

## **GOD'S DISTURBING MISSION**

### **MISSION IN THE SECOND DECADE OF THE THIRD MILLENNIUM – TRENDS AND PATTERNS**

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#### **Introduction – Defining the Theme**

It is a disturbing world we live in. Rapid changes are occurring in many regions of the world and it is not an exaggeration to say that “the world is not the same anymore”. The more recent developments in North Africa could be as important as the fall of the Communist Empire in 1989 and the fall of the Berlin wall. Whether it will facilitate the spreading of the Gospel in the Muslim countries or not, is still an open question. There is certainly a danger of precipitated conclusions and acting without the necessary caution. The more recent history of mission in Eastern Europe and Central Asia shows the harm done by irresponsible and too quick move into former closed areas without the accurate preparation, field study and respect for the already existing churches.

God is also disturbing mission today. Creative initiatives contrast to traditional ways of doing mission. God is blowing his holy wind in places and through ways that we could never imagine some years ago. The dogmatic view of mission and the Northern monopoly of affirming missiological truth, establishing missionary methods and commanding missional programmes are questioned. The time for unilateral mission is over.

We are part of a messy reality of religious confrontation, political uncertainty, economic power-imbalance, ecclesiastical competition, mission complexity and pluralistic views on the Gospel. Particularly the younger generation does not accept simplified truth, reductionist description of the world and three-step short-cut strategies.

So, what are the big challenges for Evangelical Missions today? Some would mention Islam as the main threat to the growth of the church worldwide or perhaps related to that, terrorism and closed countries. Others would say that lack of finances or lack of good strategies to reach out to the unreached people groups as major hindrances to fulfil the Great Commission. Maybe co-operation between North and South is a burning issue and need more attention.

Using the analogy of Jonah I would like to propose two main topics which I believe are crucial for global mission and could show some of the trends and patterns today: Contextualisation and Risk-taking. Or, in other words, the issues of incarnation and obedience.

More than ever it is important to do mission in the way of Jesus Christ. I borrow the expression from Andrew Kirk's book 'What is Mission' and some of his thoughts related to that.<sup>1</sup> Kirk has certainly captured some of the important characteristics of what mission is about and how we can emulate our Master Jesus when we try to fulfil our missionary vocation. And I will come back to some of these characteristics.

### **The Kingdom of God**

*Missio Dei* (God's Mission) and consequently *Missio Ecclesia* (The Mission of the Church) has to do with the establishment of the Kingdom of God. I would agree with Chris Wright who defines our mission as "the committed participation as God's people, at God's invitation and command, in God's own mission within the history of God's world for the redemption of God's creation".<sup>2</sup>

There are some vital aspects that need to be mentioned here before we continue. Firstly it is God's initiative and not ours. Secondly, it has to do with God's kingdom and not our earthly kingdom mentality. Thirdly, mission is based on the outcome that God has decided and planned and not on our understanding of success and desirable results.

Using Ladd's definition:

The Kingdom is a present reality (Matt. 12.28) and yet it is a future blessing (I Cor. 15.50). It is an inner spiritual redemptive blessing (Rom. 14.17) which can be experienced only by way of the new birth (John 3.3), and yet it will have to do with the government of the nations of the world (Rev. 11.15). The Kingdom is a realm into which men enter now (Matt. 21.31), and yet it is a realm into which they will enter tomorrow (Matt. 8.11). It is at the same time a gift of God which will be bestowed by God in the future (Luke 12.32) and yet which must be received in the present (Mark 10.15).<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Kirk, Andrew, *What is Mission? Theological Explorations*, 1999:38-55

<sup>2</sup> Wright, Christopher, *The Mission of God*, 2006:22,23

<sup>3</sup> Ladd, G. *The Gospel of the Kingdom*, 1981:18

## **What Characterises Jesus' way of doing Mission?**

If Mission has to do with the Kingdom of God and to follow the example of Jesus, what are the main principles that we should stick to?

Andrew Kirk says about the mission Jesus gave to his disciples:

The preaching of the nearness of the kingdom of God, the call to repent and believe the good news (Mark 1:14-15) is now further extended by the commission to proclaim repentance and the forgiveness of sins in the name of the crucified and risen Messiah (Luke 24:46-47).<sup>4</sup>

And he summarises Jesus' mission in three topics:

- a. to create life – involvement in every action that restores the wholeness of human life
- b. to create welfare – the political task of ensuring the right kind of state provision for the welfare of all
- c. to create non-violence – the effort to overcome the destructive spiral of ‘an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth’.<sup>5</sup>

The question is whether that would not be a good summary of what the world need today. And, somehow define priorities for the mission of the Church in the disturbing time that we live in.

## **The Example of Jonah**

In order to identify some of the major challenges, and through that respond to some trends and patterns in mission today, I would like to turn to the story of Jonah.

### **1. The Missionary Experience of Jonah**

We know the story of Jonah quite well, and I am not going into details. I am aware of the criticism regarding historicity and authenticity of the book. Most commentaries would say that it is neither a historic book, and that is why it does not appear among the historical texts of the Old Testament, nor a real prophetic book, if we compare to the other Minor Prophets. However, the fact that it has

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<sup>4</sup> Kirk 1999:52

<sup>5</sup> Kirk 1999:54

been included in the Jewish Canon and treated as the Word of God gives us confidence to analyse and apply the principles presented in Jonah. So let us leave that discussion for the moment and focus on some aspects related to his “missionary” experience.

Text: Jonah 4. 1-11

I would like to initially highlight the following:

- Jonah was a person who had direct contact with God. “The word of the Lord came to Jonah, son of Amittai”. It was certainly not the first time that he had a word from the Lord, but we do not know details about his life and ministry. He probably lived during King Jeroboam II (2 Kings 14.25) when the boundaries of Israel were restored. According to the narrative, he does not give the impression of being qualified as a prophet or even as a missionary, but that could already show us something about how God chooses people for delivering His message. God seems to have a tendency to recruit experts on fish, if you understand what I mean. Religious people are often not His first choice.
- At the same time, Jonah is a kind of figure, a type of the Messiah and there are clear analogies to Jesus, particularly regarding his death and resurrection. (Matthew 12.40). This typology is important when it comes to the question of salvation for both Jews and Gentiles, made possible through Jesus’ death and glorification. And salvation for the Gentiles was not a popular idea in Israel. Therefore, I would say that Jonah is perhaps more a prototype of Israel and consequently also of the Christian church than of our Master, and we will come back to that later. Again, I am aware of hermeneutics here, and the text should be treated as it is presented to us, in other words, as prophecy, and we need to be careful when using it as an allegory applied to ecclesiology.
- Jonah was called to preach and prophesise in a hostile milieu, a word of condemnation to the enemies of Israel. That should have been a temptation for him to do, especially since Nineveh had been so rude against Israel. (There is no reference to that in the book, only that “the wickedness of the city has come before God”.) Judah was an Assyrian province and it is during Jonah’s time that the Assyrians invade Damascus and Samaria and the kingdom of Israel is subjugated. So the man called to announce the judgment and destruction of the Assyrian capital is one from the conquered regions. Or as Jacques Ellul puts it, like “a Frenchman going to preach repentance to Berlin in 1941 or 1942”.
- After some reflection, Jonah decides not to preach in Nineveh, and he runs away from God and this dangerous job. “Las playas de España”, the Spanish beaches, are more attractive. That was probably Tarshish. Why does he run away? Firstly because he knows it is too risky and it would demand a long walk across the desert to reach the city. Secondly because they are already

condemned and he has no desire of warning them of the coming catastrophe. They deserve it and he does not want to be part of any possibly change of that destiny. His excuse for not going the first time is exactly that he knew that God was “gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and would relent from sending calamity” (4.1.). Some people are motivated to go and preach, others have plenty of motives for not going!

- Jonah flees away from the presence of God, as if Jahveh was a local god and not the universal God. But, in 1.9 he says to the sailors that he “worships the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the land”. So he knows who God is. But disobeying God leads to incoherence in practice and strange theology many times.
- Jonah is definitively not the hero in this story. The pagan sailors acted with more spirituality and respect to God than God’s prophet. The only blessing Jonah was to them was that the incident on the sea led them to fear and worship the true God. Somehow they converted to the true God.
- Three days and three nights inside the fish was time enough for Jonah to convert. It is really interesting when prophets, pastors and missionaries (and mission leaders and mission researchers) convert. They know the right theology and can easily verbalise a profound prayer. But, many times they need deep sea experiences to let this spirituality go beyond well formulated phrases. I am convinced that Jonah repented from his sin and had decided to obey God no matter what, if God could only give him a new chance. We would have done the same in similar situations, or what do you think?
- Repentance is confirmed through action and when the Lord talked to him again Jonah obeyed and went to Nineveh.
- The reaction of the Ninevites was a surprise to Jonah. Starting with the King, the whole city repented from their sins and God decided to spare them. Jonah’s ministry had been a success, comparable to the greatest preachers of all times. What a report to send home to Israel! But Jonah was not happy with what he saw. His desire was to see Nineveh destroyed and the enemies exterminated once for all. His theology of salvation, solemnly declared in the belly of the fish, was suddenly exclusivist again and did not include others than Jews. And we know how God had to give him a new lesson.

## **2. Identification and Incarnation in Mission**

The first area I would like to mention, and use this story of Jonah to compare with, is the need for Identification and Incarnation in Mission. Jonah had a tremendous problem with the Ninevites because they were his and Israel's enemies and he had no intention of making friends among them. He could not identify with their situation and only saw them as a threat to himself and his people. One of the most important motives for doing mission in the history of Evangelical mission movements has been "love and compassion", or as Paul puts it, "constrained by Jesus' love". Certainly mission is done owing to a series of motives and out of both personal and collective motivations, but "compassion for the lost" is undoubtedly the most frequently expressed. We preach the gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ because we want to see everyone saved and worshiping the true God.

However, as Jonah, we have a tendency to classify people in worthy and unworthy, friends and enemies, and we prioritise our investments according to the expected receptivity of people. This could even be a strategy, because working among those who have a positive attitude towards us and the gospel, we make more converts per invested dollar. It is also difficult to identify with those who are so different from us, especially if they have a critical view of our culture.

Incarnation is the next step after identification. It does not only require a willingness to know and bless a specific people but to be one of them. We call this contextualisation and, as you know, there are different levels of that. Perhaps it is easier for certain races and cultures to identify with each other. If Jonah had been from another nation, maybe he would have acted differently. But, as in the story of Jonah, this is not just a question of cultural sympathy or racial affinity. There are political, economic and religious factors as well, which play an important role in determining if a mission organisation, a church or a missionary feel motivated to go to a certain place. Incarnation goes beyond missionary strategy and has to do with theology and ideology of mission. It does not depend on expected outcomes or methodologies in order to reach as many as possible as quick as possible. Incarnation means to become one with people, to fully accept their conditions of living and to share with them good and bad experiences. Perhaps incarnation is what we most lack in mission today, especially with our strong focus on projects, short term engagement and quick results. So this could be a major challenge for missions and needs to be dealt with.

Some Issues:

### ***Defining our priorities***

The question I would like to ask is how we define our priorities as denominations and mission organisations. Which are the main criteria for deciding where to send our missionaries? The fact that our denomination is not represented in a particular place? Or that the results are guaranteed and so also the financial support we need for our work? Or, perhaps the personal and sometimes subjective feeling for a place that our missionaries have? None of these are necessarily wrong or bad. But coming from Brazil, with a vibrant church and local congregations in almost every corner of our cities, I have, honestly, difficulty to understand why we still have more than 3,000 foreign missionaries working in our country. At the same time there are thousands of ethnic groups around the world without any Christian witness. It is not that we do not want them working in Brazil, on the contrary, the door will always be open for foreign missionaries, but it is the issue of priorities.

The Brazilian mission movement had a tough time to start looking at nations other than Portuguese and Spanish speaking. Our investment in the belt of resistance, (known also as the 10/40 window) was almost zero in the beginning of the 1980s, 5% in 1989 and 20% in 2005. But still we invest most of our human and financial resources in areas where the majority already declare themselves as Christians.

### ***Contextualisation***

Contextualisation became a major concern in mission from the 1960s on. There are, of course, precedents to that, and Hudson Taylor was one of the greatest in that respect. And we could mention the Jesuits and other Catholic orders as well. However, in many ways, Christendom has been imposed through colonialism and imperialism, also by Protestant nations. The reactions were different depending on the receiving context and the way missionaries came. In Latin America a superficial and syncretistic religion was formed, with Christian appearance but harbouring all sorts of animistic beliefs and superstitions. In India, Christianity was very much rejected being classified as a foreign religion. In West Africa, nationals started their own churches, African Independent Churches, or spiritual churches as they were called in Ghana, blending Christian dogmas with traditional animistic doctrines and practices.

The picture should not be altogether negative. A lot of good things happened in the history of mission and churches were established in all these places. The

social and educational work done by the missionaries created better conditions for the former colonies to develop, contributing to their independence.

But the 1960s brought the heavy criticism from anthropologists and some missiologists that mission was synonymous with cultural murder. The accusation was that our missionaries had entered people groups without any sensitivity to their cultural and religious heritage and imposed a Christian culture. The critique was serious and many churches and even some governments in Europe started to question the existence of missionary work. As an MK, studying at Uppsala University in Sweden in the beginning of the 1970s, I had a hard time to explain my background for colleagues and teachers, all biased towards the political left. I don't know exactly the developments in other places, but in Northern Europe mission courses were established and missionaries started to have some basic training in cross-cultural encounter. I am sure that these pre-field training has minimised problems of cultural adaptation and given a much more positive attitude towards other cultures.

### ***Conversion and a New Christendom***

However, the situation in the world today is much more complex. It is not just the question of trying to understand the different levels of a culture (costumes, values, beliefs and worldview) but also to contextualise the message, with local terminology and, if possible even using local rituals. The issue today is not just if the missionary is able to communicate the gospel with clarity in the local language and behave like a local citizen, but, also, to what extent local religious and cultural elements can be integrated or used in Christian theology and ecclesiastical practice. The challenge has somehow moved from the missionary to the new believer, at the same time that it continues to do with what the missionary teaches. Is Allah the God of the Bible? Can you be a Christian Muslim? Should a Christian believer continue to go to the Mosque? How Jewish or how Christian is a Messiah believing Jew? Is it possible to venerate the forefathers and be a sincere Christian? Can you pray to God for healing and at the same time search help with sorcerers? Is it Ok to pray to Mary even if you have been born again through the work of the Holy Spirit? Do you need to change religion because you become a Christian? What does conversion really mean? Does it include some kind of cultural change?

Philip Jenkins describes the growing church in the South and asks the question of how to define Christianity. Trying not to be intolerant he says that “a Christian is

someone who describes himself or herself as Christian, who believes that Jesus is not merely a prophet or an exalted moral teacher, but in some unique sense the Son of God, and the Messiah” (Jenkins 2002: 88). This is, of course, a very generous and generic definition of a Christian. But, what Jenkins discusses is the fact that the next Christendom may not look like “traditional Christendom” from the West. So the question is who decides today what true Christianity looks like? Could it be that we in the West have lost important aspects of Christian faith that new churches in the Global South have re-discovered? Or that our Christianity is so blended with all sorts of human ideologies and philosophies that we have distanced from the pure teachings of Jesus and the Apostles? On the other hand, what guarantee do we have that new emphasis from the South are really exempt from non-Christian influences?

In an increasing pluralistic world where globalised communications provide most people with updated information about the variety of philosophies and religions, the pressure on Evangelical churches and missions is tremendous. What is supra-cultural? What are the principles that we cannot give away? How radical should we be in terms of conversion? How central is Jesus Christ as the only way to salvation in our missiology?

I don't have all the answers but I believe that we need to take these questions seriously and try to sort them out together as missions in the North and in the South, as sending and receiving churches, as mission associations and global networks.

Here is an important area of co-operation between North and South – an open dialogue on theology, missiology and praxis.

### **3. Risk-taking and Obedience in Mission**

The other area I would like to quickly mention is that of risk-taking and of obedience in mission. Although being a servant of God and intimate enough to hear his voice, Jonah did not want to take any risk in order to fulfil the mission given by the Lord. So he decided to disobey and flee from God. Witness to enemies and work on the outmost front of mission is dangerous and has the intimidating potential of producing martyrs.

Mission in dangerous places could be understood in various ways. To work among AIDS/HIV positive people in Africa is certainly risky. Missionaries in the Amazon face daily perils in the forest and on the rivers. Thousands and

thousands of mission workers have given their lives in dangerous areas, owing to diseases, accidents and other similar things. However, the most problematic, I believe, is persecution and hostility from local people.

We remember the Korean group in Afghanistan a couple of years ago. With all the good intentions in the world, the group of 23 short term professional missionaries went to the Taliban area for helping people and sharing the Gospel. We know that they had been warned by Korean leaders and also by ex-patriates living in Afghanistan. It was really a risky project. These Korean missionaries are certainly intelligent people, and they were aware of the danger. So I don't think we should classify them as purely naïve or ignorant. What makes a person or a group of volunteers to risk their lives in order to bless people in need? Could the love for these people mean more than the sacrifice to reach them? How would we evaluate their enterprise if they had succeeded and the Taliban had got help and perhaps some of them had turned to Christ? Do we have similar situations in the history of mission when crazy and dangerous things have been done for the sake of sharing the gospel? I think so.

So, where goes the limit between genuine desire to serve and to obey the Lord taking risks in order to share the gospel, and unwise actions?

Somehow, exotic and romantic mission is over. The last frontiers of mission are the most difficult ones. Unreached people groups are in areas where there are all sort of geographical, political and religious restrictions, almost impossible to access through traditional mission.

But it is not just the issue of getting there. To make disciples takes more than just physical presence in a place or some mass-events of evangelisation. As we all know it must go deeper and it takes time. Often it requires sacrifices that we are not ready to offer, such as living near people, sharing with them our daily life, having patience and perseverance waiting for a natural process of maturation. When is a people really reached and we can delete them from the unreached peoples list? It is, of course, a question of definition, however I believe it is important to see our missionary task holistically and not just one aspect of the establishment of the Kingdom of God in a particular society. Because, I think it is exactly there that we have the problem, reducing the message of the Kingdom to a simplistic, sometimes very didactic, proclamation of Jesus as the solution for all the problems of people. "Jesus is the answer, what was the question?"

And what has that to do with sacrifice and obedience? It has to do with obedience because the great commission does not stop with proclamation of the gospel but goes on with “baptising”, meaning introducing the newborn Christian into a church community and “teaching them to obey”, which requires good examples to follow in close and continuous fellowship. Personally, I believe this is more sacrificial and demands more obedience of us and our missionaries, than other things we can face in the world today.

Mission and suffering have been pairs from the beginning. Martyrs were witnesses who gave their lives fulfilling the Great Commission. We have all heard that there were more Christian martyrs in the 20<sup>th</sup> century alone than in all the other 19 centuries together. And should we expect something different in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? The trend so far is not of less persecution. Perhaps the reasons and the conditions will be distinct and our missionaries will have to face not only persecution owing to their faith but also due to their passport. And I don't think this is a problem just for North American and some Europeans but increasingly also for other nations seen as belonging to certain economic and political alliances. The Korean case is certainly one example of that.

A lot of questions come to our minds when we analyse worldwide mission today. It is not a rosy picture we have and I am convinced that it will be tougher in the coming years. There are no secrets any more. “They” (sorry if it sounds paranoiac) know who we are and what we are doing and planning to do. Imposition has never worked to advance the Kingdom of God and it will not work today either. We can create a “pax romana” by dominating other nations, but we can't truly convert people by imposing our faith. So that's not the right method.

When did religious fanaticism and terrorism start? What would our indigenous tribes in Latin America call the Spanish and Portuguese who came to the Americas if they were going to use a language of today? Or my ancestors, the Vikings – is there hope for a nation? Do we rejoice when the enemy convert to Christ? Is their conversion causing us problems? Where are our “Ninevehs” today?

I sincerely believe that, at all levels, we need to use another approach, particularly when dealing with societies that may not be receptive to Western influence. Political and economic power may not work in those situations and strong entrepreneurial style may be confounded with Western business

enterprises. Perhaps the best way is to follow the example of our Master Jesus Christ of compassion, servanthood and sacrifice.

#### **4. Incarnation and Risk-taking applied to Global Mission Partnerships/Co-operation**

How can we apply these aspects of incarnation and sound and wise risk-taking in our relationships and partnerships North-South, East-West?

##### *A respectful dialogue*

Firstly I would say that we need to improve our dialogue, a respectful and open ongoing conversation between mission organisations and their leaders. This is valid for denominational leaders when working with fellow churches in other nations. And, of course, it is also crucial for interdenominational leaders in their attempt to build co-operative efforts around the world. Isolation, sentiments of self-sufficiency, ethnocentrism and “my-own-kingdom-building” are all hindrances to advance the Kingdom of God. There will always be some kind of competition, but that could be healthy and inspiring. (The apostle Paul was not a stranger to this aspect of competing, although he preferred to preach where other had not been before (Romans 15.20, 21).) Specialisation is another important aspect of mission today where we can both develop our own type of ministry and co-operate with others, contributing to the wholeness of the Gospel.

##### *Process more important the final product*

The challenge many times is to lose control. Both contextualisation and risk-taking means that we give up the control of things and depend very much on others, and on God. In this global dialogue, the processes are more important than the final product, because it is by working through the issues together that we learn something and not just emulate “canned” solutions. That could also mean that our dialogue should not be exclusively in English and could require of us all an extra effort to find a common language. It is no secret that we all feel more comfortable in our mother tongue and that it could be difficult to express deeper thoughts in a second or third language. But language is not the main barrier. Attitudes are far more important. More than we in the North can understand, other cultures communicate through non-verbal means. It took me some years to understand what people in Paraguay told me, not by words, but by the inclination of their heads. And you will find extremely smart ways of

communication in many of these cultures. In Brazil it depends very much on where you put your hands when you hug a person...

What I am trying to say is that true dialogue is constructed along the road, walking together, sharing concerns and ideas, not during a one hour meeting with pre-fabricated agenda. If we want to be real partners with the newer sending mission movements, we need to step down from our fast running cars, and walk on dusty roads with our local and national leaders.

***Global sharing of resources:***

Another important side of this attempt to co-operation is a global sharing of resources. Sometimes the discussion falls into the simplistic affirmation that the North has money and experience, and the South has people and enthusiasm. Even if there could be some truth in that, I think it is a kind of generalisation that does not help us much. There is money and experience in the Global South. India and Brazil have sent missionaries for more than hundred years. Our middle class Evangelicals in Latin America, South Africa, Ghana, Korea, Japan, Taiwan and Singapore have all the resources needed to support missionaries abroad. And I see a lot of young people in the Global North willing to serve as missionaries. In my mission in Sweden we have more candidates in the so called missionary pipeline than we can afford to send.

***Being humble in relation to co-operation***

Co-operation is probably not our strength, in spite of all theories and good ambitions to work together. The growing number of denominations and independent churches, mission organisations, training centres and other Christian institutions shows our inability to co-operate. The idea of a strong and successful leader is closely linked to his capacity to start his own ministry and make it bigger than others'. In many cultures this is just foolish and goes against basic virtues of solidarity, partnership and cooperativeness. We have this problem at all levels, from local churches, to national denominations and associations of mission organisations, to international networks and umbrella organisations. Our paraphernalia of organisations is really confusing for many of the new believers in the south, and a bad witness where other global religions dominate.

I think we need to recognise that co-operation is not an easy thing to do. It demands willingness to give up control and take the risk of not being in leadership. And that is true for both South and North.

### ***Statistics are important***

One of the arguments used by God to make Jonah understand why he saved, at least for another 100 years, the city of Nineveh was that there were 120,000 people there and many cattle as well (I don't think that Todd and Jason have included cattle in their statistics). It was important for Jonah to see each individual as precious to God and not just a grey mass of enemies. I am convinced that mapping the situation around the globe helps us to prioritise and to focus on the needed areas. The challenge is to really invest where the needs are and swim against the tide, having the courage to do differently and not just follow common trends and patterns.

## **Conclusion**

### ***Changing patterns in mission***

The growing economies of China, India, Brazil, Russia, South Africa, and perhaps some others is already changing the character and the reality of mission. What about the thousands of missionary candidates who are being trained in China? Although there is debate on how the training is being done, and a question on the level of professionalism that these "tent-makers" have, this is a missionary force to count on in a near future. India has already over 50,000 cross-cultural missionaries, 95% of them working in the Indian sub-continent. With a growing economy, we will see more of them in other parts of the world and not just with the diaspora groups. And the same for Brazil, with a growth of perhaps 10% of the missionary force every year.

I think I have identified some of the trends, using Jonah as the case study and the parable. Some of these are:

- Mission investment mainly in already Christian regions of the world and consequently the negligence in relation to the unreached areas;

- A tendency to run away from risky situations, with many good exceptions, of course;
- The strong influence of political, social, religious and economic realities in mission, sometimes favouring world evangelisation but most of the time creating barriers;
- The growing awareness of cultural issues and the need for contextualisation. And here we could talk about the 'inside movements', new church planting methods, ethnic churches in Europe, and local theologies;
- A disturbing reality of the world, a messiness that makes it impossible to generalise and to pre-view the future;
- A mission situation where God does not respect our paradigms and codes of good practice, but uses people in a many times surprising way (as He has always done)

#### Final questions:

- Where is our Nineveh today?
- How do we deal with suffering in mission? Do we have the courage to go to the front?
- How can we be both bold and courageous and at the same time wise in mission today?
- What is the sacrifice that we need to face and accept in order to really follow Jesus' example of identification, contextualisation and incarnation. Or as Paul puts it: "Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible... I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings. (1 Corinthians 9.19, 22,23)