

WORLD MISSION TODAY

A perspective from the Council for World Mission

1. World Mission: Tracing CWM's Theological Journey

1.1 To praise God and to enjoy God forever is the vocation of every human being. Christians share in this vocation, and are called in particular to proclaim their faith in the Triune God who creates, sustains and redeems. More specifically, they are to declare the mighty acts of God who through Jesus Christ has called them out of darkness into God's marvelous light. Such proclamation of the good news as personal experience, arising out of joy expressed in worship, is at the heart of the mission of the Church.

1.2 The content of the proclamation as contained in the two testaments that form Christian Scripture and expressed in the creeds of the Church does not change. However, the ways in which it is expressed have changed as the Church has sought to respond to new situations and new challenges. This is also the experience of the Council for World Mission (CWM) as a community of churches in mission.

1.3 Though its roots go back to the London Missionary Society founded in 1795, the history of CWM itself is relatively short: it is just 22 years old. Yet, over these years it has made several statements on what constitutes the mission of the Church as it has tried to discern God's will in changing situations. Such statements were made in 1975, 1984, 1989, 1995 and now in 1999. Each of these statements does not attempt to correct or set aside previous statements. Rather, each new statement draws from and builds on previous statements as it articulates the call to world mission for its time.

1.4 The founding document of CWM, **Sharing in One World Mission** (1975), articulates shifts in mission perspectives for its time that are still valid today. First, it rightly declares that 'we become participants in mission not because we hold all the answers and all the truth but because we are part of the body of Christ'. Second, as a small part of the world Church, CWM acknowledges its indebtedness to the ecumenical movement, of which it is a part, 'for helping us to understand aspects of mission as they become particularly significant at moments in history'. Third, it

recognises a shift in the centre of gravity of the world Church from Europe to parts of Asia, Africa, the Pacific and the Caribbean, thus making it imperative that we be partners in mission sharing resources and learning from one another.

1.5 It also makes a significant statement on 'many-sided mission', which is worth quoting in full because it has become foundational for what CWM was later to call 'a holistic understanding of mission':

There are many words and phrases, which are used to express the nature and purpose of Christian mission. For example:

conversion – forgiveness – new life – eternal

hope reconciliation – peace – community

liberation – justice – humanisation

sacrificial caring – healing – wholeness

preaching and teaching – baptism – church growth

It is our belief that all these aspects of Christian mission are true to the New Testament and none of them can be isolated from the others and made the one controlling emphasis for all missionary work. As we recognise the variety of God's gifts to his servants and the multitude of human situations, so we seek to share in many-sided mission. (Para 2.2)

1.6 The statement on mission made in 1984 provides a biblical basis for understanding many-sided mission. It gives prominence to the commission in Acts 1:8 – 'You shall be my witnesses both in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth.' It refers next to John 20:21-22. Just as the Father sent the Son, so the Son sends out his disciples after breathing on them the empowering Spirit of God. What is implicit in this text is said to be amplified in Paul's words, 'God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, and he has given us the ministry of reconciliation, and has entrusted to us the message of reconciliation' (2 Cor.5:18,19). The section closes with these words:

So, Christians are called to share in the purpose of God who is revealed throughout the Bible as the Creator and Redeemer of the world. In this purpose God uses the Church – the body of people for

whom Jesus prayed, 'Father I pray that they may all be one...so that the world may believe that you sent me' (John 17:21).

1.7 The absence of any reference to Matthew 28:18-20 seems to imply that there could be a different and more comprehensive basis for understanding the mission of the Church. By making Acts 1:8 the starting point for understanding the mission of the Church today, there is a tacit acceptance of the fact that 'mission is first and foremost of the Spirit...' in which the Church is called to participate. Acts 1:8 also brings out other emphases. As in all the other New Testament commissions to mission, the call to mission is not so much a command as a promise, 'When you are empowered by the Holy Spirit you will be my witnesses.' Furthermore, Acts 1:8 envisages a progressive movement from home (Jerusalem) to the ends of the earth. It does not provide a mandate for seeing mission as simply 'out there'.

1.8 The commission in John 20:21-22, besides presenting the Great Missionary God, also draws attention to the work of the Holy Spirit in mission and emphasises 'mission in Christ's way'. 2 Corinthians 5:18-19 places the mission of the Church in the context of Christ's reconciling work in the world. God's mission is far more comprehensive than what often passes for the Church's mission. Finally, John 17:21 underscores the nexus between unity and mission. As the 1989 statement puts it,

One without the other has no credibility. Mission without unity is a countersign of the gospel of Christ that proclaims that God wills that all humans are gathered together into one family in God. Similarly unity without mission is dangerous for it makes the Church an end in itself and obscures the sacramental – the sign and the instrumental – character of the Church.

1.9 The statement made in 1995, **Perceiving Frontiers, Crossing Boundaries**, commemorates the 200th anniversary of the founding of the London Missionary Society. It sketches a missionary journey and challenges a new generation to dare to dream to perceive new frontiers and to cross new boundaries. It makes several significant points.

First, the need 'to read the signs of the time not simply as an exercise in social analysis, but rather to see where and how the gospel has to be proclaimed.'

Second, it relates the biblical motif of covenant to the principle of partnership in CWM and challenges CWM to embrace other partners in mission.

Third, continuing with the theme of a many-sided understanding of mission, it speaks of a holistic understanding of mission that relates to one another the various aspects of mission already identified in 1975. It also grounds a holistic understanding of mission in the biblical basis for many-sided mission provided in the 1984 statement.

Fourth, it then provides a trinity of theological motifs for understanding the mission of the church: creation, the reign of God, the nations.

Fifth, it brings back into mission the thinking and practice of the great commission in Matthew, but uses it in a new way: 'The Church, as a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural community, is called upon to disciple the nations, baptising them and teaching them, so that the nations may fulfill the life which God intends for them.' In brief, we are called to be a blessing to the nations, which was the theme of the 1997 Council of CWM.

1.10 While these theological positions on mission have special significance for CWM and the churches that constitute it, they are not simply attempts to define the mission of CWM. CWM does not have a distinct mission of its own. It participates in the mission of the Church, which is called to be a partner in God's mission. So, these are positions on the mission of the Church from a CWM perspective and are offered to all so that we may learn from each other.

1.11 The present text, prepared by a group of theologians from CWM churches together with ecumenical participants, carries and amplifies earlier emphases as a response to understanding world mission today.

2. Framework for Mission: The Missionary God calls a Missionary People

2.1 We live at a time of heightened awareness of many things that have begun to impinge on our lives. We are more conscious of our cultural and ethnic self-identity and the ways in which other cultural and ethnic identities impact on us. While such identities have to be celebrated, since they are part of the richness of God's creation, we experience these today more in terms of the conflicts they generate. We are conscious of globalisation as we are connected to one another through time and space with great rapidity. Information from all parts of the globe on many matters is available through our computers. But globalisation also tends to bring in uniformity and control. We are more conscious of the fact that we belong to the totality of God's creation. Ecological issues are thrust upon us especially at times of natural disasters and drastic climate changes. We are also conscious

of the rapid loss of plant and animal species. We realise that it is ultimately at our peril that we neglect and abuse the natural environment to which we belong. Peoples of other faiths are our next door neighbours with whom we share many things. We are conscious of the fact that they too are created by God and are God's children.

2.2 To address the implications and challenges of such a complex situation, we need an adequate theological framework for mission. To do this we turn to the biblical witness to the missionary God who reaches out in creation and in redemption.

2.3 In the Bible we discern God's character in the way God relates to creation. We see God moving out as the missionary God, creating, sustaining and saving the world. We see God reaching out as a partner with that which God has created.

2.4 This understanding of God is first described in the creation stories (Gen.1:1-2:4a; 2:4b-24). In these texts, we also find that God is characterised by community. In Genesis 1:26, God says, 'Let us make human beings in our image, in our likeness.' In reaching out to create and then embracing what is created, God expresses the character of community inherent in the God-head. God's redemptive work is implicit in the very act of creation. God's transforming presence brings order out of chaos, summoning form and meaning out of formlessness and meaninglessness.

2.5 Creation is also an expression of God's desire for and delight in partnership and relationship (Prov.8:22,30). In entering into partnership with humanity, God has entrusted us with care for each other and the natural order (Gen.1:26; 2:15). But the giving of such trust entails risk. Human beings have been given autonomy through choice; and we have not always made good choices (cf. Gen.3 and 4). We have been given the power to name, which enables relationships (cf. Gen.2:18-20). Instead, we have abused that power by naming others in a way that excludes and alienates them. Yet, in our mission of caring for each other and the natural order, God accompanies us, forgiving, healing, sustaining and redeeming.

2.6 God's desire for partnership and relationship is demonstrated in the presence of God's Spirit in the whole of creation (Gen.1:2; Ex.15:8,10). This relationship is developed further in the creation of humanity in the image of God (Gen.1:26-27; 2:7).

2.7 The understanding of God's universal presence and activity to which the Bible bears witness is often limited by the framework in which we understand God's Word as Scripture. One such understanding, to which Christianity is indebted, is derived from the Hebrew Scripture. It is the story of God's partnership with one particular people, which has been read and understood in an exclusive way. However, in the same Scripture there is evidence of God's rule extending beyond that relationship.

2.8 To take a few examples, in Amos 9:7, God says to Israel 'Are you not like the Ethiopians to me? Did I not bring Israel up from the land of Egypt, and the Philistines from Caphtor and the Arameans from Kir?' Isaiah 19:19-24 is even more explicit, and speaks of God saving and healing other people and accepting their worship. To this list can be added other parts of Scripture, such as Jonah and Ruth, which speak of God's concern for all people. These perspectives challenge us not to restrict ourselves to the partnership of God with one particular people, and to use it as a controlling perspective in reading and understanding the New Testament or the 'New Covenant'. These perspectives also require us to be open to God's relationships with other people and to make connections beyond our own faith community.

2.9 Since the principle of partnership is at the heart of existence, it follows that we cannot achieve fullness without partnership with all people and with all of creation. Together, the presence of the Spirit in all of creation and the image of God in all of humanity point to the universality of God's presence and activity. God is not limited to one part of creation or to one part of humanity.

2.10 To acknowledge God as the missionary God is to acknowledge people, who are created in God's image, as missionary people. God invites all to share as partners in God's mission, the *Missio Dei*. All human beings have the capacity to respond to this invitation.

2.11 For Christians, the idea of God as partner is specifically articulated through God's incarnation in Jesus of Nazareth. In the incarnation, God dwells with us as the Word made flesh (John 1:14), participating in human culture, and providing us with the possibility to realise our vocation as those created in the image of God and to have life in all its fullness.

2.12 In commitment to this partnership, Jesus was willing to give himself, even to death on the cross. For the Church to be God's partner, it must be willing to share in Christ's servant ministry and

be willing to give of itself especially to those who suffer and struggle for life.

2.13 The Risen One, who overcame the limitation of death and called the early disciples to reach out to the ends of the earth, also presses upon us the need to go beyond accepted limitations and boundaries. In Jesus, Christians hear the call of God to journey with God to the fulfillment of the New Creation, to which God is leading the whole of creation (Rom.8:18-27).

2.14 God is leading the whole of creation to the realisation of the hope (the eschatological reality) of living with the partner God in well-being, joy, beauty, fullness of life, and to be in communion with God. In the book of Revelation, we have a vision of what this could be. In it we see people from every nation, tribe and language coming before God with their own gifts, their own voices and their own cultures (Rev.7:9; 21:22-27).

2.15 The ground of our hope is what God has already done in Jesus Christ and is continuing to do:

*To bring good news to the poor;
to proclaim release to the captives;
the recovery of sight to the blind;
to let the oppressed go free;
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.*

(Luke 4:18-19 cf.Isa.61:1-2)

2.16 At present, we live in and experience the tension between 'the already and the not yet' of the promised New Creation. This tension draws us toward the realisation of the Reign of God. Our call to mission is located in this tension. We are called to journey with and make known the missionary God who is in partnership with the whole of creation, leading it to the New Creation.

2.17 To draw out the implications for mission in this theological framework, we turn to discern the signs of the time.

3. Signs of The Time: Discerning the Challenges for World Mission

3.1 Perceiving Frontiers, Crossing Boundaries aptly states why we have to discern the signs of the time:

When the adversaries of Jesus challenged him to give a special sign to validate his ministry, he responded with no special sign. Instead, he asked, while you can look at the sky and predict the weather, why are you not able to interpret the signs of the times? (Matt.16:1-4). Jesus both embodied and proclaimed the Reign of God as an alternative reality of hope for people in situations of despair and rejection. He fed them. He healed them. He taught them. He responded to the signs of the time. We too are called to discern the signs of the time not simply as an exercise in social analysis, but rather to see where and how the gospel has to be proclaimed. It is to perceive where people are in situations of despair. To understand the pain of God when creation groans in travail. And to discern where God is at work. So that we may be messengers of hope in our time and proclaim the good news of God's Reign inaugurated in Jesus Christ, the Crucified and Risen One, and continued in the power of the Holy Spirit.

3.2 As we look at the close of a century and the beginning of a new one, we recall the developments of the last three decades to discern the signs of the time.

Through a political lens

3.3 The 1970s, when the new CWM was formed, was the period of the cold war, which largely determined international relations. There was the threat of a nuclear war, but a direct confrontation between the superpowers, the USA and the USSR, was avoided. But the hostility between these two was transferred to Third World countries many of whom were trying to express their aspirations for a new international economic order. But their struggle for liberation and self determination were often seen through the prism of the cold war. Consequently, the Third World became the theatre for major conflicts.

3.4 The end of the 1980s witnessed the end of the cold war. With this came the collapse of the socialist governments in Eastern Europe and a little later the exit of the Soviet Union as a political reality. Politically, the world moved from a First, Second and Third World division to a multipolar situation where division was now more than ever between the rich and the poor. With the end of the cold war, the nations of the South appeared to have lost even the little bargaining power they had with the rich countries.

3.5 While there were some steps for disarmament, there was no peace dividend. Instead, the arms race and trade in arms continued in new forms. Though the nuclear status quo was maintained,

France conducted nuclear tests in the Pacific causing incalculable damage to people and the environment. Nuclear and toxic waste were dumped in a number of poor countries. Nuclear tests in South Asia caused new tensions, and increased the hostility between India and Pakistan.

3.6 Africa has not recovered from the devastation caused by military regimes. In many African countries there has not been a meaningful transition to democracy. The liberation of South Africa was an affirmation of human freedom, which has been celebrated throughout the world. But South Africa is still struggling to overcome post-apartheid violence, so that democracy can lead to progress and a good life for all. The transition to democracy in Latin America is a sign of hope. But the economies of many of its countries and the Caribbean nations are in crisis. The rapidly growing East Asian economies have now faltered, calling for greater economic realism.

3.7 With the end of the cold war, many nationalist and sub-nationalist movements seeking self-determination have emerged. While some of these are genuine, in others there has been an explosive mixture of ethnicity and religion aimed at eliminating minorities in their midst. Religion has come to play an increasing role in national and international affairs, challenging the fabric of many secular and multi-religious nation states.

3.8 Viewing the signs of the time through a political lens presents a number of challenges for the mission of the Church to bring hope into situations of despair and to make peace a reality. Important among these are the following: 1. The growing disparity between the rich and the poor within and across nations; 2. The realisation and defence of meaningful democracy; 3. Reconciliation in post conflict situations such as in South Africa, Rwanda, Chile and Argentina; 4. The political misuse of religion in the linking of religion with culture and nationalism giving rise to new dangerous religio-political movements.

Through an economic lens

3.9 The end of this century and the beginning of the next may be called the age of globalisation. Three phenomena – a multi-polar world, global capitalism and communication technologies – have converged to create what is known as globalisation. There is a simultaneous compression of time and space that is perceivable for instance in world travel and global communication. In essence, it is an extension of the worldview and effects of modernity over the entire world. While many of the ingredients in modernity have played a role in creating globalisation, the main player is global

capitalism.

3.10 The emergence of global capitalism at the end of the 1980s gave rise to great expectations among large sections of people. Coming in the wake of the collapse of the socialist economies, it appeared to offer the only viable economic model. It led to economic growth in several countries and created new wealth for some sections. However, the unjust distribution of the new wealth has only increased the disparity between the rich and the poor within countries and between countries. While attitudes towards globalisation still remain ambivalent, there is disillusionment today among the vast majority of people in most countries. To understand why this is so, we will analyse the character of global capitalism.

3.11 Capital seeks profit. It is the use of wealth to create more wealth and to accumulate it. Here nothing has changed. What has changed is the way in which capital seeks profit in a global situation, which it has in large measure created. First, through various treaties and international laws, tariff walls have been brought down, and so too quota restrictions on the movement of goods and services. Laws intended to protect currencies have been set aside. Global capitalism has created a 'borderless world' in which it thrives. For instance, parts for commodities can be made in one place, assembled in another place, and then sold everywhere. Second, it has also strived, often successfully, to standardise consumer tastes to wear the same sort of clothes, eat the same sort of food, and so on. This trait of the global market has been called 'macdonaldisation'. Third, to support the above trait, global capitalism attempts to create a global culture that is applicable everywhere, bringing in uniformity and control at the expense of local cultures and their values.

3.12 Global capitalism advocates the political ideology of neo-liberalism that demands freedom for the movement of capital. This means several things. First, in the face of global capitalism nation states seem powerless. Priorities of the state such as health, education and care for the needy are deemed to be economically unproductive and are therefore a low priority. This position is particularly evident in the structural adjustment policies that the International Monetary Fund imposes on countries that need economic help. Second, in the face of global capitalism, people are helpless. Though capital and services have been globalised, labour remains nation bound. Labour has no real power to bargain for adequate wages. To ask for a better wage is to be told that the trans-national company would gladly move to a place where labour is even cheaper. The threat of penury silences people. Third, to compound these problems, the bulk of the world's capital is not

used for production but to make profit on the world's stock markets and currency exchanges. A conservative estimate is that only 2-3 per cent of the 650 billion US dollars that circulate around the world every 24 hours is linked to transactions in the real economy such as production and services. The rest is 'casino finance': gambling on the assumed present and future values of commodities and thus having an impact on real values and prices. Capital is mobile and is vulnerable to speculation.

3.13 The forces of global capitalism have already led several countries into severe economic crisis. Even the little gains that were made by some sections of the people have been wiped out. The quest of global capitalism for short-term profit precludes long-term commitment to people and a place. This trend has destroyed many small economies. The United Nations Development Programme Report 1996 notes that with the increase in wealth, the disparity between rich and poor is growing worse in nearly all parts of the world, with roughly 20 per cent enjoying the fruits of global capitalism, and the rest struggling to hold their ground and slipping away into deeper poverty. If there is a new bipolarisation of the world today, it is not between capitalist and socialist, or even between North and South. It is between those who benefit from global capitalism and those who are excluded and increasingly ignored.

3.14 Economic reforms carried out in the interests of the world market have also led to 'the feminisation of poverty'. When people are made redundant in the interests of economic rationalisation it is the women who are the first to lose employment. The burden of looking after the family falls heavily on their shoulders. The oppression of women has intensified as a result of globalisation.

3.15 The market offers a false freedom, which is far removed from the Christian understanding of freedom. If there is to be real freedom, there must be realistic alternatives. Those who have no resources have no alternatives.

3.16 The market is free but human beings are not. In the free market freedom refers to commodities not human beings. Through its operations, transnational capital destroys employment opportunities and diminishes the dignity and freedom of large sections of workers by throwing them into penury and destitution. The rationality of the market does not make room for human relationships but only fierce competition.

3.17 To be human is not just to be independent in order to compete. To be human is to be in community recognising the claims of all for fullness of life. This is the freedom that the Gospel offers as liberation from sin, exploitation and poverty. As Bishop Lesslie Newbigin said to an assembly of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches in Birmingham (1995):

If the free market reigns, if the market is God, and if there is no power other than the free market there will be growing polarisation between rich and poor and a greater exploitation of the resources of the planet to an extent, which threatens humanity.

3.18 The global market also reduces the capacity of the state to do good for the common people. In many states welfare aspects usually sponsored by the government, especially education and health are being destroyed. It is true that, even before the coming of this new stage of global capitalism, the state had often failed to carry out welfare programmes and its obligations to the poor. But it is necessary to strengthen the institution of the state, even while criticising government policies that work against the people.

3.19 Globalisation is often presented as irreversible with no realistic alternatives. The tendency then would be either to embrace it uncritically or to dismiss it as demonic. Both these are false options. Though the all-encompassing scope of the market prevents the creation of a macro-structural economic alternative to it, as social scientists and theologians have pointed out, it is necessary and possible to challenge the logic of the market and its perverse rationality.

3.20 If the Church loses the vision of the Reign of God on earth and does not responsibly criticise the prevailing order, it abdicates an essential part of its mission. It has to identify itself with the many struggles for justice, which challenges the perverse rationality of the market. There are searches for economic alternatives, often in a modest manner and at the micro-level. There are new initiatives for empowerment and community building. Also, many groups have begun to utilise certain aspects of globalisation, especially its communication technology, for exposing, challenging and resisting the dehumanising aspects of globalisation and to build and strengthen solidarity. These are affirmations of life against the forces of death, and need to be supported.

3.21 Globalisation presents several challenges for the mission of the Church. These are 1. To continue social and theological analyses of the nature and manifestations of globalisation; 2.

To critique the seemingly messianic promises of the global market in the light of the values of the Reign of God; 3. To explore the role of religion in challenging the logic of the market; 4. To critically support institutions, such as the state, that could carry the concerns of the people over against the dehumanising forces of globalisation; 5. To promote networks of solidarity among groups engaged in resistance to the excesses of globalisation.

3.22 In discerning the signs of the time, we have identified several challenges for world mission today. These need to be translated into specific and inter-linked courses of enquiry and action at the local, regional and global levels. To under gird such mission thinking and action, we need to look again at the nature of our missionary calling. It is to explore what it means to follow the missionary God who calls into being a missionary people and enters into partnership with them.

4. Our Missionary Calling: Partners in God's Mission

4.1 Our task is like that of the scribe who has been trained for the Reign of God and brings out things that are new as well as old (cf. Mt.13:52). We will gather and blend perspectives on mission from the past with insights gained from an analysis of the challenges for mission today.

4.2 We see at least four areas in which our calling to be partners in God's mission should find expression as we seek to respond to the challenges for world mission today.

(A) In being a sign of hope

4.3 It is fundamental to the understanding of our missionary calling that the subject of the mission of the Church is not the Church itself but the Reign of God inaugurated in Jesus Christ. We are led by the Holy Spirit to participate in God's mission. We are called to live and minister in the tension between 'the already and the not yet' of the New Creation, to which God is leading the whole of creation. It is to proclaim through both word and deed the resurrection of Jesus Christ to which the Church alone is witness (cf Acts 10:40f.) as a sign of hope and an offer of salvation and fullness of life to all (cf.2 Cor.5:17). It is to minister in hope, saying with St Paul: '[We] consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God.' (Rom.8:18)

4.4 On the one hand, such an understanding of the mission of the Church delivers us from the needless anxiety to evaluate our mission with human understandings of success or failure. Since the

rationale of the Church's mission does not lie with the Church itself, the objective of mission is not the growth of churches, however important such growth may be. As St Paul reminds us, one plants another one waters but it is God who gives the growth (1 Cor.3:6). On the other hand, it also makes us realise that we ourselves have to be the best commendation of the good news that we proclaim. The values of the Reign of God must be evident in us or else we become counter-signs to the good news we proclaim.

(B) In having a holistic understanding of mission

4.5 Since the Church is a partner in God's mission, we are required to have a holistic understanding of God's mission that demonstrates ways in which the Church is for others and with others. It affirms that no realm of life is outside the realm of God. All aspects of life – individual, social, political and economic – are the concerns of God.

4.6 A holistic understanding of mission has at least the following five dimensions:

- Proclamation. It is to witness to the Good News -the Reign of God – as we experience it in Jesus Christ.
- Nurturing the people of God. Through education and pastoral care to empower people in churches to be faithful in worship and witness.
- Loving service. To serve all people with love and compassion as Christ did.
- Social transformation. To incarnate the values of the Reign of God so that all people may love God and neighbour as themselves. To strive for justice and peace, to struggle against unjust structures, and work for the renewal of cultures so that they may carry the values of God's Reign for all God's peoples.
- Caring for creation. To be responsible stewards of the world, to heal its wounds and to preserve the integrity of creation.

These five dimensions are interrelated.

(C) In having Christ's way as the model for our mission

4.7 In Jesus of Nazareth the Word became flesh. This truth has several consequences for understanding mission in Christ's way.

4.8 **First**, the Word was incarnate in a particular social context. Jesus identified himself with

suffering, enslaved, oppressed and marginalized people. This identification even led him to death on a cross. To be committed to mission in Christ's way is to demonstrate Christ's option for the oppressed and the poor (cf. Luke 4:18f; Matt.25:31-46).

4.9 **Second**, the Word was incarnate in a particular culture and in a particular history. Jesus was born a Jew. Matthew identifies Jesus in terms of Jewish expectations as Immanuel, 'God is with us' (Matt.1:23f; Isa.7.14). In his ministry, Jesus related to the living situation of a particular people and their history and so did his disciples (cf. Matt.10:6; 15:24). However, the Risen One transcended that cultural and historical particularity, and sent his disciples to make disciples of all nations (Matt.28:18-20). Taken together, these two factors indicate that while Jesus was culture specific he was not culture bound. This understanding has a bearing on the way we ought to interpret the commission in Matthew 28:18-20.

4.10 Usually we have tended to view the purpose of the sending of the disciples to the nations from a narrow Christian redemption history perspective, which is negative of other cultures and histories. However, viewed from the perspective of creation, the histories and cultures of the nations have theological meaning as part of God's creation. We need to relate to this perspective Matthew's main mission emphasis that people should be taught to do God's will (Matt.28:20; cf. 6:10b; 7:21; 25:40,45). On the one hand, it is to be both appreciative and critical of other cultures and traditions in the light of values of the Reign of God. On the other, since cultures are not static but are constantly changing, it is to participate in the transformation of cultures so that love of God and love of neighbour find expression. As **Perceiving Frontiers, Crossing Boundaries** puts it, 'The Church, as a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural community, is called upon to disciple the nations, baptising them and teaching them, so that the nations may fulfill the life which God intends for them.'

4.11 **Third**, the Word was incarnate in a prayer 'that they may all be one'. This is not unity in and for its own sake, but 'that the world may believe that you have sent me' (John 17:21). We are in the one body of Christ. If we want to participate in God's mission, we cannot remain fragmented, clinging to our historical and confessional identities. Such fragmentation is a counter-sign to the Reign of God at a time of racial and religious strife. So, unity in mission is needed for the sake of all humanity and for the whole creation. As the Seventh Assembly of the World Council of Churches (1991) put it, 'A reconciled and renewed creation is the goal of the mission of the Church.' (*Signs of the Spirit*. Official Report, p.100.)

(D) In forming wider partnerships for mission

4.12 All people are called to be partners in God's mission. The Church finds its particular calling within this larger calling in Jesus Christ. Consequently, as partners in God's mission we do not locate our calling within a narrow Christian redemption history perspective but in the larger perspective of God's presence in the whole of creation leading it to the New Creation. Such a perspective permits us to explore in new ways the relationship between creation and redemption. It also gives us a new openness to work together with people of other faiths and beliefs for justice, peace and the integrity of all God's creation.

5. A continuing exploration

5.1 In this statement we have taken insights on world mission evident in earlier CWM documents and explored them further. In these explorations we have perceived at greater depth the missionary calling of the Church as we discern the signs of the time at the present. We have still a long way to go on an exploration that is both exciting and risky. But we must undertake this exploration trusting in the leading of the Spirit and as we learn from one another as partners together in God's mission.

Easter, 1999