non-white academics are often not consulted when it comes to decisions that affect the multicultural student body. And the recommended readings in the curriculum are largely dominated by scholars from European backgrounds, even though it is not hard to find resources from Majority World scholars nowadays.⁴ Given the fact that I am in the minority among colleagues, I feel powerless in making my voice heard.⁵

The least I want to do here is to blame my Anglo-European friends for everything. I believe that many of them are more than willing to walk with me in this journey. The issue,

... there can be a “hidden hierarchy” in our mindset (whether intentionally or unintentionally), whereby people of the dominant culture and those from higher socioeconomic backgrounds are considered superior and more advanced, and that their way of life and theology are models to be followed.

however, is structural and systemic, in that the senior leadership of many churches and institutions is dominated by white Australians and, inevitably, decisions are made according to their worldview and cultural perspectives, with limited, if any, input from people of colour, despite the fact that the Australian churches are highly multicultural.⁶ The result is that church ethos and praxis, and the underlying theology, are characterised by Anglo and Western European worldviews.

By the way, just in case we accuse white people of white supremacy, Grace Lung reminds us of the “hidden hierarchy” among some Asians, where people from wealthier Asian countries tend to look down on those from poorer countries, who often have darker skin.⁷ We all need to watch out for the “plank in our own eyes,” so to speak, rather than focusing on the “speck” in other people’s eyes (cf. Matt 7:3–5).

My experience has led me to think that there can be a “hidden hierarchy” in our mindset (whether intentionally or unintentionally), whereby people of the dominant culture and those from higher socioeconomic backgrounds are considered superior and more advanced, and that their way of life and theology are models to be followed. My observation has prompted me to ask what can be done about the white domination in church and theological teaching contexts. It similarly prompts me to ask whether there is an unhealthy “hidden hierarchy” in my own attitude. I also need to ask how I can walk alongside white people like Tom in such a way that my approach does not disempower them. Indeed, what are the implications for intercultural training? Since my academic discipline is the New Testament, in the following I will examine selected Bible passages that speak of status reversal, power, and weakness in the hope that they can answer my questions above. But first, I need to mention a few thoughts on biblical interpretation, for that will determine how we read the Bible, and indeed, how we understand the gospel.

Bible interpretation and social location

Within biblical scholarship, there has been substantial resistance to the white dominance of Bible interpretation, often by way of foregrounding the agency of the readers. One of those

Like many people of colour, the Bible is vital for my faith. ... For me, the meaning of the text is central, but one’s social location can be one valuable resource (among many) to help us understand the text, as long as we humbly read the text alongside other readers. It doesn’t mean that the text has multiple meanings, but that, by reading the text together, we can hear the text better.

approaches is postcolonial interpretation, whereby one interprets Scripture by engaging with the legacy of “colonial rule.”⁸ According to R. S. Sugirtharajah, “the task of postcolonial studies” is:

- to analyse how European scholarship codified and studied colonial cultures;
- to recover how the resistant writings of the colonized tried to redeem their cultures and restore their identity and dignity.⁹

This method of interpretation has been used in a wide variety of ways. I find that it can allow the interpreter to uncover colonial practices and interpretive assumptions, and can provide avenues to understand the text better. But at times, it takes the interpreter away from the meaning of the biblical text itself. This is not the place to evaluate postcolonial interpretation as an interpretive approach, but I will mention one example as an illustration of its usage. David Moe, a Burmese scholar currently teaching at Yale University, concludes his reading of Romans 13:1–7 by saying:

Romans 13:1–7 has long been misread as a “public transcript” that has justified

dictatorial authorities in Myanmar. Reading in this way, the text brings good news to the state oppressors and bad news to the oppressed. If Paul’s hidden purpose in this text is to bring good news to both the Christian and civil community, this paper strongly argues that we should read Romans 13:1–7 as a hidden transcript of postcolonial resistance to the governing authorities who misuse their powers to their own advantage. In reading this text as a hidden transcript of postcolonial theology, Christians in Myanmar need to rethink faith not simply as a private confession of Jesus as Savior, but as a public confession of witnessing to Christ’s lordship of justice and peace against the imperial and illegal lordship of human over human.¹⁰

Space limitations disallow me to engage with the article in detail. Suffice to say that Moe does engage with biblical scholars and discuss the historical context of Romans in his argument; but, ultimately, his focus is the postcolonial resistance of the text in the context of Myanmar. This interpretive method of resistance is also very attractive in my context in Australia, given the legacy of colonial rule and white domination in the parliament.¹¹ But my love of Scripture causes me to pay much more attention to the biblical text and its original context. Here, I turn to African Americans who treated the biblical texts as life-giving authoritative texts.¹² Zilpha Elaw was a black woman preacher born in 1790.¹³ Elaw faced enormous opposition and dangers because of her gender and race. In the words of Lisa Bowens:

In a society that often refused to recognize the humanity of blacks and denied that they possessed souls, Elaw becomes a disruptive figure who breaks societal rules of what is proper for women and African Americans.¹⁴

Despite her fears and the real dangers she faced, Elaw continued to preach



among the enslaved Africans and the slaveholders, and her ministry was quite successful, for many people turned to God and were converted.¹⁵

Importantly for our purposes, Elaw appealed to Paul's concept of power-in-weakness in her preaching. She saw herself as an "earthen vessel" for God, who opened the door for her ministry (1 Cor 16:9; 2 Cor 4:7).¹⁶ For Elaw, her low status as a black woman in early nineteenth-century America was not a problem, for God had chosen the weak in the world to shame the strong (1 Cor 1:27).¹⁷ Neither was the lack of eloquent words in her speech an issue, for it was a demonstration of the Spirit and of power (2:1, 4).¹⁸ Here, Elaw used the Scriptures to counter the dominant worldview and system that enslaved African Americans. The interpreter applied the authoritative text to her own context and, in doing so, exposed the inability of her opponents—those from the dominant culture and those in positions of power—to read the biblical texts aright. Elaw's reading of Scripture served to resist white domination because Scripture was life-giving to her and she saw it as a trustworthy text from God.

Elaw's use of Scripture highlights the importance of social location in Bible interpretation. Here, the interpreter's experience of oppression gave her an understanding of the text that others couldn't see. But such an interpretation didn't foreground the reader to the degree that the interpreter became the centre. In fact, the text remained to be of utmost importance for her, and its authority gave her impetus to resist her oppressors.

In his book, *Reading While Black*, African American scholar Esau McCaulley underscores a challenge we often encounter in Bible interpretation today. Like McCaulley, we can be caught up in the clash between white evangelical and (the so-called) white progressive theologians.¹⁹ I agree with Western evangelicals who adopt a hermeneutic of trust—that is, the Bible is indeed from God and can be trusted.²⁰ (By "hermeneutic," I simply mean "Bible interpretive approach.") But I am frustrated with some evangelicals who, for example, draw a sharp distinction between preaching the gospel and social action.²¹ My frustration stems from the fact that the spiritual and the material worlds are inseparable for biblical writers, and indeed it is something that people from many non-Western cultures are

aware of. At the same time, I resonate with McCaulley's critique of those who push for a more "progressive" theology against the "fundamentalists," especially when people undermine the importance of Scripture.²² Like many people of colour, the Bible is vital for my faith. And like Elaw, I find that Scripture is an invaluable encouragement in times of hardship. As McCaulley rightly says: "If the Scriptures were fundamentally flawed and largely useless apart from mainline revision of the text, then Christianity is truly a white man's religion."²³ Also, we should "do the hard work of reading the text closely, attending to historical context, grammar, and structure."²⁴ But the social location of people of colour is also informative, because it provides insights into the text that other readings may fail to see.²⁵ As McCaulley says:

The social location of enslaved persons caused them to read the Bible differently. This unabashedly *located* reading has marked African American interpretation since.²⁶

For me, the meaning of the text is central, but one's social location can be one valuable resource (among many) to help us understand the text, as long as we humbly read the text alongside other readers. It doesn't mean that the text has multiple meanings, but that, by reading the text together, we can hear the text better. It is with this in mind that I will examine the concept of status reversal in Luke's Gospel. Our discussion will engage with different biblical scholars, both Western and non-Western, in order to gain a better understanding of the biblical text.²⁷ At first sight, one may think that status reversal doesn't have anything to do with ethnicity and race, but we will find that it prompts us to see the intrinsic value of every person, not least those in positions of weakness and powerlessness. It also challenges us to evaluate our attitude and any hidden hierarchy in our mindset.

Status reversal in Luke

Luke's Gospel is well known for its theme of status reversal, which is vividly shown in the Song of Mary in 1:46–55 that says God has scattered the proud, brought down the powerful (*dynast*) from their thrones, and sent the rich away empty. God has also exalted the humble/lowly (*tapeinous*) and filled the hungry with good things (1:51–53). The theme is reinforced by Luke's frequent references to the

widow (9x), as well as its unique mention of the rich man and Lazarus (16:19–31), the Good Samaritan (10:25–37), and parable of the rich fool (12:16–21).

But perhaps the clearest teaching on status reversal is found in Luke 6:20–26.

Then he looked up at his disciples and said

"Blessed are you who are poor,
for yours is the kingdom of God.
"Blessed are you who are hungry now,
for you will be filled.
"Blessed are you who weep now,
for you will laugh.

"Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven; for that is what their ancestors did to the prophets.

"But woe to you who are rich,
for you have received
your consolation.
"Woe to you who are full now,
for you will be hungry.
"Woe to you who are laughing now,
for you will mourn and weep.

"Woe to you when all speak well of you, for that is what their ancestors did to the false prophets.²⁸

So, the poor, the hungry, the weeping, the hated, the excluded, and the defamed are blessed because of their allegiance to Christ. But woe to the rich, those who are full, laugh, or are spoken well of. The fact that God hears the cry of the weak and protects the vulnerable clearly echoes Old Testament notions (Ps 10:17–18; Ezek 34:16).²⁹ Similarly, the woes echo the warnings of impending disasters in the prophetic tradition.³⁰ In the following, I will survey the views of four biblical scholars on the status reversal theme, and consider how each contributes to our understanding of the text.

Darrell Bock, a well-known professor at Dallas Theological Seminary, says that when "Jesus speaks of the poor or rich, he is not making *carte blanche* statements about people with a certain social or economic standing."³¹ For Bock, Jesus "is calling people into a spiritual relationship that God imparts to those willing to enter his new community . . ."³² According to Bock, Luke's Gospel stresses "a ministry of social concern for those in need" and

warns “those who are wealthy not to hoard what God has given to them (6:20–26; 7:22–23; 12:13–21; 14:12–14; 16:14–29).”³³ I think Bock makes good points here. But my experience of growing up in a relatively poor area in Asia causes me to consider the existence of socioeconomic hierarchy in Jesus’ day. Here, Joel Green’s assessment is informative:

In that culture, one’s status in a community was not so much a function of economic realities, but depended on a number of elements, including education, gender, family heritage, religious purity, vocation, economics, and so on. Thus, lack of subsistence might account for one’s designation as “poor,” but so might other disadvantaged conditions, and “poor” would serve as a cipher for those of low status, for those excluded according to normal canons of status honor in Mediterranean world.³⁴

The strength of Green’s analysis is his awareness of the social world in antiquity. The poor are not only characterised by economic deprivation but also debased social status measured by education, family heritage, and other factors. Put differently, the poor are poor because of their vulnerability and powerlessness in a hierarchical society.

Diane Chen, an Asian-American scholar, shows a similar awareness of the social world reflected in Luke when she says:

The poor in Luke encompasses a broad definition. Poverty is experienced economically, emotionally, communally, and spiritually. The poor includes peasants who can barely survive on a subsistence level, the sick plagued with demon possession and debilitating handicaps that render them unclean, tax collectors and sinners despised for their moral infractions, and others of low status who are kept there by the hierarchical society in which they live.³⁵

Here, Chen aptly locates the text of Luke’s Gospel in its historical socioeconomic context, and helps us to understand what the “poor” would have meant to Luke’s first audience. God’s extravagant grace is demonstrated in the fact that Jesus came to proclaim good news to the poor (4:18–19), people who were at the lower parts of the social pyramid. It is also remarkable that Jesus uses the Sidonian widow and Naaman the Syrian to illustrate the extent of that good



news—that even Gentile widows and unclean oppressors can be recipients of the good news, to the bewilderment of his hearers in the synagogue (4:23–30)!³⁶

Returning to the beatitudes in Luke 6:20–23, it seems that it is the South Asian scholar, Takatemjen, who understands the full force of Jesus’ teaching. He says:

These beatitudes were revolutionary. In every single one of them, Jesus took what was accepted and turned it upside down. *Blessed are you who are poor* (6:20), Jesus said, not blessed are the rich. In the same way, he pronounced blessings on the hungry, the weeping, the hated and the rejected. Those typically considered unfortunate are promised blessedness or happiness (6:21–22). They are the ones who long for what God has to give them, and God will fulfil their longings in the coming kingdom (6:23).³⁷

Thus, the vulnerable and powerless, rather than the rich and powerful, are beneficiaries of God’s blessings. Such is the value system of God’s kingdom! For Takatemjen, the implications for South Asian Christians is that they need to engage with social and economic policies.

But preaching alone is not enough. We must also work to formulate policies and laws that protect the poor. Christian communities are responsible for ensuring that the voices of the poor are heard in parliament and in legislative assemblies.³⁸

Perhaps it is because of his social location in South Asia that Takatemjen is very much aware of the systemic and structural causes of poverty and injustice. For him, advocating for better social policies is a response to the

teaching of Jesus.³⁹ As another scholar has said, the beatitudes speak of

God’s social reform agenda. On the one hand, social transformation will not be fully realised until Jesus returns. On the other hand, Jesus expects his followers to embrace the values of this reform agenda in this age.⁴⁰

I should mention that wealth is not in and of itself evil, and neither are the privileges that people have inherited (such as being born to educated parents or growing up in affluent Australia). One should not feel guilty to be a white male in the West, nor should an Asian born to middle-class parents. But what Luke’s Gospel teaches us is that there is intrinsic value in every human being, not least those who are weak and vulnerable. They are not so much objects of charity, but important people who are worthy of esteem and respect. They can be full—not inferior—participants of God’s kingdom. This is, I think, very much what African Americans like Elaw were claiming. This is what I want as an ethnic minority person in church leadership and theological teaching. I want my voice to be heard, not as a minority voice (which is often silenced by the majority) but as a valuable input that can benefit the whole church.

What Luke’s Gospel also highlights is the systemic causes of injustice, be it the religious leadership that disapproved of Jesus’ acts of mercy on the Sabbath or the synagogue and temple leadership that devoured widows despite the mandate of their own Scriptures to care for them (Luke 6:6–11; 13:14; 20:45–21:4; Deut 14:29; 24:17; 26:12). Stan Grant, who is himself a Christian, is right to say that racism in Australia is structural (see above).⁴¹ This is why the leadership in

churches and theological (and mission!) training institutions in the West needs to make sure that ethnic minorities are not only given a seat at the table, but that their voice is not overwhelmed by the white majority. This is why I must examine my own attitude as an educated and lighter-skin Asian, and eliminate any trace of hidden hierarchy in my mindset.

I also hope that I have demonstrated the value of engaging with both Western and non-Western scholars in interpreting the text. Bock rightly says that the wealthy are not to hoard, and Green skilfully highlights the social setting of antiquity. As a first-generation migrant in the West, it is encouraging to find myself resonating with Chen's reading. And Takatemjen alerts us to the social reform agenda of Jesus' teaching. The multi-dimensional engagements with the text here are immensely enriching and together they help us to participate in God's kingdom in our lives. This calls for the inclusion of multiple voices—including the voice of the poor!—in the curricula of theological and intercultural studies, from the development to the implementation of the academic programs.

In addition to Luke's message of status reversal, I want to invite my readers to take a closer look at Paul's message of the crucified Christ. The cross is, of course, the basis of our salvation—that, by faith, believers may have a personal, intimate relationship with God. But our whole life, both as individuals and as a believing community, is also to be shaped by the crucified and risen Lord.

The crucified Christ

Paul refers to the cross and the crucified Christ multiple times in 1 Corinthians 1–2 (1:13, 17, 18, 23; 2:2, 8). In particular, in his proclamation, Paul is adamant not to use eloquent words but focus on the crucified Christ, lest the cross be emptied of its power (1:17; cf. 2:1–2).⁴² And in 1:22–24, he says:

For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, *but we proclaim Christ crucified*, a stumbling block to Jews

and foolishness to Gentiles but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.⁴³

Paul's emphasis on the crucified Christ would have been absurd to his first hearers. In Paul's day, the Jews were expecting the coming of the Messiah—the Anointed One—to deliver them from their oppressors, the Romans. Many of them would have expected the Anointed One to be someone like Moses or David, who was chosen by their God to bring deliverance through mighty works. It would, therefore, have been scandalous for Paul to say that the Messiah had died on a Roman cross, which was a symbol of humiliation and defeat. For the Greeks, given their desire for reason and wisdom, it would have been utter folly



to think that the Saviour of the world had died on a shameful Roman cross—a gruesome instrument of execution reserved for rebels and the conquered.⁴⁴

But for Paul, the crucified Christ is the wisdom of God (1:24). Indeed, one can only marvel at the paradoxical nature of the message of Christ crucified. The most honourable one—the Anointed One—suffered an utterly shameful death. And the cross, a symbol of defeat, is the very means by which God conquered death—for without

death there would be no resurrection, but death has been swallowed up in victory because Christ is risen (15:54).

Remarkably, in his wisdom, God has chosen the most unlikely candidates to be the recipients of the gospel. Paul says that not many of the Corinthians were wise, powerful, or of noble birth (1:26). Indeed, God chose the foolish, the weak, the lowly, and the despised in the world (1:27–28), so that “*no human being might boast in the presence of God* (1:29).⁴⁵

In the immediate context, Paul is using this to address the divisions in the church, since some Corinthians said that they belonged to Apollos, others to Cephas, and others to Paul (1:11–16). But here, we also catch a glimpse of the profound meaning of the cross and its implications. God chose what is weak and despised in the world to shame the strong and powerful, and it is an integral part of his redemptive purpose (1:27–28, 30). Importantly, this is accomplished through the sacrificial death of the crucified Christ. Of course, we should note that there might be a small number of people of higher social standing among the Corinthians.⁴⁶ But Paul's point is that no one can boast, and that the only valid boasting is boasting in the Lord (1:29, 31), not that the privileged and powerful were inferior to the lowly in the house churches.

The way of the cross, then, sounds strikingly similar to the status reversal theme in Luke's Gospel. A proper understanding of God's kingdom and the cross calls for the dismantling of any hierarchical mindset and system, for every person deserves to be valued and respected. It means that Jesus-followers are to adopt an alternative social convention of love, acceptance, and embrace, both as individuals and as a community. This is vividly demonstrated in Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 12:22–26:

On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable . . . and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect; whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honour to the inferior member . . . but the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together with it.

... the leadership in churches and theological (and mission!) training institutions in the West needs to make sure that ethnic minorities are not only given a seat at the table, but that their voice is not overwhelmed by the white majority.

Conclusion

How then do we embody the crucified Christ today? If Jesus-followers are to adopt a cross-shaped posture and life pattern, they are to honour those who are seemingly dishonourable. This means that, as an educated Asian, I need to be careful not to allow any hidden hierarchy mindset to allure me to despise other Asians (or anyone else, for that matter). It also means that I can walk alongside my friend Tom as we willingly stop holding on to our privileges and powers, be it social, economic, or by way of advanced education, and share life with those who don't have the same privileges that we do. It means that I regularly remind myself of the need to hear the voice of others whose social locations enable them to read the Bible in ways that enrich my understanding of God and the gospel.

I will finish with a personal story. Growing up in a relatively low socioeconomic area in East Asia, I thought I was inferior to those of higher social standing. But the cross has been a constant reminder of Christ's self-emptying act of becoming a human, lowering himself to the status of a slave, dying on the cross, and being exalted by God to become the Lord of all (Phil 2:6–11). In Christ, we are not inferior or superior to one another. Although I thought that white westerners were superior, the incarnational and sacrificial life of missionaries like Hudson Taylor, Maria Dyer Taylor, and Jennie Faulding Taylor showed me that there were Christians who followed Christ's cruciform pattern. I migrated to Australia to work as a professional in IT. But several years later, I felt the call of God to quit my career and go to Bible college. This was the start of a vocation of serving God and his people in different capacities. I have since worked as a pastor, a global education officer in a humanitarian organisation, and a lecturer in theological colleges. But for most of these years, we have lived on a low family income. We always have food on the table, but the financial challenge is a frequent source of anxiety. But God has always been faithful. My wife and I can testify that this way of life helps us to know God and experience him in ways that we otherwise would not have. Miraculous financial provision (without a fund-raising strategy!) is one example. A growing trust in God's faithfulness is another.

This experience of God's-power-in-human-weakness has helped me to see the world differently. For almost one decade, I have had the privilege of having many students from refugee backgrounds in my classes. A lot of them have to work hard in low-paying jobs. Many of them struggle academically because English is not their first language. As opposed to other high-income migrants, they have a relatively low status in society. Over the years, I have adopted different teaching methods to cater for the needs of a culturally and socioeconomically diverse student body. I think students from non-European backgrounds really appreciate my attempt to read Scripture through non-Western lenses. Indeed, students of Anglo-European ancestry also appreciate it because it brings new insights to their interpretation. I endeavour to include resources written by scholars from diverse backgrounds in the curriculum.

I am convinced that my students from refugee backgrounds have much to teach me because of their sufferings—as refugees whose journeys to Australia were full of danger, as low income, non-white people in Australia, and as people whose loved ones continue to suffer enormously in their home countries. Their faith in God and resilience in adversity are inspiring.

I have found that my life experience has helped me in several ways. As a low-income migrant, I find myself drawing close to my students. I feel that we share

something in common. Also, they don't see me as an affluent professional East Asian with abundant material possessions. I think that, in some ways, they see me as one of them and I feel that we are indeed brothers and sisters in Christ. Importantly, their presence in class encourages me to boldly allow our social location to enrich our interpretation of the Bible without losing sight of the centrality of the biblical text as God's life-giving word. Reading the text with them and with other students is well and truly an intercultural experience, one that allows us to understand God and the gospel better. I am thankful for the opportunity to participate in God's mission at this intersection between culture, ethnicity, and the Bible, where the distinction between the powerful and the weak no longer exists because of the crucified Christ and risen Lord. **MRT**

Questions for reflection

1. What is your take on Luke 6:20–26 (and the Song of Mary in Luke 1:46–55)? In what way do the interpretations of scholars from different parts of the world help us understand the passage? How would reading texts in this fashion enhance your work and discipleship of others? What biblical themes would you like to study in this way for the benefit of the people you serve?



2. When you prepare talks, sermons, or lectures for your church or institutional work, how much of your reading comes from books produced by Western authors and how much is from other parts of the world? In what way would reading more widely, and particularly works produced by people where you work, enhance your preparation and delivery? What difference might it make in your ministry?
3. What can people from majority cultures do to ensure that minorities feel they are accepted, valued, and given a level playing field in education, job opportunities, and advancement? Are there systemic, structural, and institutional issues to be dealt with? What can you personally do to help this process? Do you find you are part of a “hidden hierarchy,” whether you are on top, bottom, or somewhere else? Try to describe the power dynamics around this. What can be done about it?
4. Prayerfully reflect on 1 Corinthians 1:18–31 and 12:21–26, and consider how the cruciform love of Christ may shape the way we respond to the issues raised in the article.

very good suggestions to “create safe spaces of genuine participation by culturally diverse people” (12).

⁶ For example, according to an email from the Baptist Union of Victoria (BUV), over forty percent of the Baptist churches in Victoria speak in languages other than (or in addition to) English. See BUV Communications, email message to BUV Bulletin subscribers, 22 March 2023.

⁷ Grace Lung, “Prejudice in the Church,” *Zadok Perspectives* 153 (December 2021): 9.

⁸ Paula Gooder, ed., *Searching for Meaning: An Introduction to Interpreting the New Testament* (London: SPCK, 2009), 175. Other interpretive approaches that are reader-focussed include, for example, feminist, Asian, Latin American, queer, and other readings. It should be noted that there are diverse interpretive strategies within each of these methods.

⁹ R. S. Sugirtharajah, “Postcolonial Criticism,” in Gooder, *Searching for Meaning*, 175.

¹⁰ David Thang Moe, “Reading Romans 13:1–7 as a ‘Hidden Transcript of Postcolonial Theology’ in Myanmar,” *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 157 (March 2017): 71–98.

¹¹ My heart sank when I read Senator Fraser Anning’s speech in 2017, in which he said that immigrants should “predominantly reflect the historic European Christian composition” of Australian society. This essentially meant that I and my fellow Asians weren’t welcome in Australia. “Full Text: Senator Fraser Anning’s Maiden Speech,” *SBS News*, 15 August 2018, <https://www.sbs.com.au/news/article/full-text-senator-fraser-annings-aiden-speech/8shbk54k6> (accessed 5 May 2023).

¹² Here, I am indebted to Lisa M. Bowens, *African American Readings of Paul: Reception, Resistance, and Transformation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2020).

¹³ Bowens, *African American Readings*, 114–31.

¹⁴ Bowens, *African American Readings*, 119–20.

¹⁵ Bowens, *African American Readings*, 122.

¹⁶ Bowens, *African American Readings*, 122.

¹⁷ Julia Foote (1823–1900) was another African American woman who found 1 Corinthians 1:27 useful. Bowens says: “First Corinthians 1:27 and Galatians 3:28 become significant texts for her, affirming that God confounds the wise by using the foolish and that social distinctions, such as male and female, do not determine one’s ability to preach.” Bowens, *African American Readings*, 240.

¹⁸ Bowens, *African American Readings*, 123.

¹⁹ See Esau McCauley, *Reading While Black: African American Biblical Interpretation as an Exercise in Hope* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2020), 5.

²⁰ Cf. McCauley, *Reading While Black*, 20.

²¹ Cf. McCauley, *Reading While Black*, 11. I resonate with Jayakumar Christian, former National Director of World Vision India, who says that the New Testament does not separate development from evangelism. See Jayakumar Christian, “Perspectives on Poverty and Transformation,” in *Signs of Hope in the City: Renewing Urban Mission, Embracing Radical Hope*, ed. Graham Hill (Melbourne: International Society for Urban Mission, 2015), 225–26.

²² See McCauley, *Reading While Black*, 6–9.

²³ See McCauley, *Reading While Black*, 8–9.

²⁴ McCauley, *Reading While Black*, 21.

²⁵ I am glad that Brad Vaughn no longer uses “Jackson Wu” as his pseudonym for his *Reading Romans with Eastern Eyes: Honor and Shame in Paul’s Message and Mission* (Downers Grove, IVP, 2019). Initially, I didn’t know that he was using a pseudonym when I read his books, but I could easily detect that he wasn’t a native Asian. Perhaps this is an example of why social location can make a difference? Having said that, I do appreciate Vaughn’s contribution.

²⁶ McCauley, *Reading While Black*, 17. Emphasis original.

²⁷ Due to space limitations, I won’t be performing a detailed exegesis of the text itself.

²⁸ All Scripture citations are from the New Revised Standard Version, Anglicised (NRSVA), unless otherwise indicated.

²⁹ Diane G. Chen, *Luke* (Eugene: Cascade, 2018), Kindle Location 2338.

³⁰ Joel Green, *The Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 265; Darrell Bock, *Luke* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1994), 122.

³¹ Bock, *Luke*, 120–21.

³² Bock, *Luke*, 121.

³³ Bock, *Luke*, 47.

³⁴ Green, *Luke*, 211.

³⁵ Chen, *Luke*, 2327. I find Chen’s statement about poverty particularly helpful: “Poverty is experienced economically, emotionally, communally, and spiritually.” By the way, the notion that the “poor” in Luke 6:20 is about the “spiritually poor” seems to be exegetically unsound, for the “woe to you who are rich” in 6:24 doesn’t make sense if the “rich” there means “spiritually rich.”

³⁶ See Siu Fung Wu, “Good News to the Poor,” in *Another Way to Love*, ed. Tim Costello and Rod Yule (Brunswick East, Australia: Acorn, 2009), 78–80.

³⁷ Takatemjen, “Luke,” in *South Asia Bible Commentary*, ed. Brian Wintle (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), Kindle Location 1346. By the way, I don’t mean that Takatemjen is the only one who sees the upside-down kingdom value here. For example, Tom Wright says: “This is the shape of the kingdom: the kingdom which still today turns the world upside down, or perhaps the right way up, as much as ever it did.” Tom Wright, *Luke for Everyone* (London, SPCK, 2001), 72.

³⁸ Takatemjen, “Luke,” Kindle Location 1346.

³⁹ Indeed, Takatemjen says later in his commentary on Luke that “Jesus’ model for hospitality speaks to our multiracial, multilingual and caste-divided societies.” Takatemjen, “Luke,” Kindle Location 1364.

⁴⁰ Wu, “Good News,” 82. It is worth mentioning here that the beatitudes in Luke 6 do not mean that the poor should seek to become rich and powerful. The warnings in 6:24–26 are clear!

⁴¹ Likewise, Teela Reid, a First Nations person in Australia, says regarding the forthcoming referendum on the Voice to Parliament: “The one thing First Nations people don’t want is any white guilt on this . . . We want systemic change, we want racism to stop in our nation, we want people’s hearts and minds to change in this process.” Karen Tong, “Will the Indigenous Voice to Parliament have Enough Power to Effect Change?,” *ABC News*, 13 April 2023, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-04-13/will-indigenous-voice-to-parliament-have-enough-power-to-change/102210064> (accessed 5 May 2023).

⁴² More literally, 1 Corinthians 1:17b says, “so that the cross of Christ might not be emptied.”

⁴³ Emphasis added.

⁴⁴ See also Siu Fung Wu, “Paul, the Spirit-People, and People on the Margins,” *Australasian Pentecostal Studies* 22, no. 2 (2021): 255.

⁴⁵ ESV. Emphasis added.

⁴⁶ The fact that “not many” of the Corinthians were wise, powerful, or of noble birth suggests that some of them were of higher social status (1 Cor 1:26).

¹ Tom is not his real name. I have withheld the information for privacy reasons.

² Stan Grant, “In the Year of the Voice, Australians Must Overcome a Language Barrier If We’re to Speak to Each Other, to Hear the Same Truth,” *ABC News*, 12 February 2023, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-02-12/voice-to-parliament-language-barrier-hear-the-same-truth/101956684> (accessed 5 May 2023).

³ Matt Martino, “Pauline Hanson’s Maiden Speech: Has Australia Been ‘Swamped by Asians’?” *ABC News*, 14 September 2016, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-09-14/pauline-hanson-speech-asian-immigration/7645578> (accessed 5 May 2023).

⁴ I do accept that Majority World resources were hard to find until quite recently.

⁵ I don’t mean that my experience is universal among people of colour. I celebrate with those who have positive experiences in white-dominant spaces. But I would like to invite them to walk alongside those who have negative experiences. For another example of the challenges faced by Asian-Australians, see Charlene Delos Santos, “Everyone is Welcome to the Table but . . .,” *Zadok Perspectives* 153 (December 2021): 11–12. Santos also offers

The Formation, Growth, and Development of the Hong Kong Council of the Overseas Missionary Fellowship

Tze Pui and Caoji

Both Tze Pui and Caoji are qualified researchers. Caoji has a special interest in research methods. Tze Pui has served in church contexts for over a decade.

Introduction

Founded on 25 June 1865, the China Inland Mission (CIM) had all along recruited members from the West. In 1961, the Lord led the organization to begin accepting non-Caucasian members born in homelands where CIM had offices.¹ The decision was that “married non-Caucasians of any race who are born citizens of our homelands and who have been reared therein ... can be received into membership on the same basis as Caucasian candidates.”² However, Asians who were single or born outside designated homelands were still not eligible to join. By October 1964, the CIM took another progressive step towards internationalization by lifting all restrictions and accepting Asian Christians as full members.³ This move was reflected in the reconstitution of the CIM into Overseas Missionary Fellowship (OMF),⁴ signifying the CIM had ceased to be a Western mission to the East.⁵

To demonstrate “oneness” in Christ Jesus, and that OMF was neither Western nor



Louis Pang at work at OMF's Christian Witness Press in Hong Kong, *East Asia Millions*, North American edition (November 1968): 35.

Eastern, qualified Asians were to be admitted into all administrative levels of OMF's structure.⁶ Dr. Benjamin Chew (本杰明周), a Singaporean doctor, was invited to serve as the first Asian OMF Director, to share the administrative responsibility at the International Headquarters (IHQ).⁷ This was followed by the admission of Mr. and Mrs. Louis Pang (彭子材伉俪) as the first two Asian full members of OMF in June 1965.⁸ In the one hundred years from its formation, the CIM progressively moved towards internationalization according to God's plan.

The newly reconstituted OMF also invited Rev. Theodore Choy (蔡錫惠) and Rev. Moses Chow (周主培)—the first two Chinese members of the North American Council—to evaluate the entrance of qualified Asians into all administrative levels of OMF's structure.⁹ In 1963, Choy and Chow co-founded Ambassadors for Christ, Inc. to reach out to Chinese students.¹⁰ Choy remarked that Chinese Christians had long appreciated the open hearts

of CIM members, but the steps working toward oneness in the task of “preaching the Gospel to every creature of East Asia” lagged behind.¹¹ Chow commented that the decision to incorporate Asian Christians into a longstanding organization with a deep-rooted Western culture amidst surging nationalism was an innovative and forward-looking move. Though there was a prevailing sense that the change was overdue, its implementation was still striking and timely.¹² The submission to the prompting of the Lord to “open its ... ranks to its Asian brethren, this middle wall of partition was not merely leaped over; it was broken down in the truest Biblical sense!”¹³ With the establishment of home councils in Japan, Singapore, and Malaysia in 1965, and in Hong Kong and the Philippines in 1966, the CIM was transformed into a truly multi-national international organization.¹⁴

Tumultuous years in Hong Kong

Being a British colony, Hong Kong was under the governance of Britain from 1842 to 1997 (except for four years of Japanese occupation from 1941 to 1945). Hong Kong was only thirty miles from Mainland China, which was experiencing economic and political upheaval in the 1960s: the Great Leap Forward (1958–62), followed by three years of great famine, and the Cultural Revolution (1966–76). Thousands of refugees, including many Chinese Christian leaders, came to Hong Kong. Churches flourished, increasing from 190 in 1955 to 376 within ten years.¹⁵ However, Hong Kong itself also faced many upheavals in the 1960s, including the April 1966 protest due to a fare rise on the Star Ferry, and the 1967 large-scale anti-government riots when the



Dr. Benjamin Chew, *East Asia Millions*, British edition (June 1969): 60.

use of roadside bombs and petrol bombs resulted in the deaths of a number of policemen and civilians. The political instability led to an exodus of capital and people from Hong Kong during those years, but also served as a catalyst for reforms to address the underlying social causes and grievances.¹⁶

Despite a tumultuous decade of civil unrest, and the additional social anxiety caused by severe water rationing and intense tropical cyclones, OMF formed a council in Hong Kong as led by the Lord.¹⁷ This paper, based mainly on the council meeting minutes from 1966 to 1995, describes the formation, growth, and development of the Hong Kong Council. In highlighting the sequence of events and challenges leading to the establishment of the Hong Kong Council of the Overseas Missionary Fellowship, the paper will also look at factors that helped to resolve the issues encountered.

The Chairmen of the Hong Kong Council

The Hong Kong Council was a branch office of the China Inland Mission Corporation, a UK company that was registered as a non-Hong Kong Company in Hong Kong on 7 June 1957. In 1966, Ronald B. Roberts (羅柏士)—the Director of Christian Witness Press, OMF's literature arm in the Far East—on behalf of the Corporation, chaired the Hong Kong Council Inaugural Meeting that was held on 8 September at 144 Boundary Street, Kowloon. The founding members were Mr. Woo Yan Tak (胡恩德),¹⁸ Rev. Philip Teng (滕近輝),¹⁹ and Rev. Dr. John Pao (鮑會園).²⁰

From its inception, the HK Council attempted to find a suitable local person to fill the role of Chairman. From 1966 to 1970, the HK Council was still headed by Western missionaries, Mr. Ronald B. Roberts, Mr. Marvin H. Dunn (鄧茂登), and Mr. George A. Williamson (衛理生). Williamson, who succeeded Dunn as the Director of Christian Witness Press, was appointed by the General Director, Mr. John O. Sanders (孫德生), to be the Acting Chairman of the HK Council in July 1968. Williamson expressed time and again in the subsequent two years (May 1969 to January 1970) that the appointment of a local Chairman should take place no later than January 1970. He also pointed out that it would be good

to have such a chairman before the IHQ Central Council meeting to be held in September 1970. Council members were encouraged to make recommendations to him or the General Director in private, but no suitable candidate was in sight. Williamson was thus requested to continue to act in this capacity until such a person could be identified.

A breakthrough occurred when the Assistant General Director, Mr. Arnold Lea (李亞農), attended the HK Council meeting in May 1970. Having been brought up in China with other Asian children, Lea was familiar with Chinese culture.²¹ He suggested that the General Director write to each of the HK Council members for their nominations to appoint a Council Chairman. With the General Director, Mr. Michael C. Griffiths (高力富), putting into practice the Chinese idiom “禮賢下士”—respect the virtuous and honor the worthy—the Chairmanship



Rev. Theodore Choy and Rev. Moses Chow, *East Asia Millions*, North American edition (March 1965): 35.

issue was resolved within two months. Mr. Theodore Hsueh Hung Ki (薛孔奇), who became a member of the HK Council in 1968, volunteered to be the Chairman and was appointed in October 1970 for an initial period of one year. It was noted that from 1971, Mr. Hsueh also wore another hat—serving as the general manager of Christian Communications Limited, a merger between the China Sunday School Association of Hong Kong and Christian Witness Press of Hong Kong.²²

Hsueh was born in Chongqing, Sichuan in 1940 during the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937–1945). His father was the president of the Farmers Bank of China, one of the four largest banks in China at that time. Hsueh went to Hong Kong via Macau in 1950. He accepted Jesus Christ in 1953 at a school evangelistic meeting, and went to the United States in 1958 after completing secondary school education. While studying chemistry at the University of Washington

in Seattle, he felt a call from God to go back to Hong Kong. After much thought and prayer, Hsueh returned to Hong Kong in 1964 and devoted himself to full-time ministry until his promotion to glory in 2023.²³

Through the twenty-five years from 1970 to 1995, three local Chairmen, Mr. Hsueh, Rev. Wilson Chan Hay Him (陳喜謙), and Rev. Kenneth Lo Ka Man (盧家駁), served the HK Council mainly on a voluntary basis. Over the years, they developed a tight-knit relationship that is possibly reflected in the formation of the “Three-Family Village [三家村]” with Rev. Chan as the village head.²⁴ Their families would get together almost every Chinese Lunar New Year.

The OMF operated as a matrix organization with grid-like governance structure. Council members were burdened with heavy workloads as they had to report to multiple leaders. In the first decade of its development, when there were no fulltime office staff members, the workload of the HK Council was extremely heavy and demanding. In a review on Asian Home Councils dated 9 August 1973, Hsueh wrote:

We now have two missionaries and the third will join in September, 1973 ... Because of the shortage of home staff (at present, no full time home staff, and most of the works are handled by the Chairman), the deputation and recruitment have not been taken up as much as it should ... And since time is limited, the Council is afraid to plan any specific project, because then only the Chairman again be the person handling all the details ... Full time staff is a number one item to be considered.

Almost eleven years passed before the HK Council had its first fulltime employee. In 1977, Miss Bibiana Yung (容聖莊) was employed in the capacity of office secretary. She was requested to prepare a handbook for office use and to assist with the recording of Council meeting minutes. Miss Grace Yu (余月妍) succeeded her in June 1978. A little more than a year later, she was succeeded by Mrs. Lisa Yu (余吳麗清), who stayed for over forty years. She is referred to as the “walking dictionary” of key milestones

and events of OMF Hong Kong.²⁵ In 1980, the HK Council was also able to recruit its first fulltime Promotion Secretary, Mr. Christopher Chung (鍾炳權), a graduate from the Prairie Bible Institute. Although manpower was now stronger, Rev. Lo (the third Council Chairman) also felt overwhelmed by the heavy workload.

Like his predecessors, Lo wore more than one hat when he was appointed HK Council Chairman in 1982. He had served as the fulltime Executive Director of the Far East Broadcasting Company since 1974, as well as a part-time voluntary Executive Director of the Hong Kong Association of Missions since 1978, with the approval of the Far East Broadcasting Company.²⁶

One can get a glimpse of the large volume of work facing Rev. Lo through his workshop, “Would it be possible to form a United Chinese Missions Association (「聯合華人差會可能嗎」)?” He reflected that since his time was so stretched, the office staff needed to underline the important points in all the correspondences, and to provide him a weekly summary for his follow-up actions.²⁷ The Field Office in Hong Kong also helped by taking up the preparation of the accounts of the HK Council. During the period that the Chairmanship was vacant from September 1979 to December 1981, the Council work was overseen by an Honorary Secretary.

The appointment of an OMF-HK Home Director

Though initially both Western missionaries and local Asian Christians were to serve together in the HK Council, the ultimate goal of OMF was to appoint a local Home Director under the direction of a wholly national Council.²⁸

From 1974, requests were constantly made that a full-time Home Director should be appointed to take responsibility for communicating with headquarters; taking charge of the office, financial matters, recruitment of missionaries, etc.; and, externally, to promote OMF and attending public and other meetings.



“Three-Family Village.” Front row (from left): Mrs. Hsueh, Mr. Hsueh Hung Ki, Rev. and Mrs. Chan Hay Him. Back row: Rev. and Mrs. Lo Ka Man.

In early 1975, the HK Council almost appointed its first Home Director—Rev. Chan Hay Him. Having served as the General Secretary of the Hong Kong Fellowship of Evangelical Students (HKFES) for more than fourteen years, Rev. Chan joined the HK Council in November 1974. He was well accepted by the churches and by young people in Hong Kong. Knowing that Rev. Chan was leaving HKFES soon and that his involvement in China Graduate School of Theology (as Dean of Studies) was not likely to be full time, the HK Council unanimously recommended Rev. Chan Hay Him to the General Director to serve as the Home Director (part-time). However, Rev. Chan was a “renaissance man” with a wide range of interests. He thus only served in the capacity as Chairman of the HK Council for three years before taking a position offered by Ambassadors of Christ in the United States.²⁹

As early as 1968, a recommendation was also made regarding the necessity of a full-time worker (preferably a national) to represent the HK Council and promote the work. The HK Council had ten cross-cultural workers in 1987, consisting of one couple, one man, and seven women. In those days, men were more likely than women to occupy the administrative positions,³⁰ thus, only two candidates could be further considered. Mr. Ernest Ng (伍國華) was busy building a home for his newly-wed wife (สายพิมพ์ ครัวเมือง 顧詩屏), a sister in Christ from Thailand. Daniel and Gretel Lau (劉樹森 佻儷) had just applied for temporary

absence from Japan to pursue a one-year course with the Columbia Graduate School of Missions and Bible in the United States. In 1987, with no available candidate in sight, Chairman Lo—who had already indicated his wish to step down—submitted a request to IHQ for help recruit an Executive Secretary. The post was filled for about two years by Rev. David and Mrs. Esther Chan (陳大衛 佻儷) from Canada.

After it was announced in 1990 that Dr. James Hudson Taylor III (戴紹曾), the General Director of OMF, was to move to Hong Kong in May 1991, a request was made for Dr. Taylor to serve as HK Council Home Director and to train a local person to take up the position in the future. Only willing to serve as Acting Home Director, Dr. Taylor took up the position in June 1991, taking care of administration and pastoral care for the missionaries. In September 1993, upon Dr. Taylor’s recommendation, the HK Council proceeded with the search process. Letters were sent from IHQ to HK Council cross-cultural workers and Council Members to invite nominations, and the appointment of Dr. and Mrs. Patrick Fung (馮浩鑒 佻儷) as OMF-HK Home Director was endorsed. They assumed duty on 1 January 1996.

The HK Council had started the registration process in the early 1990s to facilitate its transition to becoming a local organization. Mr. Timothy Symonds (施憫添), the Area Director of the Hong Kong Field, was invited to join the HK Council in 1992. Before joining OMF in

1982, he had already taken a two-and-a-half-year intensive language course in Cantonese at the Ministry of Defense Language School in Hong Kong, and was qualified as a Cantonese interpreter.³¹ In June 1993, he began to serve as a vital link between the HK Council and solicitors facilitating the approval and adoption of the proposed Memorandum and Articles of Association in September 1993 and registration of OMF Hong Kong as a charitable organization on 14 March 1995. During the registration process, he also assisted the CIM (UK) to transfer all assets and liabilities in Hong Kong to OMF Hong Kong.

Responsibilities of the Hong Kong Council members

As early as 1965, IHQ had given thought and specified the responsibilities of Council membership. First, members must accept the Principles and Practice of OMF that had been adopted from the CIM and considered to be basic and essential to the new OMF.³² Second, members were to give advice to the General Director or his representatives so their decisions would take into account the customs and culture of Hong Kong. Third, members should not be “yes” men, but rather be willing to share their ideas so as to “stimulate new thoughts and progressive outreach.”³³ All council members had to sign the agreement on the last page of the “Principles and Practice of the OMF”. The agreement submitted to the Home Council was then sent to Singapore for filing.

The road towards autonomy

In the following years, a number of issues or differences between IHQ and the HK Council were ironed out to reach a mutual consensus. A few of these are highlighted here. One was the co-ordination of fellowship finances worldwide. In the early days of the CIM, the policy was for home countries to deduct necessary expenses before sending funds to the field. Expenditure exceeding US \$300 required the approval of the General Director. In a memorandum dated 13 February 1970, the General Director asked Home Directors and Chairmen of Home Councils to begin discussing whether it was time for the expenditure (worldwide) to be cleared through one central body. Though the proposed idea would provide a clearer picture of worldwide income and expenditure, it did not receive support

from the HK Council, which considered it a healthy step for the younger Home Councils to be responsible for their own financial matters.³⁴ In view of the policy to work toward decentralization and to increasingly place the initiative and responsibility with the local administrative bodies, centralizing finances was considered a backward step.³⁵ Hong Kong thus retained the legitimate financial responsibility.

The second issue was that the requirements for admission to OMF’s membership had changed little over the years. In the process, a candidate was required to pass four clearances³⁶ and complete a multi-part questionnaire. One question in the personal section of the application form was “Do your parents have any objection to your serving in the fellowship in Asia in a country other than your own?” IHQ stated the preference for new workers to have their parents’ approval (whether or not they were Christians) as they came forward for missionary service. A case came up for discussion for a candidate in relation to her parents’ attitude. Mr. Hsueh reflected that when he himself returned from the United States to Hong Kong to serve God full-time before his graduation, he faced his parents’ disappointment. However, their attitudes changed over time and they were later proud that their younger son had become a full-time pastor.³⁷ Many Chinese parents might oppose their children becoming missionaries, but would passively accept it as they were already adults. After further communication, IHQ consented that parental opposition was not considered a major hindrance to someone being accepted into membership.

Another challenge was the invitation of female members to join the HK Council. While attending a meeting in Hong Kong, J. O. Sanders, the General Director of OMF, suggested that more young members should join the Council to gain experience. In response, five names (two males and three females) were put forward for prayerful consideration. IHQ was concerned that the introduction of female council members would be out of line with OMF policy, as it was the practice to confine membership to men. Further, the inclusion of more than one female member was considered unwise due to the small number of Council members. In response, the HK Council considered it an advantage to include a female member, for instance, to interview

and counsel women missionaries and potential women candidates from Hong Kong.³⁸ Two members, one male and one female, were shortlisted. After further exchanges, IHQ issued a memorandum stating there was no scriptural objection toward including women members, and also that such a precedence had already occurred in another Home Council. The HK Council was pleased with the official clearance, but they had one more hiccup to overcome regarding IHQ’s concern over the suitability of the proposed female candidate. The scrutiny and seemingly lack of trust from IHQ raised objections from some HK Council members. An official clearance was then given for HK Council to invite the female candidate to join the council. Between 1974 and 1995, the HK Council had five female members but with no more than one serving at a time.³⁹

Fourth, a sharp difference in opinion occurred between the IHQ and the HK Council over the medical clearance of an applicant seeking to join missionary service. Considered physically fit to work in the missionary field by two local physicians (though one also recommended avoiding vigorous physical work), and with preliminary clearance from the IHQ Medical Officer, the HK Council officially welcomed the applicant. A turn of events occurred when the IHQ Medical Officer changed the recommendation to say that the applicant should not serve as a missionary, not only in the proposed field, but also in other fields of work. The proposal from the local doctor and HK Council member, Dr. Ng Yik (吳猷),⁴⁰ for further medical investigation was considered expensive and unnecessary. The HK Council wondered at which stage a decision was considered final, and requested an explanation for the change of opinion. Mr. Hsueh also tendered his resignation from the post of Honorary Secretary and requested IHQ to seek a Chairman or Home Director to carry out the full leadership responsibility within four months. The issue was resolved at a meeting attended by a group of IHQ Directors and Medical Officer giving green light to the application, with the condition that the candidate would work in an urban area where medical attention was more easily available.

Resolving organizational difficulties

This paper provides a snapshot of some major issues encountered by the HK

Council. Many of the highlighted episodes and differences were operational rather than doctrinal in nature, reflecting the diversity of cultures and opinions among the participants from multi-national backgrounds. However, these differences provided opportunities for those involved to gain understanding of each other's deeply held but unspoken personal and cultural values. Though occasionally the stand on a specific issue was retained, consensus was often reached through distinguishing between principles and methods, and making necessary adjustments to the organization's structure without altering its foundation.⁴¹ The historical account also underlines the valuable lesson that the key to arriving at an acceptable solution requires active listening and mutual respect, and the determination to seek common ground while respecting and acknowledging differences. **MRT**

¹ List of councils in countries by year of formation: England (1872), Shanghai [the base for the headquarters of the mission] (1873), North America (1889), Australia (1890), New Zealand (1894), South Africa (1943), and Switzerland (1950).
² J. Oswald Sanders, "Facing the Clouds and the Winds," *East Asia's Millions*, North American edition (August-September 1963): 116.
³ Suzanne E. Green, "The New Instrument: What Tune Is It Playing?," *East Asia's Millions*, North American edition (January-February 1990): 295-96.
⁴ The Overseas Missionary Fellowship changed its name to OMF International in 1993.
⁵ "A New Instrument: Announcement of Decision Taken at the C.I.M. Overseas Missionary Fellowship Council Meetings Held in Singapore Headquarters, October 2-15, 1964," *The Millions*, British edition (December 1964): 115.
⁶ "1955-1965," *East Asia Millions*, North American edition (December 1965): 162.
⁷ Guy Longley, "Playing the New Instrument," *East Asia Millions*, British edition (April 1967): 25; Green, "The New Instrument," 296.
⁸ "I Never Thought... Yet God..." *East Asia Millions*, North American edition (November 1968): 167-68; "Pangs Welcomed," *East Asia Millions*, North American edition (July 1965): 108.
⁹ "Men of God," *East Asia Millions*, North American edition (March 1965): 35.
¹⁰ Ambassadors For Christ, Inc, *AFC History*, n.d., <https://www.afcinc.org/en-us/about/afchistory.aspx> (accessed 16 March 2023).
¹¹ Ted Choy, "New Council Members Comment on the New OMF," *East Asia Millions*, North American edition (March 1965): 36; "A New Instrument," *The Millions*, 115.
¹² Moses Chow, "New Council Members Comment on the New OMF," *East Asia Millions*, North American edition (March 1965): 37.
¹³ Choy, "New Council Members Comment on the New OMF," 36.
¹⁴ "Significant events in the mission's history," Records of the United States Home Council of Overseas Missionary Fellowship (China Inland Mission) - Collection 215, Billy Graham Center Archives, Wheaton College, <https://www2.wheaton.edu/bgc/archives/GUIDES/215.htm#507> (accessed 16 March 2023); "A New Instrument," *The Millions*, 115; "Internationalizing an Inland Mission,"

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East Asia Millions, North American edition (October-November 1982): 262-63, 271.

¹⁵ Max Hui-Bon-Hoa, "The Christian Association of the University of Hong Kong and Its Response to the Outside World (1953-1993)," in *Christian Mind in the Emerging World: Faith Integration in Asian Contexts and Global Perspectives*, ed. Peter Tze Ming Ng, Wing Tai Leung, and Vaughan King Tong Mak (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2018), 501.

¹⁶ Gary Ka-wai Cheung, *Hong Kong's Watershed: The 1967 Riots* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2009); 蘇穎容, "一個港人自講的故事," 蘇Sir 天地, n.d., <https://www.sosir.org/一個港人自講的故事> (accessed March 16, 2023).

¹⁷ Arnold J. Lea, "Speaking Frankly," *East Asia Millions*, North American edition (February 1965): 19-22.

¹⁸ 鄭以心, "初探胡恩德先生的屬靈取向對喜樂福音堂的影響," 教牧期刊 11 (2007): 83-124.

¹⁹ Kate Tracy, "Died: Philip Teng, Unanimous Choice to Help Billy Graham Evangelize China," Christianity Today, 4 February 2014, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2014/february/died-philip-teng-billy-graham-evangelize-china-alliance.html> (accessed 16 March 2023); 梁家麟, "滕近輝牧師生平簡述," *Chinese Coordination Centre of World Evangelism* (April 2014), <https://www.cccowe.org/pdf/cct/201404/p04.pdf> (accessed 19 April 2023).
²⁰ "鮑會園牧師安息主懷," *Christian Weekly* 2557, 25 August 2013, <http://www.christianweekly.net/2013/ta2020445.htm> (accessed 16 March 2023).

²¹ Green, "The New Instrument," 296.

²² "News and Views: Hong Kong C.W.R. and C.S.S.A. Merge," *East Asia's Millions*, North American edition (June 1971): 109.

²³ 征途 n.d.; 薛孔奇, 同顯主榮, 薛孔奇・觀——從主日學到教會教育並向華人基督教文化邁進3 (Hong Kong: Everyone Press, 2020); 吳思源, "薛先生的笑容," *Christian Weekly* 3050, 5 February 2023, <http://www.christianweekly.net/2023/ta2042353.htm> (accessed 22 May 2023).
²⁴ 薛孔奇, "以生命寫下歷史的巨人," in 同顯主榮, 76.

²⁵ 余吳麗清, "迎向150週年紀念使團香港區歷史點滴(一)" 使團快訊49, no. 3 (2014): 1, <https://issuu.com/omfhongkong/docs/omf-issue49-0508> (accessed 16 March 2023).

²⁶ Kenneth Lo, "Friends Speak Up," *East Asia Millions*, North American edition (August-October 1988): 91; 盧家駁, "一個不自量力的傢伙," 宣教分享 12 (1982): 10-11.

²⁷ 盧家駁, "聯合華人差會可能嗎?" 華人教會網絡 (n.d.), <http://www.church.com.hk/acms/content.asp?site=cde&op=show&type=product&code=000175&layout=sermon> (accessed 16 March 2023).

²⁸ Guy M. Longley, "Playing the 'New Instrument,'" *East Asia Millions*, British edition (April 1967): 25 and North American edition (May 1967): 75-76.

²⁹ Rev. Wilson Chan rejoined the HK Council in 1988.

³⁰ Ford L. Canfield, "The Lord Giveth the Word," *The Millions*, British edition (September 1955): 74.

³¹ Tim Symonds, "Chinese and Vietnamese Church Planting," *Diocese of Truro International Links Stories*, January 2022, <https://trurodiocese.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Tim-symonds-article.pdf> (accessed 15 June 2023).

³² Arnold J. Lea, "Speaking Frankly," *East Asia Millions*, North American edition (March 1965): 22.

³³ Lea, "Speaking Frankly," 22.

³⁴ The Council Members of the Hong Kong Home Council. "A.178 Coordination of Fellowship Finances Worldwide" Meeting Minutes, 19 May 1970, OMF Hong Kong.

³⁵ "A.178 Coordination of Fellowship Finances Worldwide" Meeting Minutes.

³⁶ "Joining, Serving & Partnering with OMF International," 1 October 2021, <https://omf.org/resource/joining-serving-partnering-with-omf-international/> (accessed 15 June 2023).

³⁷ 福音證主協會-迴響, 征途, n.d.

³⁸ As a side note to this information, both Dr. Jennie Fung (wife of Dr. Patrick Fung, General Director of OMF International) and Dr. Leung So Ka Yee (wife of Dr. Leung Chung Ying (梁松英), Executive Director of OMF Hong Kong), joined the organization a few years earlier than their husbands.

³⁹ Ms. Praise Yung (容瑞華) (1974-1981 [left for Canada in July 1975, but was requested to retain Council membership until mid-1981]; Dr. Helena Wong (王勵嫻) (1978-1979), Ms. Susie Cheung (張旋穗) (1979-1983), Dr. Jennie Cheng (鄭珍妮) (1985-1989), and Dr. So Ka Yee (蘇嘉儀) (1990-2017).

⁴⁰ Dr. Ng Yik joined the HK Council in 1969 and served faithfully until 2018 when he passed away due to a sudden illness. His tenure lasted 50 years, making him the longest-serving member of the HK Council.

⁴¹ Choy, "New Council Members Comment the New OMF," 36.

The Rest of Your Lives¹

Rose Scott

Rose Scott and her husband joined OMF in 2006. They worked initially as pioneer church planters, before moving with their two daughters to Hong Kong to take up a leadership role. In Hong Kong, Rose fell in love with efficient public transport, dramatic scenery, and egg tarts. After Home Assignment, Rose and her family will continue to serve as leaders with OMF, based in their sending country.

I am in a privileged position. I realise that, since I was born at the early end of the millennial generation, some people would say that my whole life has been privilege.² But laying aside my fondness for strong coffee and finely crafted chocolates, these early days of 2023 really are special days for me. After sixteen years serving with OMF in East Asia, ten house moves, and three different leadership roles, my husband and I have found space in our Home Assignment schedule for three months of sabbatical. At last, a time to rest!

Those of you who are part of OMF (in whatever capacity) will know already that life in this organisation is always a life of surprises. Whether it's cross-cultural communication gaffes, political uprisings, or an unexpected request to take on an organisational role that I would rather not, service in this Fellowship means "expect the unexpected." But still, I didn't anticipate this surprise:

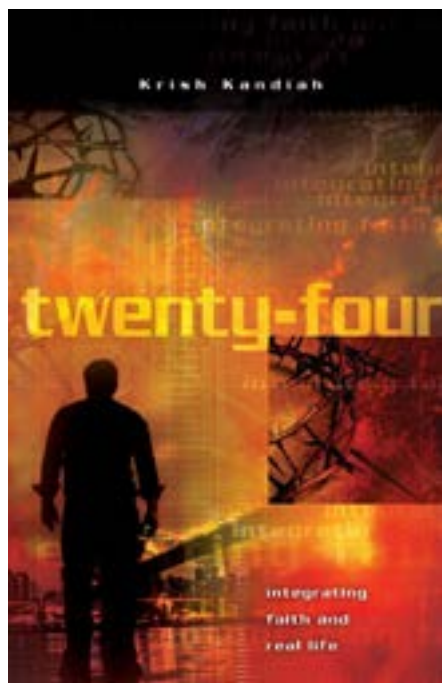
Rest is hard.

I'm not talking about sleep problems or noisy neighbours, or even about lacking funds for good coffee and *pain au chocolate* (or dim sum and artisan sushi, if that's more your thing). I'm talking about deep soul refreshment that drips hope on a heart that has become too accustomed to dryness and pain. King David said it well, "He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he refreshes my soul" (Ps 23:2–3a, NIV). God brings us to a place of outer tranquillity and inner wholeness. That's the kind of rest I need. And yet, I am really finding it hard to enter into rest.

This article tracks my experience as I have tried to rest and recuperate after several strenuous years in ministry.

God has had surprises for me as he has shown me that true rest does not consist only in cessation of activity, but it finds animation only through intimate connection with our Shepherd, expressed in worship and measured by joy. Will you come with me on this journey to explore "the rest of our lives"?

Since my sabbatical started, I've tried sleeping a lot. I've tried long walks in the hills. I've tried slow meals in nice restaurants. All these things are pleasant and bring a lot of comfort. But they don't get close to the dryness and hunger in my soul. I joined OMF in my mid-twenties. I have been part of this organisation for almost all of my adult life. I have been shaped, trained, invested in, and equipped for faithful service to Jesus in different linguistic and cultural contexts of East Asia. I have learned really well how to work. But when it comes to rest, I am a beginner.



Dr. Krish Kandiah, when reflecting on sabbath in modern life, says this: "God set a 'six plus one' rhythm for our life and yet the beat of our culture is so strong that it often captures us and breaks us away from our most precious relationships."³ His point is that our surrounding culture impacts the rhythms of our lives, and the rhythms of our lives dictate the quantity and the quality of our rest. As much as we are shaped by our beliefs, we are also, sometimes more strongly, shaped by our community. To understand my own difficulties with rest, I need to understand the rhythm of OMF's organisational culture. How has my connection with this organisation shaped my attitudes and my practices in relation to work and rest?

OMF's mission statement until around ten years ago was, "To glorify God by the urgent evangelization of East Asia's millions." We are "Passionate to reach the unreached," as our third organisational value states. Bible verses come to mind that can confirm this focus on hard work and even speed:

He [Jesus] is the one we proclaim, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ. To this end I strenuously contend with all the energy Christ so powerfully works in me (Colossians 1:28–29, NIV).

With these words bouncing around our minds, it becomes easy to throw ourselves into intense work in our ministries. It is rather harder to prioritise rest. Except, perhaps, as a responsibility: we know that rest is necessary in order to continue with even more work.

Our world is speeding up, and seems ever more focussed on efficiency. A 2021 study showed that overwork kills more people

each year than malaria.⁴ Having our International Center based in a fast-paced city like Singapore is sure to have an influence on our pace and orientation towards work.⁵ But is it possible that intensity and diligence are purely modern characteristics of OMF? Was the pace of ministry in our organisation more balanced before the era of smart phones and Zoom calls?

A quick search through older literature disproves that kind of simple conclusion. Hudson Taylor's *China's Spiritual Need and Claims*, a book he wrote in 1865, acted as a founding document for the China Inland Mission.⁶ It set the tone for CIM ministry with its opening quotation from Proverbs 24:11–12 (KJV):

If thou forbear to deliver them that are drawn unto death, and those that are ready to be slain; If thou sayest, Behold, we knew it not; doth not he that pondereth the heart consider it? and he that keepeth thy soul, doth not he know it?

Taylor follows this quotation with intense exhortations towards action; “The legitimate fruit will undoubtedly be – not vain words of empty sympathy, but – effectual fervent prayer, and strenuous self-denying effort for the salvation of the benighted Chinese.”⁷

I am humbled by Taylor's passionate obedience to Christ, and by his selfless love for China's peoples. I am grateful that he founded the CIM, which later became OMF, and I'm grateful for his commitment to preach the gospel, no matter the cost. As Taylor says at the end of *China's Spiritual Need and Claims*, “Our work is evangelistic and unsectarian: we desire to win souls for Christ.”⁸ I thank God that this is still the case in our organisation.

Is it possible, though, that the imperative zeal that we have inherited from our founder has become at times too heavy a focus on the work God has set before us to do? Do we sometimes hang our joy and satisfaction too heavily on our work, so that we become unwilling to “lie down in green pastures” under the care of our Shepherd? Am I the only one worn out by years of service, but finding myself ill-equipped to experience the “rest for your souls” (Matt 1:29) promised by Jesus?

Hudson Taylor does not give us much of an example in rhythms or skills for rest.

The biographer Roger Steer describes Taylor's response to low CIM funds in 1897:

Taylor prayed and worked, taking on a heavy load of meetings which eventually damaged his health. A severe bout of neuralgia and headaches forced him to accept his doctor's advice. “Take a complete rest. Leave the running of the mission to others for several months.”⁹

This news, although it dates from 125 years ago, seems strangely familiar. Over the past few years, as I have got to know a wider range of people within OMF, it has become quite normal to me to hear every few months of a colleague, often a leader, having to take a break from work because of burnout or stress.

Another familiar note is struck when I read about Hudson Taylor's participation in meetings: “Despite his illnesses, Taylor attended all but one of the eight meetings of the China Council held between January 1898 and September 1899.”¹⁰ This was the period during which Taylor almost died from bronchitis. Over just the past few years, I have received emails from leaders during hospital treatment and prayed for meetings held at a bedside because a key leader was suffering badly from muscle strain.

The OMF logic tends to run: if I can do the work, then I should do the work. Or, stated another way, “To work for the Lord is good. Therefore, to work *more* for the Lord is even better.” At times, I feel guilty for taking time away from ministry, as though time not spent working is time that I have somehow stolen from what is due to God. As I compare the early and current culture of OMF, it seems that “burning out for Jesus”¹¹ is a part of our organisational DNA. It is a characteristic that has been a part of us since our founding in 1865, and it still typifies us.

In OMF, we know how to work. We aren't nearly so talented at rest.¹²

Some big-hearted colleagues may want to challenge me: isn't the gospel worth sacrificing for? What about the people who still haven't heard about Jesus? How can we give anything less than 100% to serve the God who gave his only Son for us? The Bible even seems to be on the side of self-sacrificial service, “Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart” (Hebrews 12:3, NIV). Our history tells of blessings for local Christians brought by self-sacrificial service. For example, Pastor Hsi, a respected Christian leader in Shanxi, insisted on serving Hudson Taylor personally during a visit: “What, sir, have you suffered and endured that we might have the gospel! This is my joy and privilege. How could I do less?”¹³

Other colleagues will have a different type of objection to any call to rest more. Never-ending numbers of emails. Political troubles. Technological issues (am I the only one who finds our personnel systems challenging to navigate?). Emergencies that require immediate action. Or the most draining of all, interpersonal conflict. How can it be practical or realistic to have rest as the answer for the real-life problems of cross-cultural ministry and, in particular, ministry leadership?

In 1891, conflict with the London Council of the CIM caused Hudson Taylor such intense distress that “Jennie felt the strain was too much and that it might kill him.”¹⁴ The strains of ministry that we experience are not new, and they are unlikely to ever get easier. These strains cause intense pain for the sufferer and distress for everyone around them. And if the stress does not manifest in illness, it is very likely to pull any one of us towards moral failure. Christian leaders' failures



appear in the news with such depressing regularity that none of us should imagine ourselves immune to temptation.

It may seem impossible to find a different way forward. In this fast-paced and complex world, how can we do anything different than to work as hard as possible? But the stakes are far too high for us to continue with this same pattern. I don't say this to add pressure to those of us who are experiencing burnout or stress-related illness. I say these things as a fellow-sufferer, and as someone who dreams of a better way.

For me, it is straightforward to measure my progress and success by emails written, projects completed, meetings attended, and new workers welcomed into the ministry. They give me a personal sense of progress, and tangible answers to put on review forms and ministry reports. It is easy to have "SMART"¹⁵ goals for these things, so I can count up what has gone well. As an organisation, we have a tendency to invest in these measurable things in order to become "fit for purpose", that is, to be effective. On my dark days when I question the worth of my ministry, or my aptitude for it, I soothe myself with these things that I can count. My work can be measured, and I am doing a lot of it. Our sending churches' investment in our family has not been in vain. On the confusing days—when yet another house move or change of ministry focus and yet another farewell to a close friend threaten my sense of who I am—I can look at the appointments in my diary and the crossed-off items on my to-do list and find my confidence again.

The roots of my exhaustion and work addiction are finally coming into focus. My work "for the Lord" has become an idol that deadens my desire for my Lord. My attention is centred on the work I am doing. I am losing sight of my Lord whom I claim to be serving.

This is not an OMF-, or even a missions-specific problem. As Pete Scazzero writes of pastoral ministry in *The Emotionally Healthy Leader*, "I know the experience of doing good things that helped a lot of people while being too busy or caught up in my own whirlwind of leadership worries to be intimately connected to Jesus."¹⁶

I set out to spend my sabbatical time focusing on rest. God has been opening

up this topic into something even more beautiful: spiritual intimacy. I suppose I should not be surprised by that. One of Pete Scazzero's favourite refrains is, "Slow down for loving union."¹⁷ What my thirsty soul needs is not just a slower pace, but also, and ultimately, intimacy with Jesus. In Psalm 23, it is the Lord who is our Shepherd who guides us to the place of rest and refreshes our souls. Simply ceasing activity for a time will rejuvenate tired muscles, but it will not spring hope in a heart that has been overwhelmed by life in a complex world and the pressures of missions leadership. For deep refreshment of our souls, we need closeness to Jesus.

But is this just the spirit of my generation at work, influencing me towards an easier life with less strain, like all my other pleasure-seeking Millennial friends? A little research shows me that prioritising restful connection with our Lord over work for our Lord is not a recent idea at all.

Watchman Nee teaches us that

Most Christians make the mistake of trying to walk in order to be able to sit. But that is a reversal of the true order... we are invited at the very outset to sit down and enjoy what God has done for us.¹⁸

Japanese theologian, Kosuke Koyama, explains it this way:

God walks "slowly" because he is love. If he is not love he would have gone much faster. Love has its speed. It is an inner speed. It is a spiritual speed.¹⁹

Nee and Koyama teach us what is evident in the teachings of Jesus: the remedy for our work-centrism and associated sicknesses is to reorientate our work and our goals towards our King. As Jesus says,

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me...and you will find rest for your souls (Matt 1:28–29, NIV).

If I'm honest, I tend to judge myself against an internal idea I have of "a good OMF worker." I use my imaginary standard to assess my worth and justify myself against the criticism I fear from colleagues, leaders, or supporters. But as Jesus teaches us, "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matt 6:21, NIV). Our treasure must be always and

only Jesus, not ministry success or team members' approval. Watchman Nee explains:

We only advance in the Christian life as we learn first of all to sit down... to rest our whole weight – our load, ourselves, our future, everything – upon the Lord. We let him bear the responsibility and cease to carry it ourselves.²⁰

This is the antidote to ministry exhaustion and burnout—to intentionally lay all of our pressures on our Lord, even the unsolvable ones, and allow him to refresh us. Our work will never fully be sorted or even in a good place for us to leave it, even for a short while. We have to die to our dreams of ministry achievement and competence in order to allow Christ to make us alive.

Anyone in missions leadership is likely to read this "antidote" with less than full enthusiasm. I know I would have, just a few months ago. We all know the theory is to lay our burdens at the feet of Christ. The difficulty comes in actually doing it, and in experiencing any kind of relief in the process. Thankfully, Psalm 23 has more help to offer us. "Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me" (v4). In the earlier verses of this psalm, David talked about God, his Shepherd who draws close and gives him rest. Here, David talks to God. In bold and beautiful poetry, he declares his trust and assurance in God's care. He worships.

Rest is a gift of God imparted in a context of intimacy with God. Restoration and intimacy blossom as we make God our treasure, responding to his power and love in worship. Worship is the way that we submit our time and our minds to God's will. As we declare his glory and goodness, our worries and burdens take on their proper proportion in relation to God's power. Our fear of failure falls away in the light of God's never-ending love.

A few years ago, I attended a morning devotional meeting at an OMF office. A well-respected OMF leader was talking about Christian maturity. He posed a simple question: "What is the mark of a mature Christian?" Those of us in the room tried to give worthy answers. We talked about Christlike character. We talked about biblical teaching, biblical values, a life of sacrifice. In essence, we

were talking about the ideal of “a good OMF worker.” The leader smiled sagely and said nothing. None of us had found the true answer. Finally, the leader put us out of our misery. The answer was, “Joy”. He went on to show from the Scriptures and his lived experience that only the joy found by resting in God’s presence and goodness will sustain us through the pains of life and the strains of ministry.

I hear that same joy in David’s defiant song of praise in Psalm 23:4: “I will fear no evil, for you are with me.” God’s presence, care, and strength are greater than any difficulty or “dark valley” that we can experience. My Shepherd cares for me. He knows my weaknesses and failures. He knows the concerns I carry for my ministry team and for the people groups we serve. He draws close to me in love, not because of anything I have, or will, achieve. Hallelujah, Jesus, you have found me and you have saved me. Praise Jesus with me, because he gives hope even for missions leadership. There is a light yoke and rest for our souls available, even for us, and even in the midst of heavy responsibilities.

So, how can we serve in ministry with this kind of ongoing attitude of joyful rest, rather than trying to justify ourselves through our effort and responsibility? Here are some practical thoughts that I’m planning to implement for myself. None of these are new or even particularly intelligent ideas. They are just simple ways to resist the seduction of work, especially as a leader.²¹ Probably you can think of other ideas, or better ideas. I praise God for you!

1. Give myself an annual (or bi-annual) rhythm audit.

For one week, note down how much time I spend on different types of activity: spiritual growth, worship, rest and recreation, family time, administration, meetings, study/research, etc. Make an appointment to talk through my audit results with a friend I trust. Is the rhythm of my life conducive to resting in Jesus?

Pete Scazzero phrases this question this way: “In what ways does my current pace of life and leadership enhance or diminish my ability to allow God’s will and presence full scope in my life?”²² If we do not intentionally slow ourselves down, we will inexorably keep pace with our context, whether that is OMF diligence or secular efficiency.²³

I have heard it argued several times that some colleagues happen to have a particularly high capacity for work, so we should not ask them to work less than they can. And yet, I think that is exactly what we need to do. A particular colleague or leader may be able to work for ten or more hours every day without feeling strained, but their actions set a rhythm for the colleagues around them. Long work hours give birth to more long work hours and create a centre of gravity—work becomes the focus of our service. We all want to centre our service on Jesus. That will require intentionality and sacrifice in the balance of how all of us use our time. For some of us, that will include choosing to spend less time on work.

2. Keep Sabbath.²⁴

As Krish Kandiah notes, God’s rhythm is “six plus one.” In ministry, we rarely keep to this rule. But our minds, souls, and ministry teams suffer when we fail to take one day in seven for rest.

I will resist the temptation to schedule Sunday as a travel day. If speaking at a church on a Sunday, I will schedule a different day during the week to rest and enjoy God’s presence. If a crisis arises and lasts for more than six days, I will ask someone else to carry my responsibility for a day so that I can rest and reorientate my personal life and our shared ministry around rest, trust, and worship, not work.²⁵

I said earlier that time spent not working sometimes feels like time I have stolen from God. Sabbath teaches me that time spent not drawing close to God in rest and worship is in fact time that I have stolen from God. This is not to say that I should lay down my leadership and parenting responsibilities and give my whole life to worship and contemplation. It is to say that the power of my ministry is more accurately measured by the intimacy of

my walk with Jesus and my worship of him than by the clarity or quantity of my emails.

3. In times of crisis, I will intentionally make myself dispensable, both practically and mentally. I will encourage my colleagues to do the same.

Missions leaders tend to be extremely responsible people. But when the outcome of our work depends on our personal strength and success, it is not dependent on Jesus. Making ourselves dispensable is a reorientation towards giving over responsibility for the outcome to Jesus, rather than trying to carry it ourselves.

As an example, last spring I was unwell at the time of a member care team meeting. I could have led the meeting as usual, since it was on Zoom, but I asked another team member to lead it so I could recuperate. I was humbled to discover that they had more insights and fresh ideas for member care in my absence than they ever seemed to have when I was in the meetings. Am I willing to praise God for the ways he chooses to work through my weakness, or even my absence? I am learning how to.

4. I will assess the success of my work and ministry using a metric of joy, not a metric of efficiency or even effectiveness.

Nehemiah famously proclaims, “the joy of the Lord is your strength” (Nehemiah 8:10, NIV). As the leader in Hong Kong taught me, mature Christianity is joyful. That said, in my experience, our OMF culture tends to be serious and introspective more often than it is joyful. When I was at Orientation Course in Singapore, a leader asked people to volunteer for different roles. “Library





assistant” was the most hotly contested (in a gracious, self-sacrificial manner, of course). No one volunteered to lead the fun night.²⁶

Hudson Taylor may not have been a talented comedian or leader of ice breaker games, but he knew about joyful worship. *China’s Spiritual Need and Claims* includes several stories of ministry in China that showcase God’s provision in challenging circumstances.²⁷ Taylor concludes the pamphlet,

Upon past EBENEZERS we built our JEHOVAH-JIREH. “They that know thy name will put their trust in Thee.” The experience of these nineteen years abundantly shews how safe it has been to base our expectations on the promises of the living GOD.²⁸

Throughout *China’s Spiritual Need and Claims* and early editions of *China’s Millions* magazines, Taylor repeatedly attributes ministry success to God’s intervention. He continually proclaims God’s character in these same confident tones of joyful worship.

When I look at OMF documents produced recently, such as *Fellowship News* or even the OMF website, I see God-honouring documents, carefully written. *Fellowship News* from January 2023 included biblical exegesis, introduction of a new leader, and a cartoon to encourage us in good work habits. It is calm, measured, and responsible. But Taylor’s confident tones of joyful praise and worship are missing. I’m sure we enjoy personal worship times with our Lord, and gathered worship at church. But perhaps we would do well to return to our

roots as an organisation when it comes to communal worship. Can we create more space in our meetings, our documents, and our lives together to declare publicly our Ebenezers of God’s help and our worship of our Living God? I have heard stories of spontaneous worship in OMF gatherings, mostly including the hymn, “How Good is the God We Adore.” But I have never experienced it. Could now be the time to resurrect some intentional and some spontaneous worship habits in our organisational culture?

Lord God, you are the one who loves each of us. You have loved today’s peoples of East Asia since before time began. You are worthy of our praise. You are worthy of our worship. You have promised to be with us. I ask you to guide us into the rhythms of service and rest that will honour you and your ability, not ours. Whether we are Boomers, Millennials, or from any other generation, may we lay aside our desire for success and learn to serve you, our God, through resting, intimate, joyful faith. We want to glorify Jesus rather than our work. **MRT**

¹ I am indebted to Krish Kandiah for this title, which I borrowed from his book, *Twenty-Four: Integrating Faith and Real Life* (Milton Keynes: Authentic Media, 2007).

² See, for example, Joel Stein, “Millennials, The Me Me Me Generation,” *Time*, 20 May 2013, <https://time.com/247/millennials-the-me-me-me-generation/> (accessed 16 February 2023). Note: this article is rather scathing (probably unfairly so) about Millennials in the early paragraphs.

³ Kandiah, *Twenty-Four*, 148.

⁴ Christine Ro, “How Overwork Is Literally Killing Us,” *BBC*, 19 May 2023, <https://www.bbc.com/worklife/article/20210518-how-overwork-is-literally-killing-us> (accessed 13 February 2023).

⁵ A 2019 study rated Singapore as the second most overworked city in the world. Tokyo was the only city in the study where employees work harder. Danielle Isaac, “Here’s Why Singapore Is the World’s Second Most Overworked City,” *Singapore Business Review*, 2020, <https://sbr.com.sg/hr-education/news/heres-why-singapore-worlds-second-most-overworked-city> (accessed 13 February 2023).

⁶ The publisher’s synopsis for *China’s Spiritual Need and Claims* states that the book was “instrumental in generating sympathy for China and volunteers for the mission field,” <https://blackwells.co.uk/bookshop/product/J-Hudson-Taylor-by-J-Hudson-Taylor/9781611043303> (accessed 14 June 2023).

⁷ Hudson Taylor, *China’s Spiritual Need and Claims*, 7th ed. (London: Morgan & Scott, 1887), 1.

⁸ Taylor, *China’s Spiritual Need*, 87.

⁹ Roger Steer, *J. Hudson Taylor: A Man in Christ* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1990, 2001), 345–46.

¹⁰ Steer, *J. Hudson Taylor*, 350–51.

¹¹ See, for example, David Murray, “Should We Seek to Burn Out for Jesus?,” 12 February 2019, <https://corechristianity.com/resource-library/articles/should-we-seek-to-burn-out-for-jesus/> (accessed 9 February 2023).

¹² Take the bi-annual Day of Prayer material as a case in point. The 2022 year-end prayer materials

included 32 pages of prayer points. These are excellent materials and are very helpful in equipping us to do the work of praying for OMF. But OMF does not publish any corresponding materials to equip us to rest.

¹³ Steer, *J. Hudson Taylor*, 338. In context, Hudson and Jennie Taylor visited Pastor Hsi and his wife at their home in Shanxi in 1894. Pastor Hsi waited on them personally while they ate, and his response to the Taylors’ thanks was to refer to Taylor’s sacrifices to bring the gospel to Shanxi, as quoted.

¹⁴ Steer, *J. Hudson Taylor*, 327. Jennie was his wife. I can only hope that the wife of our current General Director, while sharing this lady’s name has never yet shared this experience.

¹⁵ See, for example, “Smart Goals: How to Make Your Goals Achievable,” *Mind Tools*, <https://www.mindtools.com/a4wo118/smart-goals> (accessed 24 February 2023).

¹⁶ Peter Scazzero, *The Emotionally Healthy Leader* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 119.

¹⁷ This is the title of the fourth chapter of *The Emotionally Healthy Leader*.

¹⁸ Watchman Nee (倪柝聲), *Sit, Walk, Stand*, trans. Angus I. Kinnear (Alresford: CLC, 1957, 2009), 7.

¹⁹ Kosuke Koyama, *Three Mile an Hour God* (London: SCM, 1979, 2021), chapter 1, section 1.

²⁰ Nee, *Sit, Walk, Stand*, 8.

²¹ These comments are hopefully also useful for colleagues who are not currently carrying formal leadership roles. After all, we all have a responsibility to influence people towards Christ, whatever our job may be. But organisational leaders carry an extra level of responsibility that can add particular strain.

²² Scazzero, *The Emotionally Healthy Leader*, 120.

²³ As Comer explains, “When we get overbusy, we get overtired, and when we get overtired, we don’t have the energy or discipline to do what we need most for our souls. Repeat. The cycle begins to feed off its own energy. So instead of life with God, we settle for life with a Netflix subscription.” John Mark Comer, *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2019), 50.

²⁴ I won’t attempt to explore the meaning of Sabbath in the Old and New Testaments in this article. Other people are far more equipped than me to do that. See, for example, Walter McConnell, *How Majestic is Your Name: An Introduction to Biblical Worship* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2021), 107–114.

²⁵ The concept of a “Rule of Life” is gaining popularity in some evangelical circles, especially in the United States. This is an ancient Christian practice that comprises a set of habits and priorities that are conducive to a worshipful life. People who are better able to live with structure and discipline than I am can read more in Scazzero, *The Emotionally Healthy Leader*, 135–141 or John Mark Comer’s “Practicing the Way,” <https://www.practicingtheway.org>.

²⁶ This pattern has been repeated at many OMF meetings and conferences I have attended.

²⁷ See, for example, Taylor, *China’s Spiritual Need and Claims*, 7th ed., 90–99, a description of a journey Hudson Taylor took from Shanghai to Ningpo in 1856.

²⁸ Taylor, *China’s Spiritual Need*, 100. Note, the phrase “Jehovah-Jireh” has been shown to be semantically problematic, both because of the word “Jehovah,” and doubt that “Jireh” refers to God’s provision. One article from MRT in 2018 examines the term in depth: Michael Malessa, “Reflections on the Use of ‘Jehovah jireh’ or Why This Expression should be Removed from Our Vocabulary,” *Mission Round Table* 13, no. 2 (May–August 2018): 22–26, <https://omf.org/resource/mrt-may-2018-to-make-the-word-of-god-fully-known/>. My point here is not about the correct interpretation of Genesis 22:14, but about habits of rest, dependence, and worship.

Beyond Racial Division: A Unifying Alternative to Colorblindness and Antiracism

By George Yancey. Downers Grove: IVP, 2022.
ISBN 978-1514001844. 224 pp.

Reviewed by Walter McConnell



The nineteenth century politician Otto von Bismarck has been quoted as saying that “politics is the art of the possible, the attainable — the art of the next best.” His idea has sometimes been restated as “politics is the art of compromise.” Whatever acceptance this principle may have historically, in many countries today it is vigorously rejected by opposing political factions that insist that compromise is failure. Their way, and only their way, must be wholly accepted and serve as the basis for law. To give in to the demands of others is unthinkable, despite the inevitable stalemate.

George Yancey, writing from his context of being a black man in America, has perceived a similar reality when it comes to seeking solutions for racial relations. He begins *Beyond Racial Division* by describing the racial alienation that exists in the United States between the majority white population and blacks and other people of color. He then critiques the two most popular solutions given for the problem—colorblindness and antiracism—and contrasts them with his preferred approach, which he calls “mutual accountability,” a model that “stipulates that we work to have healthy interracial communications so that we can solve racial

problems” (35). But before we consider his solution, we need to review the others.

Colorblindness is an attempt to treat all people on the same level regardless of their race—thus, no affirmative action. While the concept was present in Martin Luther King’s “I have a dream” speech, and is often promoted as a logical way to treat people fairly, Yancey argues that it falls flat.

The key sticking point with those advocating a colorblind perspective is the question of the degree to which we have overcome the effects of racism. If the effects of racism are relegated to a few racist individuals, then perhaps efforts to be colorblind can reflect our basically fair society. However, if there are still powerful effects from historical and contemporary racism that affect people of color beyond the hatred of a few racists, then colorblindness is not viable (66).

And the fact is, as multiple studies show, American life is systemically unfair against minority groups, particularly blacks, and colorblindness does little to correct the wrongs of the past and bring more balance to society.

The counter solution to this approach is antiracism. According to Yancey, antiracism can be defined by three operating themes: (1) “a belief in the pervasiveness of racism in our society,” (2) “the necessity of an intense commitment to defeat racism,” and (3) in antiracism, “the role of whites is to support the activism of people of color” (86–87). And while Yancey, as a black man, understands why people are attracted to this approach, he feels that it is, at best, a limited solution. In part, this is because he does not believe that whites will always do what is needed to reverse historical racism. It is also because the requirement that whites actively promote the welfare of people of color only reverses the power structure and creates its own kind of unfairness (98) and further lacks safeguards to prevent overcorrection.

Better than clinging to one of these polar positions, he argues, is setting a course that treats each other as equals—no inferiors and no superiors. Here is where our response to racial inequality becomes an “act of the possible.” Rather than demanding our own way, Yancey promotes entering “collaborative conversations” so that we truly understand each other’s positions and reasons for them. During

such conversations, we should engage in “active listening”—not merely listening to someone while waiting for space to present your own views—but ensuring that you truly understand theirs. We will know that we have reached this place when we say to the person, “Now, let me repeat what I think I heard you say,” and, when you are through, they say, “Yes. That’s exactly right.”

Once we understand each other, we can discuss issues that are of primary and secondary importance and, in collaboration with the others, decide which of our preferences we can live without for the benefit of all. As Yancey says, “it becomes a matter of trading off the nonessentials so both groups gain their essentials” (165). And even though it will not always work out perfectly and can prove scary (for both sides), it is a positive step forward that focuses on the common good through mutual accountability.

I highly recommend that anyone who relates to people from different racial or ethnic groups read this book as it is an extremely helpful guide for thinking through issues of racial disharmony and acting upon them. This is true even for those who are neither black nor white or living in America, as racial disharmony is not limited to that context. Anywhere there are majority and minority populations, particularly in settings where historical or cultural dichotomies exist, similar relational problems can be found between races. By showing us why we need to engage in active listening and how to do it, Yancey prepares us to relate to those who are “other” racially.

There is more of value here that the author may not have considered that is a considerable bonus for people engaged in mission. Yancey’s approach to racial division can be further applied to our relationships with those who are “other” religiously or (within the context of Christianity) theologically. By actively listening to those who differ from us on any number of issues, we will better understand their positions rather than perpetuating a caricature of their beliefs and continuing to be in a polarized relationship. Consequently, doors will open for communication and collaboration that we may never have thought possible.

Is it scary to interact with people in this way? Yes, no matter if we are separated by racial or other divides. Will it take work? Yes, but even though we may not get everything we might like out of the interaction, we can grasp the power of the possible for the well-being of all.