

**“TO SHARE IN GOD’S CONCERN FOR ALL”:
The Effect of the 1966 Report on World Mission
by Hyuk Cho¹**

In 1962 the 20th General Council of the United Church of Canada (UCC) approved the setting up of a Commission on World Mission. Its purpose was to conduct “an independent and fundamental study of how the United Church of Canada [could] best share in the World Mission of the Church.” After two and a half years of study and consultation, the Commission presented its report, *World Mission*, to the 22nd General Council in 1966. It was the most extensive mission consultation in the history of the UCC, and became a foundation for its mission practice and ecumenical relations.²

Interestingly enough, however, no references to *World Mission* appeared in subsequent UCC documents for almost 40 years! They finally came in the 2006 report *That We May Know Each Other: United Church–Muslim Relations Today*. It is clear that *World Mission* had an influence on that 2006 document. I would say, though, that in spite of the silence over all those years in official documents, the *World Mission* statement played a decisive role, not only in the development of dialogue between the UCC and Muslims, but also on the UCC’s overall mission practice.

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²Editor’s Note: Any reader of this article who has some memory of the leadership in the United Church 30 years ago and beyond will recognize what a high-powered commission it was. Just to give a sense of its qualities, among the 20 members one was a scholar in world religions with a world-wide reputation, two were upcoming Moderators, one was the powerful Secretary of General Council, and another was soon to be Secretary, seven were former missionaries and others had had various overseas experience: Donald M. Fleming (Chair), C. Douglas Jay (Secretary), Mrs. Horace Croome, Ross Flemington, H.C. Grant, John Webster Grant, Irwin Hilliard, Katharine Hockin, T.E. Floyd Honey, Ernest E. Long, N. Bruce McLeod, A.B.B. Moore, George Morrison, N.R. Richards, Cyril Shoemaker, William W. Small, Wilfred Cantwell Smith, Ruth Taylor, W.S. Taylor, and Roy E. Webster.

Specifically, *World Mission* introduced a mutuality model of shared concern for justice as the basis for working together with different faith communities; all groups that shared a concern for justice in the local, national or world community were invited to dialogue and work together. *World Mission* thus laid a foundation for interfaith dialogue as mission practice in a pluralistic world.

The factors that led to the production of that 1966 Report are most interesting. I propose to look at them under three headings: institutional, ecumenical and theological. These are, of course, interconnected; each influences the other. But describing and analyzing each will shed light on what led up to *World Mission*.

The Institutional Context

After Church Union in 1925, the mission enterprise of the UCC outside of Canada was undertaken by two organizations: the Board of Overseas Missions (BOM), and the Dominion Board of the Woman's Missionary Society (WMS). Often both organizations served in the same area. For example, according to the 1958 reports of the BOM and the WMS, both had personnel in Korea, working under the direction of the Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea. People from both organizations served in the same institutions, such as the newly-founded hospital in Wonju and the Christian Radio Station. While the BOM supported the co-ed Yonsei University, the WMS supported Ewha Womans University — not surprisingly, the WMS aims and objectives focussed on the well-being of women. Distinct entities as they were within the overall UCC structure, there was collaboration out in the mission fields. Even in the 1940s, a WMS-appointed medical doctor worked for a medical school and hospital operated by the BOM.

In 1956, at the 17th General Council, the executives of the BOM and the WMS presented a joint recommendation: "Recognizing the real possibility of closer integration in the administration of all overseas work...we respectfully request the General Council to appoint a committee representative of all parties concerned to study this problem." Upon this request the General Council in 1958 approved the report of the Committee on

Integration of Overseas Missions Work. With their history of over 30 years of working separately, why did the organizations now want to be integrated? An important factor was pressure from the overseas mission fields. The missionaries of each Board were almost unanimous in favouring a closer union. They believed that it would benefit the whole overseas programme by providing a broadened outlook of interest to all UCC members. Integration was especially welcomed by the WMS, though the impulse came not just from overseas, but also from within Canada.

Beginning in 1953 women's organizations within the UCC such as the WMS, the Woman's Association (WA), the Deaconess Order, and Women Workers began to push toward an incorporation into a united women's organization. One of the goals was to "further full partnership of women and men in the Church". At the same time the WMS was sensing the urgency for the integration of the church's overseas mission work. They had heard the increasingly insistent voices in the mission fields advocating such integration. So, on January 1, 1962, a unified women's organization was formed — the United Church Women (UCW). At the same time, the overseas work of the WMS and BOM were integrated into the Board of World Mission (BWM).

At its integration, the BWM decided it needed a new policy, direction and understanding of mission in a rapidly changing context within and outside the Church. It also needed to employ new methods to work collegially with partners. I suggest the integration of the BOM and the WMS, and the inauguration of the BWM in 1962, stimulated the development of the document *World Mission*.

The Ecumenical Context

These developments in the UCC were taking place around the same time as the integration of the International Missionary Council (IMC) with the World Council of Churches (WCC). The proposal for such integration was accepted at an IMC assembly held in Achimota, Ghana from December 28, 1957 to January 8, 1958. This proposal was in turn affirmed at the 3rd Assembly of the WCC in New Delhi, India in 1961: the IMC was transformed

into one of the WCC divisions, the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism (CWME). At that same Assembly the WCC endorsed a document entitled *Joint Action for Mission* and authorized the CWME to seek to implement its proposals in consultation with churches, related mission agencies, and national regional bodies.

The 21st General Council of the UCC in 1964 welcomed *Joint Action for Mission* and affirmed “its conviction that through this proposal God is calling His Church today to a broader vision of her task and a deeper level of commitment to mission unity”. The UCC had already been participating in “joint action” for mission with partner churches. For instance, the new Wonju Union Christian Hospital in Korea, which opened in 1959, was made possible by the contributions of two Boards of the American Methodist Church, two Boards of the UCC, the Korean Methodist Church, and the Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea. This practice was not new for the UCC with its global partners. Why, then, did the UCC take the WCC proposal so seriously that the General Council in 1964 passed the resolution to participate in *Joint Action for Mission*?

Let’s go back to an IMC meeting at Whitby, Canada in 1947: Whitby provided important implications for the future development of missiology. The theme there was “Partners in Obedience”. In adopting the concept of “partners” the IMC defined mission not as “conquest of the world but solidarity with world”. The IMC rejected the “colonial” concept of mission in favour of “Partners in Obedience”, which meant sharing the task of world mission between younger and older churches.

The adoption of the concept of “partnership” became a foundational principle of mission in the UCC. We can note the influence of “Partners in Obedience” on the WMS understanding of mission in its report in 1958: “partnership of the Churches around the world in obedience to Christ has real significance and urgency for all of us who are participating in the missionary enterprise.” About 30 years later at the 32nd General Council in 1988, the UCC adopted the statement, “Seeking to Understand ‘Partnership’ for

God's Mission Today". The statement embodied the Whitby theme in a new context.

The concept of "Partners in Obedience", the foundation for *Joint Action for Mission*, enabled the WCC to develop a more inclusive missiology at New Delhi in 1961. The UCC document, *World Mission*, comments on the WCC report:

[*Joint Action for Mission*] involves not only working together in certain sections of the work such as Christian literature, but the major re-deployment of the total Christian programme in a given geographical area so that *all concerned* look unitedly at the total task in that area and arrange for the best possible use of all resources – personnel, finances, buildings.

As the UCC noted in 1964, *Joint Action for Mission* broadened the vision of, and deepened the commitment to, mission by including all the bodies concerned. How, then, would different traditions in Christianity be enabled to work together to carry out a common mission? *World Mission* continues:

[*Joint Action for Mission*] involves the *crossing* of confessional and denominational boundaries and is a demonstration of Christian unity as well as a means of achieving better results.

Joint Action for Mission attempted to move beyond the traditional boundaries within Christianity and sought to work with ecumenical partners in mission; all who share a common concern for justice are invited to work together in the mission of God.

The UCC Commission on World Mission must have been influenced by *Joint Action for Mission*'s inclusive understanding of mission, but obviously there were aspects of its missiology that it was not satisfied with: the WCC document did not address the issue of how the church works with people of different faiths. Thus the Commission pushed the Christian ecumenical boundaries so that the UCC could work more inclusively in a "religiously pluralistic world". *World Mission* states: "*shared concern* is of more fundamental importance than the existence of elements of thought or belief." As a result of *World Mission*, the UCC tried to dismantle Christian boundaries so that various faith traditions would be able

to work together for the common good. I suggest the *WCC Joint Action for Mission* was an important influence on the development of the inclusive missiology found in *World Mission*, but the latter went further than the WCC document.

The Theological Context

The decisive difference between *Joint Action for Mission* and *World Mission* is that the WCC developed its missiology within the sphere of Christian ecumenism, while the UCC developed its in the context of religious pluralism. This is how the writers of *World Mission* put it:

The church has always lived in a religiously plural world, though it is now becoming more genuinely aware of this fact and of some of its implications. Perhaps the most important implication is that the church must be involved in this religiously plural world.

Those words reflect the influence of Wilfred Cantwell Smith (1916-2000). Smith delivered a series of lectures aired on CBC Radio's *Ideas* programme in 1961, and published them in 1962 under the title *The Faith of Other Men*. Smith later became a member of the UCC Commission on World Mission. The Commission accepted his notion of the "evolving global religiousness of men [*sic*]", within which God must be seen to be at work within the church as well as in other identifiable religious communities". This pluralistic understanding of religion infused *World Mission*: "The church should recognize that God is creatively and redemptively at work in the religious life of all mankind [*sic*]." This statement later provided a foundation for mission practice and interfaith dialogue in the UCC with Islam.

Along with an understanding of pluralism, *World Mission* noted that the theological ferment of the 20th century had challenged the church to rethink the whole nature of mission. The concept of *missio Dei* (the mission of God) first emerged at a meeting of the IMC in Willingen, Germany in 1952. *World Mission* followed its lead and stated: "The mission in which the church is engaged is a *mission* from God to man [*sic*] – to man in all continents – and not

a mission from men in the west to men in the east.” This is the concept of *missio Dei*; the church’s mission is the singular mission of God, not a matter of church mission fields.

C. Douglas Jay, the Secretary of the Commission, reiterates this in a series of lectures in 1967. Jay says the traditional concept of missions moves into the *mission* to practise the essence of the mission of God. In this context, Jay deals with “secularization” at considerable length — in two lectures out of three. He says, “secularization... is of great importance for the contemporary understanding of the mission of the church in the world.” *Missio Dei* understands that God’s primary relationship is to the world, not to the Church, and that secularization manifests the concept of *missio Dei* in the practice of mission. Secularization does not imply a dualistic understanding of secular and sacred; the sacred is not restricted to particular places, orders and functions. Similarly, *World Mission* notes, “The theology of world mission today arises out of the Act of God in sending Jesus Christ and the carrying out of His mission in which we share.... Mission implies involvement with, and participation in, the life of particular human communities whether religion or secular.”

Looking back from 1990, missiologist David Bosch says that in the 1960s, “After the devastation of two world wars, the optimism of the nineteenth century and of Social Gospel reemerged.” Secularization is the other face of the Social Gospel and even though “the terminology of the Social Gospel has been dropped... the dynamics remained the same.” It was dramatically so in the case of the UCC: the spirit of the Social Gospel reappeared in the movement toward secularization. *World Mission* recommends

that the United Church of Canada broaden its awareness of mission, seeking to relate its performance of each task at home and abroad to its understanding of God’s mission (*missio Dei*) as embracing the whole world and as committed to the whole Church.

The theological context for *World Mission* is the recognition of a religiously pluralistic world on the one hand and participation in the mission of God and the embracing of secularization on the

other. Pluralism and secularization go together in terms of recognizing others as holy in the light of *missio Dei*. I suggest pluralism, *missio Dei* and secularization influenced the missiology of *World Mission*.

“Radical Change in Mission”?

After the Report of the Commission on World Mission was approved by the General Council, Alfred C. Forrest, Editor of the *United Church Observer*, commented on it in his editorial of October 15, 1966. He referred to the Report’s “radical change in mission”. But the chair of the Commission, Donald M. Fleming, said he did “not agree that the change is radical”. The parallel “editorial controversy” between Fleming and Forrest lasted for three months in an exchange of letters and phone conversations. I believe the controversy was about theology and an understanding of the context. For Fleming and other commissioners perhaps *World Mission* was not radical enough. Thus *World Mission* recommends: “that the church should be prepared constantly to adapt both its organization and its programme to meet new opportunities and changing needs and conditions. ‘To share in God’s concern for all’ we need to dialogue constantly with contemporary theology and the rapidly changing context and with history to develop a missiology for our time.”

All of this needs to be probed further in our day.