

**LISTENING TO THE MARGINALISED VOICES:
A POSTMODERN READING OF TEXTS ON THE
WORLD MISSION CONFERENCES OF THE
INTERNATIONAL MISSIONARY COUNCIL (IMC)
AND THE WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES (WCC)**

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Abstract

Most readings of the mission conferences under discussion in the study show the tendency to interpret the conferences in terms of an “imperial hermeneutic”. In the article the postmodern interpretive strategy of foregrounding marginal voices, is pressed into service in reading texts on the mission conferences. A survey of such marginal voices is offered on the basis of the following underlying assumption: that the voices *an sich* are important in opening up new avenues for reading and interpreting texts on the mission conferences. The multiplicity of voices suggests that any attempt at reducing the conferences to an essential core, will of necessity come down to an impoverishment.

1 A POSTMODERN WORKING STRATEGY

Most commentaries on and interpretations of the world mission conferences of the International Missionary Council (IMC) and the World Council of Churches (WCC) are characterised by the construction of an essential core or a grand narrative, to use a postmodern term. There are quite a few examples of how researchers on the mission conferences try to create one voice or - put differently, in modernist terms - how they try to contain the conferences by reducing them to a single or a few rational statements, searching for a single message. An almost perfect example of this is that of Edinburgh 1910, which was about the speedy evangelisation of the world in that generation. Indeed, much of what transpired at Edinburgh was geared towards developing strategies to achieve the objective of evangelising the world fairly rapidly during that particular era. Examples of attempts at reading the mission conferences from the perspective of an essential core could be found to a greater or lesser extent in studies on or references to the mission conferences by Bassham (1979), Bosch (1980, 1991), Van't Hoft (1972) and Wind (1984). The absolute downside of wanting to create a single message, however, is that important voices raising quite refreshing issues in mission will not be heard. This is not to suggest for a moment that such constructions would be invalid. In terms of the voice metaphor that will feature sharply in this study, a construction aimed at showing the essential core of a particular conference should be regarded as one amongst a multiversity of voices. One supposes that with the run up to Edinburgh 2010 more of these rational

constructs will emerge in the name of unity, healing and reconciliation. There is a need, however, to differentiate clearly between the authentic search for unity, healing and reconciliation and the hegemonic, neoliberal, neocolonial quest for uniformity. Unfortunately in reference to the world mission conferences, interpretations of these very rich in diversity events have quite often degenerated into mono-vocalism. The study hopes to draw from one of the great advantages of postmodernism which Nürnberger (2007:222-223) interprets to be its appreciation of variety and respect for the right of others to be different and to embrace tensions as creative instead of forcing an artificial harmony.

This brings me to the objective of the study. Is a postmodern reading of texts on the mission conferences possible? If yes, what is the nature of such a reading strategy? Is it not too great an imposition to do a postmodern reading of texts when they were constructed on a different basis. In making out a case for a postmodern reading of the mission conferences an illustration on how postmodern Biblical scholars interpret texts from the Bible will be pressed into service. The term “illustrations” is consciously used to indicate the intention not to present an elaborate construct on postmodern interpretations, but to create a working strategy. Even before providing some illustrations, the strategy to be applied here refers to the postmodernist strategy and tactic of approaching texts from the margins, that is, by locating the marginalised voices in a manner that generates new understanding and new meaning. It is a strategy of picking up on persons and issues which have gone unnoticed.

There appears to be consensus amongst those using postmodern strategies in interpreting texts that postmodernity is not easy to define. Most of the time, working strategies are constructed in terms of a number of approximations. Issues of intertextuality, deconstruction and listening to marginalised voices are identified as strategies for the interpretation of texts (Adam 2001).

Before proceeding to a more particular working strategy to be used in this study, a few broad guidelines are offered on the postmodern reading and interpretation of texts. Clines (1998:xvii) uses the metaphor of a net in contrast to that of a pyramid to show how a postmodern reading of text creates more space. He maintains that the metaphor of a net for the postmodern is decentred, flexible, polymorphous and multifunctional. A pyramid on the other hand is a centralised construction that is completely inflexible and can be likened to forms of Western thinking. In his understanding the postmodern reading of texts helps to discover their indeterminacy and plurality of meanings. By reading texts in a postmodern way, we become alerted to “all reasonable readings” (Clines 1998: xvii).

1.1 David Jobling’s (2001:207-217) postmodern Pentecost

Jobling’s postmodern interpretation of the story of Pentecost in Acts 2 is used as an illustration of the strategy of listening to the marginal voices. He constructs a reading of Acts 2 from the margins in borrowing from Serres (1982:40-47) and the WCC publication titled *Spirit, Gospel, cultures: Bible studies on the Acts of the Apostles*.

The way the strategy works according to Jobling is that the speech of Peter on Pentecost which is usually regarded as central to any interpretation of Pentecost is skipped over. Serres (1982:40-47) ignores the speech by jumping from the miracle in Acts 2:1-13 to verses 44-47. Quite remarkable in Jobling's understanding, is the skipping of the very piece that would in classical terms be the hermeneutic system, the single voice in charge of interpretation. The grand narrative is overlooked and the focus shifts to the community of Acts 2 as a community where the material and the logical are exchanged. The life of the community seems to be constituted not by the "imperial certainties" of Peter's speech, but in the sharing and growing of the community. In such context the linguistic miracle in Acts 2 is interpreted in terms of a plurality and diversity of voices.

1.2 Fiona C Black's (2001:93-104) Nocturnal egression

In her amazing piece Black explores what she understands to be margins of the Song of Songs. In pressing into service, inter alia, the postmodern strategy of focusing on the margins, she tries to come to terms with a rather disturbing incident in chapter 5:6-7. The scene of verses 6-7 finds the woman running into the city to look for her lover, only to be found by the night watchmen patrolling the streets of the city. In her own narration (*The Message, The Bible in contemporary language*):

They slapped and beat and bruised me, ripping off my clothes,
These watchmen who were supposed to be guarding the city.

Black (2001) argues that, if such text remains in the margins, the shock factor will remain, but the new interpretive potential might not necessarily be revealed. By utilising Burne-Jones's stained-glass version of the horrific scene, Black centralises it. She argues that such foregrounding of the scene which she describes as a "perplexing and disturbing component of what seems otherwise to be a delightful, if sometimes unstraightforward, presentation of the lovers' escapades", forms the key to new interpretive avenues. First, in Black's understanding, the female protagonist who is seen by feminist critics as the centre of the story appears to be a well-developed subject whose voice predominates. Unlike her counterparts in the Hebrew Bible, she appears to have a personal and sexual freedom which is unparalleled. Second, it is precisely because of this that the beating by the night watchmen stands for the system wanting to bring her into line by disciplining her in a violent manner.

I shall argue in this study that it is exactly by bringing some voices in the world mission conferences out of obscurity, that is by foregrounding them, new meaning is revealed.

2 A POSTMODERN READING OF THE MISSION CONFERENCES

Some marginal voices in the mission conferences of the IMC and the WCC will find recognition in the article. What has generally been constructed as the hermeneutic for interpreting these conferences finds very little reflection here.

Instead, the voices to be heard are seen as important in themselves and not necessarily for any grand, logical or coherent contribution made to the general theme of a particular conference.

Numerous Africans, Asians and Latin Americans have contributed to the life and work of the conferences from Edinburgh 1910 to Athens 2005. The assumption of the study is not that all of them have been equally marginalised. Any such assumption would be false anyway since quite a few Africans, Asians and Latin Americans became influential in mission and missiological circles through their academic work or positions of relative power in the ecumenical world and could consequently hardly be seen as marginal. I am thinking particularly of figures like M M Thomas, P Potter, E Castro who, between the three of them, participated in several conferences, A A Boesak (Melbourne 1980 and San Antonio 1989), D J Bosch (Melbourne 1980 and San Antonio 1989) and K Koyama (Melbourne 1980). The study taps into the freedom allowed by postmodernism in areas like counter-coherence and difference. The interpretation of voices that will pass the review in this article is informed by the system of the Paraclete: interpretations flow simultaneously in all directions (Serres 1982:40-47).

3 THE VOICE OF TASUKU HARADA: ON GOSPEL AND CULTURE

One of the most remarkable addresses presented at one of the plenary evening sessions at the Edinburgh conference, came from Harada (1910:283-288). The date was 19 June 1910. His speech was titled "The contribution of non-Christian races to the body of Christ". Perhaps the most striking feature of the talk is that Harada was quite upfront with ideas, which in the mission world of 1910 were not as yet digestible: first, expressing "sympathy", in fact, "deep sympathy" for non-Christian faiths and lands. On a purely existential basis: I was born and bred among them". What strikes one perhaps more than the sympathy expressed, is the use of the word faiths rather than religions. Was this a manner of saying that he was not addressing himself to something for phenomenological consumption only, but that he was speaking about human beings, focusing on the community of believers? The second and most remarkable idea is his notion that his context prepared himself for the Gospel Harada (1910:283-288):

I owe more than I can adequately express to the old faith and ideas for the preparation of myself for the acceptance of the Gospel and for the enjoyment of the present Christian life.

Third was seeing a correlation between the deep religious consciousness of Indians and the "intense spirituality of Indian Christians". Harada went on to show what he understood to be the agreement between yoga as a form of "whole-hearted surrender to the complete overcoming of the self" and the notion of cross bearing in Christianity. The fourth view is that of showing veneration for the ancestors. By 1910, Harada had already settled for himself the issue of the difference between ancestor worship and ancestor veneration, an issue which remains an enduring question in assessing the African Initiated Churches. Perhaps some indication of Harada's sensitivity around issues of gender is that, in his address, he persistently alluded to the greatest ancestor

of the Japanese imperial dynasty, a woman who was worshipped as the Great Heaven-Shining Goddess.

In echoing Stanley (2006:6), the question should indeed be: “Were the Asian voices really heard?” Accounts of the mission conferences are not particularly helpful in clarifying whether at all issues raised by the likes of Harada were taken seriously. Were the expressions of faith shown by Harada from a general Asian and particular Japanese perspective at Edinburgh too ghastly to contemplate in some Western missionary circles? One supposes that the evolving of Christian mission worldwide in the 20th century might have had a slightly different appearance if some of the issues raised by Harada, for example, had been taken seriously.

4 THE VOICE OF K IBUKA: CONTEXTUAL CONFESSION

The address of Ibuka in the Assembly Hall on 20 June 1910 was as remarkable as that of Harada just the previous night. Speaking on “The problem of co-operation between foreign and native workers”, he brought sharply into focus the need for a context-based confession or creed in the Presbyterian Church of Japan. In exposing the adoption of the Westminster Confession, the Canons of Dordt and the Heidelberg Catechism as an imposition by the missionaries, he went on to assert (Ibuka 1910: 294-305):

The little group of Christians which formed the beginnings of the Church, and of which I myself was one, had formed a simple confession of its own. Very simple, and no doubt very crude, but really a confession of its faith; and it was very reluctant to exchange it for an elaborate system of theology with which it was very imperfectly acquainted, however excellent the system might be.

Whether in fact the confession which emerged in the Presbyterian Church in Japan twenty years before the Edinburgh conference at a meeting of the synod could be genuinely regarded as contextual, is debatable. What emerged as abundantly clear was the express need for something of a confession of its own. So much so, that the Apostle’s Creed which for some “set forth the great essential truths of historical Christianity”, was not seen to be adequate. Ultimately it was adopted but as secondary to their own confession of faith.

Was the confession home-grown and context based or merely an abridged version of confessions from elsewhere? The content speaks for itself (Ibuka 1910: 294-305):

The Lord Jesus Christ, whom we worship as God, the Only Begotten Son of God, for us men and for our salvation was made man and suffered. He offered up a perfect sacrifice for sin; and all who are one with Him by faith are pardoned and accounted righteous; and faith in Him working by love purifies the heart. The Holy Ghost, who with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified, reveals Jesus Christ to the soul; and without His grace man being dead in sin cannot enter the Kingdom of God. By Him

the prophets and apostles and holy men of old were inspired; and He, speaking in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, is the supreme and infallible Judge in all things pertaining to faith and living.

From these Holy Scriptures the ancient Church of Christ drew its confession; and we, holding the faith once delivered to the saints, join in that confession with praise and thanksgiving.

One basic deficit of the confession is that issues of Japanese culture find no reflection in the piece. The contradiction between the express need for a contextual creed and the virtually a-contextual and a-historical formulation, serves negatively as a metaphor for the following tendency in the African, Asian and Latin American churches and theology/missiology: to clearly identify the need for contextualisation and inculturation, to announce a programme, only to revert to the way of least resistance by remaining in the confines of what has been produced in the West. A further issue, which can only be raised retrospectively on the basis of insights gained during the last century, is the use of sexist and exclusivist language in the confession of the Presbyterian Church in Japan. The growing consciousness is that this is not only an issue of political correctness, but for Christians the ongoing patriarchy and male domination in church and theology constitutes a state of confession. Like racism and the gross socio-economic inequalities in the world brought about mainly by neo-liberal capitalism, sexism puts the integrity of the Gospel in jeopardy and weakens the Christian faith in general and Christian mission in particular.

On the very positive side, the confession of the Presbyterian Church in Japan serves as a forerunner of the deluge of home-grown confessional declarations, statements and in some instances full-blown confessions the 20th century has seen.

5 ONCE AGAIN: THE VOICE OF VS AZARIAH: "GIVE US FRIENDS"

It is the slogan, "Give us FRIENDS" that has made Azariah famous. Slogans are quite often helpful in capturing an issue in a very sharp and concise manner. Unfortunately they can sometimes also have an eclipsing effect. In Azariah's second address to conference on the evening of 20 June 1910 he spoke on "The problem of co-operation between foreign and native workers". In missionary circles the slogan would often be cited without further reflection on the argument on which it was based. Is this because the issues Azariah raised were uncomfortable and came too close for comfort?

Stanley (2006:11-14) offers one of the sharpest analyses of the Azariah speech to date and gives an extensive coverage of the context of the "Give us FRIENDS" slogan.

In Azariah's understanding, a holistic approach was needed for good cooperation between foreign missionaries and Indian workers. By introducing the issue of relationship on three levels, that is personal, official and spiritual, an interpretation of mission as encounter or dialogue was strongly implied.

Central to the encounter between missionary and Indian, for Azariah, was the notion of friendship, a friendship informed by a deep spirituality. In his assessment genuine friendship is what was lacking in the relationship between missionaries and Indian workers. Was Azariah properly heard at Edinburgh? In his assessment of the speech, Stanley (2006:13) draws the conclusion that:

If Azariah's speech was an accurate identification of the heart of "The Problem of Co-operation between Foreign and Native Workers", hardly anyone in the western churches in 1910 seemed ready to listen.

On the lenient side perhaps there might have been something in the conference atmosphere conducive to Azariah speaking fearlessly and prophetically. A striking feature of the opportunity afforded to Asian delegates to Edinburgh to address conference is that some of them, like Azariah, spoke more than once. Was this a matter of disproportionately creating space for the Asians as suggested by Speer (in Stanley 2006:6)? Be that as it may, the issue raised by Azariah was to haunt Christian mission in the 20th century. Several attempts were made to salvage the situation academically, of which the Whitby 1947 slogan of "Partnership in obedience" and the more radical position of John Gatu in the early 1970s in calling for a moratorium, are striking examples.

Twenty-eight years after Edinburgh, Azariah (1938:40-42), then bishop of Dornakal, was as prophetic as ever in his little address on "The church and its mission" at the Tambaram conference in India in 1938. An image of the church that carries on the life of Christ emerged strongly in the address. Also, an understanding of mission where a creative balance is struck between spreading Christianity "from slave to slave, from soldier to soldier, from artisan to artisan" and witnessing in a group. Azariah's very brief remark on the connection between worship and mission, ending with yet another sharp little statement that has perhaps made him as famous as the Edinburgh slogan: "The Church exists not to save itself but to save others ."

6 THE VOICE OF CHENG CHING-YI: CONDITIONS FOR VISIONS

Selected for discussion here is not the input Cheng Ching-yi made at the Edinburgh conference, but rather his presentation at the Jerusalem conference in 1928. As he does about Azariah, Stanley (2006:9-11) writes eloquently about Cheng Ching-yi's "profound and even disturbing impact at Edinburgh". "Days of vision" was the title of his speech at Jerusalem, inspired by Paul's reference to his Damascus vision in Acts 26:19. In a well-organised piece he dealt with the conditions for receiving a fresh vision as well as the nature of the vision to be caught. He saw the conditions for receiving a vision as follows. First, environment is identified as an important factor in the making of visions. Jerusalem, for Cheng Ching-yi (1928: 46-60), was such a favourable context for gaining a vision:

Every step we take reminds us of our Lord. In this very city He once lived and loved and worked. Just over yonder He died and near the

spot where now we meet He said His last word about the future expansion of His kingdom ... Surely such conditions are uniquely congenial for a vision that should make of us all new men and new women in Christ Jesus.

The second condition Cheng Ching-yi identified as “those desires which press most urgently upon us in our conscious hours”. Whereas the first condition was to see the immediate context of the Jerusalem conference as a source of vision, the second condition was about visions emanating from the dramatic social changes in the world of 1928. Third, in simple terms “a true conception of God and a right attitude towards Him”, was taken to be an important condition for receiving a vision. The understanding seemed to have been that a spiritual awareness of the omnipresence, nearness of God and communion with Him, would be a condition for catching a vision. The fourth condition was identified as the connection between vision and action. In showing the mutual dependence of vision and action, Cheng Ching-yi (1928: 46-60) contended:

Action without vision has no future; vision without action is unreal. Both are essential. We have come to this mountain top to gain a fresh vision of the Unseen, but we are not to ask that tabernacles be erected for us to live here always in self-centred spiritual enjoyment. Our task is down below, among the people.

In a sense the Jerusalem presentation was as challenging and prophetic as Cheng Ching-yi's input at the Edinburgh conference where he strongly proposed a united Christian church in China, overcoming the denominationalism of the West (Stanley 2006:10).

7 THE VOICE OF T KAGAWA: "ACROSS THE DEATH-LINE"

The voice of Kagawa (1928:150-166) is heard first in the report on "The Christian life and message in relation to non-Christian systems". Identified in it as a great social reformer and Christian leader, Kagawa offered a fascinating piece on what is called "the mingling currents of Buddhist and Christian life in Japan". The fascination of what Kagawa wrote is not to be found in academic prowess, but more in the easy narrative style in which he described the kind of easy practical dialogue between the faiths at the time. For example, the story is told of Takatsu Hakuju, a *Sodo* priest in one of the sub-divisions of Zen Buddhism, who assisted with the translation of the Bible into Japanese. Quite astonishing. Other striking examples are the use of Buddhist temples for Christian meetings and the collaboration between Buddhists and Christians in social action. On a more philosophical level Kagawa relates how Christian teachers in Japan thought of the Zen priests with their pantheistic mysticism as prophetic forerunners of Christ, believing that these priests have paved the way for Christ's coming.

The year 2008 will mark eighty years since the Tambaram conference. One can only speculate on what the world of 2008 would have looked like had the ideas and issues raised on religious pluralism by the likes of Kagawa been taken more seriously. It would be safe to say that the mammoth work launched by Kraemer (1938) at the Tambaram conference has almost eclipsed most of the more liberal notions on religious pluralism that emerged at Jerusalem.

Kagawa's (1938:23-27) voice was heard again at Tambaram in 1938. This time around the issue for him was not religious pluralism, but "The meaning of the cross". In a style that is almost typically Japanese (cf. e.g. Kitamori's [1966] "Theology of the pain of God") he began his presentation in moving fashion:

On Calvary I see the blood of Jesus dropping down from His body on the cross. I hear the sound of the agony of the Lamb of God for the sins of mankind (sic.). It was for me and for my nation and for my race and for the whole world.

In Kagawa's understanding, what he saw as "the wonderful revelation of redemption" was difficult for 19th century theologians to fathom since they were flabbergasted by the scientific and industrial advancement of the time. The 20th century has seen a greater sensitivity to the meaning of redemption in the context of the "darkness and depression" caused by war. Kagawa introduced the very interesting notion of the "inner consciousness of Jesus Christ" which he interpreted to be Jesus' understanding that the cross was irrefutably upon Him (Kagawa 1938:23-27)

Jesus having the consciousness of God divine, He could feel the need of human weakness that He must die for sinners. God demanded it and men (sic.) needed it. And the result was His death.

In a real sense Kagawa's reflection on the meaning of the cross could almost be regarded as an autobiographical note. Van Leeuwen (1988:150) narrates in a moving way how Kagawa's understanding of Christianity as the religion of the cross, finds reflection in the marks of the cross Kagawa himself had to bear:

In his personal life this man was pulled across the death-line time and again. Brought up in a Buddhist milieu, he converted to Christianity and as a consequence he was disinherited by his uncle. From the days of his studies at the Presbyterian College of Kobe, he took sides with Japanese working class and went to live in one of the worst ghettos. In 1921 he ended up in prison for pleading the cause of striking dock-labourers and their right to a trade union. Surviving on one lung, because of tuberculosis, he reflected in his own person the spiritual strength of the revival movement. During the Second World War, his conscientious pacifism led to his imprisonment for a second time, this time as peaceful opponent of the deified emperor. His life has become a constant testimony of the life "across the death-line": personal, political, indeed, across the death-line of the Second World War.

8 THE VOICE OF K NKRUMAH: A VISION OF AFRICA

If this were to be a game based on showing the odd one out, Nkrumah would have been the one. His selection as one of the marginal voices is ambiguous in a way, but is justified on the basis of the location and date of the Achimota conference: Ghana 1957-1958, the very time of the country's independence and Nkrumah's ascendancy to power. At a garden party for delegates to the conference of the IMC, Nkrumah (1958:148-150) presented a gem of a little speech in which, among others, the following issues were highlighted. First, instead of the customary missionary bashing, he paid tribute to the work of missionaries in West Africa. Turning to the sacrifices some were ready to make, he spoke about the "little cemeteries lost in the bush where lie buried the brave men and women who, in bringing the Christian faith to this country, gave the last full measure of their devotion". Second, Nkrumah addressed himself to the new challenges facing Ghana. In what could be seen as his unfolding vision for Africa, he challenged delegates in simple terms: "You see Africa. You see the ambitions and hopes of millions of Africans ..." Nkrumah went on to show the irony of wealthy nations spending billions in a futile and destructive armaments race instead of giving Africa and Asia the necessary capital injection. Third, in reflecting on the issue of unity as represented by the delegates as well as the further unity they came to seek, Nkrumah was speaking prophetically - if the resolution of the Ghana conference on the fusion between the IMC and the WCC is taken into consideration.

9 THE VOICE OF J GATU: SELFHOOD AND SELF-RELIANCE

The voice of John Gatu has become marginal not so much because the moratorium call he sounded in the early nineteen seventies was not heard, but more because it was grossly misunderstood. Elsewhere (Botha 2006:255-281) I have shown how in Gatu's own interpretation his main issues were the

selfhood and self-reliance of the African Church, rather than the literal withdrawal of missionaries and funds. Gatu's (1973:111-113) brief talk at the Bangkok 1973 conference titled "Churches renewed in mission", debunks the notion that his call for a moratorium was irresponsible.

In almost fundamentalist fashion he argued that the starting point for the priesthood of all believers has to be conversion which he translated as "the necessity and centrality of Jesus Christ in the individual Christian's life as portrayed in his (sic.) commitment to the service of his brother (sic.)".

In revealing the heart of his call, Gatu identified overdependence on Africa's part on what he called the "we can help" psychology of the Western churches, as the issue to be faced. An enduring emphasis with Gatu had been the release of churches in Africa from dependence to selfhood and identity. Local stewardship remains central to his proposal on the self-reliance of churches in the continent.

Recently during a brief stay in Geneva, Switzerland for some research at the WCC library and archives into the mission conferences, I saw the WCC Strategic Plan for 2008 to 2013: very impressive in terms of what is planned for the different units. However, the one issue which struck me was that there is no African church yet that is contributing a single penny to the budget. So much for the stewardship of the African church. Was Gatu's call heard? Not so much by the Western church, as by Africans?

10 THE VOICE OF C BANANA: GOOD NEWS TO THE POOR

Banana was scheduled to participate in the Melbourne conference of 1980, but was overwhelmed by the political developments in his country relating to the liberation of Zimbabwe. In fact, at the time of the Melbourne conference Banana had already ascended to power as President of Zimbabwe. His (Banana 1980:104-119) paper prepared for Section 1 was, however, received by the conference organisers. The paper, titled "Good news to the poor", dealt with the connection between "the struggle of liberation from poverty and the proclamation of the Good News". The genius of Banana's paper is that it contains perhaps one of the sharpest definitions of poverty in the ecumenical movement. In his articulate and well-prepared paper he shows the complexity of issues around poverty. In answering the question "Who are the poor?" he stated (Banana 1980:104-119):

To be poor is to have not, to experience lack and deficiency. In Jesus' words the poor are the "little ones" (Matt. 11:25), the insignificant people of no consequence. They are powerless, voiceless and at the mercy of the powerful. The powerful are the oppressors and the powerless poor are the oppressed. The methods of keeping the poor perpetually in their place are oppressive social, political and economic structures. Oppression is always marked by the suffering of the oppressed. The dynamics of being poor are such that the oppressed poor finally accept the inhumanity and humiliation of their situation; they accept the status quo as the normal course of life. Thus, to be poor becomes both a

state of things and an attitude to life, an outlook, even a worldview. The vicious circle is completed when the oppressor, in turn, internalizes an attitude of permanent supremacy and paternalism towards the poor, and undertakes to speak, think and act for the poor. The poor are thus made dependent and made to feel dependent on the rich.

In the further unfolding of his ideas, Banana exposed some superficial explanations of poverty which are based on a misinterpretation of biblical texts like Luke 6:20 to which "idealized poverty" is attributed and John 12:8 to which "necessary poverty" is attributed. He also exposed the dualistic interpretation of Luke 4 and the spiritualization of the text. In turning to the question "What is Good News", he dealt with the dialectic between good and bad news and the understanding of good news as liberation. The forces of oppression, namely imperialism and capitalism were identified. He dealt with the responses formulated by the poor, invoking the notion of class struggle and the response of the church, engaging the ambiguous nature of the churches' position. Ultimately, according to Banana, the main source of liberation for the poor is the death of Christ: "On the cross, Christ identified himself with the poor, the oppressed and the captives of all times".

11 THE VOICE OF M KANYORO: GOSPEL AND CULTURE

Perhaps it is fitting that the concluding voice in this article is that of an African woman. Kanyoro's (1998:96-110) eloquent presentation at the 1996 Salvador conference on "Called to one hope: The Gospel in diverse cultures", passes the review here for its focus, amongst others, on African women. Its title is "Listening to new voices from struggling communities". "For generations", Kanyoro asserts, "African women have unquestioningly obeyed all that society prescribes for them in the name of culture. Culture has silenced many women in Africa. It has hindered them from experiencing Jesus' promise of abundant life for all (John 10:10)".

She proposed quite strongly that cultural hermeneutics is required for the demystification, analysis and interpretation of culture, discerning both the liberating and oppressive aspects of culture. The cultural hermeneutics done by African women consists of telling stories of their own experience as well as reading and understanding the scriptures in their particular cultural setting.

A very incisive feature of Kanyoro's presentation is the identification of "Listening to new voices from struggling communities" as one of the challenges for mission in the 21st century. A profoundly prophetic moment is her suggestion that the promotion of the unity of the church can sometimes sacrifice the integrity of groups within. In Kanyoro's interpretation Kanyoro's (1998:96-110):

The voices of the marginalised, seeking to move their concerns to the centre of the ecumenical debate, will increasingly define ecumenical formation. The solidarity groups, bound together by race, ethnicity, gender, various orientations of opinions and practices on (for example) environmental concerns, indigenous issues and human rights interests, require fundamental changes in the powers, procedures and forms of being "ecumenical" as well as being "church". Do these voices not mirror the signs of the reign of God?"

12 ONCE AGAIN: LISTENING TO THE MARGINALISED VOICES

Intentionally no attention has been given to the dominant hermeneutic or methodology for interpreting the world mission conferences, if ever there were any. I have consciously skipped aspects of the mission conferences which are normally treated as central to their understanding. The grand narratives on these conferences have been avoided. Instead, a number of marginal voices on a multitude and diversity of issues have passed the review. Retrospectively it would be safe to suggest that these quite often dissonant voices were sources of new meaning and new interpretation of Christian mission in the 20th century. Mere snippets, mere fragments here and there, but the profundity of the issues raised cannot be denied. A fundamental underlying assumption in the study is that, much as the voices are presented here as nothing more than a survey, as such they add to a new interpretation of the mission conferences. Unfortunately the question remains: Were these voices heard?

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