

**WEA MC Global Consultation  
Panama 2016**

**Cooperation in a Polycentric World**

**By Patrick Fung**

This Conference has asked me to address the topic “*Cooperation in a Polycentric World.*” The main theme of the Consultation is **POLYCENTRIC MISSION** – from all nations to all nations. By way of introduction, let me briefly highlight again “Why Polycentric Mission”?

**1. Why Polycentric Mission?**

We have seen enormous changes in the landscape of mission over the past 100 years, and especially since the Edinburgh 1910 Conference. Although there were very few non-westerners at that conference,<sup>1</sup> mission conferences today are very different. I particularly appreciate Paul Woods’ comments, one of the researchers at OCMS, regarding today’s new mission dynamic, “We can see a *rainbow* around the table- whether the table actually is round is another matter.” Today we can rub shoulders with brothers and sisters from many different continents, different backgrounds, North and South, East and West. As I shared at the 2010 Cape Town Lausanne Congress, rather than passing the mission baton from the Western world to the majority world Church, God is adding “more hands” to it.

One of the best definitions I have seen so far in defining polycentrism in the context of world mission is by Kirk Franklin,

The concept of polycentrism is an outcome of globalization and glocalization and it provides a deliberate movement away from established centers of power, so that leadership takes place among and within a community that learns together. Polycentrism assumes self-regulating centers of influence within a given structure. This occurs when there are many centers of power or importance within a political, cultural, or socio-economic system. The multiple centers may be of leadership, power, authority, ideology, or importance within a larger ‘political boundary’.<sup>2</sup>

Professor Andrew Walls insightfully highlighted the concept of polycentrism in global mission: the riches of a hundred places learning from each other. He believes that there is no one single centre of Christianity or one single centre of missionary activity. He said, “One necessitates the other.”<sup>3</sup> Each center enriches the others and there is a need for one another.

However, despite this inspiring concept, we do face a challenge. While the numeric center of gravity in terms of Christian growth has shifted to the global South, the fiscal center of gravity remains in the global North, though this might be changing. The concept and the practice of the “powerful” bringing the good news to the “powerless” is rightly being challenged. Samuel Escobar passionately argued that

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<sup>1</sup> The 1,215 official delegates were predominantly British and American, with a small minority coming from the non-Western churches - nine Indians (including one Eurasian Methodist woman from Madras), four Japanese, three Chinese, one Korean, one Burmese, one Anatolian, and a Europeanized black African.

<sup>2</sup> Kirk Franklin, HTS Theological Studies, *Polycentrism in the Missio Dei*, AOSIS

<sup>3</sup> *Christianity Today*, February 2007

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“missionary and theological tasks have a global dimension wherein neither imperialism nor provincialism has a place.”<sup>4</sup>

The title of this plenary session is “Cooperation in a Polycentric World”. However, for the sake of discussion, I will use the two words, “cooperation” and “partnership”, interchangeably in this paper. I would like to explore three areas in this paper.

First, I want to ask the question of what are the implications of the biblical understanding of “*koinonia*” as it relates to partnership and cooperation for global mission.

Second, I want to ask the question of what are the possible pitfalls, barriers and challenges in partnership and cooperation for global mission in a polycentric world.

Finally, I want to ask the question of what kind of partnership and cooperation would be possible for global mission in a polycentric world in today’s context.

**1.1 “Dancing Together” and Koinonia- Implications for the Changing Missionary Endeavour**

Based on the Gospel of John, chapters 14-17, Paul Woods applied the concept of ‘Perichoresis’- literally *dancing around*, to the understanding of the members of the Trinity, a phrase first coined by Jürgen Moltmann. ‘Perichoresis’ describes a “community without uniformity, personality without individualism and [difference without division]”.

“In this dynamic view of the Trinity, the dance results in the provision of space, each person for the other two. Hence, difference (but not division) is ensured, and separate identities preserved.” The love of each member allows him to ‘stand out’ for and be drawn to the others, and thus *perichoresis* leads to *kenosis*- space making is associated with self-emptying (Philippians 2:6).”<sup>5</sup>

The model of *perichoresis* in the Trinity is to cascade down from God to the believers as Jesus prayed for the disciples “May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.” (John 17:21). Unity thus cascades down from God to the believers, one form of unity derivative of another.<sup>6</sup>

Thus partnership reflects that unity with one another and unity with God. A biblical cooperation involves serving together as a community in unity but not uniformity. Giving space to one another, *kenosis*, involves emptying self, letting go of our own space, preferences and agenda.

It is breath-taking to know that we can enjoy partnership with God. In 1 Corinthians 3:9, Paul speaks about “God’s fellow-workers you are; God’s agricultural and building projects you are!” Michael Griffiths puts it this way, “Perhaps it would revolutionize the spiritual experience of some of us if we

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<sup>4</sup> Samuel Escobar, “A Movement Divided: Three approaches to world evangelization stand in tension with one another” in *Transformation: An International Journal of Holistic Mission Studies* 1991 8:7

<sup>5</sup> Paul Woods, “Perichoresis and Koinonia: Implications of our Fellowship with God for the Changing Missionary Endeavor”, *Mission Round Table*, Singapore: OMF, Vol 10, No1 January 2015

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, p6

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grasped this concept: we have been given the esteemed privilege of being junior partners with the Holy Trinity.”<sup>7</sup>

The New Testament usage of the word “*koinonia*” carries several important meanings:<sup>8</sup>

- **Fellowship**- which is most commonly understood and used as in Acts 2:42, Philippians 2:1, 3:10; 1 John 1:3, 1:6-7. It has both a vertical dimension referring to fellowship with God which has ethical implications of walking in the light as in 1John 1, and a horizontal dimension, which is fellowship with one another in Christ.

Acts 2:42 They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to *fellowship*, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

1John 1:6 If we claim to have *fellowship* with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth.

- **Contribution**- Dr Luke often used the form of *koina* to refer to communal ownership of Christians with the characteristics of generosity and contributing to the well-being of others. Macedonia and Achaia Christians were pleased to make a contribution (*Koinonia*) for the poor in Jerusalem (Romans 15:26). Thus *Koinonia* is not simply spiritual unity, but also unity in the sharing with the needy.<sup>9</sup>

Romans 15: 26 For Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make a *contribution* for the poor among the Lord’s people in Jerusalem.

- **Participation**- Paul used “*Koinonia*” to refer to participation in the blood of Christ (1 Cor 10:16). It is a declaration of allegiance. However the New Testament goes further to explain that this allegiance is not just with Christ but also with those who are suffering because of Christ.

1Cor10:16 Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a *participation* in the blood of Christ?

1Peter4:12 Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. <sup>13</sup> But rejoice inasmuch as you *participate* in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.

Heb 10:33 Sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution; at other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated. <sup>34</sup> You suffered along with those in prison and

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<sup>7</sup> Unpublished article by Michael Griffiths

<sup>8</sup> Paul Woods gives a much more detailed theological treatment on the understanding of *Koinonia* in his paper.

<sup>9</sup> The ethical, practical, concrete dimensions of this are explained in much detail by Chris Wright in his book *Living as the People of God- the Relevance of Old Testament Ethics*.

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joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions.

- **Sharing**- though similar to Romans 15:26, this does not refer so much to the concept of contribution but rather to the sharing in the service of God's people with the aim to benefit others. Paul referred to the Philippian Church's generosity in sharing and meeting the needs of Paul. Trust is a key to his sharing process.

<sup>Phil 4:14</sup> Yet it was good of you to share in my troubles. <sup>15</sup> Moreover, as you Philippians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel, when I set out from Macedonia, not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only;

- Finally **Partnership**- this concept – often based on Philippians 1:5, has most often been used in mission circles. *Koinonia* here signifies a purpose with a shared commitment to Christ, the vertical dimension, and a shared commitment to the same task and goal in the proclamation of the gospel, the horizontal dimension.

<sup>Phil 1:3</sup> I thank my God every time I remember you. <sup>4</sup> In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy <sup>5</sup> because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, <sup>6</sup> being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

Thus the biblical concept of *Koinonia* carries the rich multi-dimensional meaning of fellowship, sharing, contribution, participation and also partnership.

## **1.2 Reflections on *Koinonia***

- In the context of polycentric mission, how do we “dance together” and give “space to one another” so that there is “unity without uniformity, personality without individualism and differences without division”?
- Peter encouraged the early church Christians to *participate* (fellowship) in the suffering of Christ (4:12). The author of Hebrews affirmed those who stood with others in suffering and accepted suffering as part of their calling (Hebrew 10:33). How do we (Global North and South and beyond) participate (share) in the suffering of brothers and sisters from another context?<sup>10</sup> What might not be helpful?

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<sup>10</sup> “Love calls for Solidarity. Loving one another includes especially caring for those who are persecuted and in prison for their faith and witness. If one part of the body suffers, all parts suffer with it. We are all, like John, ‘companions in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus’”. (Rev. 1:9). *Cape Town Commitment 2010*.

## **2. Pitfalls, barriers and challenges in embracing and practising Koinonia (Cooperation)**

Whether we refer *Koinonia* to “partnership”, “sharing”, “fellowship”, “participation”, or “communion”, the problem is that we do not find practicing *Koinonia* easy and natural in the global church and mission context with our cultural prejudices and historical baggage. The early church in Jerusalem faced that problem when leaders rebuked Peter when he went to the house of uncircumcised men and ate with them (Acts 11:2). Sharing was not meant to be. Surprisingly it was the new emerging church in Antioch, the seemingly peripheral group, who collected the offering and contributed towards the needs of the Jerusalem church when they heard about the need in Jerusalem. (Acts 11:28-29). I wonder what the response of the established organized Jerusalem church was when they received the gift from the Gentile young Antioch Church? It requires humility, respect and acceptance, accepting the “weaker” partner as equals as well as accepting one’s own inadequacy.

### **2.1 The danger of comparison without appreciating the unique contributions**

The Antioch Church shared its resources with the Jerusalem Church. But God’s resources are not only about money and certainly not about the exercise of power which money often brings. In the Antioch Church model, it was the “powerless” which brought resources to the “powerful”. In our global family, some will bring quite different gifts. Some will model faithfulness in the face of suffering and persecution and show us a vital element of authentic gospel living. Some will bring years of experience of commending the Lord Jesus Christ in the context of another world faith. Some will show how to live with shining trust in God despite poverty or injustice. Others will bring deep traditions of believing prayers. The Body of Christ needs all of these, and many more and in true partnership we shall each bring what we have, not what we don’t have, to bless the world church in its mission. And we will respect and rejoice in diversity, rather imposing one way of doing mission on others.

### **2.2 The Issue of over-confidence and lack of confidence**

The 1910 Edinburgh Conference had a triumphalistic tone with the watchword “Evangelization of the world in this generation”. It was a noble vision. However, Andrew Walls commented that “The Edinburgh conference did not expect the non-Western leaders to make any significant contributions.”<sup>11</sup> With the majority of those from the West, the idea of world evangelization was from the West to the Rest. Western dominance in mission in the past 100 years is a fact. With the significant church growth in the majority world as well as vast changes in the global economic order,<sup>12</sup> one would have expected that the churches of the Global South would shape and bring significant impact on the global church and mission movements with self-confidence. In some areas this has been true. However, most of the time, it is not the case. Note the critique by Hwa Yung, a key leader in Asia and in the Lausanne Movement,

The fact is that, despite the fundamental shift of the center of gravity of Christianity from the west to the Global South, for the moment the centers of power remain largely in the North: denominational and organizational structures, institutions and established mission agencies,

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<sup>11</sup> Andrew Walls, Publications??

<sup>12</sup> *The Economist* (Oct 3<sup>rd</sup>-9<sup>th</sup>, 2015)

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publishing houses, academically trained personnel, and above all, money. This imbalance can grossly distort our perceptions of the global church realities, and consequently the way we work. Consequently, we remain blinded to changing global realities and locked into outmoded courses of action. And few—too few—Global South leaders have the self-confidence in Christ to think and act in a way that is not domesticated by the perceived superiority of western culture and traditions! ,... in many other areas, the churches of the Global South remain under western tutelage.”<sup>13</sup>

Sometimes, those from the Global South may resist change out of loyalty to models of theology and missiology which they inherit from the West. The challenge by Samuel Escobar on “managerial missiology”<sup>14</sup> , whether you agree with the label or not, was a timely wake-up call to the global church.

### **2.3 The risk of history repeating itself**

Christ crucified has brought into being nothing less than a new, united human race, united in itself and united to its creator. Christianity is not international, it is supranational.<sup>15</sup> God’s new community will always transcend the racial, lingual, national barriers as it reflects the nature of the kingdom of Christ.

While I rejoice in the growth of the Asian Missionary Movement, I still have a nagging restlessness. There is a thinking that is circulated among Chinese Christians that the 21<sup>st</sup> century mission or the next century mission belongs to the Asians or to the Chinese. Sometimes, even the Westerners boost the confidence of our Asian brothers and sisters by promoting this concept which unfortunately is to our harm. I do not deny the wealth and the tremendous resources with which God has blessed many of the Asian countries including China. However, I am concerned that we, as Asians, may be repeating the same mistake that our Western brethren might have committed in the past, that is, to equate economic and political power with advances in the spreading of the gospel. We continue to reinforce the notion that the spreading of the gospel is always from the powerful to the powerless, the haves to the have-nots. There is a sense of Asian triumphalism which makes me nervous. We also need to remember that mission partnership is not just between North and South, but also South and South and much beyond. For as Andrew Walls said, “mission today is from anywhere to anywhere”.<sup>16</sup> Partnership is multi-directional, dynamic and multi-centered led.

### **2.4 Is our “We” too small?**

Luke, in the book of Acts, has used several key words which have significant missiological implications. The first is the word “We”. Luke was almost hidden in the missionary service but he was not passive as

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<sup>13</sup> Hwa Yung, Unpublished Paper on Church of the Global South

<sup>14</sup> William Taylor ed., *Global Missiology for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic), p.109

<sup>15</sup> Michal Green, *30 Years that changed the World*, Leicester: IVP, 2002, p.154

<sup>16</sup> The term “Mission from anywhere to anywhere” has been used by Andrew Walls in the Chapter “Christian Mission in a Five-hundred-year Context” in the book *“Mission in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century- Exploring the 5 Marks of Global Mission.”* He said, “In the multi-centric Christian church there can be no automatic assumption of Western leadership; indeed, if suffering and endurance are the badges of authenticity, we can expect the most powerful Christian leadership to come from elsewhere.” P. 203-204

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indicated in Acts 16:10.<sup>17</sup> There was sensitivity to the work of the Holy Spirit, spontaneity with a sense of urgency. The second is the Greek word *Homothumadon*, translated as “with one accord” in the NIV which occurred ten times in the book of Acts out of twelve in the New Testament. The “*inclusive*” nature of God’s community, embracing both Jews and Gentiles, was evident throughout the book of Acts.

In today’s changing landscape of mission, we are challenged to redefine the “We”.<sup>18</sup> Eldon Porter in his paper, “Partnering with the Majority World in the Global Paradigm” wrote,

In light of the vast diversity of expressions of missions, the intrinsic value of flexibility is essential if one is to become globally friendly. Traditional agencies that were developed in a paradigm where almost all their missionaries came from fairly similar contexts (education, a common trade language, standard of living, etc.) are faced with a vastly diverse and constantly changing global context. A partnership friendly agency is almost always one that is focused on the essentials and flexible with secondary issues. Every [mission] agency is different, but when membership is tied to structures, policies, and systems, it will be more difficult to truly partner with the majority world and treat their missionaries as equal.

**2.5 Reflection on barriers in practicing *Koinonia***

- How do we define the “We” in today’s global mission context? Is our “We” too small to pursue God’s Kingdom’s work? What needs to be changed? In order for us to “dance” together for His kingdom, how do we release space (*kenosis*) to others so that they can participate as well?
- What do you think could be the unique contribution to global mission from your cultural context? What are the specific gifts, resources and strengths that God has given you in your context to contribute to global mission?
- How can Christian leaders from the majority world overcome their inferiority complex, if any, and develop a healthy confidence in God, avoiding a reactionary attitude?

**3. Cooperation in a Polycentric World for Global Mission- Dreaming Possibilities**

Before we think through the possibilities of cooperation and partnership for global mission, we need to take a step back in trying to understand the context we are operating in today. There are several key factors that influence the way we consider partnership.

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<sup>17</sup> “After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, *concluding* that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.” (Acts 16:10). That word “concluded” in verse 10 means ‘to knit together’, ‘bring together’, ‘to put together in one’s mind’. So clearly Paul related the vision he had received to the others, - and they discussed it, they weighed up all that had happened to them - the plans, the closed doors, the vision and their current location, and together they came to one mind - Macedonia - and their response was immediate, purposeful, and united.

<sup>18</sup> One agency which has gone through the process of redefining the “We” is the Wycliffe Global Alliance (formally Wycliffe Bible Translators International). One of the purposes of the “redefinition” is to give a greater voice to various partners in the Global South, balancing the voice of the more experienced and influential northern organisations, improved missiological reflection and the training of leaders for the Bible translation task. Franklin, “A Paradigm for Global Mission Leadership,” 65.

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- It is worth noting that those leading the vibrant and rapidly growing majority world church and mission movements are not wrestling with issues that traditional mission agencies are wrestling with. Their structures tend to be simple, working in partnerships is the norm, and their systems tend to be more flexible. To a great extent, they are leading the way in how missions should happen in the global paradigm.<sup>19</sup>
- The second macro issue is the desire and ability of a local body of believers to get directly involved in missions. In the past, a local church could not do missions without working through the agency. Today we see churches of all sizes from around the world involved directly in cross cultural ministries. From the perspective of the local church, partnering with a mission agency is just one of many options for how they engage.<sup>20</sup>
- In today's 'flattened' world where technology allows us to be much more interconnected, people are able to communicate freely with virtually anyone, in almost any location globally. This ability to connect leads in turn to the creation of ministry partnerships. This affects our sense of belonging. Old structural paradigms of "homes" and "fields" defined in the past by geographical distance and colonial relationships are undergoing reform and in many cases, needing to be replaced by new structures<sup>21</sup> which reflect new realities and changed relationships. The global diaspora movement phenomenon including the refugees' situation further make the home and field model unsustainable as often the "homes" become the mission fields.
- The disparity of economic power between the Global North and Global South has remained. The World Bank published the figure of thirty-one countries belong to the low-income nations bracket and thirty-two countries in the high-income nations bracket. When we examine the details, those from the low-income nations are mainly from the majority world, the Global South while those from the high income nations are from the Global North.<sup>22</sup> One main exception is China. As a share of world GDP, America and China (including Hong Kong) are at 16% and 17% respectively, measured at purchasing-power parity.<sup>23</sup>

I will now try to share a few thoughts on the different possible partnership models in the context of the polycentric world. What I share below is far from being comprehensive, and I have probably raised more questions than answers. However, I hope that my sharing will generate meaningful discussions as we explore further together.

### **3.1 Partnership with and beyond Sending Churches- Rethink the Tentmaking Model**

It is interesting to note that there is no preserved biblical record of Antioch as Paul's sending church, sending financial support to Paul and Barnabas and no "thank-you" letter from Paul to the sending

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<sup>19</sup> Eldon Porter, Unpublished Paper, "Partnering with the Majority World in the Global Paradigm", 2016

<sup>20</sup> See Eldon Porter's paper for more details

<sup>21</sup> Eddie Arthur and Eldon Porter are making the point that tweaking and reforming is inadequate and that something more substantial and radical will need to happen.

<sup>22</sup> Country Income Groups (World Bank Classification), Country and Lending Groups, 2011, The World Bank Group, viewed 30th August, 2011

<sup>23</sup> *The Economist* (Oct 3<sup>rd</sup>-9<sup>th</sup>, 2015)

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church like the letter to the Philippian church. In Philippians 4:5, Paul asserted that “not one church shared with me....except you.” Michael Griffiths made the following comments on the biblical model of self-supporting missionaries:

There is no place for us to act as freelance mavericks and claim, “The Lord has led me...” We need to consult with our sending church leaders, to seek their advice, guidance, and support. We are not to act as though we are not members of the local [sending] church. However, It is evident in 1 Corinthian 9 that from the earliest days some missionaries were church supported and yet others, notably Paul and Barnabas and probably Dr Luke, were self-supporting. There were sound practical reasons for this: some had portable trades and some didn't. <sup>24</sup>

As an increasing number of missionary workers from the majority world are called into global mission, we may reconsider the model of the earliest Protestant missionaries- the Moravians. They were inevitably all self-supporting. <sup>25</sup>

Acts 20:34 “These hands of mine have supplied my own needs and the *needs of my companions*- that here is a practical partnership between Paul and his colleagues: some earned money and supported others who did not or possibly could not. In what way can this principle be applied to our context today particularly for those from the majority world?

With the greater proportion of the world becoming Creative Access Regions,<sup>26</sup> tentmaking is not only a mission strategy based on financial needs but a response to the current political climate. Some may argue that the future of mission is very much a tent-making future even in open access places. Tent-making not only provides a potential stream of income and a clear identity in the community, but also demonstrates whole-life discipleship. The structures of traditional mission agencies need to change in order to fully facilitate this way of mission and allow for the inevitable partnerships that come from tent-making. Today's workers face many challenges. When they come into a community with no visible means of support, even if they do not call themselves missionaries, they can be the target of suspicion. Thus would it be possible that the workers are not only self-supporting, but also mutually supporting in joint business ventures? Those from the North and the South and beyond can join hands together for Kingdom venture through business means. Some may be able to bring financial resources, some technical skills, and yet others the strength of networking. There is much we can learn from the corporate world.

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<sup>24</sup> An interview with Michael Griffiths, *Mission Round Table*, Vol 10, No.1 January, OMF International.

<sup>25</sup> On Christmas Eve 1792, a Dutch tailor, a German cobbler, and a German cutler arrived at Bavianskloof to begin a mission to the southern part of Africa. The mission station they started was a self-supporting farming community, working to support each other. Another record of self-supporting missionaries- On 30 March 1756, Solomon Schumann wrote from Surinam in South America: Brother Kamm is picking coffee; Brother Wenzel is mending shoes; Brother Schmidt is making a dress for a customer; Brother Doerfer is digging the garden; Brther Brambly is working on the canal.” They were mutually self-supporting team. For details, see *Mission Round Table*, Vol 10, No. 1 January 2015, OMF International

<sup>26</sup> PEW Research Center 2013 indicated that 96% of the world population lives in Creative Access or Semi-Restricted Areas. Some other research shows a lower figure but a consistent increasing trend.

### **3.2 Partnership in developing Christ-like leaders**

Power and control remain some of the key barriers in developing meaning partnership for global mission. Effective and God-honouring partnership requires godly Christ-like leaders who can model the way.

The Lausanne III Congress held in Cape Town, 2010, addressed the need for Christ-like leaders

The rapid growth of the Church in so many places remains shallow and vulnerable, partly because of the lack of disciplined leaders, and partly because so many use their positions for worldly power, arrogant status or personal enrichment. As a result, God's people suffer, Christ is dishonored, and gospel mission is undermined. 'Leadership training' is the commonly-proposed priority solution. Indeed, leadership training programs of all kinds have multiplied, but the problem remains,... Some leadership training programs focus on packaged knowledge, techniques and skills to the neglect of godly character. By contrast, authentic Christian leaders must be like Christ in having a servant heart, humility, integrity, purity, lack of greed, prayerfulness, dependence on God's Spirit, and a deep love for people.

I am aware of at least one network that has invited leaders from both the Global North and South to dialogue together on a regular basis to learn how to develop Christ-like leaders. It would be helpful to develop a trusting relationship with honest open sharing to explore some of the deeper issues that impede effective partnership.

Some of the questions may include:

- Will western agencies and missionaries recognize emerging leaders from the majority world as equal partners and allow them to take on leadership responsibilities?
- Will western agencies be willing to adjust and reorganize their basic structures to be relevant to contemporary majority world context and to facilitate the changing roles?
- Can Christian leaders from the majority world overcome their inferiority complex and avoid a reactionary attitude and pride?
- Will those leaders and missionaries from the majority world be willing to humbly acknowledge with gratitude the contribution from Western missionaries?
- Can leaders from the majority world prove themselves to be accountable if funds and resources are entrusted to them?
- Is there a trend moving towards inter-dependence rather than independence or dependence?
- What are some of the models of Christ-like leaders in the Global North and Global South Context? How is that expressed differently?
- What has hurt us deeply from leaders of another cultural context? What might be some of cultural misunderstandings? Have we been able to talk openly about those issues?
- Are we able not only to "eat at the same table" but allow others to decide the "menu" beyond our comfort zone?

We are on a pilgrimage together as we help one another, whether from the North, South, East or West, to be and to nurture Christ-like leaders.

### **3.3 Partnership in a reverse order- From the rest to the West?**

The concept of “Evangelization or Re-evangelization of Europe” was not a notion only of the Evangelical Church. Pope Benedict XVI issued a renewed call to the Catholic Church,

Powerful events are currently at play in Europe reshaping the geopolitical landscape,...one particularly important area of *collaboration between Orthodox and Catholics* today concerns the defense of the Christian roots of Europe and of Christian values ....

The evangelizing of Europe has been one of the most strident themes publicized by both Benedict and his predecessor, John Paul II.<sup>27</sup>

Pope Francis emphasized the importance of Christians being “missionary disciples”<sup>28</sup>- “All the baptized, whatever their position in the Church or their level of instruction in the faith, are agents of evangelization, and it would be insufficient to envisage a plan of evangelization to be carried out by professionals while the rest of the faithful would simply be passive recipients....Every Christian is challenged, here and now, to be actively engaged in evangelization; Every Christian is a missionary to the extent that he or she has encountered the love of God in Christ Jesus: we no longer say that we are ‘disciples’ and ‘missionaries’, but rather that we are always ‘missionary disciples’.”

Patrick Johnstone in his book, *The Future of the Global Church*, highlighted the significant decrease in Christian population in Europe in the past century between 1900 and 2010 with currently more than 25% labelled as “evangelized non-Christians”.<sup>29</sup> On the other hand, the totally unevangelized population in Africa and Asia fell dramatically over the course of the century - and that the resulting growth of the Church in Africa, Latin America and Asia has been a largely evangelical phenomenon.

If we truly believe that the West needs “re-evangelizing”, the key question would be who will be taking up this baton in this “new” evangelization opportunity?

When we think of evangelization, often we begin with strategies. However, it would be good to recall the wise words of Michael Green as he described the early church movements, “Growth of the early church movement was not initiated by master plans, not charismatic leaders, not fantastic strategies, but by nameless, committed, fearless disciples.”<sup>30</sup>

God is on the move. With the ongoing refugee situation in Europe as well as the significant diaspora community of scholars and students from different parts of the world converging in Europe, Europe potentially becomes a significant place where people will hear the gospel for the first time. What a wonderful opportunity for the Church in Europe to reach out to these people through both the proclamation and the demonstration of the gospel, in words and deeds. The impact and transformation which we expect to see will not stop in Europe.

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<sup>27</sup> *The Trumpet*, Feb 201

<sup>28</sup> Pope Francis, *EVANGELII GAUDIUM: The Joy of the Gospel*

<sup>29</sup> See Patrick Johnstone, *The Future of the Global Church*,

<sup>30</sup> Michal Green, *30 Years that changed the World*, Leicester: IVP, 2002, p.142

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As we disciple these new believers, many may return to where they come from and the spiritual impact will multiply. Perhaps the greatest contribution of the Church of the West to world evangelization today would be discipling followers of Christ, wherever they come from. Churches from Asia, Africa and Latin America can strengthen the hands of brothers and sisters in Europe by sending workers in step with the Spirit's leading. Using Michael Griffith's words, "what an esteemed privilege to be junior partners with the Holy Spirit" as God unfolds His plan of salvation, far beyond our plans and strategies. Indeed, this mission movement phenomena will not only be from the West to the Rest in the past, from the Rest to the West today, but more importantly from "everywhere to everywhere" with the gospel of Jesus Christ.<sup>31</sup> By discipling others to be faithful followers of Christ, the Church of the West will be a blessing to the global church of Jesus Christ. The world will not be the same.

### **3.4 Partnership in Theological Reflection- Rediscovery of the supernatural dimension**

Many from the majority world are coming to Christ because of the experience of divine healing and power encounters with demonic forces. However, basically those from the West have by and large ignored the spirit world. This has affected the way we carry out our ministries. Dr Robert Solomon from Singapore made the following comments,

This has implications for the way we do pastoral care and counselling. For some decades now, professional counsellors and care givers have been trained in the theories and practices of counselling and psychology, many of which ignore the spirit world in their understanding of human problems and in finding therapeutic strategies. There is a need for a change in this.

Philosophical rationalism has been sitting on the throne ruling over ideologies and hermeneutics. In this process, the spirit world as understood by traditional societies and non-western communities has been dismissed. Human problems have been understood in terms of modern science. Even theology has bowed down to modern science and had discarded and thrown away some old hermeneutic tools in understanding the world we live in and our human experiences in it.<sup>32</sup>

This is just one aspect of theological reflections that Christian scholars from both the West and the majority world can learn from and enrich one another as "iron sharpens iron". We are beginning to see this trend happening with intentionality. One fine example is the Langham Foundation, though based in the West, has a commitment to serve the global church. Not only does it help to nurture and develop

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<sup>31</sup> One personal testimony I would like to give was when I was preaching in Marburg, Germany in 2015. I was preaching in one of the oldest churches in town. I was told that Martin Luther preached in that church before! What excited me was not Martin Luther but rather what happened after the church service. Nine university graduates came up to shake my hand. They were all from China and came to study about four years ago. All of them became Christians within those four years as they received the gospel through the ministries of German brothers and sisters. One graduate who came from Shanghai shared with me, "Four years ago, brothers and sisters here in Germany shared with me the gospel. I was saved. Today God has challenged me to share the gospel with the refugees here in Germany!" Mission today indeed is from everywhere to everywhere.

<sup>32</sup> Annual Lecture, "Aspects of Trinitarian Mission- The Holy Spirit and Spirit World of Asia- Travelling the Supernatural Highways in Asia: The Spirit World in Pastoral Care" delivered by Dr Robert Solomon at Trinity Theological Seminary, Singapore 2010

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theologians and scholars from the majority world, it has also published theological compendiums written by scholars from the majority world. One such publication is the *African Bible Commentary* written solely by African scholars. It interprets and applies the Bible in the light of African culture and realities but also brings relevant insights into the biblical text which transcends the African context which are relevant for readers worldwide. I am encouraged by one principle that Langham Foundation holds onto, that is, to encourage these scholars to do theological reflections in their local context by staying where they are without migrating to the West. The challenge for us is not just to develop a non-Western theology, but rather, “More than Western” theology.

**Conclusion**

There will be many more examples of possible partnership or cooperation for the Kingdom’s work in a polycentric world. Some of the most creative ideas with sound missiological and theological reflections will come from the table discussions at this WEA consultation.

Biblical partnership that is based on the Trinitarian God involves self-emptying (*kenosis*), giving space to one another. It is not the model that the world advocates, a win-win situation. Rather, it is a sacrificial partnership.

“Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. For I testify that they [the Macedonian churches] gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability.” (2 Corinthians 8:2)

Biblical partnership proclaims a gospel in a polycentric world that transcends the barriers of race, ethnicity, and culture, making the church the most inclusive community on earth.<sup>33</sup>

Biblical partnership reflects the church of Christ that must be unifying, sanctifying, reconciling, proclaiming” in order for it to be God’s agent in reflecting the Trinity.<sup>34</sup>

~End~

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<sup>i</sup> Samuel Escobar, “A Movement Divided: Three approaches to world evangelization stand in tension with one another” in *Transformation: An International Journal of Holistic Mission Studies* 1991 8:7

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<sup>33</sup> Peter Rowan, *Mission Round Table*, Singapore: OMF, Vol 10, No1 January 2015, p.19

<sup>34</sup> Charles Van Engen, *Mission Round Table*, Singapore: OMF, Vol 10, No1 January 201, p.18