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From the Margins to the Centre

The Diaspora Effect

A Collection of Essays to Celebrate
the 20th Anniversary of the Tyndale Intercultural Ministry
Centre

*Edited by Michael Krause
with
Narry Santos and Robert Cousins*

From the Margins to the Centre: The Diaspora Effect

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CHAPTER 4

Rethinking Mission In, To, and From Canada Today

Robert Morris and Jonathan Fuller

The Need to Reexamine Global Mission

In his recent book, *Transcending Mission: The Eclipse of a Modern Tradition*, Michael Stroope states, “Scholars and practitioners of mission are sounding an alarm, or they acknowledge something is amiss. David Smith, former lecturer in mission and world Christianity at the International Christian College in Glasgow, traces the demise of Western, modern mission and concludes that it “has lost its credibility and can no longer survive, unless there is a drastic and fundamental change” (Stroope 2017, Location 23). Stroope goes on to quote from other well-known missiologists, including Wilbert Shenk, Lesslie Newbigin, and David Bosch, in support of his argument that the modern language and practice of mission needs a fundamental reexamination. “Rather than rehabilitating or redeeming mission, we have to move beyond its rhetoric, its practice, and its view of the world. The task is one of transcending mission” (Stroope 2017, Location 26).

The recent Canadian Evangelical Mission Engagement Survey affirmed the importance of mission for Canadians today, while also highlighting the lack of consensus among Canadian Evangelicals about its meaning and practice. Canadians have a rich history of engagement in mission, but the rapidly changing global context suggests that the concerns raised by Stroope and other missiologist are worth consideration by Canadian mission leaders.

Changing Face of Mission and Future Fit

In June 2018, two consultations were convened in Toronto to respond to the changing face of mission in the Canadian context. The first, Common Calling, sought to come to some agreement on the language of mission. The second, Future Fit, hosted by the TIM Centre,

brought together a wide variety of reflective practitioners of mission in an attempt to discern how the structure and strategy of mission could be more relevant and effective in the changing global context.

Various authors in recent years have identified a number of factors that contribute to the growing sense of disruption in the global mission movement. Eddie Arthur, until recently the Director of Wycliffe Bible Translators in the UK and a leading writer on contemporary mission issues in Europe, suggests four major factors; namely: (1) religion – the shift of the Christian centre of gravity from the West to Africa, Asia and Latin America; (2) politics – the decline of the colonial powers; (3) globalization – the blurring of the distinction between local and global; and (4) rapid change – the movement of people, evolution of technology, and economic shifts (Arthur 2016, 4-5).

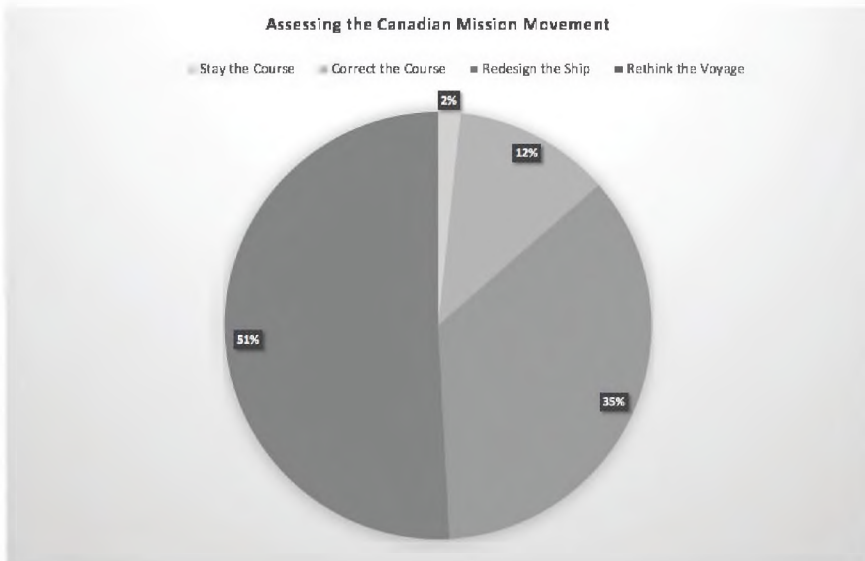
Eldon Porter, a consultant for COMIBAM and MissioNexus, spoke at the Future Fit consultation. In his paper, “Partnering with the Majority World,” he suggests two primary factors that have led to a significant paradigm shift. These two factors are as follows: (1) the growth of the majority world church and its mission movement; and (2) globalization, as driven by communications technology (Porter 2016, 5). Porter unpacked these further, by exploring following four macro issues:

1. The Majority World Church and Mission Movement, where “. . . structures tend to be simple, working in partnerships is the norm, and their systems tend to be more flexible.”
2. Direct Local Church Involvement, where “. . . we see churches of all sizes from around the world involved directly in cross-cultural ministries. . . . Partnering with a mission agency is just one of many options.”
3. The Global Diaspora Movement, where “. . . unprecedented numbers of people are moving from their culture of origin into another cultural context.” Porter suggests that this has required traditional agencies to focus on people groups rather than geography, to see “sending offices” as field or ministry supervision offices as well, and to work more closely with other agencies.
4. The Highly Interconnected World, which allows a much greater diversity of ministry opportunities, and for some missionaries,

replaces the sense of belonging within their mission agency with the value of being connected (Porter 2016, 5,6).

During the Future Fit consultation, the delegates were asked to reflect on the Canadian Mission Movement, in light of these changing dynamics. They were asked whether they agreed with Stroope that there is a need for us to “transcend mission” in Canada today by selecting one of the following options:

1. **Stay the course.** God is still at work through the Canadian mission movement today. We don’t need to change.
2. **Correct the course.** The world is changing, and we need to make adjustments, but our movement is fundamentally healthy.
3. **Redesign the ship.** Our mission models are no longer fit for purpose. We need new models.
4. **Rethink the voyage.** We need to step back and ask fundamental questions about where we are going and why. We need to transcend mission.



Out of 59 respondents, 51% indicated a need to rethink the voyage,

while 35% felt that the Canadian Mission Movement at least needs to consider new models. While this was only an informal poll, it does suggest that most Canadian mission leaders recognize the need for significant change and are open to exploring that further.

Mission and its Continuing Change in History

A major point of consensus in both consultations was that the nature of God as a sending God must define mission. The very word “mission” is derived from the Latin *missionem*, meaning, the act of sending. While there is much to be celebrated from the last two centuries of the Western mission movement, we will be better able to avoid the failures of Christendom mission efforts tainted by power and privilege, if we remember that all of God’s people are sent, and that all sending is an act of stewardship that must be defined by the incarnational model of humility and sacrifice.

When Jesus said to the disciples, “As the Father has sent me I am sending you” (John 20:21), he was positioning himself in a long line of people who had been sent by God to declare his glory among the nations. From Abraham to Joseph, Moses to Jonah and beyond, God was in the business of sending people cross-culturally. It culminated in sending his own Son, who with the Holy Spirit in turn sent Philip, Peter, and Paul to the nations (see Chapter 2). It did not stop there. At Future Fit, Steve Watts recounted the story of Boniface, who was just one in a long line of people with a sense of “sent-ness” throughout the Middle Ages. The founding of the Franciscans in the thirteenth century and the Jesuits in the sixteenth century gave new impetus to global Christian mission, but the nineteenth century witnessed the most rapid expansion of the Christian church, since the fourth century.

As early as 1810, William Carey proposed a Missions Conference that would present a united front with one purpose – world evangelization. That dream came true in the World Missionary Conference in 1910 in Edinburgh. Building on the momentum of the Student Volunteer Movement, and the new accessibility provided first by the British Empire and the American expansion overseas, Edinburgh 1910 was the high tide of Western missionary expansion. That included women in mission, who comprised 60% of the missionary work force. Significantly, 80% of the attendees came from the UK and USA. It was not until Lausanne 1974 that half the delegates came from the two-

thirds world. The years following World War, I saw the emergence of parachurch agencies, many of which were missionary sending agencies that relied on voluntary donations and personal support for their funding.

The common characteristic of most of the emerging models was that they were predicated on workers going from the “West to the Rest.” As early as 1912, Roland Allan had written *Missionary Methods: St. Paul’s or Ours?*, pleading for the planting of indigenous churches, but the missionary movement continued to be dominated by what Ray Aldred at Future Fit called “assimilative missiology.” He drew a parallel between our treatment of the first nations in Canada with how we exported Western cultural patterns in global missions. In both cases, our expectation was that people coming to Christ would adopt Western values and cultural assumptions. In this respect, the Western mission movement failed to reflect the character of God’s sending. We fell short of following the model of Jesus sending his disciples, just as the Father sent him.

Lausanne 1989 in Manila was chaired by Thomas Wang and reflected a significant shift in the mission movement’s centre of gravity. David Hesselgrave noted that, by 1985, 66% of all evangelicals lived in the two-thirds world. It would be decades before the shape of mission-sending agencies would reflect this new reality, but it was into this context of traditional sending patterns that Tyndale Intercultural Ministries Centre (TIM Centre) was born in 1998.

New Partnerships and Models in Mission

In light of these changes in mission and the growing recognition that geography is no longer a defining characteristic of mission, Canadian evangelical leaders have also begun to embrace a wider understanding of mission partnerships. Traditional mission thinking understood that there were primarily three participants in mission: the Academy (educational institutions); the Agency (mission-related communities and sending bodies); and the Assembly (local churches and denominations). The Future Fit consultation in June 2018 was a reminder that a fourth participant should be included – the Agora (the marketplace). These four entities working together will play a vital part in God’s mission in the new context, but only if they are able to engage with that new context in new ways. The old models are no longer adequate.

In his book, *Overturing Tables: Freeing Missions from the Christian-Industrial Complex*, Scott Bessenecker argues for a radical realignment of the Western missionary movement, a cleansing of the temple, in order to reclaim mission from capitalism. “The Protestant church unintentionally accelerated a consumerist mindset rather than offering an alternative vision to the corporate model commanding our fidelity. Seeking first the kingdom of God ought to consume us; rather, we have turned the kingdom of God into something consumable (Bessenecker 2014, 97). He further states:

When the Protestant church hitched its train to the London Missionary Society and the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Mission, it set in motion an industrial complex that followed the corporate vision of a capitalist enterprise, requiring large infusions of venture capital in order to get a mission started and needed ongoing donor investment to keep the machine running. This translated into the need to build fundraising societies in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and eventually birthed the individual, faith-based funding model, whereby missionaries must tap privately held wealth to fund their individual salaries and personal mission expenses. This is one way to fund missions—it might even be a decent way for those of us living in an affluent society—but it is not the only way to run a mission, and it becomes nearly impossible for those who are not connected to enough people of means in order to generate a living wage. (Bessenecker 2014, 89, 90)

Andrew Scott shares Bessenecker’s passion to see the contemporary mission movement radically rebuilt. In his book, *Scatter: Go Therefore and Take Your Job with You*, Scott mounts a strong critique of the Western mission movement’s failure to value work as the primary means of witness. He shows from Scripture and from history that God has used his people’s vocation to bear witness, with the vocation being an essential part of the witness’ credibility. When he turns his attention to the Western missionary movement, he is scathing in his critique. He argues, “We have succeeded in taking a plan given by God to everyone who follows Jesus and narrowing the entry point down into a very finite model that over 99 percent of Jesus followers look at and

say, ‘If that is missions, I don’t fit’ (Scott 2016, Kindle Location 173). Scott goes on to grieve the impact of this model on the Western church:

This dichotomized thinking has relegated talent, passions, work and as a result, the vast majority of the church, to a second-tier class of caste where they are only called upon for money, prayer and a few odd jobs around the church. . . . The vast majority of our kingdom workforce is ‘benched’ because they do not fit our model for doing church and mission. (Scott 2016 Kindle Location 183-186)

Scott’s book has resonated with a whole new generation of Jesus followers, who are passionate about his glory and deeply engaged in global issues, but who cannot make sense of the traditional agency structures, policies, and processes. This new generation is capable of travelling the globe, willing to sacrifice, and be energized by the idea of their vocation being redeemed for the Kingdom. It is easy for those who have been part of the traditional agency for years to see these models as naïve and unaware of the challenges involved in living and ministering cross-culturally. We know very well the value of wise member-care to allow cross-cultural workers to maintain a redemptive presence in difficult contexts. But does the emphasis on comprehensive support infrastructure and strong member-care keep the Western missionary movement from necessary flexibility and appropriate risk-taking? Are our well-developed structures and policy handbooks keeping us from serving God’s purposes in this generation?

Andrew Scott is not suggesting that we discard the traditional “supported missionary” model, but rather that we need to stop seeing that model as the norm. He contends:

What if instead of only sending out those who needed financial support to live, we also send those who could find a job in those unreached parts of the world that would provide for their families? This would take away one of the biggest restrictors on many going. Again, let me say, lest I be misunderstood, there are still roles at this point within cross-cultural missions that will continue to need support to their nature, but I believe these are quickly diminishing and mostly in the context of equipping

others to do the work of ministry. . . . Therefore, seeing work as the primary vehicle and arena to shine our lights includes the majority of people because most people have some type of job. (Scott 2016, Kindle Location 1784)

The problem for the traditional mission agencies is that they are trapped in a cycle where funding depends on membership fees paid by long-term members. Embracing a more vocational model and intentionally supporting those who go out to work cross-culturally will not generate the funds necessary to sustain the current structures. Bessenecker is not criticizing individual Western missionaries, as much as the whole system within which they function. “For me, the issue is not that Western missionaries are living extravagantly, it is that their entire salary and benefit package, all of their ministry expenses, some of their living expenses and their children’s educational costs, are packaged inside an overhead-laden business model that must be supplied largely by missionaries’ connections to people of means. (Bessenecker 2014, 83). His concern is that our focus on money and funding has corrupted the very mission of Christ to which we have given our lives. He adds:

The mission of God is not built on money. This is good news for those trapped outside the financial strongholds but who bear a calling into mission. We have allowed our organizations and churches to be shaped by the call of the profits rather than the call of the prophets. While the business world has done much to help the church grow in its management of limited resources (whether time, money or personnel), there are many ways in which the excessive focus on finances has obscured or even co-opted the spirit and mission of Christ.” (Bessenecker 2014, 89)

Scott and Bessenecker are uncomfortable but convicting companions on the journey of exploration, a journey that the Future Fit consultation indicated many Canadian mission leaders are committed to pursuing. At the very least, it is helpful to have familiar models that are challenged directly. Beyond that, we, the authors of this chapter, write from positions of hope and passion. We are not prophets of doom but storytellers, bringing encouraging news from the frontiers of mission.

Our challenge is not only to be willing to consider how these new models, or at least new ways of mission engagement, might impact the Canadian mission movement, but also to consider how we can introduce these ideas to the Canadian church.

Conclusion

The diversity of Canadian society and the richness of the Canadian church offer the Canadian mission movement a remarkable opportunity to welcome, embrace, and send mission-minded workers from, to, and through new gospel partnerships (Philippians 1:5) of all the four participant communities of the Assembly, Academy, Agency, and Agora. The development of diaspora mission and the growing recognition that mission today is polycentric are opening up new models of mission and even perhaps challenging us to realign our voyage to be more true to God's kingdom purposes. The TIM Centre continues to be a reflective community, where Canadian Evangelical leaders and thinkers can share this journey, listening together to the Spirit of God, as he forms us into a mission movement fit for the future.

Reflection Questions

1. Morris and Fuller list the four factors that Porter calls "macro issues" in relation to major paradigm shifts in global mission (majority world church and mission movement; direct local church involvement; global diaspora movement; highly connected world). What challenges and opportunities do you see, in light of these four macro issues in global mission?
2. If you were to answer the question that was asked in the Future Fit Consultation ("Is there a need to "transcend mission" in Canada today?"), which of the following four options would you choose: (a) Stay the Course; (2) Correct the Course; (3) Redesign the Ship; or (4) Rethink the Voyage? Why?
3. This chapter advocated for a new or renewed missions partnership among the Academy, Agency, Assembly (church), and Agora (workplace). How can these four different entities work together toward missions, in light of our current global changes?

4. Morris and Fuller present Scott's "strong critique of the Western mission movement's failure to value work as the primary means of witness." What is your view about the idea of "redeeming" people's vocation or work as a primary means of witness and global mission?

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