



MISSION

ISSUE 1 2022

CATALYST

Intelligent comment on faith and culture

Decolonising Christianity

And just there on those pleasant pastures is where I saw the holy Lamb of God.

UNSETTLING OUR CHRISTIAN HERITAGE

ANCESTRAL FEELING

10. Renie Chow Choy mines her Baptist past for a Western Christianity capable of fostering belonging

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Contributors
(In order of appearance)



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was born in Abergavenny to Scouse Catholic parents. After a career in sports and news journalism that took in stints in Russia, India and across the UK, he made the inevitable move to the Christian charity sector in 2019. This is his first issue as *Mission Catalyst* editor.



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Revd Wale Hudson-Roberts

After eight years as a Baptist minister with extensive ecumenical involvement, Revd Wale Hudson-Roberts was appointed as the Baptist Union's Racial Justice Co-Ordinator. His responsibilities also include gender and disability concerns.



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is a freelance photojournalist who has been working in South East Asia and Europe since 2011. For the last decade, and until last year, he made his home in Phnom Penh. The primary focus of his work is covering social conflict and humanitarian issues.



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studied at Queen's University Belfast and obtained his doctorate from the VU Amsterdam. He was minister in two Baptist churches in Northern Ireland over a period of twenty years and later worked on behalf of Baptist theological seminaries in Prague and Amsterdam.



Annet Ttendo-Miller

is a Ugandan lawyer, a graduate of Makerere University, Kampala with a Masters in Human Rights and Constitutional law from the University of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. In 2022 she was appointed as BMS World Mission's first Gender Justice Co-ordinator.



Nana Natalia Lester-Bush

is a specialist in advising organisations on Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Liberation and is Co-Chair of Goldsmiths, University of London's Race Justice Strategy Board. They were born to a Ghanaian mother and very English very Anglican father.

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TO MORE TRULY HEAR JESUS

Our cover painting, John Constable's 'Salisbury Cathedral from the Bishop's Grounds', is an exemplar of the immutable order of English Christianity, a stasis Constable held dear. And its caption draws on William Blake's 'Jerusalem', a poem now evocative of evokes a nationalist culture that can conceive of Jesus walking this green and pleasant land. Yet as I have learned through difficult self-reflection, there are huge parts of Jesus we cannot see or hear through the vision, voices & experiences of white, usually middle-class, men and women in the West (or more accurately, the Global North). To more truly hear Jesus, we need to listen to those who look and live like Him.

We must find a way to think about the history of Western Christianity that

promotes an inclusive memory and fosters belonging. Our sisters and brothers in the majority world church will help shed more light on our understanding of the good news of the kingdom if we are willing to divest ourselves of power. Our Christian imaginations and engagement have to stem from humble recognition that we do not have all the answers. Postcolonialism calls for the stories of the forgotten and unforgotten, excluded and included, orthodox and unorthodox, Black, and white, to listen to each other. Because God is faithful, we can boldly come before Him to ask for help.

I pieced together the preceding paragraph from lines borrowed from each of this issue's contributors. I wish I had written the paragraph myself as it stands as something of a manifesto



for Mission Catalyst under my watch. The truth is, until I read the articles that follow, I did not have the conscious vocabulary to articulate that idea. Each piece in this relaunch edition stretched me, dis comforted me, and challenged me. Ultimately, each piece changed me. My only hope as you turn final page of this relaunched issue is that some of that ring true for you.

Matty Fearon
Editor

Letters

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



I am not going to say much, but I pray you will have the wisdom to balance the different roles that *Catalyst* seems to play. It is a *Catalyst*, a strirrer. Perhaps - for me - this led to it looking for too much controversy in the recent past. Because as much as a strirrer, *Catalyst* should be a bastion of truth, of consistency, as BMS has so successfully done down the ages. May we not lose the zeal of Carey from back in the day.

Steven Hewitt
Pastor, Stanley Road Baptist Church

I have found it very stimulating and helpful in the past, not least because it has had the courage to tackle some difficult issues and included contributors offering a variety of views. I hope you will continue on this vein and that your stated intention 'to return the magazine to its missiological roots' will not mean any narrowing of topics or opinions expressed. Yes, please do continue 'the challenge and erudition' that marked the best past issues.

John Matthews

Congratulations and commiserations on taking on the editorship of *Mission Catalyst*. Both the magazine and the conferences under the same name have been amongst the most stimulating things coming out of British Baptist circles. My advice to you, as you become editor, is not to make assumptions about the nature of your readership.

Bob Allaway

I think the magazine has won an excellent reputation, and I'm glad it's going to be un-paused. What I liked about it was its willingness to talk about things the Baptist Union finds it quite difficult to discuss, because it is necessarily a bit 'corporate'. I think Jonty knew the audience, which is still I think broadly conservative, and was careful not to annoy them too much, but he certainly gave a voice to people at the margins. But I like what you say about returning it to its missiological roots! - I'm sure it has a good future under your stewardship.

Mark Woods



THE

GREAT

ESCAPE

Breaking the bonds of our English Christian heritage

DR RENIE CHOW CHOY ARGUES THAT THE ANSWER TO POSTCOLONIAL DILEMMAS MUST LIE IN STRIPPING THE 'OUR' IN 'OUR CHRISTIAN HERITAGE' OF ITS NATIONALISTIC AND RACIAL CONNOTATIONS

For the majority of global Christians, thinking historically about the origins of their Christian affiliations renders Western Christianity categorically inescapable. Therefore, historical

thinking itself represents the fundamental problem since it makes the West (England specifically) inescapable. It follows that we must find a way to think about the history of Western Christianity that promotes an inclusive memory and fosters belonging. My hope, expressed in my book, is that Christianity in England can distribute an inheritance to those in its former empire who claim descent. By this I do not mean that English Christianity alone guards the assets and treasures for which the Global South thirsts; I do mean that Christianity in England has a power, precedence and prestige owing to an entrenched way of viewing history which considers it the

“ Christianity in England has a power, precedence and prestige owing to an entrenched way of viewing history ”

progenitor of many varieties of global Christianity.

Just as many people from former colonies feel they have a rightful claim to British citizenship by virtue of their membership within the empire, so do many ethnic minority Christians assume English Christian heritage to be their proper possession, and I would like to lay claim to this inheritance that has been dominated by a white-majority culture. Yet if one looks at conceptions of Christian heritage through the prism of identity and belonging, one is immediately struck by the gulf that separates the assumptions

of the white British from ethnic minority Christians. The National Trust – which protects many historic sites of Christian interest – has a membership that is less than 1 per cent black. The national past – ‘our Christian heritage’ – like all aspects of heritage, as Patrick Wright has noted, seems ‘to be identifiable as the historicised image of an instinctively conservative establishment’. Thus Conservative MP Lord Cormack’s definition of ‘heritage’ not as significant places and things but as ‘certain sights and sounds’ implies that heritage is inherent and incommunicable, something with which ‘one must have grown up in

the midst of ancestral continuities': the sights and sounds of 'the Eucharist in a quiet Norfolk Church with the mediaeval glass filtering the colours, and the early noise of the harvesting coming through the open door; or of standing at any time before the Wilton Diptych'. I could go on: the sight of church steeples, the sound of church bells, the smell of climbing roses on a church wall. Of such cultivated senses, Stanley Baldwin said: 'These are the things that make England, and I grieve for it that they are not the childish inheritance of the majority of the people today in our country.'

Are they not? If so, it is not for lack of appreciation by the majority, but because Stanley Baldwin implies that this heritage reflects quintessentially English sensibilities, the property of the well-established, landed class who, out for a walk on an autumnal evening, would be moved by the smell of 'that wood smoke that our ancestors ... must have caught on the air when they were coming home with the result of the day's forage'. The irony of this, as Corinne Fowler has pointed out, is that heritage sites attract nostalgia for an era when Britain was connected with colonised countries across the globe – a fact that is forgotten at best, covered up at worst, in the discourse on 'our Christian heritage'. In this country we continue to think of the colonial action as having taken place elsewhere, off stage. So naval battles were fought in far-away oceans; sugar was planted and harvested in exotic islands; tea was picked in the Orient – and the Christianisation of dark, brown, yellow-skinned people occurred in the heat of the Tropics. Yet it was this global empire that, having evangelised the people of Asia, Africa and the Americas, galvanised them to believe they were part of the Christianity of England.

We need to see the legacies of empire through a single frame. We ought not to be satisfied with the assumption that Christians from the colonies have only changed the face of Christianity in England by making it more ethnically diverse: we must also insist that the impact be historiographical, necessitating an adjustment to the definition of 'heritage'. For the vast majority of the white British public, England's Christian heritage might denote cassocks and stained glass and church bells, but for Christians from former British colonies – statistically more evangelical and charismatic – this heritage is impregnated, enlivened, activated by something more ahistorical and expressed in more devotional terms. Some of my ethnic minority students say



Westminster Abbey with a procession of Knights of the Bath, by Canaletto, 1749

“ *In this country we continue to think of the colonial action as having taken place off stage* ”

that Christian heritage for them means Scripture, justice, morality, humility; Christians from former colonies are much more likely to interpret the historical marks that English Christianity has left on them in terms of worship, doctrine, ethics, mission, evangelism. And these aspects in turn make the 'national heritage' of things like medieval manuscripts and Norman baptismal fonts take on religious – as opposed to national or ethnic – significance. Thus, claiming 'Christian heritage' as something that primarily pertains to those with white British ancestry has as much logic as claiming the same for British weather, and does as much damage as claiming the same for civility.

Christianity in this country has paid a high price for its associations with national and ethnic identity, and its failure to understand how much it represents 'home and family' to diasporic people. The undervaluing of members of the 'Windrush

Generation' when they arrived from the colonies to the metropole included the undervaluing of their commitment to English Protestant Christianity – to the Anglican, Methodist, Baptist and other traditions. It has often been the case that 'white Christians' did not take seriously the role that England has played in the lives of those Christianised under its influence, and have not entirely understood the depth of identification with Western Christianity as a forebear in the family of faith. The answer to postcolonial dilemmas is therefore not to foist a separate lineage upon ethnic minority Christians who have been touched by empire; the answer must lie in stripping the 'our' in 'our Christian heritage' of its nationalistic and racial connotations.

This is an edited extract from Ancestral Feeling: Postcolonial Thoughts on Western Christian Heritage (SCM Press, 2021)

IMAGINING OTHERS

Essential alternative Biblical interpretations

*DRAWING ON THE LEGACY OF SAM SHARPE, WALE HUDSON-ROBERTS MAPS
OUT WAYMARKERS ON A JOURNEY TO DECOLONISING OUR THEOLOGY*

During a visit to Peru, Pope John Paul II met with representatives from a Peruvian indigenous movement. They addressed him with these words:

'We Andean and American Indians have decided to take advantage of your visit to return to you your Bible, since in five centuries it has not given us love, peace and justice. Please take back your Bible and give it back to your oppressors because they need its moral teaching more than we do. Ever since the arrival of Christopher Columbus a culture, language, religion, and values which belong to Europe have been imposed upon Latin America by force. The Bible came to us as part of the imposed colonial transformation. It was an ideological weapon of this colonial assault. The Spanish sword which attacked and murdered the bodies of the Indians at night became the cross which attacked the Indian soul.'

There is no messing around here, no beating around the bush, not even a slight hint of ambiguity. For good reasons the Bible given to the Peruvian Indigenous community is returned. They are rightly angered by the way in which white people have used the Bible as a tool of oppression; subjugating, controlling; actively colonising the minds of Black and Brown companions; a shocking indictment on white Christian history. In more recent days, postcolonial reflection and theology are providing an essential critique and a strong repudiation

“ *Postcolonialism calls for the stories of the forgotten and unforgotten, excluded and included, orthodox and unorthodox, Black, and white, to listen to each other* ”

against such monstrous thinking and behaviour.

Postcolonialism is a critical posture and language that gives voice to the marginalised. It exposes the unequal reading of history and theology and encourages the hope of a voice for the excluded. It rightly demands that non – Western worldviews are read alongside inherited ones, for such processes inspire liberation. Postcolonialism calls for the stories of the forgotten and unforgotten, excluded and included, orthodox and unorthodox, Black, and white, to listen to each other. If we are to do justice to further developments in theory and practice, the voices of the powerful need to listen less, for example, to Karl Barth's ground-breaking *The Epistle to the Roman's*, and more to the authoritative and liberating voice of a James Cone reflected in his ground-breaking text, *Black Theology and Black Power*. Postcolonialism reminds Christians that only by weaving these varied theological perspectives and strands together, where necessary, and

by juxtaposing less well-known texts with the apparent 'normal' ones, can the voices of the powerless – Black and Brown – be legitimately affirmed. An interdependent and just dialogue which actively renders the foregrounding of Black and Brown contributions, in church and society, is what postcolonialism screams out for. As a result of this, I often find myself critiquing and sometimes dismantling parts of the Exodus narrative.

We are familiar with the story: the Israelites living under oppressive rule in Egypt ends only when they have assumed the mantle of their original oppressors, occupying a land not theirs to inhabit. What instinctively appears to be a relatively simple text of liberation is clearly far more complex than seen at first reading. The plethora of violent incidents, the most celebrated of them all, the destruction of Jericho and its livestock, all done in the name of the Lord their God. Hardly anywhere are we encouraged to question the fact that the land of God's promise is not an empty



Radical reading is required to place the Canaanites in their rightful place as the colonised

land ripe for occupation. Or question the legitimacy of what might be described as a colonising process or even the employment of possible genocidal tactics. In this story, God, it seems, becomes the lead actor in a very powerfully constructed narrative that almost favours the powerful. Listen to the cluster of words and phrases used to depict the ‘other.’ God, it appears, is attributed with many statements supporting and even inciting extreme violence. Of the Canaanites, God is reported to say: ‘I will blot them out’ and ‘I will drive them out.’ As for the description of the land of Canaan, this is presented in ever more glowing terms: a land awash with milk and honey juxtaposed with escalating negative portrayals of the Canaanites; depicted as inferior people whose religion is merely idolatrous. When God is heard to warn the Israelites about making a covenant with these (Canaanite) people, they are described as ‘being a snare’ who will entrap those who are proclaimed to be God’s chosen ones, a holy nation.

Sadly, the idea of religious contamination and entrapment can be found almost everywhere through Christian history and has often become a major theme in the justification of later initiatives leading to colonisation and oppression. The whole narrative that runs from Exodus and into Joshua has been used to legitimate many later

“ Black and Brown people the world over, have found their own people’s experience of history more comparable to that of the Canaanites than the Israelites ”

Christian colonising initiatives. I have been challenged to wrestle with these issues after reading an influential writer, Robert Allen Warrior, a member of the Osage Nation of American Indians. Warrior, like Black and Brown people the world over, has found his own people’s experience of history is more comparable to that of the Canaanites than the Israelites under Moses and Joshua. Warrior boldly experiments with reading the Exodus narrative through his own unique experience as an indigenous North American. He rightly bemoans the exclusion of the Canaanites in this story. The Canaanites are made to play no more than supportive roles in a story that has little or no concern for their plight as a colonised people. The Biblical narrative omits to mention their side of the story. It seems that the Canaanites are merely pawns in the story of a superior people chosen by God to occupy land they do not own. In a radical departure

from received readings, Warrior chooses to read the narrative through the lens of the Canaanites, the outsider, the colonised. He finds that in identifying with the Canaanites, the story of Native Americans as the ‘othered’ are shared with the ‘othered’ others.

Whether Warrior has it right or not, we desperately need postcolonial resources to enable alternative ways of interpreting some biblical texts and engage a much-needed deconstruction process. I agree, this is very much a work in progress, but it is crucial if liberative theologies are to be effective in creating the kind of genuinely liberative and emancipatory processes that lead towards a more thoroughgoing decolonisation.

James Cone, the father of Black Liberation theology, insisted that Christian theology is a theology of liberation, which is something also powerfully exemplified in the life of the Jamaican national



Sam Sharpe



Robert Allen Warrior



James Cone

hero, Sam Sharpe, to whom a great deal of attention has been drawn by fellow Baptists both in Jamaica and the UK. Sharpe anticipated much that today can be found in liberating interpretations of Scripture, encouraging his enslaved companions to protest and advance their own liberation. I believe Sharpe would have fully embraced Warrior's position, rejecting the idea that God condones the kind of enslavement forced on the Canaanites; repeated with impunity in the history of his own Jamaican companions. Sharpe's protestations against a heinous system, created in the image of whiteness, appears motivated by what I would describe as a postcolonial reading of Scripture. He reportedly said: 'In reading of my Bible, I found that the white man had no more right to make me a slave than I have to make a slave of a white man.' This is a powerful insight and a commanding witness to the principle of 'liberation from below.' It is no wonder that Sharpe has become a symbol of liberation from below for huge numbers of Black and Brown people in this country and beyond. Before the likes of Martin Luther King, Willie James Jennings, M Shawn Copeland, Keri Day and Yolanda Pierce, the Baptist Deacon Sam Sharpe provided a narrative to help other Black people see Godself as integral to their humanity and purpose.

So where do we as Baptists, particularly Black and Brown Baptists, desirous of demonstrating a greater commitment to postcolonial thinking and praxis, go from here? First, while liberating exegesis has been challenging oppressive readings of Scripture for more than half a century, there remain hard, but very necessary

“ We desperately need postcolonial resources to enable alternative ways of interpreting some biblical texts and engage a much-needed deconstruction process ”

questions concerning the possible misuse of some Biblical texts. Postcolonial thinking is a significant resource as those who experience oppression, validated by certain kinds of biblical interpretations, seriously address the questions of authority that are raised. This is a discourse that has become an essential precursor for Black and Brown liberation while attempting to live in the system described by Willie James Jennings as whiteness, and Babylon – Bob Marley.

Second, increasingly we are discovering examples of the way that previously harmful texts can be put to work to challenge colonialism. There are respected movements in South Africa, Latin America, as well as African Americans in North America who are effectively turning to the Bible to validate with authority their struggle under oppressive powers. This leaves me in no doubt whatsoever that both local and national Baptists, Black, Brown, and white may just be ripe to commence conversations around decolonisation – its theology and praxis.

There is no doubt in my mind that racism and colonialism are a deep-rooted global phenomenon. The consequences, often toxic and lethal, are clearly evident in the ways Black and Brown people

have been encouraged, forced in some historical cases, by white missionaries to interpret the Bible through the lenses of their oppressors. The good news is experiments in post-colonial thinking and the search for a postcolonial theology has begun to challenge the dominance of some oppressive interpretations of the Christian scriptures. The outcomes present serious challenges to those communities, predominantly Black and Brown, who have been so strongly influenced by particular white interpretations of the core text. The time has surely come to challenge unquestioned interpretations of Scripture that have evidently served to perpetuate the crushing and intolerable experience of racism, patriarchy and other forms of injustice that have tragically shaped so many lives. My hope is that it might soon be possible to discover a more genuinely decolonising theology, one that will indeed offer hope for further liberation in the face of colonial oppression. In this respect, one from the Baptist tradition, 'Daddy' Sam Sharpe has paved the way. Therefore, is it not our responsibility, as a Baptist movement committed to racial justice, to assiduously work at developing Sharpe's legacy?



SHELF AWARENESS

The books that formed us

MATTY FEARON TAKES US THROUGH THE KEYHOLE OF HIS LIBRARY DOOR TO PEAK AT THE (MOSTLY WHITE) THINKERS WHO HELPED FORM HIS FAITH



The pandemic sent us to Zoom and Zoom turned other folks' bookshelves into an obsession. There was fun to be had,

Tory MP Michael Gove's shelves briefly became a culture war epicentre. And yet, this is serious business, what is on our bookshelves matters. I edit a magazine read by church leaders, missiologists and theologians, and so it matters who is forming my faith and challenging my ways of seeing the world. As church leaders, missiologists and theologians, who you are reading matters even more. The Zoom age heralded the great conflation of public and private workspace but, equally so, the murder of George Floyd and the rise

of public discourse around racial justice meant it mattered if you could name three black theologians, let alone say you had their works on your shelves.

This feature sprang from a challenge laid down by our new columnist Nana-Natalia Lester-Bush – “which type of people do I feel most comfortable learning from and listening to? If you can't think of answers off the top of your head, maybe take a look at your bookshelf” – and I accepted. I was tempted to slip in some James Cone, Anthony Reddie and Emilie Townes, to carefully curate my taste. I resisted because they somewhat shamefully remain on the pile marked 'to be read'. And so you see before you some

pretty usual suspects for a white straight male, including 14 men who look just like me; a couple of mystic curveballs; a Vietnamese Buddhist, two women and a solitary person of colour, Azariah France-Williams. And just like Natalia-Nana promised, “If you're doing it right, it may sting but, like TCP, it's a healing, cleansing stinging.”

When attempting to conjure up a sense of God, the Welsh priest-poet R. S. Thomas, featured on the shelf above, wrote, “It is this great absence / that is like a presence”. I could and should apply those same words to the collection of books that have shaped me spiritually. I am stung but I know how to heal.

THE SUBALTERN'S problem of BELATEDNESS

Confronting the legacy of Western mission

THE MAP RENIE CHOW CHOY USES TO EXPLAIN HER BAPTIST ROOTS BETRAYS THE RESTRICTED HORIZON ESTABLISHED BY EUROPEAN COLONIALISM

The expansion of Christianity, the processes of denominational development, the proliferation of Christian culture – these are all processes that originate in the West. I have long relied on a map to visualise the process by which my parents in Hong Kong became Baptists, a map admittedly reliant on all the irksome indicators of linear historicism: it overlays ‘decisive turning points’ in church history onto geographic sites and shows the movement of time and ideas via arrows.

My map begins in England with the Reformation during the reigns of Henry VIII, Edward VI, Mary Tudor and Elizabeth I. With Separatists from the Church of England arguing that the English Reformation did not go far enough, we go into exile to the Netherlands in 1609 with John Smyth, Thomas Helwys and their Baptist communities, escaping religious persecution during the reign of James I. In 1612 we travel with Helwys back to London, where he establishes the first Baptist church in England. Then we trace the journey of Roger Williams across the ocean to Rhode Island, where in 1639 he establishes what is widely considered the oldest Baptist congregation in North America. With the founding of the American Baptist Home Mission Society in 1832, we travel with Jehu Lewis Shuck and Henrietta Hall Shuck to Macau in 1836. Upon the British possession of Hong Kong, we then follow the Shucks and their colleagues William Dean and Issachar J.

“ I have long relied on a map to visualise the process by which my parents in Hong Kong became Baptists ”

Roberts as they become some of the first missionaries to reside in the new colony, establishing the first Baptist congregation on Queen’s Road. William Dean then organises a separate Chiu Chow-speaking congregation composed of three members meeting on rented premises, which benefits greatly in 1896 from a visit by a wealthy American woman called Mrs Vanderpool who offers a donation to purchase a building. Five years later in 1901, a new building on Peel Street opens as the Hong Kong Baptist Self-Governing Chinese Christian Church with 38 members. This is the congregation that becomes the Hong Kong Baptist Church on Caine Road – and by this line of descent, we finally get to my parents, introduced to the youth fellowship at this church by their classmates and my aunt.

Visualising my Baptist roots in this manner, it’s easy to see the subaltern’s problem of belatedness. It locks my parents into a ‘a peculiar diasporic itinerary informed by the historical connections established by European colonialism’, including settler colonialism in America. It relies on a conventional way of conceiving the transfer of culture

(religious or otherwise) from the West to the rest, like the *translatio studii* (transfer of learning) described by Kwame Anthony Appiah: ‘from the late Middle Ages until now, people have thought of the best in the culture of Greece and Rome as a civilisational inheritance, passed on like a precious golden nugget.’ Appiah urges us to abandon the concept of Western civilisation altogether as though it were something we can inherit, possess, pass on. His argument is liberating in so far as he assures us ‘Western Christian heritage’ should not be perceived as an ‘asset’ which some possess by right of birth or nationality or skin colour and others have literally to cross oceans in order to obtain. Responding to Appiah, however, the journalist Josh Glancy observes that even if we abandon the concept of Western civilisation, the stories and narratives we tell about ourselves are incredibly powerful, ‘so what do we replace it with?’, he asks. The question is an exceedingly good one, for ‘Western civilisation’, even if not actually a ‘golden nugget’ transferable from generation to generation, nevertheless still exists as such in many a migrant’s aspirations and imaginations.

It is the thing that one crosses an ocean to pursue and, at least in many Chinese families, this not for the sake of individual gain, but so that one may observe filial piety through service to family.

The implications for how we ‘map’ history are profound. As DeLoughrey observes by quoting the poet Derek Walcott, our obsession with maps to show territories and boundaries is precisely how ‘the mind was halved by a horizon’. Walcott’s poem highlights that ‘the stick to trace our names on the sand’ is just a temporary, provisional tool, because ultimately the sea will ‘erase’ all human uses for cartography. The map I visualise to explain my Baptist roots betrays such a restricted horizon, and the problem is shared by any denominational history that recounts a ‘genealogy’ focused on Anglo and Anglo-American origins. In fact, as Johnson argues in his *Global Introduction to Baptist Churches*, Baptists cannot point to a single individual or group as the source of their faith tradition. Although numerous histories identify the Anglican priest John Smyth (mentioned above) as the first Baptist, in reality his influence was limited. Several of his followers organised his community into English General Baptist denominations, while other Baptist groups developed without any contact with his ideas, especially in the Anglo-American, Anglo-Canadian, Native, African and African American cultural bases. So Johnson argues, ‘the movement cannot be conceived as originating out of a single core from which subsequent schisms produced division’, and apprehending the development of Baptist churches with reference to their origins in ‘Anglo identity’ obscures the influences from other independently derived sources.

Taking into view even just a few more dimensions, the map I visualise, described above, no longer makes any sense. The strands that explain my religious lineage are a complex web which, even when simplified for the sake of explanatory ease, are a bewildering mess resisting partitioning along clear lines and strands. How could I possibly select which of the following stories of religious ancestry to tell?

I have already traced the movement of Separatists and their missionary descendants from England via America to Hong Kong: John Smyth, Thomas Helwys, Roger Williams, Jehu Lewis and Henrietta Shuck, William Dean. But in fact, Hong Kong only became a centre of vital Baptist expansionist activity when many



“ The strands that explain my religious lineage are a complex web, a bewildering mess resisting partitioning along clear lines ”

Chinese people and foreign missionaries escaped the mainland during the civil war between the Kuomintang and the Communist Party, and during the Chinese Communist Revolution. Therefore we must acknowledge the ‘pre-history’ of the Shucks and the Deans in mainland China, a strand that explains the conversion to Christianity of my husband’s great-grandparents.

Or shall we tell of the religious inheritance that comes to my family through the ‘big names’ of missions to China, individuals with no direct connection to the churches in Hong Kong but who have attained legendary status in Chinese Christian history? Names like Hudson Taylor, Pearl S. Buck, Robert Morrison and Lottie Moon populate memoirs, charities and buildings, and all are considered the spiritual forebears of Chinese Protestant Christians.

Or shall we turn to the genealogy of Christian publishers who first provided vital reading material to converts? Or shall we turn to the Student Christian Movement, which propelled Christian campus ministry, the womb that nurtured my parents’ faith in locations as far apart as Hong Kong, Edmonton and Winnipeg? But we cannot overlook the influence of ‘white’ churches in university towns who warmly embraced so many foreign

students like my father as he spent years far from home. And then, given my parents’ eventual emigration to Canada, there is the Canadian Baptist ancestry that also needs to be traced.

Behind every arrow in the map I had previously visualised hides a hundred relationships, a thousand stories, ten thousand influences, prayer meetings, discipleship meetings, church committee meetings ... For every one strand pursued here, there are dozens missed. I have not, for example, even touched on the Baptist involvement in civil rights protests during the 1960s, which paved the way for me to grow up in Canada with fair access to housing, healthcare and education. How could everything discussed here possibly be flattened out into an arrow from England to America to Hong Kong to Canada? Thus in attending to the many influences that have fed into our spiritual heritage, it becomes clear how relationships complicate the Hegelian narrative upon which the arrowised maps are based. At the risk of stating the obvious, imagining the people and the stories behind the arrows makes a difference.

This is an edited extract from Ancestral Feeling: Postcolonial Thoughts on Western Christian Heritage (SCM Press, 2021)

From over there to everywhere

Long-time Cambodian-based photojournalist George Nickels returned to the country earlier this year to capture Pastor J's ministry, a man who had made a boundary-crossing missionary journey of his own from India to end up in Phnom Penh.

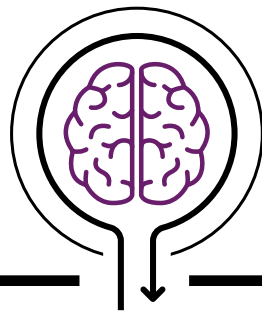
Pastor J dreams of working beyond student communities in the Cambodian capital and sharing the gospel with rural villages in Cambodia. One such village is Prakeab, where people's hope for the future goes only as far as their next harvest.











A TIME I CHANGED MY MIND

INTERCULTURAL MISSION: the future of mission or pure wokeism?

IN OUR AGE OF ENTRENCHED OPINIONS HARD-BOILED INTO TRUTHS, THE HUMILITY TO HAVE ONE'S MIND CHANGED MUST BE CHERISHED. IN THIS ISSUE DAVID MCMILLAN LAYS BARE HIS OWN ASSUMPTIONS

I've always used the term cross-cultural mission without question. It's been the standard term for mission engagement and I always worked on the assumption it captured the core of missionary endeavour, of taking the good news to those who haven't heard.

Now, I've changed my mind. Mission should strive to be intercultural, not merely cross-cultural. It all began when I was invited to re-join BMS for an interim period to revisit the role of mission training in the light of, what seemed to me at the time, an obscure concept called polycentrism. I accepted and found myself on a journey of exploration that has significantly shifted my understanding of the nature and future of mission.

Polycentric intercultural mission – the future of mission or pure wokeism? I get the sense that some see this emphasis on polycentric intercultural mission as an expression of bleeding-heart, postmodern self-deprecation. The suspicion is that this shift in emphasis is merely a weak, self-flagellating atonement for colonial sins, jumping on the bandwagon of critical theory. Well, some expression of atonement for missionary compliance in

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colonial sins (intentional or unintentional) would be no bad thing – repentance is after all a thoroughly biblical response to sin. But, a fear of, or failure to engage with, critical race theory, decolonisation theology, feminist or other theological voices represents insecurity and a holding on to the comfort blanket of our own cultural and theological certainties.

The Spirit, our sisters and brothers in the majority world church and even our critics will help shed more light on our understanding of the good news of the kingdom if we are willing to divest ourselves of power in the formation of strategy, control under the guise of governance and arrogance in limiting in language and theology the purposes of the kingdom of God.

BMS World Mission, like many other Western mission agencies, continues to

equip mission workers with the skills to cope well and thrive in a different culture and appreciate the challenges of communication in other languages and cultures. Such preparation for mission remains essential. The challenge that is being given more attention recently, is how mission is done in context and how mission agencies perceive their role in the future as the church in the majority world becomes the majority of the church.

The recent change of language from cross-cultural mission to intercultural mission, arises from a critique of elements of the cross-cultural mission movement and post-colonial reflections on western missionary endeavour. For example, Paul Bendor-Samuel has argued that much of the cross-cultural mission movement “... may talk the talk of missio Dei but remain locked into language, processes and



structures that keep control of mission as the responsibility of the agency, worker and sometimes the sending church, but almost never the receiving church.”

Intercultural mission is “...a way of expressing theological mutuality and equality between cultures [that is] ... relational, mutual, dialogical, open-ended.” In practical terms this presents significant challenges to ways of working for Western mission agencies as we come to terms with the fact that the church in the Global South is the majority church and the future of world evangelisation will depend on mission workers from the majority world.

At the same time, within the UK, others are addressing the challenge of shifting our thinking in church life and ministry from multicultural to intercultural. Spurgeon’s college lecturer Seidel Abel Boanerges argues that interculturalism addresses the need to move beyond simply existing together in a Western culture to dialogue and the building of relationships between cultures within the life of the church. The shift that Seidel wants to see in the increasingly multicultural UK church is precisely what we need to see in the global mission context.

The philosophy of intercultural mission requires a methodology and polycentric working provides that methodology. Polycentrism (many centres) as understood in mission conversations is characterised by the shift of power through decentralisation from established centres to the margins,

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embracing equal authority and a revolving leadership within the community of operation. Polycentrism is not simply about operating in many centres but operating from within many centres as one among many. Polycentric mission is not about sending to many centres but drawing from many centres in the cause of world mission.

If we take seriously an emphasis on intercultural working in a polycentric way, it raises significant challenges about power and control for Western mission agencies, in particular around strategy, governance and control of the gospel.

Western mission agencies tend to develop strategy within a western culture and expectations. Generally speaking, the results of collaborative conversations with stakeholders are harvested and brought in-house where decisions on strategy are finalised. However, this approach means that the trajectory of movement in traditional cross-cultural mission tends to be deductive and driven by strategic goals. An intercultural polycentric approach draws partners into the heart of the decision making process. Their

contributions are not simply evaluated in the setting of strategy but formative in the decision making. Strategy is set within the context of shared control and may need to be more flexible and open-ended.

An increasing devolving of financial control in a decentralised way of working raises challenges of governance for any mission agency with recognised charitable status. However, for some, the most challenging implication will be about who gets to determine the language that expresses, and the interpretation of, the gospel. How much have we still to learn about the meaning of the good news of the kingdom that Jesus preached as the Spirit of God moves powerfully across the Global South? How much do we have to unlearn? How much of the good news is already embedded in other cultures and religions and how much of what we have offered has been a form of western cultural imperialism? The answers to these questions will not be found in talking to ourselves. They will only be found as we dialogue with brothers and sisters in the majority world who are finding their voices and casting their own theology.



UNSETTLING THE WORD

The Parable of the Persistent Widow. Luke 18: 1-8

IN A NEW SERIES OF BIBLICAL EXPERIMENTS IN DECOLONISATION, ANNET TTENDO-MILLER RE-IMAGINES SCRIPTURE FOR THE SAKE OF REPARATIVE FUTURES.

In Luke's Parable of the Persistent Widow, Jesus highlights the biblical case for widows. He stresses the importance of championing the cause of the vulnerable when there is no lawyer to protect them and no efficient human judicial system to carry out justice. The text describes the Sovereign God as one who cares about justice and the victims of injustice. The major concern that can be found in God's law is that the marginalised not to be deprived of justice. Deuteronomy 24:17 commands that the foreigner and the orphan is not deprived of justice, and not to "take the cloak of a widow as a pledge." Numerous laws placed a duty on every Israelite to care for the fatherless, the widow, the stranger, and the disadvantaged members of society: "This is what the Lord Almighty said: Administer true justice; show mercy and compassion to one another. Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the foreigner or the poor (Zechariah 7:9-10). "Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy." (Proverbs 31:8-9) and Isaiah 1:17, "Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow."

In Uganda, my country of origin, poor, marginalised women are often overlooked for many of the same reasons widows were overlooked in the ancient world. I have come across many cases of widows. I recall one peculiar case that involved a well written and valid will, which was unusual in a society where so many people do not leave a will at all. At that time, I had not seen such a well drafted will and I do not think that I have since over the course of

“ In Uganda, poor, marginalised women are often overlooked for many of the same reasons widows were overlooked in the ancient world ”

my professional life in Uganda. The facts of the case were that my client's husband had left a will clearly stating his wishes, appointing a customary heir and lawfully distributing his wealth to his spouse and children. Traditionally, the in-laws would be responsible for the welfare of the widow. However, in this case the siblings of the deceased, in shameless self-interest, took advantage of the widow and deliberately disregarded the will. They refused to follow the wishes of the deceased, taking power into their own hands.

It turns out that the deceased had a pre-existing relationship at the time of his marriage to my client. He had been customarily married to another woman in a traditional ceremony and had five children with the deceased before they separated. My client was lawfully married to the deceased in church and had been living with her husband for over 44 years with eight children. These two widows were now at the centre of a dispute over who the "true" wife of the deceased was. Despite the clear wishes of her late husband, my client was being dis-inherited and chased out of her matrimonial home by his relatives. I represented my client, doing my best to ensure that she would get fair treatment in court and that her rights would be protected. Thanks be to God, there was victory in court, a favourable judgement was given for my client, and she was allowed

to stay in her matrimonial home. The will of her deceased husband was upheld. However, the customary wife was not cast aside. The court recognised her status as a widow and she was allowed to stay in the house she already occupied, in her late husband's property in his ancestral village. I remember feeling joy that my client's needs were met, but also respect for the wise judge that had dispensed a measure of justice to both women.

Uganda and Mozambique have laws that allow widows to own land. However, an illiterate woman who lives in a village, and has no resources to fight for her rights is at a distinct disadvantage. In such patrilineal societies, it is commonly believed that women should not own property. Women are not allowed to inherit land, not even the house that they live in. If her husband dies, a woman is often left having to fight against family to reclaim her land. Many women simply lose hope and give up. Most people in the community are not aware of laws and do not know their legal rights. By providing legal aid services to the poor and marginalised Christian lawyers in both countries play a vital role in helping widows to enforce their rights, training communities about the laws that protect women and representing vulnerable clients. These Christian lawyers' fellowships are responding to the Biblical call to do justice, with compassion, for the poor.

BROWN SAVIOUR, WHITE TEACHERS

More Christ in our Christianity

*IN HER DEBUT COLUMN, NANA-NATALIA LESTER
BUSH CALLS ON US TO WEIGH DOWN OUR SHELVES
WITH A FAR BROADER SLICE OF GOD'S BELIEVERS*



Finally, the Last Word. You made it to the end - well done! After reading this edition you may be wondering whether this was a special 'Diversity & Inclusion' issue! You see, we notice when the contributors are entirely or mostly People of Colour, speaking about issues of equality, colonialism, equality and other 'non-Christian' topics...we notice. Even if we don't realise that we notice, most of us do notice - because it's unusual for a Western magazine to centre the voices & contributions of People of Colour. In a faith which follows a Brown-skinned, Middle-Eastern Messiah who had never heard the English language let alone followed any of our English Christian culture or customs, it's still rare to hear from Brown-skinned non-English people, and it's definitely out of the ordinary to have an entire magazine filled with our voices & opinions.

OK yes, England's population is majority-white so it makes sense that the voices heard most often and most loudly in church are white too. That's just statistics. Though, if it's just statistics then it is weird that while one in five British people are non-English, and while the churches with majority Black & Brown congregations are the fastest growing, we don't hear or see their teachings with the same visibility & commonality we do other Church leaders & believers. Almost as if we feel more comfortable listening to

& learning from white men. Hmm. Now, before you head straight to the resources on the back page (I'm there too!) to escape my racial nagging, or curl up into a ball feeling guilty or criticised for being white, please, take a breath. And listen. To me, yes, but most importantly, please listen to yourself. What feelings arise as I'm speaking (ok, writing)? Do you want to race away from the conversation or dismiss it as unimportant or irrelevant?

I did at one point too. And then I grew up (thank you Holy Spirit for not letting me off the hook!). Instead of running away from the uncomfortable, unpleasant questions, I started facing them. And I listened - to others' challenges, to my own defensiveness, and to the Spirit's guidance. Instead of dismissing the hard questions I answered them. So here goes - let's try engaging with this one together. Ask yourself, as boldly as you can (& then maybe ask the Spirit for a little more boldness to go further!): do I feel most comfortable listening to & learning from white men? Or maybe you could ask it more openly - which type of people do I feel most comfortable learning from and listening to? If you can't think of answers off the top of your head, maybe take a look at your bookshelf, at the preachers & teachers you follow and respect, and at the podcasts or online talks you've listened to recently. Then consider, what does this show about the kind of people you trust to listen to, learn from and be shaped by, and

which kind of people you don't. If you're doing it right, it may sting but, like TCP, it's a healing, cleansing stinging.

See, my shelf was and still is very full of books by 'leaders in Christianity' - you know the men I mean. And a few women (white, of course) too. That's okay. They taught me lots of interesting things about faith and their understanding & experiences of God and Church/church. But as I grew in faith and began to more deeply accept the beautiful truth that God really is infinite & in all things & that every person is made in God's image, my pale, male bookshelf both weighed heavily and felt way too light.

How on earth can I learn about this God when I am only listening to a narrow slice of God's teachers and believers? I couldn't. And neither can you. I hope you will begin a lifelong listening journey with our exceptional contributors.

I love, admire, and am close friends with a Brown, itinerant, trade-family-raised Middle-Eastern Messiah. Through the Spirit we can all connect with Jesus & Creator God in whose image we are (all) made. But there are huge parts of Jesus we cannot see or hear through the vision, voices & experiences of white, usually middle-class, men and women.

Our Saviour is not a white man, so maybe we should listen to them a little - or even a lot - less.

Be open.

natalia-nana

DECOLONISING WESTERN CHRISTIANITY

If what is contained in this issue has led you to look fearlessly and thoroughly at your own bookshelves and podcast playlists and YouTube sermons, then I hope some of the following works. Ask yourself, as boldly as you can (& then maybe ask the Spirit for a little more boldness to go further!): how can I stretch the boundaries of my mind?



READ

BEING ATTENTIVE: Explorations in Practical Theology in Honour of Robert Ellis

ed. Anthony Clarke

A recommendation by Wale Hudson-Roberts, in this volume friends and colleagues of Robert Ellis, a distinguished Baptist minister and theologian, come together to pursue the theme of 'paying attention' across a whole range of areas.

CANAANITES, COWBOYS AND INDIANS: Deliverance, Conquest and Liberation Theology Today

Robert Allen Warrior

Another recommendation from Wale, this article first appeared in 1989 and can still be found online. Warrior, like Black and Brown people the world over, has found his own people's experience of history is more comparable to that of the Canaanites than the Israelites.

MULTICULTURAL KINGDOM: Ethnic Diversity, Mission and the Church

Harvey C. Kwiyani

'Multicultural Kingdom' explores some of the causes and implications of ethnic diversity on the British Christian landscape - and the implications on the landscape of theology itself. Why, it asks, do we prefer to remain segregated in our ecclesiology?

INTERCULTURAL PREACHING

(eds. Anthony G. Reddie, Seidel Abel Boanerges and Pamela Searle)

As recommended by David McMillan, these essays are drawn from a series of Multicultural Preaching Listening Days organised by Baptists Together between 2017 and 2019.

ANCESTRAL FEELING: Postcolonial Thoughts on Western Christian Heritage

Renie Chow Choy

Contributor Renie Choy's work experiments with ways that the

Western Christian inheritance can awaken the memory of one's own ancestors.

WATCH

THE WORK OF THE PEOPLE

An incredible spiritual visual library and virtual sanctuary for a growing community of people. Theologians and practitioners, including Rene August, Walter Brueggemann and Shane Claiborne, have felt safe to be vulnerable, honest, unguarded and unscripted.

www.theworkofthepeople.com

THE FORUM AT ST BART'S: Decolonising Christianity

In this 2021 lecture, the Reverend Dr. Miguel de la Torre, ordained Baptist minister and Professor of Social Ethics and Latinx Studies at Iliff School of Theology in Denver, explains why it is important to de-couple Christianity and whiteness.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=yYIqc5H1Rw

LISTEN

DECOLONISING FAITH WITH NANA-NATALIA LESTER-BUSH

Nomad podcast

I first experienced the force of Nana-Natalia's eloquence and of her argument through this interview on the Nomad podcast. Nomad emerged in 2009 out of an experiment in digital church fostered by the Methodist church. www.nomadpodcast.co.uk/natalia-nana-decolonising-faith-n252/

A People's Theology: DECOLONISING CHRISTIANITY WITH JO LUEHMANN

A perfect companion piece to Nana-Natalia's Nomad discussion, this is a wide-ranging interview with Jo Luehmann, a Colombian-born pastor, about her work in deconstructing and decolonising Christian faith.

<https://lnns.co/ycd2hPYHL76>

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