

Matthew 10: A Mission Mandate for the Global Context.

Stuart C Bate OMI

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Introduction

At different times in our lives different texts of the bible speak more clearly to us. It is as though their time has arrived and they give us a word of life for our present situation. This fact is as true in the social and cultural context as it is in the personal spiritual life of the individual. When the images, metaphors and concepts of the biblical text somehow correspond to our own context then the text comes alive. Such an experience is not to deny the truth of all God’s word for us. Rather it is the entering of God’s world into the reality of our daily life. It is the experience of being touched by the Spirit, of spiritual consolation. We say the text speaks to us or it is relevant.

Such experiences carry both a value and a danger. The value is that the text *comes alive*. It speaks to us. It becomes “good news”. The danger is that we are wont to exaggerate the experience sometimes so much that we may exclude other aspects of the richness of God’s word. Nonetheless such experiences are experiences of the Kingdom of God close at hand and so they may express the essence of the purpose of the mission of the Church.

Now there are many texts in scripture which speak of God’s mission. So the question arises as to whether these texts also have their *kairos* in the socio-cultural context of the people of God, the Christian community. It is the thesis of this short article that they do. In illustrating this thesis we are going to look at the two missionary mandates of Matthews Gospel in Chapters 10 and 28 and show how the one provided a root metaphor for the great missionary endeavour of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and suggest how the other may be speaking more clearly to the current socio-cultural context of the Global village.

Matthew 28: The Biblical Paradigm for Mission in the Modern Period

The nineteenth century is rightly called the missionary century. Lopez Gay (1987:89) has pointed out that in the year 1800 there were 350 Catholic missionaries and that by 1900 this had risen to 87000! It was a century during which an astonishing number of Religious Congregations were formed with a missionary thrust.ⁱ It was the century during which the science of Missiology emerged through the pioneering work of Warneck, Venn, Streit and others. Subsequently much of this missionary vision was formalised in the great missionary encyclicals up to Vatican II and in the Protestant missionary conferences during the same period..

Much of the Biblical Inspiration for this massive missionary movement was found in Matthew 28: 18-20. This was a text that spoke to the European Christian consciousness and culture in a powerful way. It was referred to as the “great commission”. The fundamental social context which gave rise to the *kairos* for this text was the European “discovery” of “new” worlds into which Europeans entered, conquered, colonised and exploited. Already in the fifteenth century explorers and adventurers began to find new lands in their search for better trade routes to the east. From the sixteenth century they began to occupy and colonise parts of the new lands but it is only in the nineteenth century that we begin to see mass migrations of Europeans to the Americas, Africa, Asia and Australasia.ⁱⁱ This was a migration not only of settlers but also of European culture and in particular three parts of that culture: European “civilization”, European “colonial control” and European “Religion”.

European “civilization” was good news especially from the European perspective: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations...teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” was often as easily applicable to European culture and civilization as much as it was to the teachings of Jesus (See Verkuyl 1978:168-173). European “colonial control” implied the transfer of “authority” in the non-European nations. “All authority is given to me” (Mt 28,18) easily spoke to the mind of the European Christian colonial settlers as they participated in saving and civilizing of the natives. “David Livingstone’s threefold programme for ‘saving’ Africa [was] by means of mission, trade and colonisation” (Hellberg 1965:14). “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations” (Mt 28, 19) was thus easily seen as a duty imposed on all European Christians to bring the Christian culture and civilisation that they had been brought up in to the “poor primitive pagans” still in the darkness of ignorance and immorality. Here was scriptural legitimisation for the “duties” of colonisation.ⁱⁱⁱ

What I have expressed above is clearly a caricature of the nineteenth and early twentieth century missionary movement. But I have made these facile parallels precisely to show how easy it was for this text to speak to the hearts and souls of sincere zealous Christians. There *were* new ends of the earth to go to; there were new nations to be evangelised; there were new disciples to be won. And most of all, the modern age finally provided the technology to achieve the relatively rapid movement of comparatively large groups of people around the face of the earth. In the nineteenth century, seaways were opened up in a way that had never been

possible before and large groups of people moved from Europe to almost every corner of the earth. The nineteenth century missionary movement can be characterised as the expansion of European culture, civilisation and religion by plantation throughout the areas of the world where it exercised hegemony.

This is a cultural analysis of the Church's mission and the cultural key is always at the interface of mission and the world. I have noted elsewhere that the Church's mission in terms of its pastoral response may be described as culturally mediated pastoral responses to culturally mediated human needs.^{iv} Consequently the cultural question is always a contested central area in discerning the Church's mission. In the mission movement of the nineteenth century we must recognise to what extent European culture provided the medium through which both the needs from the context and the response from the Church emerged.

The Contemporary Context

The modern era has seen the emergence of an inculturated "modern" Christianity. It has also spawned the emergence of a type of Christianity which specifically rejects much of modernity. Such is the Pentecostal movement. The Catholic Church, too, has a significant grouping of anti-modernists amongst its members. What is also interesting and significant is that in the latter part of the twentieth century it is these anti-modernist groupings who are providing the greatest number of Christian conversions whereas modern secular Christianity is declining in both numbers and influence^v

As the twentieth century draws to a close and a new millennium dawns we find ourselves in a very different Christian community living in a vastly different social context. Modern culture with its "scientific" certainty is being transformed into the global culture of multi-communal networking and high speed information technology. The question arises then whether the Church's missionary activity is in need of a different biblical paradigm to inspire the same missionary zeal and commitment as the Matthew 28 text did in the modern period. After all there are no more nations to discover and the only ones who are "boldly going where no one has gone before" are the crew of Star Trek. The certainty of the "authority" of modern Western culture has been replaced by the uncertainty of the present age where "authority" is increasingly questioned and also diffused to many competing centres. It is an age where "what to teach" is increasingly replaced by "what to experience". Our culture is becoming a culture of learning through experience much more than learning from a teaching authority.

Matthew 10: A Biblical Paradigm of Mission for a Global Village

The missionary mandate of Matthew 10 proposes some surprising synergies with the global culture of the new millennium and is proposed as the basis of a new paradigm for mission in this culture and civilisation. The text was relatively unpopular for Christians of the modern period because of its insistence on a mission tied up with demons and miracles both of which had little place in the emerging secularisation of the modern period. Today these terms are increasingly reinterpreted and re-integrated into postmodern discourse. Let us consider some facets of the text which render it one whose time has arrived.

Authority

Both Matthew 28 and Matthew 10 speak of the authority given to Jesus as the source for his mission. In Matthew 10 however, the nature of the authority given to the apostles is articulated and not general. In verse 1 they receive authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out and to heal sickness and infirmity. In verse 7 they are given the mandate to preach that the Kingdom of heaven is at hand. In Matthew 28, the reference is to *all* authority which is given to Jesus. This was often culturally construed to mean that all authority was similarly passed on to the apostles. It was only a short distance from there to the justification of domination of all kinds: spiritual, social, political and cultural. In Matthew 10 the authority handed over is focussed on some very specific tasks which are very difficult things to do. It is authority over unclean spirits to cast them out and to heal every disease () and infirmity (μ). In being sent to proclaim the kingdom of the heavens, to heal the sick, to raise the dead, cleanse lepers and expel demons, they are mandated to fight the influence of evil in the community at hand: the world they know and belong to. In this way they follow Jesus in making the reign of God alive and present in the way that Jesus did.

Authority contains within it the notion of acceptance. This is the idea that those under the power of the authority accept that power over them. If they don't then the power wielded is coercion and oppression rather than authority. The demons accept that Jesus has authority over them. When he approaches they cry out (Mt 8,29-31; Lk 8, 28-31) and when he casts them out he does so by name. They reveal their name and the way in which they can be cast out (Sullivan 1987:230). Jesus' authority is first manifest in his temptation by Satan before his ministry (Lk 4). Satan is allowed to tempt Jesus in all manner of ways and Jesus stands up to the demon refusing to be corrupted by its wiles and lies. Authority somehow lies in this experience of fighting the

demons in our own lives as individuals and as Christian communities. Only in that way do we gain the experience to be able to continue the struggle in our ministry to people. Authority is not passed on automatically to the disciples but only when they have been with Jesus for some time. Being part of his work they become ready and experienced to enter into his mission and ministry.

The greatest sign of Jesus' authority is his willingness to accept the sins and evil of the world onto himself and to become the sacrificial victim of them. Precisely in that moment of apparent defeat, the power and authority of God is manifest in Jesus and he is risen from the dead. This is the perspective of the Gospel of John where the power and authority of Jesus is clearly manifest right through the trial and passion to the cross when Jesus is exalted and draws all to him. We who wish to receive this ministry from Jesus should know that we will have little authority over the demons of the world if we have not waged battle with those in our hearts, our families and in our communities. This is the way in which we build up our knowledge and experience in the battle against evil and in that way receive authority to cast out other demons in our ministry.

Go to the Lost Sheep of the House of Israel

The mission is to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. It is to the community, culture and society of which Jesus and the disciples are part. Here then is another difference to Matthew 28 where the mission is to other cultures communities and societies. This commission then is not to those outside but those within. This is a powerful metaphor for the community of the Global village since by definition, in this culture, we are all within. All of us belong. This mission does not concern bringing our culture to others. Rather it is about purifying and making holy, of heaven, what we know and are. Our global society is filled with lost sheep. We are made to know about them through the revolution in telecommunications. We already see and hear the suffering of the lost, wherever they are, through our radios, TV's and on the Internet. Almost all people have access to some electronic media, yet this global interconnectivity is only in its infancy. The metaphor of the lost sheep of our own community is played out daily before us. It is difficult not to know what is happening. Here is a powerful motivation for those who are filled with compassion to respond.

As you go Preach that the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand

Every Christian and every Christian community has in some way experienced the reality of the presence of the Kingdom of heaven in the journey of life. It is this experience which brings us to conversion and commitment as Christians. The first words of Jesus in Marks gospel (Mk 1,15) express the whole of the kerygma and the Christian message. Only when the *kairos* is fulfilled and the kingdom is truly at hand for us can we turn around and believe in the good news. This is the person and this is the community which can then be sent out to proclaim the message for these are the ones who carry the kingdom among them (Lk 17,21). Here is a mission about carrying the kingdom amongst us, proclaiming it by word and deed where we are and as we journey.

Heal the Sick

We have shown elsewhere how the mission to heal the sick becomes the central focus of the Churches mission in socio-cultural contexts which are fundamentally sick (Bate 1995:283). In his own life Jesus made the kingdom present in three fundamental ways: He preached good news, he healed the sick and he died on the cross carrying the sin of the world. What kind of healing was this? In this text the word used is *therapeuo* from which we get our English word therapy. Beyer (1965: 129) points out that *therapeuo* is used in NT in "sense of 'to heal' and always in such a way that the reference is not to medical treatment, which might fail, but to real healing". We might note here that the other word used for healing in Jesus' ministry is the word *sozo* which can also mean save or to rescue. Healing in this sense always refers to the whole person and not to individual members of the body (Foerster 1965: 990). It is concerned with restoration of the fullness of human life in those who have lost it. A more holistic understanding of sickness and health is one of the signs of the postmodern age. Here then is a metaphor that speaks powerfully to the people of our time and context. One of the signs of modernity which is carried through to post-modernity is the loss of the sense of meaning and hope which gets replaced by a restless search for satisfaction in consumerism and spectacle (See Kraft 1995:89-91). This too is a sickness of the contemporary age in need of healing.

Raise the Dead

When Jesus heals or casts out demons, his goal is to bring life to the human being who is sick or possessed. His mission is about saving, rescuing and restoring human life. This, then, is the sense in which the mission to raise the dead should be understood. In the modern culture, this was a difficult text to live as it was

interpreted clinically, within the framework of the scientific culture. Today the limitation of such an understanding is clear. The sense of deadness spoken about here needs to be interpreted for our time and culture. We live in a world where people are increasingly deadened and dulled by the plethora of images around them. Life is easily lost in a world of drugs, violence, HIV-Aids and the like. Often the sense of life once found in belonging to family, tribe, village and local community is increasingly replaced by the deadness of anomie and alienation which the technologically linked global vision brings. The restoration of life is a search for identity in the confusion of sameness and the facelessness of the new world. Such dead people and communities need the raising of which this text speaks. Here is an injunction to mission which responds to an increasingly urgent culturally mediated human need. The life which faith gives is a life which raises the dead. It is a life for which people are searching increasingly.

Cast out Demons

As it struggled with the notion of raising the dead, so the modern Western culture was very uncomfortable with the idea of demons and many theologians were concerned to “demythologise” these kinds of texts in their quest for an inculturated Christianity of the modern age. Today we are more inclined to accept the reality of demons. The global world is a multicultural world. Many of its cultures have no difficulty with the notion of demons. As people in the modern world re-search their own cultural roots in Celtic, Nordic, African, Asian and other cultural expressions so demons and angels are returning to mainstream consciousness. Popular culture is increasingly investigating these areas as any survey of Movies, TV and the Internet can show.^{vi} But we also have to reinterpret the presence of evil in the world, especially social evil. In the highly structured society in which we live, individual culpability for many of the evils which beset us is increasingly difficult to establish. We speak of the blights of crime, violence, ethnic cleansing, structural poverty, capitalism and so forth. These social evils have become the demons of today since they seem to transcend human agency gaining a life of their own which is oppressive and seemingly out of control. This transcendence and self propagating life could be seen as describing the demonic status of these structural evils. In this way we may hear of the “demon” of Apartheid or the demons of “communism”, “AIDS”, global warming, pollution and so forth.

Demons may also be understood today as the compulsions, obsessions and evil structures which sometimes possess us. This is increasingly important in the post-modern period where and a growing fear of the unknown resulting in oppression by the sheer size and quantity of what is going on is coupled together with a sense of anomie, lawlessness and violence. We are increasingly overwhelmed by the size of the world and its events. We cannot know all the information. The pace of life is faster and faster and so we search for quick easy solutions in order to deal with things. One of these is the propensity to demonise the fearful. Certain people are easily and quickly demonised. One of the first was Hitler. Since then we have had many others: Josef Stalin, the Vietcong, Saddam Hussein, Fidel Castro, Bill Gates and even the Pope. Its all too easy to do this when people want quick easy answers in sound and picture bites. Such demonising has become a part of our post-modern culture and is certain to continue as a feature of our global technological culture. We need to be liberated from this tendency of ours to create demons in the image of our enemies since the technological resources at our control make this all too easy. Casting out demons here means the quest for responsibility to use the immense technological means we have in a responsible manner.

Sheep amongst Wolves

In Matthew 28, those sent out are sent with knowledge and power. In Matthew 10, the way of sending out is much more subdued. The disciples are sent not as those who know everything. They are not going to bring the value of their knowledge to the “nations”. Rather they are innocent in a world that is increasingly violent and dangerous. Being sheep amongst wolves means having to accept to be a victim. The world will victimise the innocent through violence, hatred, fear and lust. In the struggle for the peace and harmony of the Reign of God we should not expect that everyone will immediately be converted. The evil of Jesus and the apostles day made them victims. They died for the sake of the Kingdom. We should expect that doing Gods work will make us victims. This does not seem as pleasant a mission as the assurance of Matthew 28 though we should not lose track of the courage and heroism of those who followed the great commission. In Matthew 10 however this consequence is spelt out more clearly. Indeed it points to the mode of the mission to come. It makes us very dependent on the power of the Spirit in our lives since we cannot do these things by our own human agency. This reveals how much more clearly the place of the Holy Spirit becomes in this new time, something which many authors have remarked upon and many Christians have experienced in the last 30 years or so.

Rereading the Gospel from the Perspective of Matthew 10

The actualisation of the mission mandate in Matthew 10 provides us with a framework within which the Gospel can be read. Our concern is to reread the Gospel in order to find the good news which nourishes the mission of Matthew 10. It is the search for an understanding of the kerygma which can inform this mission for our time. Now the kerygma is perhaps most succinctly expressed in the first words of Jesus in Mark's Gospel: The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel. It is Jesus who makes the kingdom present. He reveals its nature through the parables and in his preaching. He makes it present through the healings and miracles 41 of which are attested by the evangelists (Kelsey 1975: 55-57).

This is very nice good news for people and the crowds grow and follow him. However there is a deeper side to the good news which Jesus begins to reveal after seeing that the disciples have understood the message and who he is (cf. Mk 8). From then on he begins to proclaim the journey to Jerusalem, to suffering and to death on the cross. After he has spoken this deeper part of the gospel, Peter rebukes him and then the one who Jesus has proclaimed to be the rock on whom the Church will be built (Mt 16) is referred to as Satan for "you are not on the side of God but of men". The message from then on becomes an increasingly hard good news and the crowds desert Jesus until on the cross he is alone: abandoned and denied even by his closest disciples.

The seemingly "bad" good news of the second part of the Gospel is however the real good news. It is the power of the cross which allows the healings to occur and the kingdom to be upon us. What is not crucified with Jesus remains unhealed (See Bate 1995b: 168). It is Jesus' death on the cross that opens the way to the kingdom and not the "good" good news of the healings and the preaching. Jesus agrees to be the sheep amongst the wolves and the victim for us in order that we can participate in his life. Ministry and mission demands that we too walk the same journey. This is the power and authority which is placed on us as we become apostles.

If we wish to live the mission mandate of Matthew 10 then we should remember these two sides to the Gospel message. Sometimes, those who concentrate on making the healing ministry a reality in the life of the church only recognise the "good" good news of the healings. Failures are ignored and suffering is downplayed. Yet failure and suffering is at the centre of the good news as the life of Jesus shows. We too, as we imitate Christ, are called to walk these two parts of the Christian way. The life we bring in healings and fighting demons is rooted in the suffering on the cross. The minister is thus the one who accepts to follow Jesus in the way of the cross. So the mission mandate of Matthew 10 is an invitation to us to walk where Jesus walked. It is also an invitation to go to the suffering and pain of our Global Jerusalem in a journey home to the Father. As we go we should preach saying 'the kingdom of the heavens is at hand' we should heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons. What we have received we have received without pay. So we should give without pay in a world sold on money.

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Notes

ⁱ Lopez-Gay 1987:90-94 reports that nine new Clerical missionary congregations were formed in the 19th century together with five new congregations of lay brothers working in education. By 1880 more than 30 new congregations of sisters had been formed and by the end of the 19th century 10000 missionary sisters were active.

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- ii It is estimated that as many as 55 million people migrated in the period 1820 to 1920. They left because of economic, political and religious difficulties in their home countries and the opportunities offered in the “New” worlds. (See Webster 1992:750).
- iii Much has been written about the link between the Church’s mission and colonisation and about the perceived cultural superiority of the Europeans. See for Example Buhlmann 1978
- iv See Bate 1998: 172-173 for more on this notion.
- v Since 1985, David Barrett has produced annual statistical tables reflecting religious adherence globally since 1900 and trends for the future. See Barrett & Johnson 1998 for the latest of these. One of the major trends is the growth of Charismatic and Pentecostal groupings as well as Catholics and the decline of those churches founded in the reformation and closely tied to secular modern culture. See also Bate 1995a for some statistics reflecting the same trend in the South African context
- vi A request on the search engine Altavista under the word “celtic” returned 480257 hits in February 1999.