Mutuality in mission

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Abstract

The Christian church exists in the world because of God's mission (*Missio Dei*), that is God's plan and action for world salvation. The churches around the world today must understand that their relation in the past, including their involvement in God's mission, has many times been characterized by hierarchical perspectives and should be transformed to a more mutual one. This article affirms the need for mutuality in doing mission by exploring some Christian theological concepts as *koinonia* and *perchoresis*. In addition, it also reflects on the concept of mutuality from the perspective of Meto people in West Timor, Indonesia.

Keywords

koinonia, mission, mutuality, perichoresis, power

Introduction

In the reflection on their mission history in Indonesia, especially in Sumba Island, East Nusa Tenggara, churches in the Netherlands published a book entitled *Zending Voorbij* [*Mission Finished*].[1] In the introduction to this book, the editors write that the book's title refers to the mission period that was finished in Sumba when the Sumba Christian Church (GKS) proclaimed its independence. Prior to this, the Dutch mission board had been very dominant in Sumba, but after its independence, the relationship between the mission board and GKS changed. That is what is meant by "mission finished."[2] My question is this: Is the mission finished? Is mission something that only happens when a mission board finishes its work in a mission field and a young church becomes independent?

In this article, I want to emphasize that the church's mission is not yet finished and will not be finished as long as the church is still on this earth. The church's mission flows from God's heart for the goodness of the world. On one hand, it is true that mission practice understood as a one-way

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1. See J. B. van Halsema, ed., *De Zending Voorbij: Terugblik op de Relatie tussen de Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland en de Christelijke Kerk van Sumba 1942–1992* (Kampen: Uitgeverij Kok, 1995).
2. Ibid., viii.

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relationship of churches in the West to parts of the world formerly called the "non-Christian world"[3] must be finished. On the other, the church's mission as the joint involvement of churches in God's mission for salvation and goodness in the world is not yet finished. Our task now is to find an appropriate way to carry forth this joint mission.

In the context of globalization today, churches around the world must struggle with the unique challenges in their own contexts. At the same time, they must also pay attention to the common challenge of addressing globalization and its impacts that affect all of us.

If we understand the church's mission as involvement in God's work to preach good news and carry out acts of salvation, then churches have an obligation to read the signs of the times and translate both the news and acts of salvation in changing situations. In the past, the relationship between churches in the West and the East was characterized as a subject–object relationship; that is, the mother churches in the West not only supported but also dictated the form of Christianity in the mission fields.[4] As churches carry out their joint mission today, a key word that must be given attention is *mutuality*.

This article intends to reflect on mutuality in mission. What I mean by mutuality is mutuality among churches of different Christian denominations. I will attend especially to the relationship between churches once called the mission base and those in the mission field. Mutuality in mission should include mutuality in the struggle for truth, justice, peace, and the integrity of creation. My background as a woman theologian from West Timor influences the way I view and understand this theme.

Historical borders

The effort to develop mutuality in mission is not an easy matter. First, we are faced with a strongly rooted construction of thought that the true pattern of Christianity is the Western pattern. The fact is that Christianity was actually born on the Asian continent. Nevertheless, Christianity only became a very influential world religion after it entered Europe, in particular after the Roman Caesar, through the Milan Edict, made Christianity the state religion in 313. After that, European trade and colonialism in the Third World, especially, supported the spread of Christianity throughout the world.

In Protestant mission history, the intense spreading of the Gospel to the nations of the Third World occurred from the time of the formation of mission boards in Europe. The formation of the Netherlands Mission Society (NZG) in 1799 encouraged the active spreading of the Gospel in regions the Dutch colonized, including Indonesia. In West Timor, for example, the NZG became active in 1819.[5] Although during the previous period the Dutch East Indies Company (VOC) had established schools and churches in several places in Timor, real efforts to spread the Gospel message to local residents only began with the presence of the NZG.

Undeniably, the paradigm for relations during the colonial period clearly distinguished the mission base (churches and mission boards in Europe and North America) from the mission "field"— young churches in the global South and East. Churches in the West were seen as mother churches, whereas churches in the East were seen as daughter churches.[6] The task of churches in the West,

3. Compare with the theme of the First International Mission Conference in Edinburgh, 1910: Carrying the Gospel to All the Non-Christian World. See Richard A. D. Siwu, *Misi dalam Pandangan Ekumenikal dan Evangelikal Asia 1910–1961–1991* (Jakarta: BPK GM, 1996), 18–19.
4. During the Dutch colonial period, church order in the Dutch Indies (the term used to refer to the area that is today Indonesia) followed the pattern used in the Netherlands.
5. See Frank Colley, *Benih Yang Tumbuh XI* (Jakarta: PGI, 1972), 34–39.
6. This feminine metaphor for the church may originate from Calvin's teaching in which he speaks of the church as a mother. See Yohanes Calvin, *Institutio: Pengajaran Agama Kristen* (Jakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia 1983), 185–86.

according to the old paradigm, was as a parent to guide young churches that, of course, still needed direction to arrange and order the Christian life they had just accepted. Providing guidance makes sense in such a context.

We need to realize the issue of power in this relationship, however. Churches in the West were supported by economic strength, knowledge, and technology that enabled them to be dominant in that relationship. In his book *Meditationes Sacrae*, published in 1597, Francis Bacon says, "Knowledge is power."[7] In the relationship between churches at the base and in the mission field, the source of power for churches in the West came not only from knowledge but also from the money and technology they possessed. At the same time, a Eurocentric bias in this relationship was unavoidable. European nations viewed their cultures as superior to indigenous cultures of the mission field.[8]

As a result, churches at the base and in the mission field became stuck in a pattern of hierarchy and paternalism. Churches in the West felt it was only proper that they dictate knowledge, bring money, and transfer their technology to churches in the Third World. They also made efforts to change the local cultures because they viewed the cultures of those in the mission field as primitive. In this context, mission was understood as a one-way relationship: from churches in Europe to churches outside of Europe. The relationship formed was a subject–object relationship. Churches in Europe conducted mission initiatives, plans, and actions, whereas churches outside Europe were viewed as passive recepients.

In the context of Indonesia, this type of relationship continued for centuries and was also supported by colonialism. In a situation of colonialism, the pattern of power relations was increasingly formed as a superior–inferior relationship. Churches in Timor depended on support from churches in the West, whether it was support for personnel, finances, or even theology. This dependence, in turn, caused the internalization of an inferior status among local churches.

There is another side to this power dynamic. Churches in Indonesia live in a multi-religious context. A special relationship existed between Christians and the colonial authorities because they shared the same religion, which in turn created jealousy among followers of other religions. In the struggle for national independence, Christians were usually suspected of supporting the colonizers. Churches that received preferential treatment from the Dutch Indies government during the period of colonialism were accused of being unfaithful to their own nation. When the people proclaimed independence for the nation, suspicions regarding the loyalty of local Christians continued.

New understanding of the mission relationship

Political independence of nations in the Third World prompted churches in the West and in the East to evaluate their relationship. At the International Mission Conference in Whitby, Canada in 1947, the churches and mission boards that attended spoke about "partnership in obedience." Churches no longer viewed themselves in a relationship between old and young churches, or mother churches and child churches, but they understood each other as equal partners. As partners, they affirmed their joint commitment to be obedient to God, the Source of Mission. Therefore, obedience was no longer limited to young churches being obedient to old churches. Churches are increasingly aware that the gaps in knowledge, finances, and technology cannot be an excuse to continue an unbalanced relationship.

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7. This is a frequently-cited expression, e.g., by Michael Foucault. See Foucault's book, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972–1977*, edited by Coilin Gordon (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 109–45.
8. See Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), regarding European views of Eastern nations.

In the 1980s, Adolf Exeler, a German missiologist, suggested that the name of courses in mission studies be changed from "Missiology" to "Comparative Theology."[9] Exeler was of the opinion that churches in the West must change their arrogant and paternalistic views and attitudes for a willingness to learn from young churches. Therefore, according to him, the appropriate relationship to be developed among churches around the world in carrying out their joint mission is through dialogue, namely an openness to learn from each other. For him, the success of the mission movement had caused a big crisis for mission itself. As quoted by Karl Müller, Exeler says "Paternalism, condescension, treating people as objects and the Western claim to universalism—all these concomitant symptoms of a mission infected by colonial thinking are untenable because [of] the emergence of independent mission churches."[10]

A change in this perspective also means a change in understanding the relationship among churches in carrying forth mission. It is no longer understood as a one-way relationship but as mutual giving and receiving. Each party has its own strengths and weaknesses. In such a situation, churches need to help and complement each other's work.

Mission is no longer understood as only originating from the West, but also the other way around. In this sense, all Christians are missionaries. Each congregation and church is a mission base and simultaneously the mission field. The Centenial Celebration of the First International Mission Conference in Edinburgh was held in the same location. Therefore, it was stressed that "we are called as communities of faith to mission from everywhere to everywhere."[11]

I think that ecumenical mission relationships of mutuality will make the conduct of mission more efficient. In such a relationship, everyone is a subject of mission. Those who conduct mission are not just a group of certain individuals, but rather all people of faith in every aspect of their lives. With such a pattern of mission, all people of faith are motivated to be mature in faith and join in taking part in the conduct of mission in the midst of the world.

Theological basis for mutuality in mission

Certain theological concepts can enrich the insights and practices of mutuality in mission. I will focus on two, namely *koinonia* and *perichoresis*. These two concepts are mutually related and need to be in dialogue in order to complete each other.

Koinonia: A mandate to be in relationship

The concept of *koinonia* in the Christian tradition refers to the importance of fellowship as part of the church's mission. Koinonia is the church's call to unite as *qahal YHWH* or *ekklesia*. Like the people of Israel in their witness in the Old Testament, God also calls the church to live in fellowship and to order itself in accordance with God's will.

Mutuality in mission must be based on a theological understanding of the essence and call of the church as *koinonia*. The church is *koinonia*, that is a fellowship, first with God and then with fellow humans. People of faith are called to be in relationship, as God is a relational God.

In Genesis 1:26, God says: "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness." Humans are created in the image and likeness of a relational God. The word "we" is a plural pronoun. God is a God in fellowship. That humans are created in the image and likeness of God means that humans are in fellowship with the Lord and their fellow human beings. Church members, as

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9. See Karl Müller, *Mission Theology: An Introduction* (Nettetal: Steyler Verlag – Wort und Werk, 1987), 13–15.
10. Ibid., 13.
11. See "Edinburgh 2010: Common Call," in: www.edinburgh2010.org/fileadmin/Edinburgh_2010_ Common_Call_with_explanation.pdf (accessed October 13, 2015).

followers of God, are called to live in solidarity with each other, to guide and develop intimacy and a sense of sharing the same fate and responsibility. In this fellowship, church members value the unique character of each individual and also each person's special needs while at the same time being open to accepting differences among themselves. Even more than that, they are willing to work together to give witness to God's purpose in the midst of the world.

Perichoresis: Paradigm for understanding and managing relationship

There can be various qualities and dynamics in these relationships. The quality of the *koinonia* relationship is a reciprocal relationship of mutul empowerment. People of faith are called to be in a relationship in which partners strengthen each other. The theological basis for mutuality among churches around the world in doing mission can also be strengthed with the concept of *perichoresis*. The term *perichoresis* (rotation) comes from a Greek word that was used especially to depict the relationship among the three persons of the Trinity. In Latin the term is *circumincessio*, and the English translation is *to permeate* or *to encompass*.

As explained by Elizabeth Johnson, a feminist theologian from North America, the background for the term *perichoresis* (rotation) comes from choreography. The term refers to a circle dance, a circling motion, or a circle that rotates like a wheel. The metaphor of a circle dance intends to show that each of the Divine Persons is in dynamic rotation around the others, interacting and intertwined in a circle of divine life. Although the Three are different, the Three relate to each other in the fellowship of love.[12] The metaphor of the circle dance seeks to show that fellowship with the Triune God—Creator, Savior, and Renewer—is not a hierarchical or pyramidal structure with an asymmetrical character. Rather, the Persons of the Trinity are in a relationship of equality and mutuality. In the circling dance, the three share the energy of life, salvation, and renewal.

In such an understanding, mutuality among churches must be based on mutuality and reciprocity of the Three in One. Church unity must be understood as an analogy of the reciprocity in the life of the Triune God. As Peter Neuner states, "if the Church's nature is to be reciprocity, this must be understood in terms of who God is and what God is like. The Church is reciprocity, because, for Christians, God's own being is also reciprocity."[13]

Koinonia characterized by perichoresis

In the interest of developing mutuality in the mission of churches throughout the world, these two basic theological concepts, *koinonia* and *perichoresis*, need to be integrated. *Koinonia* that is not based on an understanding of equal and mutual reciprocity may instead become exploitative and dominating. *Koinonia* may be claimed as a fellowship of people of faith in Jesus Christ. Yet this fellowship may not have the characteristic of equal and mutual reciprocity if the church as *koinonia* does not intentionally care for its character of *perichoresis*.

The experience of my own church, the Evangelical Christian Church of Timor (GMIT) based in West Timor, Indonesia, shows that the church's *koinonia* can be trapped by hierarchical feudalism if the church does not consistently care for its *perichoresis* characterized by mutuality and equality. In the presbyterial-synodal system that we follow, there are three pillars in the church structure, namely the congregation, the presbytery, and the synod. The relationship among the three should actually be a relationship of equality and mutual empowerment. In reality, many times the three are

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12. See Elizabeth Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse*, 10th anniversary ed. (New York: Crossroad, 1996), 197; Elizabeth Johnson, *Quest for the Living God: Mapping Frontiers in the Theology of God* (New York: Continuum, 2007), 214.
13. Peter Neuner, "The Church as Koinonia: The Central Theme of Vatican II", 177; www.theway.org.uk/Back/30Neuner.pdf (accessed October 13, 2015).

seen in a top-down relationship. What distinguishes the three actually should not be status but the area of ministry covered. The congregation is the basis of ministry. The presbytery covers a middle level of ministry, whereas the synod covers the broadest area as it includes all the congregations in GMIT. In practice, however, the synod council is viewed as having the highest position in the church, and the presbytery council is seen as being below the synod and above congregational councils. Although officially congregations are viewed as the basis of ministry and the most important space in which ministry is developed, in reality congregations and congregational councils are viewed as being below presbytery and synod councils.

Several factors influence this hierarchical pyramid. First is the oligarchy of local feudalism. Leaders of the different ethnic groups are considered to better understand the problems of their people and know what is best for the community. They are also land owners who are thought to possess an aura of magical mysticism that gives them greater wisdom than others in the community. The broader the territory a leader has authority over, the greater his charisma is believed to be. In a society influenced by such feudalism, it is easy for the church to be trapped in feudalistic relationships. Church leaders at each level, especially at the presbytery and synod levels, are considered the same as ethnic leaders, and the territories to which they minister are seen as territories of authority and power.

Another factor strengthens this pattern, namely the bureacracy of Indonesia's New Order government. For more than three decades, the pattern of government bureaucracy influenced Indonesia. Leadership developed along patron–client lines. Leaders were seen as parents who understood everything, whereas those under their leadership were seen as dependent on their leaders. This unbalanced pattern of relationship also developed in the relationship between city and rural congregations. City congregations were considered superior to village congregations. Here the superiority of the colonial era, based on knowledge, financial strength, and adaptation to the skills and culture of modernity, has been replicated in the relationship of city to village. City congregations are viewed as having superior status because they have more cash and are more advanced in the sense of being more modern. In such a climate, relationships within the church are vulnerable to a return of the subject–object relationship.

In this context, when emphasizing that the church is *koinonia* we must underline that the character of that *koinonia* is *perichoresis*, characterized by relationships of reciprocity in which equal partners complete each other. In a relationship of *koinonia* marked by *perichoresis*, no one is higher than another. Each partner in the relationship is valued for herself or himself; the partners are equal and need each other.

Lessons in mutuality from West Timor

From the cultural riches of the Meto[14] people of West Timor—one of the ethnic groups served by my church, The Evangelical Protestant Church of Timor[15]—we can learn much about mutuality. The Meto people call their neighbors *aok bian*, which literally means "half of one's body" (*aok* = body,

14. The Meto people are one of the ethnic groups who inhabit the western part of the island of Timor. They are the largest ethnic group in the west, their territory covering four regencies (Kupang, South Central Timor, North Central Timor, and Belu) in the Province of East Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia.

15. The Evangelical Protestant Church of Timor (GMIT) is one of the largest Protestant churches in Indonesia. Its Calvinist background is a product of the work of Dutch Protestant missionaries. The first to bring Protestantism to Timor was the Dutch East Indies Company (VOC). After the VOC was dissolved in 1799, the work of evangelization was carried out by the Netherlands Missionary Society (NZG). During the period prior to independence, the church in Timor was part of the Protestant Church of the Dutch East Indies (Indische Kerk). GMIT became an independent church on October 31, 1947. Concerning the early history of GMIT, see Cooley, op. cit., 17–70.

bian = half, one side, other). This term is applied not just to one's kin or clan, but to all people. For the Meto people, a person is not complete without one's neighbor. An individual has only half a body, and his or her life will only be complete by living in togetherness and relationship with the neighbor. Without openness to others, the individual cannot survive. Life can only be lived in relationship with others.

The term *aok bian* also implies that the relationship between people who need one another requires a willingness to acknowledge that the other is different from one's self. One half-body is on the left and the other is on the right; left and right need each other in order to be complete. "Right" has no meaning if there is not also a "left," and vice versa.

Mutuality therefore means a willingness to recognize that we need one another in order to live. Only if we accept that we are different can we complete one another and be whole. In such a context acceptance and respect for difference is very important.

The issue of power in mission

Even though mutuality is an ideal condition for carrying out a common mission among the churches in the current era of globalization, it must be acknowledged that such an ideal is not easily achieved. In a broader context than that of the internal dynamics of an Indonesian local church explored above, the challenges of common mission are more complex. While drawing themselves into a relationship of mutuality in mission with other churches, the local churches of East and West must continually work out their own internal processes of renewal.

It must be admitted that even though the colonial period is over, the impact of colonialism still continues.[16] Indeed, it could be said that globalization has now become a new form of colonialism and imperialism. We live in a world with an economic structure that greatly enriches the few and impoverishes the many. Contemporary efforts to develop mutuality among the churches of West and East must face these unjust economic and political structures. In explaining the current map of mission, Robert Schreiter shows that the challenge we face is due to the change from a world political economy that was bipolar to one that is multipolar after the end of the Cold War.[17] The centers of economic and political power are no longer fixed in just a few places, but are widely distributed throughout the world. A further characteristic of global capitalism is the accumulation of wealth among the owners of capital and the exploitation of the marginal mass of people who are unable to compete in the global economy.

Our churches live within such a world economic structure. Some of us are part of the group who have profited from globalization. At the same time, most of the world's churches are part of the mass of people who have been victims of this same global economy. When we speak of partnership while at the same time we live in unequal financial conditions, we are in danger of being trapped in a return to relationships characterized by subject and object, strong and weak, helpers and those in need of help.

Biblical understandings of power

In a context such as this, we need critical reflection on the role of power in mission.

The Hebrew Bible proclaims that the author of all power under the heavens is God, because God created the earth and all that is in it, including human beings. God then gave power to humans to participate in the care of the earth: "Then God said, 'Let us make humankind in our image,

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16. See Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Criticism and Biblical Interpretation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 11–40.
17. Robert Schreiter, *The New Catholicity. Theology Between the Global and the Local* (Maryknoll: NY, 2002), 4–11.

according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air …' and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it'" (Gen 1:26, 28, NRSV).

The power that God gave to humans is not power without limits. The symbol of human limitations is the prohibition against eating the fruit of the tree that God placed in the center of the garden (Gen 2:16–17). Yet humankind fell into sin precisely because they overstepped the bounds that God had set for them. People wanted to become like their Creator, to have the same power as their Creator, and thus they forgot that the power given to them was limited.

In the ordering of Israel's life as the people of God, God lifted up leaders. The power given to these leaders was meant to serve the good of the people, without prejudice or preference. When these leaders, both religious and political, acted in an authoritarian way, God sent the prophets to warn them, to proclaim that God was on the side of the poor and the marginalized, and to speak against the oppression of the people (e.g., Isa 10:1–2).

Jesus said that God had given him all power in heaven and on earth (Matt 28:18). Yet His power was different from the power that was exercised in His time. In the context of Israel's oppression under Roman colonization and their further exploitation by Herod, Jesus clearly took the side of the oppressed people. Jesus called for repentance from the pyramid of power. In place of oppressive power, Jesus taught that true leadership is based on service (*diakonos/*servant and *doulos/*slave). He said:

> You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. (Mark 10:42–44, NRSV; compare Matt 20:25–28)

The opposite of power is powerlessness. Powerlessness in Jesus' time was related to poverty: without money and economic resources, a person had no role in the exercise of power. In such a context, Jesus' teaching about the Kindom of God and his acts of healing were a form of empowerment of the poor and marginalized. He travelled about and taught about the sovereignty of God with unquestionable authority. He healed the sick and expelled evil spirits (Matt 10:1). Jesus criticized the accumulation and misuse of power by certain individuals and groups (Matt 23:23).

If we would learn from the attitude of Jesus toward power in the context of the imbalances of power in our own time, we are challenged to reflect about what kind of power we are developing in mutuality. Power that tends to dominate and exploit (power over) must be replaced by shared power, which shares the power of life.

Mutuality: Because we all are vulnerable

Another reason to encourage mutuality is the Christian view of humanity. According to the Bible, humankind was created good because we were created in the image and likeness of God (Gen 1:27, 31). Even so, humanity fell into sin (Gen 3). Because of our fall into sin, none of us is perfect. Each one of us and each of our communities will always have limitations. For that reason, we are all vulnerable, both when we are powerful and when we are powerless. When we are powerful, we are subject to misusing that power for our own interests. When we are powerless, we are subject to developing a dependency, both financial and theological, on those who are strong. The most recent mission document from the World Council of Churches, "Together Toward Life," stresses the following:

> The dominant expressions of mission, in the past and today, have often been directed at people on the margins of societies. These have generally viewed those on the margins as recipients and not active agents of missionary activity. Mission expressed in this way has too often been complicit with oppressive and

life-denying systems. It has generally aligned with the privileges of the centre and largely failed to challenge economic, social, cultural and political systems, which have marginalized some peoples. Mission from the centre is motivated by an attitude of paternalism and a superiority complex. Historically, this has equated Christianity with Western culture and resulted in adverse consequences, including the denial of the full personhood of the victims of such marginalization.[18]

The document invites us to understand the complex dynamics, both in the churches' internal relations and in the wider context of global society. As an alternative to mission from the centers of power, we are encouraged to join in a movement of mission from the margins.

Mission from the margins calls for an understanding of the complexities of power dynamics, global systems and structures, and local contextual realities. Christian mission has at times been understood and practised in ways which failed to recognize God's alignment with those consistently pushed to the margins. Therefore, mission from the margins invites the church to re-imagine mission as a vocation from God's Spirit who works for a world where the fullness of life is available for all.[19]

I am of the opinion that an awareness of imbalances in power is very important. By recognizing it, we are forewarned not to be caught up in it or perpetuate it. At the same time, I believe the expression "mission from the margins" is not entirely appropriate. It is better that we develop mission neither from the centers nor from the margins, but in togetherness. I believe "mission *with* the margins" would be more appropriate, because in this way we acknowledge that we are all equally agents of mission.

Mutuality: Empowering each other

If all churches in the world are called to mission, then mutuality in mission will enable the churches to support one another in carrying out the mission mandate that God has given them. The document from 2010 reflecting on 100 years since the first International Conference on Mission in Edinburgh states:

Disturbed by the asymmetries and imbalances of power that divide and trouble us in church and world, we are called to repentance, to critical reflection on systems of power, and to accountable use of power structures. We are called to find practical ways to live as members of One Body in full awareness that God resists the proud, Christ welcomes and empowers the poor and afflicted, and the power of the Holy Spirit is manifested in our vulnerability.[20]

The character of mutuality is seen most prominently in the willingness of partners involved in a relationship to bear one another's burdens (Gal 6:2). True friends are ready to share the suffering and joy of their partners, for only in this way can they support and fulfill one another.

A mutualistic relationship does not mean that the partners lose the capacity to be critical of one another. Mature relationships encourage the exchange of criticism, and both parties should be able both to accept and to give it without being offended. If the relationship is not strong enough, however, criticism can be seen as a threat or as excessive intervention by the partner. A mature relationship will only be possible if the partners view one another as equals. Within the relationship of equality, both parties can acknowledge that they are not perfect and therefore need one another, just as they also need God. They can also affirm that they each have energy and capabilities that can be shared in support of one another in the practice of mission.

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18. See "Together Toward Life: Mission and Evangelization in Changing Landscape," in: www.oikoumene. org/en/resources/publications/TogethertowardsLif_SAMPLE.pdf (accessed October 12, 2014).
19. Ibid.
20. Op. cit.

Another factor that is also important for nurturing a relationship of mutuality is to maintain accountability to one another. Churches who receive support from their partners, in whatever form, need to be open to sharing information and reporting on the use of that support. Without such transparency, support can be misused for purposes inconsistent with those for which it was given. Openness is essential to creating an atmosphere of trust.

Mutuality: Learning from each other

One of the common forms of mutuality in mission is that churches send ecumenical workers to serve with partner churches. Unlike during the colonial period, the presence of a missionary in the life of a partner church should be free from a "Santa Claus" mentality. That is to say, it should not be one-way service to the partner, but a genuine cooperative effort, not doing *for* but doing *together*, where all parties are both serving and learning from one another. In this way, the quality of missionary presence is not characterized by dictating what should be done or giving instructions on how to do it. It is rather a matter of accompanying[21] one another on a journey, seeking together the will of God, and working together for a more just and peaceful world.

This also means that the cooperative work of mission will result in a great variety of forms. If the realities of the local context are respected, the tendency to copy/paste between partner churches can be avoided. Each context has its own dynamics so that a pattern of ministry that is appropriate in one place may not automatically be appropriate in another. This means that we need to be willing to live with diversity and to learn from it. In such a relationship, ecumenical workers can become bridges between their home church and partner churches. They can facilitate opportunities for two different communities of faith to learn from one another.

Homework for churches in the so-called "mission field"

In the past, the relationship between churches in the West and the East was understood as that between mission's "home base" and its "field." In light of the discussion above concerning mutuality in mission, there is clearly some homework to be done, both by the churches of the former home base and by the former mission field.

The churches of the former mission field need to deconstruct the mentality of inferiority that has crippled their active involvement in mission. Limitations in financial and other resources should not be an excuse to abstain from active involvement in mission, whether in the local, regional, or global contexts. Instead of portraying themselves as inferior in order to seek aid, the churches of the former mission field must develop self-reliance in the area of resources, finances, and theology that would enable them to make a contribution to ecumenical relations in the regional and global contexts. The "proposal mentality"—a dependency on donors both domestic and international—needs to be replaced by the ability to seek and develop local resources to support mission. This means that the churches must also learn to manage their money in accordance with their ecclesiology in order to maximize the mission of the local church.

Another challenge is to find creative forms of mission suited to the unique conditions of the local context. Throughout the long colonial period, nearly all forms of ministry imitated those in the churches of the West, including liturgies, polity, and church architecture. Authentic contextualization will require an intensive dialogue with local culture and local wisdom. A willingness to see indigenous culture as a partner in developing mission relevant to the local context must replace the tendency to see traditional culture as "pagan."

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21. In their study about mission in the third millenium, Robert Schreiter et al. identified accompaniment as the most appropriate form of mission relationship. See Robert Schreiter, ed., *Mission in the Third Millenium* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books 2002), 149–61.

Homework for the churches in the so-called "mission base"

The churches of the former mission base also have their own homework to do. The main challenge is to change the old mission mentality. The first step toward changing that mentality is to eliminate paternalism in ecumenical relations. Instead of paternalism, we must take up the common task of reconstructing mission in partnership and mutuality. If we confess that we are sisters and brothers in Christ, then no one among us can play at being father or mother. If we confess God as Father and/ or Mother, let no one claim to take God's place as parent.

Another aspect of the needed change in mentality is a deconstruction of the Euro-centric or West-centric point of view. For centuries mission was carried out with a sense of "Manifest Destiny." [22] The Old Testament belief that Israel was God's chosen people was reproduced in the conviction that God had chosen Europeans and the white race to preach the Gospel and bring modern technology to the rest of the world. To eliminate Euro-centrism is an essential sign of repentance from an attitude that contains the seeds of racism. By removing Euro-centrism we create a space in which authentic meeting and learning across cultures is possible.

The third homework assignment involves deconstructing the teacher mentality. The churches of the West in their mission activity have often considered themselves the teachers of the younger churches. Indeed, the church is called to teach (Matt 28:20), but at the same time the church is a community of disciples. We are called to be both learners and teachers of the will of God. Churches in both the former mission base and the mission field need to develop a balanced spirituality of discipleship and doctrine, learning and teaching. Everyone has wisdom to share. We are always both teachers and students in life and ministry.

Mutuality: Sharing common calling to work for justice and peace

All churches and all people of faith have the same calling to be involved in the mission of the Triune God to do the work of creation, salvation, and renewal. We realize this mission in our struggles to bring life, peace, and justice to the entire world. The need for justice and peace is universal. It is the need of all people, all nations, and all of creation. This is why we must find ways to work together on issues of social, economic, political, cultural, and economic injustice all over the world. In this context, our presence in mission means to facilitate our common involvement in the call to bring life, salvation, and transformation to the world.

Author biography

Mery Kolimon was born in SoE, West Timor, on 2 June 1972. She finished her bachelor of theological study at the Theological Faculty of Artha Wacana Christian University at Kupang, East Nusa Tenggara Province, Indonesia in 1995. In 2001, she completed a master's degree in Missiology at Gereformeerde Theologische Universiteit, Kampen, the Netherlands. She holds a PhD from the Protestant Theological University in the Netherlands, which was completed in 2008. Currently she teaches Missiology and Contextual Theology in her alma mater in Kupang, West Timor, where she also serves as the Director of the Postgraduate Program of the University. In addition, she is coordinator of the Eastern Indonesian Women's Network for Study on Women, Religion, and Culture. Since 2009, she has served as one of the international partner board members of Common Global Ministries Board (United Church of Christ and Christian Church [Disciples of Christ]). In October 2015, she was chosen as synod moderator of her church, Gereja Masehi Injili di Timor, Indonesia, for the period of 2015–2019. She is married to Yustus Maro and they are blessed with three children: Meriana, Rulien, and Alberd.

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22. The phrase comes from the language of American national ideology also adopted by the churches—an understanding that they were chosen by God to bring Christianity to the rest of the world. See David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books 1991), 298–302.