

“Without Faces”: Women’s Perspectives on Contextual Missiology

Cathy Ross

Introduction

In 2006 Dana Robert asked the following question, “What would the study of Christianity in Africa, Asia and Latin America look like if scholars put women into the centre of their research?”¹ She argues that the current demographic shift in world Christianity should be analyzed as a women’s movement as women form the majority of active participants. So what is missiology and what would it look like if considered from a woman’s perspective?

Various definitions of missiology² claim that it means the ongoing, intentional reflection on the practice of mission with the purpose of effecting change in the way mission is carried out. Kirk writes that its task “is to validate, correct and

¹ D Robert, “World Christianity as a Women’s Movement”, *IBMR*, Vol 30, No 4, (Oct 2006):180.

² For example, see S Moreau, *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (2001), “**Missiology** generally refers to the formal academic study of all aspects of the missionary enterprise. Inherent in the discipline is the study of the nature of God, the created world, and the Church as well as the interaction among these three. To study that interaction, of necessity it combines insights from the disciplines of biblical studies, theology, and the social sciences. Being identified with the missionary task, however, it must go beyond each of these disciplines to engage not only in understanding but in effecting change as part of the missionary endeavour.”

Or

Missiology: “the conscious, intentional, ongoing reflection on the doing of mission. It includes theory(ies) of mission, the study and teaching of mission, as well as the research, writing, and publication of works regarding mission” (*Neely 2000, 633*). “1. the study of the salvation activities of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit throughout the world geared toward bringing the kingdom of God into existence, 2. the study of the worldwide church’s divine mandate to be ready to serve this God who is aiming his saving acts toward this world” (*Verkuyl 1978, 5*).

<http://www.missiology.org/missionsdictionary.htm#M>, accessed 8.1.10

establish on better foundations the entire practice of mission.”³ Kenyan scholar, Philomena Mwaura makes a plea for missiology to empower and transform. So the discipline begs for application and praxis – its aim is to bring about change. Therefore missiology calls for not only study, research and reflection but also for self-evaluation and engagement. It needs to be self-critical and light on its feet so that change can be embraced and effected. This means that missiology as a discipline is always contingent on new discoveries, always tentative as it tries new approaches, always humble as it learns from elsewhere.

What does it mean then to engage in a contextual missiology? This is a current discussion in theology as theologians debate the place and role of context in theologizing. Bevans maintains that there is only contextual theology “that is specific to a particular place, a particular time, a particular culture.”⁴ He argues that the role of present human experience is vital in working out our theology, the understanding of our faith. Human experience is not an optional add-on it is a God-given part of who we are – our social location (where we live), our family and background, our community, our culture – all have an impact on how we do our theology. Bevans affirms that theology “*must* be contextual; but it must also be in dialogue, open to the other, ready to change, ready to challenge, ready to enrich and be enriched.”⁵ As Paul Matheny writes in a recent book on contextual theology, “Interpretations of the meaning of Christ for faithful living can be and are often meaningful beyond the particularity of the local theology that gave it birth.”⁶ And so it is for missiology also – for the study of mission, its purpose and

³ A Kirk, *What is Mission, Theological Explorations*, (London:DLT, 1999), 21.

⁴ S Bevans, *An Introduction to Theology in Global Perspective*, (Maryknoll:Orbis, 2009), 165.

⁵ Ibid. 5.

⁶ Paul Duane Matheny, *Contextual Theology, the Drama of our Times*, (Eugene,Oregon:Wipf and Stock, 2011) 72.

methods, its motivation and its goal. If we keep this in mind, - if we are ready to dialogue and to listen and learn - then our missiology will be not only contextual but also humble.

If women do indeed form the majority of active participants in the world church, what might women's perspectives contribute to the discipline of missiology? Would the practice of the discipline be very different? Would the issues and ideas under consideration be new? How might the approach be fresh? Might there be an element of surprise as unexpected approaches may emerge?

Historians have discovered that reading history from the viewpoint of women has brought fresh insights and new questions. New and different sources have been brought to light. Women's names and experiences have not often appeared on the great documents or as part of the great events of history but women have been there thinking, reflecting, writing journals, diaries, letters within their own families and networks. It has been this more personal, more "ordinary" history that feminist historians have tried to bring into focus.... history that deals with everyday life and relationships in the social context of the time. Perhaps women's perspectives on missiology can offer a missiology "from below" – a more ordinary, a more personal, a more modest missiology.

Women's perspectives certainly offer a participatory approach. When I presented the first draft of this paper surrounded by the women from all over the world, I was flooded with ideas, comments, new and challenging insights which has meant a not only significant rewriting of the original draft but also personal

growth as I have heard how some of my ideas need nuancing, developing, editing or just forgetting in various contexts. Their thoughts and input were rich and diverse and have enlarged and corrected my small world. Their input confirmed for me that missiology can only be contingent and must be contextual. There can be no grand theories, no totalising statements – we come from such diverse and different contexts – the contrasts are legion. It is a privilege to hear the stories and to be gently challenged to try to think outside my context, and incorporate the insights of others into my few thoughts. I suspect this is a particular challenge for Western scholars and raises all sorts of questions regarding intellectual property, publishing rights and indeed even how scholarship is carried out and evaluated.

Finally, before proposing some ideas from women all over the world that might lead us in this direction, let me offer you a brief and delightful definition of missiology that breathes fresh life into this search, “Missiology therefore is the study of the Church as surprise.”⁷

A Missiology of Emptiness and Hiddenness

A missiology of emptiness was first suggested by Korean woman missiologist, Chun Chae Ok in 2004.⁸ I believe that this resonates with much of women’s engagement in and experience of mission. A missiology of emptiness is about emptying self to the point of self-sacrifice. It is about *kenosis* as expressed in Phil 2:5-11. Scholars debate two possible meanings here - Jesus’ taking on the form of

⁷ Ivan Illich, quoted in D Bosch, *Transforming Mission, Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, (Maryknoll:Orbis, 1992), 493.

⁸ Chun Chae Ok “Integrity of Mission in the Light of the Gospel: Bearing the Witness of the Spirit: An Asian Perspective” Unpublished paper, 11th conference of the International Association for Mission Studies, Port Dickson, Malaysia, August, 2004.

a servant by becoming human (the incarnation) and Jesus' self-surrender and the giving of his life on the Cross (self-sacrifice).⁹

For women, their involvement in mission is often experienced from this point of weakness, sacrifice and invisibility. Historically we know that women have been deeply engaged in the work of mission, but because women were seen as adjuncts to men, they were "systematically written out of historical and anthropological records."¹⁰ In fact missionary was a male noun – "it denoted a male actor, male action, male spheres of service."¹¹ Throughout the history of mission, women have often been nameless and faceless. The early CMS records sometimes did not even note the name of the wife – merely according her a little 'm' to denote that the male missionary was married. Young Lee Hertig entitled her article on 19th century Bible women and 20th century evangelists in Korea, "Without a Face" because they remained "invisible and faceless."¹² Yet despite this, they "carried the gospel from house to house and were sacrificially devoted to their labour of love."¹³ She claims that once the church began to become institutionalised, "masculinization of the Korean church took place, and the hard labour of the Bible women remained invisible and faceless. Patriarchal leadership took over and continued to harvest the Bible women's work with

⁹ See C Brown, (ed), *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology, Vol 1*, (Exter:Paternoster, 1976), 548.

¹⁰ Fiona Bowie, "Introduction: Reclaiming Women's Presence," in *Women and Missions: Past and Present Anthropological and Historical Perspectives*, ed. Fiona Bowie, Deborah Kirkwood, and Shirley Ardener (Oxford: Berg, 1993), 1.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 1.

¹² Young Lee Hertig, "Without a Face, The Nineteenth Century Biblewomen and Twentieth Century *Jeondosa*" in D Robert (ed), *Gospel Bearers, Gender Barriers, Missionary Women in the Twentieth Century*, (Maryknoll:Orbis, 2002)

¹³ *Ibid.*, 186.

women's labour credited to male leadership."¹⁴ Chung also confirms this claiming that the new Christian movement became "a new version of confinement and bondage" as women were once again marginalised and so the "Korean church became, and remains, male dominated."¹⁵ According to Belaynesh Abiyio from Ethiopia, women take courage and hope from Jesus as "the boundary breaker" who enables transformation of their situation.¹⁶ Although male leadership is still prevalent in Pentecostal churches in Kenya, Mwaura and Parsitau offer a fascinating study of three women in leadership in Pentecostal circles, who challenge the gender stereotypes in African cultures.¹⁷ These women provide visible role models of women in leadership which is so important because it allows women to imagine and visualise that participation in leadership is possible. Therefore this begins to undermine and undo the patriarchal public culture and worldview.

The kind of work often performed by women – hospitality, visiting, counselling, ministries of compassion and children's work has tended to be seen as secondary to the primary tasks performed by men. Christian women's roles in church and mission have not been recorded nor sufficiently recognised.

Women evangelists, women deacons, mothers and daughters are the ones who most of the time, give their total service for the faith community and its neighbours in visiting, in prayers, in counselling and in a variety of

¹⁴ Young Lee Hertig, "Without a Face" in D Robert (ed) *Gospel Bearers, Gender Barriers*, (Maryknoll:Orbis, 2002), 186.

¹⁵ M Chung, "Mission possible! Toward a new perception of mission", Unpublished paper, "Women in Mission", Bossey workshop, 15-18 October, 2010.

¹⁶ B Abiyio, "Who is Jesus for African women?", Unpublished paper, "Women in Mission", Bossey workshop, 15-18 October, 2010.

¹⁷ P Mwaura and D Parsitau, "Gendered Charisma: Women in Mission in the Neo-Pentecostal/Charismatic Churches in Kenya and the Construction of Christian Community", Unpublished paper, "Women in Mission", Bossey workshop, 15-18 October, 2010.

aids. .. Women's witness with the gospel to the world is carried out in weakness and selflessness.¹⁸

Women are familiar with approaches that are hidden, less recognised and rarely celebrated. We need to recover these perspectives in our missiology. After all, this was the approach of Jesus in his ministry where he emptied himself for the sake of others, where he sometimes even asked people to keep his healing miracles secret, where he declared that the first would be last, and told his disciples that we all need to take up our cross to follow him.

There is, however, another side to this story. Feminists would claim that a missiology of emptiness and a missiology of hiddenness are not healthy approaches for women. They say that women are already socialised into self-sacrifice and servanthood and that these approaches can only reinforce this unhelpfully. This can be dangerous for women where Christian attitudes of service and self-sacrifice can be taken too far and therefore result in unhealthy oppression of women. Culture can certainly be a source of oppression and this was readily acknowledged by early missionaries – footbinding of women in China or *sati* in India being obvious examples. There are also more subtle examples such as tribalism in the Majority World or 'old boys' clubs' in the Western world which can deeply embed male power. Moreover, we can become blinded by this as the prevailing culture and fail to see and name this oppression as sin. And then, as feminist theologian Serene Jones writes, "we must strain hard to see, given the powerfully destructive ways in which oppression structures our thinking and makes even the most profound forms of brokenness

¹⁸ Chun Chae Ok, "Integrity of Mission"

seem normal.”¹⁹ Oppression works like a blinder preventing us from seeing that we are caught in sin. Therefore relations of domination begin to abound; women become disempowered and invisible and so we have to be extremely careful that a missiology of emptiness and a missiology of hiddenness do not ultimately work against women. Sadly, we continue to see this throughout many cultures in our world. Marilu Salazar reminds us of the invisibility of women in Latin America in the Roman Catholic context. She quotes Brazilian theologian, Ivone Gebara whose critique of the Latin American Conference of Bishops, held in Aparecida in 2007, was, “we women were the great disappeared ones in Aparecida.”²⁰ The official documents from the conference made no mention of indigenous women, religious women, feminist theology, nor women’s organisations “that in Latin America have dedicated their labours to fight against the different faces of violence and to offer alternatives of survival.”²¹ Atola Longkumer, from India, claims that “discrimination, exclusion, marginalisation and even violence” exist within the church.²² She explains how a lack of gender analysis has led to a truncated understanding of the gospel so that an equal Christian community has not been created. This has led to “a position and participatory power that is not very different from the pre-Christian mission days for the Ao women despite education and Christianisation.”²³ This does beg the obvious question as to why Christian mission did not seem to challenge cultural practices that were discriminatory or harmful towards women.

¹⁹ Serene Jones, *Feminist Theory and Christian Theology, Cartographies of Grace*, (Augsburg:Fortress, 2000), 109.

²⁰ M Salazar, “Education and Violence: A Reflection from the Perspective of Latin American Feminist Theology of Liberation”, Unpublished paper, “Women in Mission”, Bossey workshop, 15-18 October, 2010.

²¹ Ibid.

²² A Longkumer, “Tetsur Tesayula: The limits for women in the Ao Naga Christians in Northeast India”, Unpublished paper, “Women in Mission”, Bossey workshop, 15-18 October, 2010.

²³ Ibid.

And so while I would continue to make a plea for a missiology of emptiness and a missiology of hiddenness to be practised by both women and men, I realise that context is vital and will mean important nuancing. If one is already invisible, excluded or oppressed then a missiology of emptiness and hiddenness may not be appropriate. If one is reading this from a position of relative power, then it is a very different story. However, I still believe this approach is what Jesus modelled to us all in his incarnation. We know that Jesus poured himself out for the sake of the world. We know that Jesus befriended disreputable people and refused to condemn the unrighteous. We know that Jesus loved women and children and the poor – the hidden ones, the little ones, the marginalised, the outsiders.

By contrast so much of our current missiology is focussed on the drive for growth, expansion, projects, strategies and numbers. We have targets to meet, business plans to write, strategies to elaborate, conversions to count, projects to elaborate, ever bigger and more expensive conferences to attend.²⁴ Much of this language and worldview come from the worlds of the military and management

²⁴ The Third Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization, held in South Africa in 2010, is one example. While the talk was of cooperation and representation, the language used by most speakers was gender-exclusive, only 13 of 43 main speakers were women, no women were on the Lausanne executive tasked with organising the congress and Hwa Yung later estimated women made up only 27% of the total attendees. Meanwhile, Oceania was never given a voice from the main platform, nor were indigenous/aboriginal groups, Korea (a significant evangelical missionary-sending country), Pentecostals or the disabled. English was the dominant language used from the front. The congress itself, which 4500 delegates attended, cost \$US17 million and has generated subsequent country, regional and international meetings, forums and gatherings. One wonders if the money could be better spent. See, Tim Stafford, "Who Got Invited to Cape Town and Why," http://blog.christianitytoday.com/ctliveblog/archives/2010/10/representing_th.html, (cited 12 March, 2011) and Allen Yeh, "Four Conferences on Four Continents: Cape Town 2010 (Epilogue)," <http://www.scriptoriumdaily.com/2010/10/26/four-conferences-on-four-continents-cape-town-2010-epilogue/>, (cited 12 March, 2011).

– worlds of war and success. In fact there is even a term, “managerial missiology”²⁵ – a cold, reductionist term turning Christian mission into a manageable enterprise using information technology and marketing techniques. Concepts and programmes such as “10-40” and the “4-14” windows, “Adopt-a-People”, “AD2000 and Beyond”, “homogeneous units” come from this approach. Escobar offers the following critique, “What I am seeing in the application of these concepts in the mission field is that missionaries ‘depersonalize’ people into ‘unreached targets’, making them objects of hit-and-run efforts to get decisions that may be reported.”²⁶ Some may argue that this is a contextual approach befitting North American culture but is this the kind of Kingdom we wish to inhabit? Where is the language that expresses our mission engagement in terms of weakness, vulnerability, relationships, service, compassion, meekness, caring. What a contrast to the language of servanthood expressed by Indian Christian, P T Chandapilla, from his context as a minority Christian in a predominantly Hindu culture,

Servanthood is entirely voluntary. Servanthood is for those like Jesus Christ, who laid aside his privileges, and who choose to act on it. There is no pressure, no recruitment, no inducement. True servanthood shows whether we are really sons and daughters of God. ‘He who is rich became poor.’ The benefactor becomes the beggar. The one who has everything

²⁵ “the belief that missions can be approached like a business problem. With the right inputs, the thinking goes, the right outcomes can be assured. Any number of approaches have been hailed as the ‘key’ to world evangelization or to reaching particular groups -- everything from contextualization to saturation evangelization. Most while successful up to a point, also have been shown to have limits.” <http://www.missiology.org/missionsdictionary.htm#M>, accessed 8.1.10

²⁶ S Escobar, *The New Global Mission, The Gospel from Everywhere to Everywhere*, (Downers Grove:IVP, 2003), 167.

opts for nothing. This is a paradox. Where this does not occur there is no servanthood.

Abiyo explains that servanthood can be either an oppressive or life-giving metaphor for Ethiopian women. Ethiopian women understand servanthood as they are socialised into it from an early age. But Jesus' model of servanthood was not a passive one and the ensuing story of the resurrection provides hope for renewal and transformation. As Park Soon Kyung, a Korean woman theologian explains, servanthood can be a powerful witness to evil and a challenge to the powers and principalities of the world.²⁷ Perhaps we all need to have the courage to be weak and vulnerable, emptying ourselves to the point of death, as Jesus did.

A Missiology of Comforting, Consolation and Healing

A missiology of comforting draws from the power of the Holy Spirit to comfort, transform and heal – both humanity and creation. The Holy Spirit, also known as the Comforter, is the one who comforts the broken, the afflicted, the suffering. God is a God of consolation who is with the HIV/AIDs sufferers, the abused women, the victims of Hiroshima or Rwanda, of war. Women and children are the victims of war and violence. Women struggle on to feed and protect their families, to live in reconciliation and peace, to bind up the wounded, to heal the broken-hearted.

Women, as mothers, are always comforting their children. Anne Nasimiyu-Wasike writes that

²⁷ See Chung Hyun Kyung, "Who is Jesus for Asian Women?" in C Cadorette et al (eds) *Liberation Theology, An Introductory Reader*, (Maryknoll:Orbis, 1992), 127.

Africa today needs a mother's love. African women as mothers have sustained and continued to nurture the life in Africa despite the ethnic wars, the military dictatorships, oppressive governments and economic hardships which deprive many people of basic necessities...The woman of Africa has given her life for the love of her children but the man of Africa must join hands with women of Africa and follow the example of Jesus the mother.²⁸

Traditionally women have been more associated with the virtues of comforting, nurturing and healing - certainly they are over represented in the caring professions. Whether this is thanks to nature or nurture (genes or socialization) is debatable but it does mean that women more often understand and practise a missiology of comforting. This is why we need a theology that does not mandate hierarchy in our approach to mission and where a Trinitarian understanding is helpful. The Trinitarian community of three divine persons modelling mutual submission is a far cry from hierarchical approaches that can sometimes lead to unhelpful approaches of power, authority, and control.

Mission is comforting – bringing comfort to humanity in distress and to creation in distress. A good example is found in a Mother's Union (MU) group in Tanzania. The MU was founded in England in 1876 by Mary Sumner and now exists in 77 countries with 3.6 million members. It works to support family life and empower women in their communities through supporting the needs of families, tackling the causes of injustice and providing a network to strengthen members in their Christian faith. "Heart and home of change" is the metaphor

²⁸ Quoted in D Stinton, *Jesus of Africa, Voices of Contemporary African Christology*, (Maryknoll:Orbis, 2004), 157.

used by this group in Tanzania to speak of hospitality offered, widows and children being cared for, craftwork projects, prayers being offered, joys and sorrows shared, community development embodied. This group of women provide powerful, practical comforting, consolation and sustenance for their community, “the affirmed fellowship of love, the women who support you to leave an abusive husband and work to provide you with a house of your own, the receipt of needed food, the new family after losing your own.”²⁹ Where women experience brokenness in so many ways – whether it is increasing family breakdown in the West, rape as an instrument of war to terrorise and humiliate women and whole communities,³⁰ or the daily grind of facing gender discrimination or racist structures in the workplace, mission carried out in the way of this Tanzanian MU group can offer healing and grace to broken and scarred women.³¹ The case study by Mwaura and Parsitau is another fascinating example. They tell the story of SLIF, (Single Ladies International Fellowship) in Nairobi. They explain that it “is dedicated to uplifting the lives of single women in Kenya by empowering them spiritually, socially, and economically, and by so doing, it addresses critical issues around inadequate healthcare, poverty, low self-esteem, loneliness, and marginalisation.”³² This is a ministry that provides comforting to single, separated, and divorced women, single mothers and widows. It is a ministry of support and encouragement and as with the MU it is a ministry that uses women’s space for consolation, healing, transformation, and empowerment. This group enables women to rise above victimhood and to reclaim their self-esteem. However, it is also important to remember, as

²⁹ E. Sanderson “Women changing: Relating spirituality and development through the wisdom of Mothers’ Union members in Tanzania” *Women’s Studies Journal*, Vol. 20, No.2, (2006):95.

³⁰ For example, see http://www.amnesty.org.uk/actions_details.asp?ActionID=534 which relates the story of Justine Bihamba working to protect women from rape in the Congo.

³¹ See Jones, “Sin: Grace Denied” in *Feminist Theory*, 94-125.

³² Mwaura and Parsitau, “Gendered Charisma”

Longkumer reminds us that “women-only” space can contribute to keeping women excluded and on the margins. Again, context is vital in determining the appropriate missiological reflection and response.

Chung Hyun Kyung claims that Asian women believe “in spite of,” - in spite of lack of protection from their fathers and brothers who may beat them or sell them into child marriage or prostitution.³³ She writes, “Some Asian women have found Jesus as the one who really loves and respects them as human beings with dignity, while the other men in their lives have betrayed them.”³⁴ In other words, women find consolation in their relationship with Jesus. They know that Jesus sides with silenced Asian women and can bring liberation and wholeness. Jesus is the one who can bring healing, solace and renewal for women.

This is a reminder that women can offer very different images and understandings of God and this is necessary for a fully orbbed appreciation of who God is. Perhaps women are more attuned to the female images of God in Scripture and also to the role models of women in the Scriptures – these can provide a healthy counterbalance to male-only imagery and language. Images of God as dance, God as Mother (in all aspects of suffering in childbirth as well as protecting her young), God as verb, God as relationship present us with other aspects of God’s character. Feminist theologian, Janet Martin Soskice, reminds us that much of Jesus’ ministry was spent in “turning the symbols” – a king entering Jerusalem on a donkey for example. She asks, “Why in the Christian glossing of the Hebrew Bible should the unjust sufferings of innocent women not be read as prefiguring that of Christ? Is it only sufferings of men that can fit the

³³ Hyun Kyung, “Who is Jesus”, 124.

³⁴ Ibid.

template of the Christian saviour?"³⁵ Salazar also reminds us that to see the image of God as male only is idolatrous and that this creates problems for women. She asks the question that many feminists ask, can "a male saviour be the symbol of salvation for women when these women are living in their bodies the abuse and violence of men?"³⁶ She claims that we need a subversive love that not only denounces situations of oppression, but also can model a divine love that empties itself of privilege and power.

A missiology that embodies comfort, consolation and healing may indeed be perspectives that women can bring to our hurting and wounded world today. Jesus proclaimed them when he read from the scroll of Isaiah at Nazareth where he announced freedom for those in captivity, release from oppression and good news for the poor – indeed words of comfort, consolation and healing for those who have ears to hear.

A Missiology of Hospitality and Relationship

Christine Pohl reminds us in her superb book on hospitality, *Making Room, Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition*, "The first formative story of the biblical tradition on hospitality is unambiguously positive about welcoming strangers."³⁷ Hospitality was considered an important duty and often we see the hosts becoming beneficiaries of their guests and strangers. So Abraham and Sarah entertained angels in Gen 18, the widow of Zarephath benefited from Elijah's visit (I Kings 17) and Rahab and her family were saved from death by

³⁵ J M Soskice, "Turning the Symbols", in D Hampson (ed) *In Swallowing a Fishbone? Feminist Theologians debate Christianity*, (London:SPCK, 1996), 31.

³⁶ Salazar, "Education and Violence",

³⁷ C Pohl, *Making Room, Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 24.

welcoming Joshua's spies. (Josh 2) Ultimately Israel's obligation to care for the stranger is because of her experience as a stranger and alien. Hospitality is a good metaphor for mission and an appropriate concept for missiology because it implies invitation, warmth, sharing of food, relationship.

Nineteenth century mission theory encouraged the formation of a pious Christian home as an "object lesson" for reforming home and family in mission contexts.³⁸ The use of 'pious Christian home' as a mission theory meant that women could continue in their expected private sphere, without threatening the man's more public sphere, and also be engaged in mission service. Robert has argued that the idea of the Christian home has been a major force in Protestant mission, "a cornerstone of missionary thinking, it has been ignored in virtually all formal studies of mission theology."³⁹ Although this theory could reinforce traditional Victorian values of submission, public versus private space⁴⁰ and gender inequality, it could also provide "a platform for women's involvement in cultural change, social reform, self-sufficiency, and missiological innovation."⁴¹ In a Christian home – at its best - women could experience a companionate marriage and respect from their husband in contrast to abuse, polygamy and servitude to the husband's extended family. They could nurture and educate their children, practise philanthropy within their communities and thereby begin to effect some social transformation. The home is also the place where hospitality

³⁸ Diane Langmore, "'The Object Lesson of a Civilized Christian Home'," in *Missionary Lives Papua, 1874-1914*, ed. Robert C. Kiste, Pacific Island Monograph Series, No. 6 (Honolulu: University of Hawaii, 1989), 65-88.

³⁹ Dana Robert, "The 'Christian Home' as a Cornerstone of Christian Thought and Practice," in *Christian Missions and the Enlightenment of the West: The Challenges of Experience and History* (Boston: North Atlantic Missiology Project), June 1998, 36.

⁴⁰ See C Ross, "Separate Spheres or Shared Dominions", *Transformation*, Vol 23, No 4, (October 2006): 228-236.

⁴¹ Robert, "The 'Christian Home'", 37.

is offered and relationships nurtured. In the diaries and letters of missionary wives in nineteenth century New Zealand, for example, hospitality and close relationships are key themes.⁴²

Michele Hershberger claims that offering hospitality helps us to see differently. As we welcome people into our homes, share food with them and spend time with them, our perspective begins to change. She writes that when we eat together we are “playing out the drama of life”⁴³ as we begin to share stories, let down our guard, welcome strangers and see the other. Rev Rebecca Nyegenye, chaplain at Uganda Christian University, Mukono, told me that in Uganda, hospitality goes with both elaborate meals and listening to the visitor. Ugandans believe that for any relationship to be strong, food and intentional listening must be shared. Listening is an important part of honouring the guest. In both hospitality and mission, listening to the other is the beginning of understanding and of entering the other’s world.

A missiology of the house or a missiology of the kitchen table could be a necessary corrective to much of our missiology. This conjures up images of intimacy, homeliness, warmth, comfort, rootedness, safety and relationship. However, these metaphors of hospitality and home can be problematic in some contexts. Christine Lienemann-Perrin alerts us to the ambiguities and complexities of this public/private separation for women. She writes, “We know that in all of our world’s societies violence increases behind the excuse that what

⁴² See C Ross, *Women with a Mission, Rediscovering Missionary Wives in early New Zealand*, (Auckland:Penguin, 2006)

⁴³ M Hershberger, *A Christian View of Hospitality, Expecting Surprises*, (PA:Herald, 1999), 104.

takes place in the home is of no public concern.”⁴⁴ The home is sometimes not a safe place for women. Salazar reminds us that domestic violence is more common than we would like to think. “Home, for millions of women, has become a place more dangerous than the streets.”⁴⁵ When violence against women is common in the home, it forms part of the educative system for the children and they grow up thinking this is normal. As Serene Jones reminded us, we then begin to believe that profound forms of brokenness are normal. Salazar claims that the church in Mexico invites women who suffer from domestic violence to “carry their cross” and to bear this abuse with the same patience as Christ. So rather than being a place of refuge, home can become a dangerous place for women, a place where women suffer and are brutalised by the men in their lives. This is a far cry from the nineteenth century vision of pious domesticity and needs to be challenged and named for what it is – abuse and violence.

Again, hospitality is not a simple metaphor and plays out in different ways in different contexts. So while for some it may indeed mean invitation, warmth, sharing of food, relationship; for others it may mean ongoing stress and virtual impoverishment as hospitality is demanded and expected sometimes beyond the resources available. This begins to make it a more problematic metaphor for some. Abiyio reminds us that women in Ethiopia suffer as they overstretch themselves to offer hospitality for their husbands’ benefit. Mercy Oduyoye comments more generally on the role of hospitality in Africa and how it can be oppressive for women,

⁴⁴ C Lienemann-Perrin, “the Biblical Foundations for a Feminist and Participatory Theology of Mission”, *IRM*, Vol 93, No 368, (Jan 2004): 31.

⁴⁵ Salazar, “Education and Violence”,

Women's experience of domestic hospitality is that of Sarah, a situation in which they work and the men take the credit (Gen 18:1-15). Rebecca's hospitality to the servant of Isaac (Gen 25:15-27) is traditional to Africa. To illustrate the exploitation of women in men's hospitality to men, African women theologians recall Abraham passing Sarah off as his sister, Lot offering his virgin daughters in order to save his male guests (Gen 19:1-8) and the horrible murder of the 'Levite's concubine.' (Judg 19:22-30).⁴⁶

And so hospitality becomes a burden and oppressive for the giver rather than life-giving and renewing. It is important to remember that what can be a life-giving and expansive metaphor for some can be problematic and constricting for others.

However, hospitality is still a powerful metaphor with which to think about mission. It begins with God and is an essentially outward looking practice and virtue. Hospitality involves listening, learning, seeing the other and negotiation of space by all parties. Generous hospitality can lead to reconciliation and genuine embrace of the other. Indeed, poverty may even be a good place to start with hospitality. Poverty of heart and mind creates space for the other. Poverty makes a good host – poverty of mind, heart and even resources where one is not constrained by one's possessions but is able to give freely. Hospitality from the margins reminds us of the paradoxical power of vulnerability and the importance of compassion. "Hospitality... means primarily the creation of a free space where the stranger can enter and become a friend instead of an enemy. Hospitality is not to change people, but to offer them space where change can

⁴⁶ Mercy Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women's Theology*, (Sheffield:Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 46-7.

take place.”⁴⁷ Immediately we can see the resonances for mission here. Mission, the divine invitation from God to enter into a loving relationship with God, is about allowing people the space to come to God in their own way; to become the person God created them to be. Mission is not about invading their space, forcing them to come to Christ in the manner of the *conquistadores*, - vanquishing them in the name of Christ; nor is it imposing or transplanting Christianity to make them like us as was so often done in the colonial period.

This understanding of divine invitation is perhaps most powerfully expressed in the Eucharist, where this ritualised eating and drinking together re-enacts the crux of the gospel. As we remember what it cost Jesus to welcome us into relationship with God, we remember with sorrow the agony and the pain but at the same time we rejoice and celebrate our reconciliation and this new relationship made possible because of Christ’s sacrifice and supreme act of hospitality. We rejoice in our new relationship with God, made possible through the Cross and we rejoice as we partake of this meal together in community. When we share in the Eucharist, we are not only foreshadowing the great heavenly banquet to come but we are also nourished on our journey towards God’s banquet table. Jesus is, quite literally, the Host as we partake of His body and blood and we are the guests as we feed on him by faith with thanksgiving. In this way, the Eucharist connects hospitality at a very basic level with God and with the *missio Dei* as it anticipates and reveals God’s heavenly table and the coming Kingdom.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ H Nouwen, *Reaching Out, The Three Movement of the Spiritual Life*, (Glasgow:William Collins, 1976) 68-9.

⁴⁸ See Hershberger, *A Christian View*, 228-9 for further discussion on this.

So what might our missiology look like if we adopted these perspectives of hospitality and relationship? I suggest that our missiology would be more humble, modest and joyful. Our missiology might be done around the kitchen table over a meal. There would be fewer grand statements and plans,⁴⁹ fewer large conferences with important statements, less competitiveness. We would spend more time in relationships, more time feasting and feeding the stranger, more time listening to and learning from the other. This might lead to some surprising insights and challenging perspectives for the practice of mission.

A Missiology of Sight, Embrace and Flourishing

The gifts of sight and insight are gifts of the Holy Spirit. Just as the women disciples were the first to see Jesus, our eyes have to be opened to recognise Jesus also. Once we can see Jesus, the Holy Spirit enables us to see the other person. Christian mission requires that we actively see and welcome the guest and stranger in our worlds.

Can we really talk about a missiology of sight? I think we can because sight and insight are important in Christian mission. If we had been able to “see the other” might the genocide in Rwanda never have happened? If we were able “to see the other” might the ethnic cleansing in Bosnia-Herzegovina, the civil war in N Ireland, the ignorance and apathy concerning Sudan and Congo, *apartheid* in South Africa, tribalism in Sri Lanka, violence and oppression in Burma and Zimbabwe, caste and class systems, oppressive colonialism – might all this have been avoided – if only we could see? Who are we blind to in our contexts, which prevents us from seeing the other person and, wittingly or unwittingly, means

⁴⁹ For example there have been 2,000 plans to evangelise the world since 30AD, *IBMR*, Vol 35, No 1, (Jan 2011): 29.

that we practise a missiology of exclusion or oppression rather than one of embrace? Might it be the homeless person, whom we have never seen before, whom we have always passed by in the street and never looked in the eye nor exchanged a greeting. Might it be the young people whose music is so loud, whose language is incomprehensible, whose body-piercing and head shaving is so alien – have we ever stopped to look them in the eye, to appreciate their music, to consider the pressures they may be under – the bleak prospect of unemployment, broken homes, student loans, an uncertain future – have we ever stopped to look them in the eye and tried to understand them in their context? Might it be those migrants who never learn our language, who never even try to integrate, who take over whole streets and suburbs in our cities – have we ever had them in our homes, offered them hospitality and tried to “see” their culture.

So a missiology of sight must encourage Christians to acknowledge the identity of the other – the other who is full of potential to be realised in relationship with Christ. The actual and the potential must be seen and acknowledged together. And in this encounter with the other, I too am confronted with the truth of myself and all that I am capable of becoming. When I embrace the other, in a small way I begin to die to myself and begin to see myself in the other. John V Taylor comments, “But no less necessary to the Christian mission is the opening of our eyes towards other people. The scales fell from the eyes of the convert in Damascus precisely when he heard one of those whose very lives he had been threatening say, ‘Saul, my brother, the Lord Jesus has sent *me to you*. I-Thou.”⁵⁰ The gift of sight truly enables us to see the other person, to share our common humanity and to establish relationship. Therefore a missiology of sight which

⁵⁰ J V Taylor, *The Go-Between God, The Holy Spirit and the Christian Mission*, (London:SCM, 1972), 21.

embraces the other, also acknowledges and welcomes the potential in the other. Mother Theresa saw this in her selfless giving and serving of the poor, the sick and the dying in Calcutta. She knew that Jesus had sent her to them and she saw the potential in the other person. Therefore a missiology of sight which embraces the other can lead to human flourishing.

A further aspect of flourishing is care for creation. Creation suffered from Adam's refusal to safeguard Eden as a result of the Fall. Calvin DeWitt, professor of Environmental Studies comments, "Degradations of creation—beginning locally, extending regionally, and reaching globally—manifest an arrogation of Creation's Economy—a failure of people to be responsible stewards of God's gift."⁵¹ He goes on to outline four Biblical principles of stewardship: the conservancy principle - we should return the service of creation to us with service of our own; the safeguarding principle - we should safeguard the Lord's creation as the Lord safeguards us; the fruitfulness principle - we should enjoy the fruit of creation but not destroy its fruitfulness and finally the Sabbath principle - we should provide for creation's Sabbath rests with no relentless pressing.⁵² If we can care for creation, steward creation rather than dominate and exploit it for our own selfish purposes, then we will contribute to the sustaining and flourishing of the planet rather than the ruin of it. "As was expected of Adam, achieved by Noah, and taken on by Christ, we also become servants—servants of the garden, of humanity, of the whole creation."⁵³ Salazar writes about ecosophy, the wisdom of the *oikos* "which searches to learn from the

⁵¹ Calvin B DeWitt, "To Strive to Safeguard the Integrity of Creation and Sustain and Renew the Life of the Earth (i)" in A Walls and C Ross (eds) *Mission in the 21st Century, Exploring the Five Marks of Global Mission* (London:DLT, 2008), 86.

⁵² *ibid.*,89-90.

⁵³ *Ibid.*,93.

wisdom of creation and its laws in order to live in harmony.”⁵⁴ Feminist theologians have long seen the connection between exploitation of women and the domination of creation and therefore call for a re-imagination of our relationships within all of creation. “This movement is concerned not simply with the social, economic and political equality of women with men but with a fundamental re-imagination of the whole of humanity in relation to the whole of reality, including non-human creation.”⁵⁵ The World Evangelical Theological Commission issued a clarion call for the church “to proclaim the full truth about the environmental crisis in the face of powerful persons, pressures and institutions which profit from concealing the truth.”⁵⁶ Creation care is indeed a vital part of mission and crucial for human and non-human flourishing in God’s world.

Case Study

An interesting exercise might be to imagine what a women’s mission society might look like. When some students were faced with this assignment, they came up with the following ideas: “A women’s mission would be strong on nurture of members, it would make decisions by consensus rather than by voting, an all-women’s mission would be characterised by humble service, there would be an emphasis on *doing* as much as on *telling*, there would be an impulse to cooperate with other like-minded groups.”⁵⁷ These qualities did in fact

⁵⁴ Salazar, “Education and Violence”

⁵⁵ S Schneiders in Anne Clifford, *Introducing Feminist Theology*, (Maryknoll:Orbis, 2001)

⁵⁶ Summarizing Committee Report of the World Evangelical Theological Commission and Au Sable Institute Forum, In: Mark Thomas, guest ed., *Evangelicals and the Environment: Theological Foundations for Christian Environmental Stewardship* (special issue), *Evangelical Review of Theology* 17(2) (1993): 122-133.

⁵⁷ “Pioneers in Mission”,

http://www.interserve.org.nz/site/interserve/files/NZ_GO_text_%20files/Pioneers_In_Mission_GOmag_Oct08.rtf, accessed 12.1.10

characterise Interserve, founded in 1852 under the name Zenana Bible and Medical Mission, and was an all-women's mission for 100 years. They were also found in the women's mission societies in early 20th century North America.⁵⁸ The existence of these Women's Mission Boards was relatively short-lived and by the early decades of the twentieth century they had merged and integrated with the General Boards, almost certainly to the detriment of the involvement of American women in mission.⁵⁹ The women succumbed to a variety of pressures: appeals to denominational loyalty, criticisms about duplication of resources and inefficiency, assurances that they would be represented in decision making structures and that their concerns would be acknowledged and served in the new 'integrated' structures.⁶⁰ Unfortunately, the reality was very different. This has sadly resulted in a silencing of women and what women have to offer in the sphere of missiology. Ironically at the beginning of this millennium Dana Robert, even wondered if the collapse of the women's missionary movement led to a decline in the mission interest of mainline churches because of the removal of their greatest advocates of mission.⁶¹

And what about the role of the church? How might missiology be a study of the church as surprise? Argentinian theologian, C. Rene Padilla claims that the local

⁵⁸ By 1900 forty-one of the ninety-four Mission Boards were Women's Boards. R Pierce Beaver, *American Protestant Women in World Mission, A History of the First Feminist Movement in North America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 87-88.

⁵⁹ According to women Beaver interviewed, they believe they now have less involvement in policy making and that missionary dynamism and zeal has declined. R Pierce Beaver, *American Protestant Women*, 202-203.

⁶⁰ Alice L Hageman, "Women and Missions: The Cost of Liberation," in *Sexist Religion and Women in the Church, No More Silence!*, ed. Alice L Hageman (New York: Association Press, 1974), 167-193.

⁶¹ See Dana Robert, "Women and Missions: Historical Themes and Current Realities," in *Twentieth Century Missions and Gender Conference* (Unpublished paper presented at a conference at Boston University, March, 2000), 1-15.

congregation is the best agent for transformation because the deepest and most significant changes in people's lives take place through love expressed and experienced in community.⁶² Küng writes that the Church "takes over the reign of God in concentrated form: it becomes the voice of Jesus himself."⁶³ Do we experience the voice of Jesus and the love of God in and through church? Do our models and structures of church allow for transformation to take place among the community of disciples? The passages in Acts 2:44-45 and 4:32-35 are expressions of deep *koinonia*, including economic *koinonia*, made possible by Pentecost and the infilling of the Spirit. If this type of love, sharing, and solidarity were experienced and expressed by a local congregation, then our communities and our world would look very different. Perhaps our local congregations could then become places of transformation with modest aspirations to offer comfort, consolation and healing, willing hospitality and genuine relationships, which would foster human flourishing. Perhaps, then missiology would indeed be the study of the church as surprise.

Conclusion

You will notice that I have grouped the perspectives - a missiology of emptiness and healing; of comforting, consolation and healing; of hospitality and relationship; and of sight, embrace and flourishing – and this is deliberate. Women see the connections, operate on different levels simultaneously, build bridges to reality, notice resonances and echoes, tend to think holistically. It is not possible or appropriate to think of a single, dominating missiology. There is no overarching theory, no controlling metaphor, no final word. As I said at the

⁶² See C. R Padilla, "Wholistic Transformation and the Local church", unpublished address given at Eastern University, USA, August, 2009.

⁶³ H Küng, *The Church*, (London:Burnes and Oates, 1967), 96.

beginning, missiology as a discipline is contingent, tentative, incomplete. Contexts vary, situations change and so our missiology needs constant refining and nuancing. There is no definitive missiology. Women have different perspectives from those which have been commonly on offer, perspectives worth heeding but which have been marginalised or not heard. Women's missiology is based on a real resistance to a male dominated mission practice that can emphasize power, dominating control as well as endless activity and programmes. So it is out of contexts such as this that women begin to reflect and imagine a new way of witnessing to the gospel. If Christianity were to be studied as a women's movement as Robert suggested in 2006 - at least for the reason that women make up the majority of members of the world church - then it is only fair that women's perspectives be heard and celebrated; and then perhaps we shall begin to see and relate face to face.