

# Discerning What God is Doing among His People Today: A Personal Journal

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## 1. Introduction

If we were to reflect on our journey as individuals and as people corporately, it would reveal how the human race has made amazing progress in every aspect of human life, particularly in the past one hundred years or so. From a distinctly Christian perspective, God has also revealed his own plan for his creation as well as his will to fulfill this plan. In this divine economy, the people of God, called collectively the church, has been graciously invited by God to join God's own journey of restoring his creation.<sup>2</sup>

My own reflection will look back at the last one hundred years and highlight what God has been doing with his people as his "mission partners." Therefore, the two major themes of our gathering are understood in plain language: mission is what we are called for in relation to the world and God's creation, and "churches together" in unity is how we relate to each other as God's missionary people.

I will begin with myself and then extend to others, and I will also begin with the past and move to the present. I do this as a second generation Christian, having grown up in a family where Christianity was always viewed as "weird" and abnormal. This was also a common experience for many of my friends from the non-western world. At the end of each section, I will add comments that I have learned about what God has been doing with his people. I will discuss my own stories in this reflection, my own cultural and ethnic orientation as a Korean, and my own Christian experience as a Pentecostal. Hence, the presentation is oral in style.

As a friend will be speaking on new and emerging trends in Christianity today, I need to be extra careful that I am not duplicating her areas, while ignoring my own. Another colleague will discuss issues of discernment regarding the place of the church in God's mission, and he can take us into the future. However, in spite of all my efforts not to do so, I have to confess that I may find myself following in my colleagues' footsteps.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Wonsuk Ma is the Executive Director of the Oxford Centre for Mission Studies, Oxford, UK. See his interview in this issue. This paper was presented at the Global Christian Forum (GCF) conference in Nov 2007 held in Limuru, Kenya. GCF plans to publish the same or revised material in various journals, including *Transformation*, along with other studies.

<sup>2</sup> My statement of "Mission as the Restoration of God's Creation" is found in Wonsuk Ma, "The Spirit of God in Creation: Lessons for Christian Mission," *Transformation* 24:3 & 4 (July & Oct 2007), pp. 222-230, esp. p. 227.

<sup>3</sup> Also, as I am trying to avoid excessive academic terms and expressions and maintain the oral

## 2. What Have We Learned?

What have we observed in God's work with his people in the last one hundred years? What have we learned from this observation about his intention and our response?

### 2.1 Christ: The Best Thing that Can Happen in Life

My first encounter with Christian truth was extremely personal and real. I had been a "good" Sunday school boy, and church events were all part of my "fun" life, as I hardly remember what the Korean War was like, not to mention the harsh Japanese colonial rule which predated the war. When I was a teenager, one day my mother decided to take my younger sister, who had suffered from polio, to a healing crusade in a nearby town. Mom asked me to get up early in the morning (5 a.m.!) and join the dawn prayer meeting at the church. My first reaction was, "She can't be serious, that God could heal my sister, who had been given up by my own uncle, who was a surgeon!" Then, I realized that all the things I had learned from the Sunday school class may not be "just old stories" at all; they may be real, if Mom is taking my sister to the same God. I had never before heard of a God who can, and will, do such a thing, and much more than that, or who as Christ in fact died in my place. Although my sister did not experience a radical healing as expected, my conversion process was well under way. Christ's coming into my life had become the crucial experience for the rest of my life.

Christian mission begins with this conviction of the uniqueness of Christ and his offer of salvation. That explains why my Mom was so zealous in bringing the people around us to the church. Even though she struggled as a new member of the church, and as the only Christian in a practically non-religious family by marrying my Dad, she thought all along that she was the only person in the family with "real life." The first fruit of her missionary engagement was all five of us, and then my cousins, later my Dad and my Grandma, both of whom used to be the fiercest critics of her faith. For her and us, this was a sure proof that this God was the very best and we were among the lucky few in this Buddhist country. We had eternal life and we were children of God! This God continued to prove his love and mercy as my Mom regularly resorted to him when everything else failed.

It was one of the critical moments of my life, when I gave up my hope to go to university, and temporarily stopped my high school studies to help my younger siblings to continue their studies, when both parents were gravely ill. The only "lifeline" my Mom had was a small Pentecostal church which was known for "weeping in prayer." Desperate (and dedicated, I supposed), these people braved the cold winter and a dark path to "hang on" to the only hope for their daily survival. After the dawn prayer meeting, my Mom would tread the

still dark path back home, worrying about what to cook for her five children. She recalled, having started the fire “by faith” with water in the pot, she heard something drop outside the door. She ran out to the doorstep and saw a sack of rice. Two shadows hurriedly disappeared under the cover of darkness. For her, they were, and are, the angels, and God had miraculously provided for her needs. Such stories as this were repeated throughout her life.

The reality of the Christian message as Christ’s good news to the poor (Luke 4:18-19) is particularly felt among the marginalized. The humble and yet desperate desire of my parents for their children was for them to receive an education much higher than elementary education, which they could only attain under Japanese colonial rule. There are millions of the “poor” in the world to whom Christ’s good news has been offered. Some of them are the millions of Indian Dalit parents, who struggle so that their children will be able to break the chain of oppression and poverty; also the ever-increasing refugees in various parts of the world, dislocated from their homes by force; hundreds of thousands of children, who are enslaved in city brothels and industries, forfeited of their basic rights to be children under care and protection; and millions of people under oppressive rulers, who fight for their freedom, as seen recently in Myanmar. This list goes on endlessly.

The steady and exponential growth of churches in the global south (or “southern church”) has been in part attributed to the “poor” hearts finding the unique “good news” offered by Christianity. There is no doubt that such growth, for example in Korea, owes much to the missionary efforts of the western church (that is from Europe and North America, as well as Oceania), in spite of some criticisms, particularly as Christianity often came as part of a colonial enterprise. Moreover, as experienced by the Pentecostal movement in the twentieth century, the “poor” are the most eager recipients of the gospel.

## **2.2 Mission: So Natural for God’s People**

Someone has brilliantly defined evangelism as “a beggar telling another beggar where to get bread.” Then it is not difficult to follow my Mom’s reasoning, that sharing any good news with those who are in need is natural, whether at “home” or “out there.” She was a genuine “Great Commission” Christian, although she never spoke about the Great Commission. According to her, sometimes people simply do not know what they so desperately need. This simplistic and deep conviction has made many first-generation Christians extremely zealous in their faith, be they Koreans, Chinese, Brazilians or Nigerians. Often their speeches are neither politically correct nor religiously tolerant, nor is their behaviour culturally refined or properly informed. In fact, they may appear religiously imperialistic and culturally ignorant, with their unswerving dedication and overflowing energy. The recent hostage incident involving the Korean short-term mission group in Afghanistan is a case in point.

However, I became one of them: a Korean missionary to the Philippines.

Church history is a history of missionary work, be it good or bad. The missionary instinct of Christianity has been recently confirmed by the “Back to Jerusalem” missionary movement of the Chinese house church movement.<sup>4</sup> This modern laboratory case of Christianity went through an entire generation, with almost no outside interference, under the extreme persecution of a brutal totalitarian political system. When the world finally had a chance to glance at the Chinese church, the big surprise was that the church had not only survived, but that it had also grown. An even bigger surprise has been its resolute commitment to “reach back to Jerusalem,” while still struggling to survive in the midst of persecution. The understanding of the nature of the church (“ecclesiology”) cannot be complete without this outward mission to the world.

The Edinburgh Missionary Conference of 1910 was a coordinated effort among Protestant churches to bring this intuitive mission into a carefully crafted plan to evangelize the world in their own generation. As more than 80% of the world was under the political control of the western “Christian” nations, there was optimism to finally complete the great commission. Plans and resources were at their disposal and they earnestly believed that they could “finish the job.”<sup>5</sup> But instead, in this generation, two of the greatest world wars humans have ever known were fought among “Christian” nations. The second half of the century witnessed the weakening of the western churches, while new churches emerged in the non-western world. Accordingly, the missionary mobilization was initially from the north and west to the east and the south. However, the last quarter of the twentieth century witnessed an increasing missionary movement from the south to the south (such as Brazilian missionaries to Malta). This does not in any way undermine the dedicated missionary service of so many from the western church, who willingly gave their lives to share the very “good news” of Christ.<sup>6</sup>

What have we learned from this? The missionary call of the church begins with the uniqueness of Christ, and only those who affirm him as the way of life can obey Christ’s invitation to join in God’s ultimate goal of restoration. Although viewed as problematic in the religiously pluralistic world, this mission

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<sup>4</sup>David Aikman, *Jesus in Beijing: How Christianity Is Transforming China and Changing the Global Balance of Power* (Washington, DC: Regnery, 2003), pp. 193-205; Paul Hattaway, *Back to Jerusalem: Three Chinese House Church Leaders Share their Vision to Complete the Great Commission* (Waynesboro, GA: Authentic Media, 2003).

<sup>5</sup>The conference theme, “The Evangelization of the World in This Generation,” was indeed the watchword of the missionary community in the western world.

<sup>6</sup>I have personally been impacted by a young woman single missionary Ruby Rachel Kendrick (1983-1908) who died in Korea within a short time after her arrival. His tombstone reads, “If I had a thousand lives to give, Korea should have them all.” Taek-bu Jun, *Yanghwa-jin Missionary Biographies* [in Korean], rev. ed. (Seoul: Hongsung, 2005) includes many of such records of early missionaries in Korea.

is carried out by those who believe and experience that Christ is the best thing that happens in life. Often God raises his people from the margins, be it in the church world (ecclesiastically) or in the socio-economic context (socially). In fact, it is the “beggar” who values the piece of “bread” he receives and is then willing to share this good news with other “beggars.” The second half of the last century demonstrated incredibly diverse missionary dynamics: laity as well as clergy; evangelism as well as social engagement; western as well as non-western; preachers as well as professionals. The Pentecostal movement has forcefully presented what is called the “prophethood of all believers,” arguing that every believer has a missionary call.

### **2.3 Divided Body in the Name of Mission I: Which Life?**

A “Korean missionary” was as strange a concept to me as to my hosts. Until then, at least according to the common perception, “missionaries” were white and lived in a large compound away from people in the country, eating food they brought from home. A missionary who needed to learn to speak English did not fall into the existing stereotype. However, this was not the first time that my unique value was not recognized: I saw it happen to my Mom long ago.

However, I quickly learned that “not all mission is created equal,” and not everyone means the same thing when they talk of mission. The biggest divide I soon encountered was the emphasis on human life in reference to death: one group has a mission to preach “life after death,” while the other has a mission to work for “life before death.” This divide was particularly evident among the normal (or western) missionaries, and soon I also realized that “mainline” churches are distinguished from “evangelical” ones by their mission emphases.

These groups started together in the Edinburgh Missionary Conference in 1910 when carefully crafted theological agendas were presented for Christian (at least Protestant in this case) mission. Championing the marginalized and oppressed masses in society, particularly in the developing world, the “life before death” camp purported to prepare God’s people and its church to play an important role to create a just society. The move from Edinburgh to the formation of the World Council of Churches (WCC) via International Missionary Council caused the “life after death” group to gradually drop out. To mainstream missiology, issues that hinder the creation of a just society are all mission topics: oppressive political systems, unjust socio-cultural structures, wide-spread poverty, the HIV-AIDS pandemic, ethnic genocide, human trafficking, among many others. The famous liberation theology from Latin America with its variations is but one example of the mission engagement of this group.

My early missionary life in the newly adopted country of the Philippines was

during the time of the Marcos dictatorship. Home-grown (mostly Catholic) liberation theologians often led the armed resistance movement called the New People's Army. Many political "enemies" of the Marcos regime found this movement to be the only "home" for their social and political life. Such an approach often requires its missionaries not only to be in sympathy with the victims, but also to be involved in the struggle with them. Such solidarity with suffering fellow humans is indeed a noble cause, although sometimes the absence of "Christian-ness" is criticized.

The other "life after death" camp, to which I considered myself to belong, is extremely committed to the "soul saving" business. Having correctly diagnosed that human problems have their roots in sin and the spiritual severance from the Lord of all lives, Christ the Saviour is the answer to all human needs. Over the decades, this camp has strengthened its commitment to evangelism and church planting, just as the "before" camp has concentrated its efforts on issues in "this life." This evangelical mission was further reinforced by the surge of Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity, resulting in the rapid growth of evangelical Christianity, particularly in "southern" countries. Theologically some topics on the "liberal" agenda, such as church unity, inter-religious dialogue, and social engagement, were left to the other camp. The Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization (1974), commonly viewed as the best expression of an organized evangelical mission, was a watershed event in that it positively embraced social service as an integral part of Christian mission.<sup>7</sup>

What is logically apparent (without even mentioning the biblical teaching) is that these two approaches are complementary to each other, as we need to live our life both before and after death. My eager church planting among mountain tribal groups quickly taught me that the presentation of the Christian "good news" meant very little when many children were losing their lives because there was no medical facility available. The "good news" has to include this earthly aspect as well as the heavenly one. At the same time, generous humanitarian aid without the presentation of Christ cannot be called Christian mission. In several years into this missionary journey, my wife and I came to conclude that each "life" camp has part of the whole truth. This does not make their claim only a half truth. It is part of the full truth. However, each does not represent the full truth. Both are equally credible works of God's mission, but each is never complete without the other.

#### **2.4 Divided Body in the Name of Mission II: Which Church?**

Our family's move from a small town to a nearby city was also a move from a one-church community to a many-church setting. In the new city, by my Mom's

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<sup>7</sup> Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, "The Lausanne Covenant" (July 1974) found, among others, at <http://www.lausanne.org/lausanne-1974/lausanne-covenant.html>, accessed on Sept 11, 2007.

choice, we all moved to a small Pentecostal church under a woman pastor. In Korean society this is by no means a respected congregation even among fellow Christians. This “weeping church” so aptly described, because of various emotional expressions freely displayed, was where desperate youths, mothers and families came to weep and find hope for life. Even my Christian uncles (on my mother’s side) urged us to get out of this “cultish and indecent” church, where nonsensical claims of healing and miracles were regularly made, not to mention the controversial “speaking in tongues.” But my mother weathered the years of hardship, and this time criticisms from fellow Christians were added to the struggles with non-believing in-laws and other family members. I used to think that we needed to overcome the “world,” but this time I also found out that we needed to overcome our fellow believers! With hindsight, I can see that there were doctrinal issues that divided the church. But I have also experienced enough cases to realize that small differences (often relational) or utterly “worldly” cravings for power and control have divided local congregations. From one Presbyterian church (in fact, only one “Korean Church” as early Presbyterian and Methodists decided) in Korea about 120 years ago, there are now more than 100 Presbyterian denominations, some due to “imports,” but most are due to domestic divisions. Each group’s claim for authenticity and truth, at the cost of others, is blatantly un-Christian.

My Pentecostal “table” was turned around as the Pentecostal movement spread its wings globally. By the time my wife and I were deeply involved in tribal areas in the northern Philippines, my Pentecostal denomination was the biggest and strongest, and still is the fastest growing. When we opened a church in a deep mountain village some years ago, one existing “liberal” church simply died, and we “praised” the Lord for his wonderful work. We thought that Christ’s “full gospel” had finally arrived in this place. However, I quickly realized that there were hundreds of small villages in the mountains without a single Christian family, let alone a church. As most zealous missionaries from “new” (or “southern”) churches would do, we were busy trying to evangelize everyone, including other Christians. In fact, we seem to have spent more energy in “converting” other Christians into our form of Christianity than we did non-believers. (Local) church growth was equated with the Kingdom growth, even if sheep-stealing is part of the strategy. The extremely individualistic nature of “evangelical” Christianity has spent much time and energy trying to figure out who is in and who is out. Anyone who is out should be “evangelized,” be they Catholic or otherwise.

It was only when I began to meet with brothers and sisters from other Christian churches did it become apparent that I was not only ignorant, but also arrogant. In fact, when I saw a good post-Pentecostal scholar enjoying his cigar, my confusion was at its height: how can the mouth which smokes speak “heavenly language” (or tongues)? I was genuinely worried about the

Holy Spirit who might have to look for fresh air. My understanding of church (ecclesiology), the Holy Spirit (pneumatology) and mission was hopelessly shallow and narrow. Later did I also realize that the gift of the Holy Spirit in the twentieth century was intended for the whole church. Only a few courageous Pentecostals like David du Plessis understood the mind of the Holy Spirit and took this very good news to other Christian churches, while they received severe criticism from their own churches.<sup>8</sup>

It is also noticeable that the ecumenical movement which has worked to bring various Christian churches together has created, ironically, an environment for some churches to find it simply impossible to approach the network. It has inadvertently formed a “game plan” to know which belong to the “in church” and which are “outside” of the circle. How the Catholic Church has defined a genuine church and a second class church is a similar practice.

My “evangelize-everyone” attitude began to change when I started meeting wonderful new friends who dress and worship differently than I do. After all, I found out that I must look quite strange to them as well. This “church unity by fellowship” (*koinonia*) has been something I have observed from my youth: average Christians care very little about denominations. I also noted that from diverse orientations, common experiences of the Holy Spirit bring together God’s people for celebration. This “spontaneous ecumenism”<sup>9</sup> was noted from the Azusa Street Mission, the very birthplace of the modern Pentecostal movement. My own experience of working with various church traditions in mission settings suggests that common commitment to mission is another platform where church unity can be experienced. This still leaves a legitimate place for a structural effort to create church unity.

## 2.5 A Tale of Two Siblings

My first exposure to the Edinburgh Missionary Conference (1910) was almost by accident. I was a mission practitioner whose academic training was in Biblical study. Even the second Lausanne Congress on World Evangelism in Manila (1989) was not of interest to me, even if it did take place in the same county where I was working. Only when I was invited to participate in the preparatory conference for the Edinburgh centenary (2005), did I become aware of this historic event and its enduring effect since then. As a Pentecostal, this was a new discovery. The following is a story of the two global missionary movements of the twentieth century, the Edinburgh Conference and the Pentecostal movement, born in the same decade (1900s) and but with very

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<sup>8</sup> David du Plessis, *A Man Called Mr. Pentecost: The Story of a Legendary Missionary to the Church* (South Plainfield, NJ: Bridge Publishing, 1977).

<sup>9</sup> This term was used in describing an unexpected ecumenical phenomenon among Pentecostals and Catholic Charismatics by Koichi Kitano, “Spontaneous Ecumenicity between Catholics and Protestants in the Charismatic Movement” (PhD dissertation, Centre Escolar University, Manila, 1981).

little contact with each other. Yet both have exerted an enormous influence on Christianity today, like a tale of two siblings who never met each other.

As discussed earlier, the Edinburgh conference explored critical mission themes over the first half of the last century. However, within its own generation, a series of events proved that the main mover of Christian mission is not humans but the Holy Spirit. The two world wars shattered the optimism of world mission, many “heathen” nations gained their independence. In the process, the Edinburgh tradition gave birth to an ecumenical movement, so giving birth to the WCC. International Missionary Council, the heir of the Edinburgh Conference, joined the body a few years later. The second half of the twentieth century was a story of ecumenism, but by the end of the first fifty years of its existence serious issues had surfaced.

The WCC was born out of a missionary movement, which recognized that church unity is an integral part of, or prerequisite for, mission. To an outsider, it is an unfortunate development that the WCC should have been a mission body with the ecumenical unit under its wing. To be truthful to the original idea, church unity should have been explored always in the context of mission, but in reality, mission has been truncated into the discussion of church unity. Some believe that this is one reason why the traditional “mainline churches” (particularly in the West) have steadily lost its influence, membership and resources.

By contrast, the Pentecostal movement began as a marginalized fringe Christian phenomenon in the downtown of Los Angeles. Although mockery from the society was harsh, the most unbearable attacks were lodged by fellow Christians.<sup>10</sup> In every aspect, they were the powerless, as the Azusa Street Mission was headed by an African-American preacher William J. Seymour.<sup>11</sup> The marginalized and “poor” were attracted to the message of God’s immanent presence by manifestations such as healing, miracles, and religious ecstatic experience (or “baptism in the Holy Spirit”). With its missionary fervor instantly recognizable,<sup>12</sup> the Pentecostal movement was predominantly a revival phenomenon. This “religion of the poor” survived through its endless divisions and doctrinal controversies and also never-ending external marginalization and criticisms. Thus, for the first half century of its existence it remained as a fringe movement.

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<sup>10</sup> Cecil M. Robeck, Jr., *The Azusa Street Mission and Revival: The Birth of the Global Pentecostal Movement* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2006), p. 134 reprints such a cartoon ridiculing the Pentecostal movement.

<sup>11</sup> Robeck, *The Azusa Street Mission and Revival*, esp. pp. 87-128 describes the pivotal role of Seymour in the Mission.

<sup>12</sup> For example, Allan Anderson, *Spreading Fires: The Missionary Nature of Early Pentecostalism* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2007), pp. 149-190 notes that as early as 1906 (the same year when the Azusa Street Mission began), a Pentecostal missionary was present in the “Bible Lands” (p. 152-53).

However, its adherents hold a strong conviction that the “best thing” (Christ) in their life was even bettered by the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, and they were extremely eager to spread the good news to the fellow “poor.” This “fired-up poor” brought the movement during the second half of the last century into a global expansion in various shapes and forms. This movement of “primal spirituality” has had a particular appeal to those who are “poor” in many ways (economically, socially, politically etc.), and who live in the developing countries. Many “indigenous” types of Christianity, closely resembling the Pentecostal spirituality, but without any historic tie to the North American “springhead,” have been “discovered.” This spiritual and renewal movement, without any global structure or umbrella organization, has become a powerful missionary movement, evident in its exponential growth.<sup>13</sup> In its zealotry for mission, however, church unity was completely ignored, even though the Azusa Street Mission demonstrated the powerful potential of the Spirit for church unity.<sup>14</sup>

These two most powerful mission movements of the twentieth century are in good contrast in their birth stories. What is equally noticeable is their ethos of mission: the ecumenical initiative is a “gathering into” movement (centripetal), while the Pentecostal-charismatic movement is a “spreading out” movement (centrifugal). Now with a century of experience behind them, each one has begun to reflect on itself: recognizing its own strength and achievements as well as being self-critical about its weaknesses and mistakes. Understandably the WCC views one in a more organized way, while the other one is still in a “spontaneous” way. The recent general assemblies of the WCC highlighted the person and work of the Holy Spirit,<sup>15</sup> and took steps to intentionally include some Pentecostal delegates. Its latest Conference on World Mission and Evangelism in Athens (2005) is another case in point: its theme was “Come Holy Spirit, and Heal and Reconcile.”<sup>16</sup> The presence of Pentecostal Christianity in the gathering was evident not only in the plenary speeches, but also in the workshops and worship programmes. The creation of a more neutral and new space such as the Global Christian Forum is an indication of this growing awareness.

From the Pentecostal perspective, some churches, particularly from the

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<sup>13</sup> Patrick Johnston and Jason Mandryk, *Operation World*, 21<sup>st</sup> century edition (Cumbria, UK: Paternoster, 2001), p. 3 predicts close to one billion Pentecostal-Charismatic believers by 2010.

<sup>14</sup> The inter-racial and ecumenical nature of the Azusa Street Mission has been well documented. For the recovery of this tradition, specifically for Asian Pentecostals, see Robeck, Cecil M., Jr. “Pentecostal Ecumenism: An Introductory Essay for Asian Pentecostals.” *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 2:1 (1999), pp. 87-103

<sup>15</sup> The most obvious is the theme of the seventh general assembly in Canberra, Australia (1991): “Come Holy Spirit, Renew They Whole Creation.” The theme of the latest ninth general assembly still maintains the emphasis, although less explicit: “God, in your grace, transform the world.”

<sup>16</sup> “Conference on World Mission and Evangelism” (<http://www.mission2005.org/>, May 19, 2005), checked: Oct 25, 2007.

“southern” continents, have slowly joined various gatherings of the WCC or its national councils. Often this move comes with much criticism from their fellow Pentecostal churches, sister organizations and their own constituencies. Ecumenical dialogues are in progress with the Roman Catholic Church,<sup>17</sup> the Reformed Churches,<sup>18</sup> Lutherans as well as the WCC at the global level, while growing national or local dialogues take place. Unlike their dialogue partners, Pentecostal delegates are all individuals without any representing authority from their Pentecostal churches.

This self-critical reflection and growing awareness of each other through various (some times courageous) contacts has led the two siblings much closer to each other than was possible decades ago. As the Edinburgh centenary celebration is being planned, this may be a historic opportunity to bring the divided church together for its mission. Even the 2010 Edinburgh conference is correcting its mistakes by becoming as inclusive as possible, ecclesiastically (as now Catholics, evangelicals and Pentecostals are included) and geographically (with an intentional effort to reflect the current global Christian status with the “southern” majority).<sup>19</sup> We have to confess that this divided history was not the Lord’s intent, but human short-sightedness and failure to recognize the divine intent. In spite of human failure, the Spirit with his creativity and graciousness brought forward God’s mission and now brings his church together for the same mission.

## 2.6 Huge Fringe: “Southern” Christianity

Earlier we discovered that one division among the churches was between the “mainline” and evangelical churches. The former was generally regarded as “liberal” in their attitude toward the scriptures, mission and the world (including other religions), while the latter as “conservative” in the same areas. The former is generally found in the fold of the WCC, while the latter “outside” of it. Regardless of their theological stance, however, in earlier days the western churches were the missionary-sending entity (benefactor, thus “Christian” as they were “missioning”), while the nations and states of the global south were considered the mission field (beneficiary, “heathen,” thus, “missioned”). This global divide was the setting one hundred years ago (e.g., in the time of the Edinburgh conference).

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<sup>17</sup> For example, “Evangelism, Proselytism and Common Witness: The Report from the Fourth Phase of the International Dialogue 1990-1997 between the Roman Catholic Church and some Classical Pentecostal Churches and Leaders,” *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 2:1 (1999), pp. 105-151.

<sup>18</sup> For example, “Word and Spirit, Church and World: The Final Report of the International Dialogue between Representatives of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and Some Classical Pentecostal Churches and Leaders 1996-2000,” *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 4:1 (2001), pp. 41-72.

<sup>19</sup> Towards 2010, “Edinburgh 2010—Mission in Humility and Hope” ([http://www.towards2010.org.uk/int\\_june\\_2005\\_doc.htm](http://www.towards2010.org.uk/int_june_2005_doc.htm)): checked: Oct 25, 2007.

Now the rule of dividing the Christian world has changed drastically. The southward move of the centre of the global Christian gravity means there are far more (about four times more) Christians in the global south than in the north (or “west”). The rapid increase of “southern” missionaries is also a natural consequence, already outnumbering their traditional western counterparts. For example, Korea is the second largest missionary-sending nation after the United States, while the highest missionary-sending country per capita is surprisingly Mongolia.<sup>20</sup> The ambitious plan (but not at all surprising considering the huge Christian population that is still growing) of the Chinese house church networks to raise 200,000 missionaries in the near future to reach “Back to Jerusalem” can be a reality. These are just numbers. However, equally significant is what is “under the hood.”

Southern Christianity has exhibited several important characteristics. The first is its holistic understanding of the Christian faith. It is not only the spiritual aspect of salvation that is important, but also the material and physical aspects as well. In a way “life before death” and “life after death” come together to form a complete spectrum of human life. In fact, a supreme God who cannot bring physical healing today, while promising an eternal life after one dies, is not convincing at all to people, who regularly expect their ancestor spirits to bring healing and good fortune. Equally holistic is the understanding of the natural and supernatural world. In the religious worldview where spirits, gods and demons are perceived to be extremely active in human affairs, it is no wonder that southern Christianity includes spiritual beings in religious life, and phenomena such as miracles and exorcism. Socially speaking, becoming Christian often comes with a high cost in many parts of the southern world, where Christianity is a minority “foreign” religion.<sup>21</sup> Only with the strong conviction that the best thing in life is Christ can Christians persevere in this hostile environment. Furthermore, generally speaking, these southern Christians take the scripture at its face value,<sup>22</sup> unlike western sophisticated methods of biblical interpretation with their high degree of skepticism and suspicion. Unquestionable acceptance of religious teaching is part of their culture. This explains why the same church (e.g., Anglican) demonstrates a remarkable difference between the West and the South (e.g. Uganda) over issues like human sexuality. Now the clearest divide in global Christianity is between the North and the South. This too-good-to-be-true picture is not without problems. There is a great danger for Christianity to be reduced to

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<sup>20</sup> It could be India in the total number, which includes many cross-cultural missionaries within country. Johnston & Mandryk, *Operation World*, p. 6.

<sup>21</sup> A personal account of this sort is found in Wonsuk Ma and Julie C. Ma, “Jesus Christ in Asia: Our Journey with Him as Pentecostal Believers,” *International Review of Mission* 94 (2005), pp. 493-94.

<sup>22</sup> Philip Jenkins, *The New Faces of Christianity: Believing the Bible in the Global South* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

old religion where deities are “used” for human consumption. Nonetheless, southern Christianity has shown great potential to renew global Christianity, while deeply engaging in a completely non- or even anti-Christian society. This makes today’s Christian mission extremely viable and effective.

### 3. Conclusion

The last one hundred years have shown us the remarkable work of God, as global Christianity has gone through unprecedented world crises and yet faced incredible opportunities. Christian unity will continue to remain a major challenge for Christian communities. There will be more reasons why divisions will further intensify, on the one hand, and a more urgent and predominant reason why the church should work together, on the other hand. The mission of God is to bring complete restoration to his creation through the life-giving power of the Holy Spirit. If mission has divided the church, it is entirely due to human fault. In fact, mission is to bring the church together.

Thus, our journey as fellow Christians has taught us that church unity is like riding a bicycle. We will fall unless we go forward. Church unity was rightly perceived within the context of mission, and this should continue. Called by one God, redeemed through the one Lord, and empowered through the presence of the one Spirit, church-together is not only a dream but also a possibility. There is a potential for spontaneous ecumenicity through loving fellowship and Spirit-led worship. Working together for the cause of God’s kingdom is another viable arena for church-together. We have sufficient experience to further pursue this aim.

Then how can organic or spontaneous ecumenism be structurally regulated so as to perpetuate it? This represents a serious challenge as the history of ecumenism in the last half a century exemplifies. For this reason, we should not overlook the role of learning and reflection: the earnest desire to learn from the scripture and from fellow Christians should lead us to develop a desire to be one. Occasions like this have the potential to foster such authentic ecumenicity by combining open *koinonia*, Spirit-filled worship, and diligent learning to discern what the Lord is doing in different Christian communions. It is all for God’s mission’s sake that we are called together to be in one body so that the world may know that we are the people of God (John 17:21, 23). An African saying may encourage us: “If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.”