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Preliminary Draft

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*grew up in So. Africa in Durban
3% of Asian population Xn
so his friends were Hindus & Muslims*

Title:

Changing "from glory into glory": Toward a radical transformation of relationships (in mission).

*Finish then thy new creation,
Pure and spotless let us be;
Let us see thy great salvation
Perfectly restored in thee:
Changed from glory into glory,
Till in heaven we take our place,
Till we cast our crowns before thee,
Lost in wonder, love and praise.*

[Charles Wesley, 1707-1788; Hymns & Psalms 267]

1. INTRODUCTION

The title of this paper is based on a phrase from a hymn of Charles Wesley. The last verse of that hymn points to what seems to me to be the divine intention in Creation and salvation, and the purpose of the Missio Dei. Both this intention and aim are achieved in and through the unbounded grace and love of God which the hymn cited above refers to as "Love divine, all loves excelling" in its opening line.

It is my contention that proper relationships within and between authentic Christian communities, between Christians and others, and between humanity and the created order, are defined and determined by divine grace and love. This grace and love are at the heart of God's creative and salvific work. This work of creation and salvation may be appropriately described as the transformation of reality "from glory into glory". The development and goal of this divine project is the restoration to perfection of the *oikumene*, the completion of the divine process in the "New Creation." Effective participation in this project is possible only if the participants themselves experience personal (individual and communal) transformation in the process. This transformation makes for authentic relationships in mission, which means that the relationships we form with others and with the rest of creation should be a living testimony to God's grace and love, a sign of the Kingdom of God, and a dynamic witness to the New Creation.

It is within this cosmic and global framework that I wish to review briefly the discussion and practical outworking of relationships in mission in the last century, offer a tentative theological basis for understanding future relationships, and make a few suggestions for future practice.

2. RELATIONSHIPS IN MISSION IN THE 20TH CENTURY

There is a very good summary of the history of international relationships in mission in the 20th century in the July 1997 issue of the Journal *International Review of Mission*, Volume LXXXVI, No. 342, and in Lothar Bauerochse's *Learning to Live Together*.¹ What I intend to do here is to note a few points in the discussion as it developed in ecumenical circles during the last century in order to show how relationships progressed, and highlight issues relevant to our discussion.

Those gathered at the first modern ecumenical world conference on mission held in **Edinburgh in 1910** discussed the way missionary societies and agencies related to the so-called "younger churches."² They felt it was necessary then to get mission agencies to work together and to develop partnerships with local churches abroad. V.S. Azariah of India called for genuine relationships between missionary societies and churches in the mission field:

You have given your goods to feed the poor. You have given your bodies to be burned. We ask also for love. Give us friends."³

A few others from the "younger churches" offered similar challenges.

Three things need to be noted about that conference. First, there were very few people from the "younger churches" present, and even these represented the agencies and not the indigenous churches.⁴ Second, representatives from western mission agencies dominated the proceedings. Third, the content of the discussions indicate that relationships in the field were based for the most part on the paternalism of the powerful and the dependence of the weak, rather than on genuine love and friendship.

The International Missionary Council meeting held at **Lake Mohonk** in 1921 noted that while foreign missions recognised the need for churches to be truly indigenous the reality was that they were not so (note for example in India and China).⁵ A number of other issues were raised. There was talk about the status of missionaries in relation to local workers, the need to involve mission churches in policy-making, in determining their own missionary requirements, who should control of funds, and also the part that local churches could play in missionary selection, preparation and in local leadership training.

What this revealed is that the dominant religious culture in churches related to foreign missions was still very much Western, that real power and control still lay with Western bodies, and that representative missionaries still held a status and authority above local Christians. There was a real need to develop genuine and equal relationships between Western mission societies and agencies and churches elsewhere. There was still much to be done.

The **Jerusalem conference (1928)** took the discussion on relationships further. By this time the world context had changed radically. One could no longer speak confidently of the "Christian West" and the non-Christian rest, or of Western religious or cultural superiority. Western societies were themselves experiencing religious decline, and were involved in the

slave trade, in establishing political empires, and exploitation. The challenge to mission was that it now had to cross religious, cultural, social and racial boundaries, rather than geographical ones.

Of the 231 delegates present, 70 were representatives from the younger churches.⁶ 52 of these were indigenous Christians. Even though many of these representatives were missionaries there was now a decisive shift in representation, and this ensured the participation of the whole church in the proceedings.⁷ The conference has been described as the first "representative global gathering in church history."⁸ The Nordic Missionary Council launched an unsuccessful challenge, on constitutional grounds, against this move by the International Missionary Council to afford full voting rights to additional representatives.

During that conference, the leaders of the "younger churches" called for action rather than empty words:

"Younger church" leaders demanded action, not more talk on relationships: the local church must be made the centre and point of departure for all missionary activity. Authority and control must be transferred from mission to church; and the younger churches must have the freedom to develop in ways that would ensure their being truly rooted in their own cultures, so that they might be set free from isolation from national life."⁹

It is at this conference that "partnership" emerged as a theme. Mission was viewed as the global task of a united universal church. Mission would be done effectively through a pooling of the experience and resources of the world church, and would involve the movement of "receiving churches" towards self-reliance.¹⁰ The local church would be the centre of missionary work in its own context.¹¹ Again, there was discussion of the need for local control of finances, for liberation from dependence, and for missionaries who were "animated by the spirit of comradeship."¹² At the same time it noted that progress had been made with the real desire for, and practical outworking of, a true partnership between older and younger churches.¹³

At Tambaram, 1938, the majority of the delegates present came from the younger churches. The world situation was different from that in 1928. There was now less optimism, a realisation that the world would not be evangelised "in our generation". However, one important development with regard to these conferences is that the Tambaram meeting was the first one held in a country outside the West. Much was said about indigenisation, the local cultural expression of the Gospel and churches that are deeply involved in the life of the people.

Tambaram tried to link "mission" closely with "church" and wanted to get the younger churches to commit themselves fully to the task of mission.¹⁴ Missionary proclamation was felt to be essential in all countries, including those in the North where secularisation was having a negative effect on Christians.¹⁵ Already at Tambaram there was a realisation that the West was itself a mission field though this aspect did not get much attention at that meeting.

Again partnership received particular attention:

*"The unfinished evangelistic task is the responsibility of the whole church and has the whole world as its field of action."*¹⁶

This work of mission, which focused on evangelisation, was to be done through

*"a partnership between the older and the younger churches, by a pooling of resources and by cooperation of all Christians."*¹⁷

Partnership served the practical purpose of uniting North and South in the evangelisation of the world. Local churches in the "South" would be centres of mission in their own countries. The kind of missionaries that the situation called for is the kind that would work as "colleagues of the younger churches."¹⁸ The selection, preparation and supervision of missionaries needed to become more and more the shared responsibility of both sending and receiving churches.¹⁹

Edinburgh spoke of the "church in the mission field", Jerusalem of "relations between the churches", and Tambaram of "the world-wide mission of the church."²⁰ In Jerusalem "partnership" referred to the quality of the relationships between "younger" and "older" churches, and in Tambaram it referred to the effective co-operation of these groups of churches in performing the missionary task.²¹ Local churches were to assume greater responsibility for mission in their local situations, and financial and material support would be reduced to encourage local stewardship and financial independence. There was also the appeal to the younger churches to help churches in the "North" by sending missionaries to them.

The theme of the **Whitby conference (1947)** was "Partners in Mission". That conference is associated with the concept "partners in obedience". It met at a time when the world had witnessed the recent world war, and the start of the development of new independent states in Asia and Africa, and therefore also the desire of churches in the South for independence from their "parent" organisations in the North.²² In a situation of crisis the experience of real international and ecumenical fellowship was an encouragement to all present. A spirit of optimism led to the desire for prophetic mission and a proclamation of the Gospel of hope.²³ There was a feeling of urgency about this. The task ahead was so great that "North" and "South" had to work together as "partners in obedience", overcoming divisions between them and between denominations, and working together despite theological differences. There was a genuine desire for unity in mission. The disintegration of empire and the rise of national self-confidence in the colonies required, for practical reasons, that the missionary enterprise should not be associated with the centres of empire.²⁴

The conference felt that the terms "older" and "younger" churches were no longer appropriate or desirable, but it would continue to use them for "convenience."²⁵ It was the responsibility of all churches to strengthen its members, deepen their spirituality, and prepare them for effective witness.²⁶ The conference spoke of the need for deeper fellowship between the churches, and the need to develop leadership so that the "younger" churches would become self-governing and self-propagating.²⁷ It drew attention again to the status of missionaries in the local churches, the difference in pay between missionaries and local workers, the say of

local churches in selection and invitation of missionaries, partnership in policy-making, and participation in boards of mission institutions.²⁸

There are four things we need to note about “partnership”, as the Whitby conference understood it. First, it was a partnership necessary for the success of the missionary enterprise conceived as the proclamation of the Gospel to the whole world, that is, evangelism. This notion of partnership, as Bauerosche points out, is partnership for the sake of expediency.²⁹ Second, relationships between “North” and “South” would henceforth be a direct partnership between the churches of “North” and “South”. The mission societies would act as mediators.³⁰ These relationships were, until Whitby, relationships between mission societies and the churches in the South. Third, the donor-recipient relationship remained essentially the same, though responsibility for use of donations was placed solely in the hands of the receiving churches.³¹ Fourth, there was to be ecumenical exchanges of personal across the North-South divide, with Christians from the South working as pastors in Northern congregations.³²

The World Mission Conference in **Willingen (1952)** met at a time when some areas were closed to mission societies, a time of re-awakening of the world's major religions, and a time when the world experienced the spread of communism, and the rise of secularism in the West. It was time for a radical review of the need, purpose, and nature of mission. The report of that conference suggests that mission and church derive from God's work as a Triune God. The church's mission is to participate in the *Missio Dei*, the mission of God. The goal of mission was to bring the whole world and the cosmos under the reign of God. Mission should no longer be thought of as the crossing of geographical boundaries. Rather, mission is to be done by local communities in their own contexts. The terms “younger” and “older” were no longer acceptable, as were the terms “sending” and “receiving” when applied to churches in the “North” and “South” respectively.³³ However, the conference retained the concept of “foreign missions” and still felt these missions had a special task.³⁴ The churches in the “North” would make it their priority to challenge their own local congregations with their missionary responsibility. Churches in the “South” will need to be supported with material and personnel resources, and mission societies would continue to provide this. These churches would be given full responsibility for themselves as soon as possible. As far as relationships in mission go, Willingen did not go beyond the Whitby statements on partnership. Willingen did not work out the practical implications of its revised conception of mission.

At the International Missionary Council meeting in **Achimota, Ghana, in 1958**, delegates met to discuss “The Christian Mission at this Hour”. The bible study sessions on partnership pointed to the need for straight talking, the affirmation of every person in Jesus, the unity shared in the ministry of reconciliation, and the need for joint stewardship of God-given resources.³⁵

In addition the theme of mission as *Missio Dei* (God's Mission) was emphasised - Mission belongs to Christ, Mission as participation in the *Missio Dei*, as transformation of human relationships, as working for justice. There is need for voluntary mission societies, but these are to exist as a sign of the missionary vocation of the world church.³⁶ What is significant

about the discussions at this conference is that the special role of the mission societies was now being questioned. Authentic partnership required that they give up their power, but as the conference soon discovered mission societies found it difficult to do this. In practice mission remained for the most part a one-way-traffic, thus continuing a tradition that existed in previous centuries. "Partnership in obedience" remained good theory, and relationships in mission were not radically reshaped to reflect this theory. It is not surprising then that there was conflict at Achimota, and that no real resolution was achieved.

In 1961 The International Missionary Council became part of the World Council of Churches (WCC) and its work continued by the WCC's Division of World Mission and Evangelism. Mission and church had become organisationally integrated. The first conference of the Council for World Mission and Evangelism (CWME) was held at Mexico City, in 1963. Its main theme was "God's Mission and Our Commission." That conference came up with the phrase "mission from six continents to six continents." It agreed that every church has a missionary vocation, is a centre of mission in its own location, and shares in mission in the world church.³⁷ Every place was to be regarded as a mission field.³⁸ All Christians are together participants in God's mission in God's world.³⁹ The conference also stressed the need for ecumenical partnerships in mission. It saw unity of the worldwide church as essential for authentic Christian witness in a secularised or non-Christian context, and therefore viewed the missionary movement as including Christians from all continents, witnessing together, and proclaiming the "whole gospel to the whole world".⁴⁰ Nevertheless, the majority of delegates came from the "North". Very little was mentioned about "partnership". In reality, the mission societies often remained in charge of Overseas/foreign mission.

The WCC's joint committee on the Ecumenical Sharing of Personnel (ESP) established in 1969 addressed again issues relevant to partnership in mission. John Brown summarises part of its discussions as follows:

*"The committee saw its task as helping the churches to make a new start in new tasks, new relationships of genuine equality, new respect for each other's identity and calling, and new ways of supporting one another within the fellowship of the universal church. The committee believed that the call to share in God's redeeming work now means action and support of people towards liberation. In sharing personnel, money and people are closely related. The committee raised the question of whether people and money should be inseparably related. The committee saw power as being at the heart of the problem - money as an expression of power."*⁴¹

The committee discussed at great length the usefulness of moratorium as a strategy in certain situations to give local churches space for self-expression, developing independence, discovering their own resources for mission. It asserted that the liberation of the churches includes the affirmation of self-hood.⁴² The moratorium question received much attention in the early seventies. Moratorium was seen by some as a means of breaking unequal power relationships between sending agencies and receiving churches, and as a way of providing space for receiving churches to rediscover their true identity, gain self-confidence, and take steps towards independence and self-reliance.⁴³ The All Africa Conference of Churches held a major debate on this in 1974. It caused fear among some, and it brought some changes in

relationship between the sending and receiving partners.⁴⁴ The very threat of severing links helped to forge better ones.

The "Salvation Today" assembly at Bangkok, 1973, drew together the various strands of the discussions of previous years. The conference concentrated on issues of racism, violence, exploitation, oppression and political liberation. Brown summarises some of aspects of the discussion on relationships in mission as follows:

*"...home and foreign missions were not to be separated; mission is in six continents; mission is the responsibility of all churches; the local church has primary responsibility for mission in its area; all churches need the help of other churches in their mission work; the end of the westernization of the church - the churches have many identities; a moratorium is a valuable tool for mission in some places."*⁴⁵

*"The assembly sought a more mutual sending and receiving of missionaries; it sought an end to unequal power relationships between churches simply reflecting the power relations between the rich and poor nations ; it sought mature relationships, with a mutual commitment to participate in Christ's mission in the world; each church realizing clearly its own identity, its own cultural milieu; the bearers of the gospel of liberation must themselves be liberated; each church expressing its unity with other local churches; interdependence between local churches; representation of receiving churches on the governing bodies of sending churches; the radical reform of mission structures."*⁴⁶

While this is the case, some other mission bodies continued the pattern of domination and dependence.⁴⁷ On the other hand, the Council for World Mission (LMS + Congregational Council for World Mission) formed in 1977, viewed all churches as part of the Body of Christ, and restructured its organisation to make all associated churches full members with representation on the Council.⁴⁸ It offered, to quote Brown, a *"practical model of radical restructuring, shared decision making, mutuality, and transparency in relationships."*⁴⁹

The Heads of mission agencies were challenged, at a consultation convened by CWME in 1978, *"to share power between partners and to work toward mutuality and transparency."*⁵⁰

At the Melbourne meeting of CWME in 1980, the theme of which was "Your Kingdom Come", it was felt that there was not a sufficient ecumenical sharing of resources. The conference recognised that all that needed to be said about relationships in mission had been said before. The main issue at Melbourne was the use of power:

"To build interchurch relations without challenging our own power structures which dehumanize and betray the Kingdom, is to build on sand...we need to be converted...towards an action that reflects the crucified Christ in the way we use power in mutual relationships."⁵⁰

Section IV of the Report on the conference recommended

"that CWME and national or regional councils of churches be called upon to take the initiative in challenging churches to implement better structures of

cooperation in mission, helping them to come together for the study of new possibilities for sharing in decision making, better approaches to mutual support, ecumenical exchange of personnel, and united witness in the light of this report. In particular, they should give new consideration to the reasons that led to the proposals for a moratorium. Such reasons have lost nothing of their urgency since the Bangkok conference in 1973.”⁵¹

Regional consultations on Relationships in Mission, 1988-1992 (conducted by the CWME Relationships in Missions desk) raised the same old issues. The situation is well summed up in one paragraph of the list of issues raised at these consultations:

“It is twenty-five years since the Mexico City assembly met with the theme “Mission in Six Continents.” Many northern mission boards have changed policies, theology, and thinking—but most have not changed their structures for mission although some have done so. Are these structures now a hindrance to the mission of God?”⁵²

The report mentions the need for mutuality and reciprocity; the widespread notion of mission in terms of the crossing of geographical boundaries; the need to give priority to local ecumenical co-operation; the need for seeing one’s own reality through a partner’s eyes; the need for joint decision-making within mission structures; a sharing of power; equal access to information; common ownership of resources; mutual accountability; openness; transparency; solidarity with the poor; and affirms the need to send and receive in every direction.⁵³ And it spoke of partnership in the following terms:

“Partnership implies exchange of ideas and resources; cultural diversity enriches partnership; listening to one another in theological reflection; readiness to share non-material resources; remove attitudes of donor/receiver; sharing of theological and liturgical insights.”⁵⁴

What this survey reveals is that throughout the 20th century the relationship between churches and mission agencies of the North and churches in the South has been, in differing degrees, one of inequality with the domination of the South by the North. Admittedly there has been a shift away from the outright arrogance and paternalism of the North that is characteristic of early 20th century relationships, and there have been deliberate and sometimes substantial movements toward a partnership of equals. Ongoing discussions on “partnership”, and the particular urgency with which these discussions were held testify to a genuine attempt on the part of many in the North to enter into relationships of equity and mutual respect. There was much good theory on the subject of relationships in mission.

However, many in the South would argue that there is an unacceptable gap between theory and practice, and suggest that we have in reality North-South relationships that in many instances do not constitute a “partnership of equals”. Certainly at the level of theory there developed over the years an understanding of church and mission that provided a firm foundation for an authentic Christian relationship within the Body of Christ. The ecumenical consensus reached by 1973, if not before, suggests this.⁵⁵ Nevertheless the regional

consultations held by CWME between 1988 and 1992 suggests that much more needed to be done at the end of the 20th century to bridge the gap between theory and practice.

It is the disjunction between theory and practice that remains the problem at the beginning of the 21st Century. The fundamental issues concerning relationships in mission (or interchurch relationships) remain. These have to do with the basic structure of the relationships that exist, and on the people involved in these relationships.

The fundamental difficulty, however, is more than just the gap between theory and practice. I venture to suggest that we need to view relationships in mission within a fully ecumenical and cosmic framework. In the next section of this paper I outline what I consider to be a possible theological framework for future relationships within a cosmic framework.

3. A THEOLOGY OF CREATION, INCARNATION, AND COMMUNION.

I wish to place my thoughts within a threefold framework. Some may prefer to call it a Trinitarian framework. I choose not to label it. I do however wish to say that it seeks to come to terms with the diverse activity and experience of God in the world. I offer three areas of reflection - CREATION, INCARNATION, and COMMUNION.

3.1. Creation

The God who brought all things into being in and for love is the origin, development and *telos* of creation. The origin of all creation in this singular Alpha point suggests a common source of being, and an integral relationship of the whole of creation in and with God. This intrinsic connection and inter-relationship in the divine love makes it possible for creation to find inner harmony as it is brought into a deeper relationship with God. This Shalom is the *telos* for the inhabited earth, the *oikumene*. (John 1 speaks of the *kosmos*). We may envision Paradise as the existence of cosmos in a perfect relationship of love with God and in God. Put another way, we may speak of a perfect relationship of all being (diverse realities) with Being.

The lack of harmony in creation or in any part of it is due to a weakening of this link of being with BEING. The restoration of harmony intrinsic to authentic relationships in the New Creation is the restoration of relationships to their perfect condition, perfect relationship between being and BEING. This seems to me to be the essential message of the biblical narratives of Creation and fall, and the subsequent narratives of Reconstruction and renewal, of restoration, in the Old and New Testaments.

It is in this restoration, or New Creation that the cosmos experiences the “glorious liberty” of which Paul speaks. For New Creation is indeed the liberation of the *oikumene* from all that keeps it from participating in this process of glorification. Positively, this liberation is the experience of the glorious freedom that is promised to creation, the freedom for which the whole of creation groans:

“I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God...because creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God. We know that the whole of creation has been groaning in travail until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait...For in this hope we are saved.” (Romans 8:18-24)

This is the glory mediated through a process of reconciliation revealed and effected in Incarnation, and constantly made real in the power of the Holy Spirit. As Ephesians has it, God’s plan for creation is the reconciliation of all things in heaven and on earth.

“For he has made known to us in all wisdom and insight the mystery of his will, according to his purpose which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.” (Eph. 1:9-10)

The divine plan is to reconcile every atom of cosmos to God and in God. Humanity is but a part of the cosmos, God’s *oikumene*, that toward which God offers Grace on top of Grace. God’s grace and love extends toward all creation, and so also toward us, though not *because* of us!

Salvation is this restoration to full communion of the whole of reality. Salvation of humanity, of individual and community, is not to be separated from the salvation of the rest of creation. It is not to be separated from the salvation of the *oikumene* and the transformation of the *oikonomia*, that is, God’s household.

This is the Missio Dei, the divine project of transformation, which is the project of the Kingdom of God. It is not OUR mission and it is not OUR world. It is God’s mission in God’s world. In Jesus and in the power of the Spirit, God reveals the nature of the divine project of Creation and Salvation and extends to the whole of creation the invitation to participate in it, and empowers it to do so. All who accept this invitation become part of the process that seeks to change the cosmic order from “glory into glory”. The rest of the cosmos responds in its own way to this invitation. Our task is to establish what the role of humanity might be in this process and what and how we might contribute to it.

3.2. Incarnation

The Incarnation is both the revelation and the instrument of the universal (cosmic) salvific process. God’s purpose and plan is revealed in Jesus, as is our role in the divine project. Divine presence and activity is the means whereby creation is transformed from “glory into glory” ever moving it toward the heavenly *telos*. God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself (2 Cor. 5:19). The New Creation, the restoration of the *oikumene*, is achieved in Christ through the Holy Spirit present and active in the whole of reality.

The Incarnation reveals the locus of presence, the nature of the activity, and the kind of participation required. God in Jesus reveals the Missio Dei, and invites us to become partners with God and with creation in the single project of the Kingdom of God. What does the Incarnation reveal?

First, in the Incarnation, both the nature of created existence and divine nature are completely at one. Traditional theology tends to focus attention on the relationship between humanity and divinity, and emphasise that all the characteristics of the divine nature are shared by the human nature, and all the characteristics of the human nature are shared by the divine nature. It is, to use Paul's formulation, the Spirit of God and the human spirit being in tune with each other - the spirit of God testifying with the human spirit that we are the children of God (Rom. 8:16). However, the Incarnation does not only reflect God's relationship with human beings but also reflects God's relationship with the *oikumene*, the cosmos (See John 1). It is the reconciliation of all things in Christ (Eph. 1:9-10). The unity achieved in Christ is one in which everything is shared, the experience of one is the experience of the other, the welfare of one is the welfare of the other, and what belongs to the one belongs to the other. There is total solidarity and understanding. Authentic relationships are relationships characterised by this kind of unity, mutuality and solidarity, a total sharing.

Second, there is identity and difference. The cosmos is the cosmos and God is God. The human is recognisable as human, and the divine revealed as divine. Unity and difference exist in perfect harmony. In becoming human God affirms that which is particular, distinct and different from the divine and yet is in union with it. God does not obliterate humanity but enables it to find fulfilment. Authentic relationships are inclusive and also accepting of creative diversity. There is no room for exclusion and cultural domination. (I Cor 12 - the Body of Christ celebrates diversity in the service of Christ). The way of Incarnation includes the crossing of boundaries, openness to others, the ability to live constructively with difference.

Third, Christ embodies the Kingdom. His engagement with the world drew the kingdom into its midst and exposed people to the Kingdom, its truths, and its values. The Jesus way could be summed up in two words - Kingdom and love. Authentic relationships proclaim the kingdom and engage the world in its name and power, and so share in the transformation of the world, in the liberation of creation from domination. Naming, shaming, and subjecting the powers is part of this mission of God in Jesus. Conflict, with those powers that resist the movement toward the New Creation, is unavoidable. To share in Incarnation is to participate with God and with others in that process of transformation that liberates and transforms the world, including humanity, from "glory into glory".

Fourth, Jesus spent a great deal of time with the poor, the excluded, the weak, the suffering. To seek to be in authentic relationships with these poor is to be truly blessed. It is to offer the poor, the weak, the marginalised, the opportunity for a full life and to demonstrate a willingness to do so even at great personal cost to self. The Risen Christ is present in and through the "needy" (Matt. 25:34-46), the Others, so that they become the mediation of divinity. If we wish to meet God then this is the place where we can meet him, in the Other. We experience Incarnation in the encounter with the Other.

Fifth Christ was obedient unto death, even death on the cross. To be in right relationships is first and foremost to be in right relationship with God, and to be open to a life of discipleship, a following of the way of God even to death. To be a faithful disciple is to be willing to take risks for the sake of the Kingdom. Incarnation signifies the necessity of self-emptying service and self-sacrifice in the process of New Creation. The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and give his life (Mk. 10:45). Authentic relationships involve the willingness of partners to offer self for the sake of others, to be living sacrifices (Rom. 12).

Incarnation affirms creation and reveals the divine presence and activity in all creation as in human life and activity. It reveals that to acknowledge this presence and to respond positively to it is to be drawn into the project of the Kingdom, the process of re-creation, as revealed in the way of Jesus. It reveals that the power for transformation is to be found in the Holy Spirit present and active ~~in~~ in the world.

3.3. Communion

I use the Eucharistic model here to express the idea of the presence and activity of the Spirit as reconciler, the power that makes New Relationships (New Creation) possible. The sacrament of Holy Communion is a re-enactment of the process of reconciliation that makes all things new, by bringing them into a new relationship with God and the world. When a community shares the gift of bread and wine, participants share in that network of relationships that constitute the Body of Christ. This participation is made possible by the Holy Spirit at work in the act of consecration and sharing of elements.

However, this sacrament is cosmic in its significance. It not only symbolises the participation of the *oikumene* in the divine process of reconciliation, which constitutes the New Creation, but also is itself that process in which the *oikumene* participates in God's mission. It is everything that is made new (Rev. 21:5). So when Christians gather to celebrate the sacrament of Holy Communion they do not do this only for themselves or among themselves. They do it in the midst of and together with the rest of the cosmos. The "Body" of Christ that is broken is the cosmos, not just human beings, and definitely not just the Christian community gathered in the place in which the rite is performed.

This communion is not just a communion between God and the church. It is a communion between God and the *oikumene*. It signifies the eucharistic presence of the Spirit of Christ in the whole of creation, and Christ's body broken for creation. The uniting presence of the Spirit creates a cosmic fellowship and harmony, a unity in which diversity is celebrated and brokenness is healed. The Spirit mediates the presence of the Risen Christ in a suffering and broken world, healing and reconciling. It enables positive and creative engagement with difference in a creation-transforming process. Such is the cosmic significance of the *epiklesis* in the eucharistic liturgy, although the tendency in some liturgies is to limit this work of the Spirit to the reconciliation of Christians alone.⁵⁶

Just as the Spirit moved before creation to bring order out of chaos, so too it continues to move through a creation that needs reconciliation and healing and continually establishes

communion in a process of New Creation. The Holy Spirit that was the creative force in Creation (Genesis 1) is the Spirit that is *dunamis* for the New Creation. The Missio Dei is the creation of true Holy Communion in the *oikumene*. Creation exists for such communion. To share in the Missio Dei is to seek and to work for this communion in all relationships, in relationships with nature, with other Christians, with people of other faiths and none. It is to recognise the Spirit at work in the whole of creation. This is what it means to be truly “ecumenical.”

All this has implications for our understanding and practice of mission and relationships in mission.

4. IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE DISCOURSE AND PRACTICE

4.1 Our understanding of Mission, Kingdom and Church and their inter-relation.

There are a number of inherent difficulties with the understanding and practice of mission, and therefore also of relationships in mission in the 20th century, difficulties which we need to address if we are to acknowledge and participate effectively in the Missio Dei, the process of New Creation.

First, there is the difficulty of terminology. It is difficult, as Bosch suggests, to define “mission”. Mission becomes everything the Christian and the church does, with the result that missiology is often no different from other theological disciplines. In addition, the widely varied use of the term both in the history of mission and today, in church and society, reduces the sharpness of the term. It is this breadth of application of the term that often leads to confusing discussions about the nature of mission and evangelism and the relationship between them, and consequently to a real practical dilemma.

I think this difficulty arises because “mission” is understood as the task of the church as church, in relation to the world, that is in relation to people outside the church. Such an understanding of mission is the product of an inadequate biblical hermeneutic that uses Matthew 28:19 as a hermeneutical key for the interpretation of the biblical testimony on this subject. Mission is then understood primarily in terms of a “missionary mandate” given to the church, is defined in terms of the church, viewed as a prerogative of the “church”, and understood as the activity of the church, with the evangelistic emphasis on the making of disciples. So the key questions become What is the mission of the church in relation to the world? and How do we make and baptise disciples? This ecclesio-centric and conversion oriented perspective presents us with a serious theological difficulty. It does not allow for extra-ecclesial and cosmic dimensions of the Missio Dei. If we are to speak of mission as God’s mission in ecumenical perspective, and include the participation of the cosmos in it, then we need to offer an understanding of mission that recognises God’s activity in the world and includes the participation and contributions of the un-churched. What I propose is that we limit our use of the term “mission” to the Missio Dei. That is, we should not use the term to refer to the activity of the church or of humanity, and speak rather of the participation of Christians, of the church, of people of other faiths and none in the mission that belongs only

to God; and that this mission includes God working in people and situations beyond the church.

Rather than take our lead from such biblical passages as Matthew 28:19 and argue, less than convincingly, for a missionary mandate given to the “Church”, it would be more appropriate to take our lead from the general tenor of the biblical witness as a whole. I have argued elsewhere (*International Review of Mission*, January 2000) that Matthew 25:31-46 could be used as a hermeneutical key to interpret what we might call “mission” in Matthew’s Gospel. It seems to me that what we have in this text is an indication of the locus of Incarnation today, and the nature of the Missio Dei, at least in relation to humanity. God (the Risen Jesus) is present in the world through the vulnerable and needy. Encounter with God takes place in the encounter with this Other, and participation in the Missio Dei in this context is solidarity with the Other. If we link this idea with the vocation of discipleship described at various points in the New Testament and with the call to be witnesses mentioned in Acts 1:8, we are led to the conclusion that to participate in the Missio Dei is to encounter God in relationships and to share in the act of New Creation. Discipleship is then witness in word and deed to God’s grace and transforming love. This is the *euangelion*, the Good News proclaimed in words and actions that contribute to the transformation of the *oikumene*, to the restoration of *X present in the Other* relationships, to the making of all things new, to the process of New Creation.

If we proceed along these lines, we are drawn to the conclusion that mission belongs neither to the church (*missio ecclesiae*) nor to humanity (*missio humanitatis*) but to God alone. There is only the Missio Dei and the Kingdom of God, and both relate directly to the *oikumene*. The *oikumene* is the locus of Incarnation, Missio Dei, and Kingdom, the place where God is present and active, and the place in which God reigns, so that neither is related only to nor identified only with Christians, the church, and their activities. Further, participation in the Missio Dei and life in the kingdom is no longer exclusively the prerogative and possession of the Christian or the church. The boundaries of Mission and Kingdom extend far beyond the boundaries of church. The whole *oikumene* is invited to share in Mission and Kingdom. Indeed, any part of the *oikumene* that contributes to the process of transformation, of New Creation, shares in the Missio Dei and the life of the Kingdom of God. This entails a shift from the conversion-benevolence (charity) paradigm to the transformation-participation paradigm. This shift leads us to live the transformation-participation paradigm, and so also into authentic discipleship (both individual and communal) in a global and plural world. Discipleship then becomes a living and dynamic participation in the process of transformation that is the divine project for creation, a participation that involves a partnership with the *oikumene*. Such a shift has serious consequences for relationships in mission.

4.2 Relationships in Mission: a way forward

It seems to me that a number of changes are required if we are to establish appropriate relationships in mission.

First, there needs to be a shift from a bi-lateral (North-South) relationship paradigm to a multi-lateral one. While there was the attempt to move away from this paradigm in the 20th

century, it remains the defining paradigm for relationships in mission today. The basic paradigm governing relationships in mission is the North-South ecclesial paradigm. This paradigm exists because of the historical, and often colonial, link between churches and mission agencies that constitute the “centre” of mission and the Christian communities established by their missionary work. The tendency is to associate freedom, independence, wealth and power with western churches and agencies, and oppression, dependence, poverty and powerlessness with churches in other parts of the world. No matter how much talk there is about equality and mutuality, the reality is that the relationship between these two groups is characterised by domination and dependence. The tenuous thread that holds this relationship together is benevolence or “charity”. Further, there is in practice little genuine acknowledgement of the needs of western churches/societies, and not much effort is put into setting up systems and structures to ensure that these churches and societies really listen to and receive from people they bring to the West through partnership programmes.

Second, when mention is made of “partnership” it usually refers to the relationship between churches and agencies in the North and churches in the South. There is need to move away from this church-centred approach. Our understanding of partnership needs to be extended to make it fully ecumenical. I suggest we use the term “partnership” to refer to relationships with any group or organisation that works for the transformation of the *oikumene*. In other words relationships in mission are fully ecumenical in that they include people of other denominations, of other faiths, of no faith, and relationships between human beings and the rest of the creation. In addition, this partnership is a fellowship (*koinonia*), a friendship in the Gospel, a partnership based on grace and love, a partnership of equality, mutuality and solidarity. (Phil.1:5ff.)

To seek and to enter into such relationships is to acknowledge that people outside the “church” are able to participate in the *Missio Dei*, and indeed might already be doing so through the power of God’s spirit at work in and through them. It is our task to recognise the signs of the Kingdom in the world and to get alongside those who are such signs, and to work with them irrespective of denomination or religious persuasion. This means working with para-church and other faith organisations, with non-governmental and atheistic organisations, where such groups are actively involved in the transformation (or liberation) of humanity and the world. The HIV/AIDS crisis and inter-ethnic conflicts provide two great opportunities for relationships and “partnerships” in mission. This means a shift away from the denominational paradigm, and a narrow ecumenical paradigm. To be truly ecumenical is to work with everyone and everything that contributes to the process of transformation, the process of New Creation.

Third, we need to ask to what extent we by our lifestyle and witness promote the globalisation of that which stands in direct contradiction to the forces of New Creation, and how much we contribute to the ill effects of globalisation. How do we contribute to the globalisation of neo-economism and western culture and to western political domination of the globe? We need to ask ourselves in connection with relationships “in mission” whether by our theory and practice we are not encouraging and contributing to this negative globalisation and how we might alter our behaviour and work for positive change. It seems to me that there is still very much a western flavour to theological debates at the international level, and still a

preoccupation by many in other parts of the world with western theological ideas and norms. We need to face up to issues of power within the church and between churches. A first step would be a social analysis of church and society at the local, national, and international levels.

Fourth, we need ~~to seek~~ to speak out against and resist the tide of globalisation, and to ensure that our relationships with others both within the church and outside it reflect Gospel/Kingdom values. We need urgently to seek a common understanding, with people of all faiths and none, of what this means in today's world both in religious and secular life. The search for a global ethic will form part of this quest for a common understanding and praxis. This means that we should be more open to diverse perspectives and practices, and learn from and teach others how to live constructively with difference in a world torn apart by conflict and war. It means active involvement in acts of peace and reconciliation. It means educating people for such involvement.

Fifth, we need to take practical steps to ensure that in our relationships we give priority to the Other in our world. To encounter the Other is to experience divine epiphany and to enter into partnership with the poor, the needy, and the vulnerable, is to experience Incarnation. It is to approach the other with humility, respect, and awe. To participate in the Missio Dei is to be in solidarity with the Other. The poor and marginalised are the centre of mission both in terms of locus and of power in mission. Effective leadership and power, the planning and implementation of programmes, and the control of resources should be shared in inter-church and other relationships in such a way that the Other has a special place. Do Methodist structures and practice reflect this kind of relationship with the Other?

Sixth, all this has implications for formation in mission. Systems of formation, the formation environment, and programmes of formation need to take on a truly ecumenical and global/international flavour, so that Christians are properly equipped for discipleship and witness that is fully ecumenical and cosmic in a diverse and plural world.

These are but a few practical implications for relationships in mission. There are no doubt other implications, but we do not have time to consider them here.

5. CONCLUSION

We live in a *kairos* moment. We need a theology and praxis that is appropriate, credible and relevant. Above all we are challenged to speak and act with that integrity which every disciple of Christ is called to have. Perhaps we might begin with our theological institute. There are three steps we could take as we endeavour to participate in the New Creation:

1. The Institute should meet not only in the UK but also in other parts the world, say for example the next one could be, ~~for example~~, in Latin America or Asia or Africa.
2. We should ask people of other faiths to lead a session or two.
3. The majority of delegates should come from parts of the world other than Britain and the USA, and money should be found to make this possible.

ENDNOTES

¹ *International Review of Mission*, Volume LXXXVI, No. 342, July 1997; Bauerochse, Lothar, *Learning to Live Together: Interchurch partnerships as ecumenical communities of learning*, Geneva, WCC, 1996.

² *International Review of Mission*, ibid., p. 210.

³ quoted in idem.

⁴ Bauerochse, op. cit., p.4. Only 17 of the 1300 delegates came from the churches in the "South".

⁵ *International Review of Mission*, op. cit., pp. 210-211.

⁶ Bauerosche, op. cit., p. 11

⁷ *International Review of Mission*, op. cit. p. 211.

⁸ Bauerochse, op. cit., p. 12.

⁹ *International Review of Mission*, op. cit., p. 211.

¹⁰ ibid., p. 212.

¹¹ idem.

¹² idem.

¹³ idem.

¹⁴ Bauerosche, op. cit., p. 22.

¹⁵ Idem.

¹⁶ From Report on the Tambaran Conference, quoted in *International Review of Mission*, op. cit., p. 213.

¹⁷ idem.

¹⁸ idem.

¹⁹ Bauerosche, op. cit., p. 24.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 25.

²¹ Ibid., p. 26.

²² *International Review of Mission*, op. cit., p. 213.

²³ Bauerosche, op. cit. P. 28.

²⁴ Ibid., pp. 29-30.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 31.

²⁶ idem.

²⁷ idem.

²⁸ ibid., p. 214.

²⁹ Bauerosche, op. cit. p. 31.

³⁰ Idem.

³¹ Ibid., p. 32.

³² Ibid., p. 33.

³³ Ibid., p. 42.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 45.

³⁵ *International Review of Mission*, ibid., p. 214.

³⁶ idem.

³⁷ ibid., p. 215.

³⁸ idem.

³⁹ ibid., p. 216.

⁴⁰ idem.

⁴¹ ibid., p. 217.

⁴² ibid., pp. 217-8.

⁴³ ibid., pp. 218-219.

⁴⁴ ibid., p. 219.

⁴⁵ idem.

⁴⁶ idem.

⁴⁷ ibid., pp. 219-220.

⁴⁸ ibid., p. 221.

⁴⁹ idem.

⁵⁰ ibid., p. 222.

⁵¹ idem.

⁵² ibid., p. 224

⁵³ idem.

⁵⁴ idem.

⁵⁵ ibid., p. 225.

⁵⁶ The Methodist Worship Book of the British Methodist Church has the phrasing “send down your Holy Spirit...Unite us with him forever”(MWB, Ordinary seasons [1]) and “May the same Spirit unite us with all your people on earth and in heaven.”(MWB - Ordinary seasons[2])