



INFEMIT

# GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE



**Stott-Bediako Forum**

Transformation Revisited: Mission  
and Gospel Imagination

As part of this year's Stott-Bediako Forum, we invite you into a process of dialogue and reflection.

This guide is meant to be used in small groups, so you can gather with other forum attendees or use it with the people that you meet with regularly.

While it is not necessary that you be a forum participant to use this guide, we especially recommend it for those who will be joining us for the forum, so that you can begin to think about the forum topics, raise questions, locate your own experience, and learn from others. You may go through the sections one-by-one or pick-and-choose those that seem most interesting and generative for you.

We look forward to exploring together the theme, *Transformation Revisited: Mission and Gospel Imagination*.

**INFEMIT**



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

### **Seeds of Mission as Transformation**

*Theology Implications of Radical Discipleship* 3

### **What is Mission as Transformation?**

*Excerpt from "Mission as Transformation"* 7

### **The Latin American Legacy of Integral Mission**

*Integral Mission: A New Paradigm* 11

### **The Task of Imagination**

*Excerpt from The Prophetic Imagination* 15

### **Prophetic Imagination in Today's Global Context**

*A Call for Repentance: An Open Letter from Palestinian Christians to Western Church Leaders and Theologians* 18

### **Imagining INFEMIT's Future**

*A Call For Biblical Faithfulness Amid the New Fascism* 22  
*Voices from the Global Evangelical Community*

## Introduction

The 1974 Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization and the Covenant issued on that occasion have often been considered a major milestone for the understanding and practice of mission today, particularly among Evangelical churches around the world. However, it is less well known that during this gathering, a group of primarily Majority-World leaders met to issue another document, addressing their concerns over the bifurcation of the gospel, in which evangelism and social concern were treated as two separate and unequal aspects of the Church's witness. This document and the relationships that sprung among this group of leaders were the early seeds of the movement we now call "Mission as Transformation."



*We invite you to read their declaration, Theology Implications of Radical Discipleship, and as you do, ponder the following question:*

***How does this declaration, issued 50 years ago, strike you today?***



## THEOLOGY IMPLICATIONS OF RADICAL DISCIPLESHIP

1974 Lausanne Congress

A number of issues have thrust themselves upon us from papers delivered in this Congress and, from the subsequent wrestling with them under the authority of God's Word, a number of us have felt the compulsion of his Spirit to share this response.

*We affirm that...*

The *evangel* is God's Good News in Jesus Christ; it is Good News of the reign he proclaimed and embodies; of God's mission of love to restore the world to wholeness through the Cross of Christ and him along; of his victory over the demonic powers of destruction and **eath**; of his Lordship over the entire universe; it is Good News of a new creation of a new humanity, a new birth through him by his life-giving Spirit; of the gifts of the messianic reign contained in Jesus and mediated through him by his Spirit; of the charismatic community empowered to embody his reign of shalom here and now before the whole creation and make his Good News seen and known. It is Good News of liberation, of restoration, of wholeness, and of salvation that is personal, social, global, and cosmic. Jesus is Lord! Alleluia! Let the earth hear his voice!

The *communication of the evangel* in its fullness to every person worldwide is a mandate of the Lord Jesus to his community. There is no biblical dichotomy between the Word spoken and the Word made visible in the lives of God's people. Men will look as they listen and what they see must be at one with what they hear. The Christian community must chatter, discuss and proclaim the Gospel; it must express the Gospel in its life as the new society, in its sacrificial service of others as a genuine expression of God's love, in its

prophetic exposing and opposing of all demonic forces that deny the Lordship of Christ and keep men less than fully human; in its pursuit of real justice for all men; in its responsible and caring trusteeship of God's creation and its resources.

***There is no biblical dichotomy between the Word spoken and the Word made visible in the lives of God's people. Men will look as they listen and what they see must be at one with what they hear.***

There are times when our communication may be by attitude and action only, and times when the spoken Word will stand alone; but we must repudiate as demonic the attempt to drive a wedge between evangelism and social action.

*The response demanded by the evangel* is that men and women repent of their sin and every other lordship than that of Jesus Christ, and commit themselves to him to serve him in the world. Men are not already reconciled to God and simply awaiting the realization of it. Nor can biblical authority be found for the false hope of universalism; the reality of the eternal destruction of evil and all who cling to it must be solemnly affirmed, however humbly agnostic the Bible requires us to be about its nature.

Salvation is by God's grace on the sole ground of Christ's death and resurrection and is received by obedient faith.

Repentance is demanded; men must experience a change of understanding, attitude and orientation. But the new birth is not merely a subjective experience of forgiveness. It is a placement within the messianic community, God's new order which exists as a sign of God's reign to be consummated at the end of the age.

*Methods in evangelization* must center in Jesus Christ who took our humanity, our frailty, our death and gave himself in suffering servanthood for others. He sends his community into the world, as the Father sent him, to identify and agonize with men, to renounce status and demonic power, and to give itself in selfless service of others for God. Those who proclaim the Cross must be continually marked by the Cross. With unashamed commitment to Jesus Christ we must engage in the mutual listening of dialogue, the reward of which is understanding. We need to meet men on their own ground and be particularly attentive to the powerless. We must use the language, thought-forms and imagery appropriate to differing cultures. As Christians, we must live in such unity and love that men may believe. We must allow God to make visible in the new humanity the quality of life that reflects Christ and demonstrates his reign. We must respect cultural integrity while being free from all that denies or distorts the Lordship of Christ. God's Spirit overcomes all barriers of race, color and culture.

*Strategy for world evangelization* in our generation is with God, from whom we

eagerly anticipate the renewal of his community, equipping us with love and power so that the whole Christian community may make known the whole Gospel to the whole man throughout the whole world. We believe God to be calling us into greater unity and partnership throughout the earth to fulfill the commission of our Lord Jesus Christ.

***We must allow God to make visible in the new humanity the quality of life that reflects Christ and demonstrates his reign.***

*We confess that . . .*

We have been failing in our obedience to the Lordship of Christ and have been refusing to submit to his Word and be led by his Spirit.

We have failed to incarnate the Gospel and to come to men as servants for Christ's sake.

Our testimony has often been marred by triumphalism and arrogance, by lack of faith in God and by diminished love for his people.

We have often been in bondage to a particular culture and sought to spread it in the name of Jesus.

We have not been aware of when we have debased and distorted the Gospel by acceptance of a contrary value system.

We have been partisan in our condemnation of totalitarianism and violence and have failed to condemn societal and institutionalized sin, especially that of racism.

We have sometimes so identified ourselves with particular political systems that the Gospel has been compromised and the prophetic voice muted.

We have frequently denied the rights and neglected the cries of the underprivileged and those struggling for freedom and justice.

We have often separated Jesus Christ the Savior from Jesus Christ the Lord.

We have sometimes distorted the biblical understanding of man as a total being and have courted an unbiblical dualism.

We have insulated new Christians from life in the world and given simplistic responses to complex problems.

We have sometimes manipulated our message, used pressure techniques and been unduly pre-occupied with statistics.

We have allowed eagerness for qualitative growth to render us silent about the whole counsel of God. We have been usurping God's Holy Spirit of love and power.



*We rejoice...*

In our membership by his Spirit in the Body of Christ and in the joy and love he has given us in each other.

In the openness and honesty with which we have met each other and have experienced mutual acceptance and forgiveness.

In the possibilities for men to read his Word in their own language through indigenous translations.

In the stimulation of mind and challenge to action that has come to us from his Word as we have placed the needs of our generation under its judgment and light.

In the prophetic voices of our brothers and sisters in this Congress, with whom we go forth in humility and hope.

In the certainty that the kingdoms of this world shall become the Kingdom of our God and of his Christ. He shall reign forever.

Alleluia!

*We resolve...*

To submit ourselves afresh to the Word of God and to the leading of his Spirit, to pray and work together for the renewal of his community as the expression of his reign, to participate in God's mission to his world in our generation, showing forth Jesus as Lord and Savior, and calling on all men everywhere to repent, to submit to his Lordship, to know his salvation, to identify in him with the oppressed and work for the liberation of all men and women in his name.

*LET THE EARTH HEAR HIS VOICE!*



## **Questions for discussion groups:**

1. Which of the declaration's pronouncements feel relevant to you and your particular context?
2. What pronouncements are missing from this document that you would add if you were to rewrite it for today's context?
3. What other questions or concerns does this declaration raise for you?

## Introduction

As the paradigm of “Mission as Transformation” developed, various authors contributed to its articulation. In many ways, this articulation continues to today as its proponents engage with new and changing realities in our global context. Throughout the literature, you will see, as Ruth Padilla DeBorst states, that “Proponents of this approach understand that all followers of Jesus are sent into the world as he was, to embody and proclaim the good news of God’s reconciling presence and purpose for the entire creation. Reconciled relationships in the creation community are at the heart of transformation. And this transformation affects all dimensions of life, matters spiritual, social, political, economic, and ecological.”<sup>1</sup>



*Some of the movement’s earliest and most recognized authors are Vinay Samuel and Chris Sugden, the writers of Mission as Transformation: A Theology of the Whole Gospel. We invite you to read an excerpt from one of Vinay Samuel’s articles from 2002 that aims to explain in a succinct way some of the central ideas of this paradigm. The full article and other reference texts are available below if you’d like to keep exploring.*

***How do Samuel’s uses of “mission” and “transformation” differ from other uses you’ve encountered?***



# What is Mission as Transformation?

## EXCERPT FROM “MISSION AS TRANSFORMATION”<sup>2</sup>

Vinay Samuel

### **Mission – God’s grand picture**

Mission is God’s mission – ‘missio dei’. It is God’s intention or God’s purpose for the world. It is God’s plan and strategies for the world, and God’s action in the world. It is God and the world and it is a grand scheme. It is more than saying ‘what is God’s plan for my life?’. It is to ask ‘what’s the whole thing about?’ God told Jeremiah, who was just a young man (Jeremiah 1: 9–10) ‘. . . I have put my words in your mouth . . . put you over the nations and kingdoms. I will give you power to uproot and to tear down’. Incredible? What is God’s plan for the world? There’s nothing wrong in thinking big because that’s what God wants us to do and that is his purpose. That is the grand picture and mission is always the big picture first. God’s purposes are universal and he wants us to bridge the gap between our situation and his plan for the world.

### *Mission in history*

God works and reveals himself in human history. The Bible talks of how God worked with nations. When God showed himself, in miraculous acts on behalf of Israel or in punishing a nation, he was acting in history. That is how the

---

<sup>1</sup> Padilla DeBorst, Ruth. “An Integral Transformation Approach” in *The Mission of the Church: Five Views in Conversation*, edited by Craig Ott (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016).

<sup>2</sup> Samuel, Vinay. (2002). Mission as Transformation. *Transformation*, 19(4), 243–247. <https://doi.org/10.1177/026537880201900404>

prophets saw it. God intervened through the course of human history but never violated human freedom. History is governed neither by fate nor by chance but under God's providence. It moves forward. Mission is God's action in everyday life, individual and corporate.

### *Mission in creation*

God expresses himself through his creation. He created not just human beings but the whole creation. Not just to feel good but something that'll express himself, his character and personality, his love and joy and most of all to make known who he is. Therefore he continues to express himself in his creation and in its history. That's why it's a dynamic view of creation, not something static like a picture. God chooses us in this divine freedom to love this creation and work it, and fulfil God's purposes.

That is the large picture of mission. In the Old Testament we have God working with all the nations, taking one nation, using it as a symbol, as a sign of the way in which he expresses his character, his divinity, sovereignty, his power but the whole creation is his area of involvement. In the New Testament we have the narrative of God entering history through the incarnation. He shapes history by becoming part of it. And after his death and resurrection he sends his Spirit into history, everyday life to continue his purposes for his creation.

Looking at the larger picture of mission in both the New and the Old Testament we find

God working with all the nations where he expressed himself – his sovereignty and divinity. But, why incarnation? Why become like one of us, be pierced, bleed, suffer, hurt and cry? He identified with us. He does not stop there but sends the Holy Spirit to guide us in every decision we make. And that is his mission.

Our identity is shaped by the historical circumstances in which we experience our belief, in which God deals with us and relates to our belief, that's how reality is. Our problem as evangelical Christians – we are constantly separating belief from history, constantly separating truth from real living and history. As God works to push history to its completion even one individual coming to Christ is a significant historical action of God. God is working in history to move the whole nation to fulfil his purpose and that is the grand vision of God's mission. All this teaching is so that you know and you don't have to be bewildered by history. What a privilege! God's mission in the world, 'missio dei' motivates our involvement in the world. That is why I say mission is individuals coming to Christ, challenging corrupt and sinful systems, structures and cultures and enabling individuals and communities to experience God's transforming power.

***Mission is individuals coming to Christ, challenging corrupt and sinful systems, structures and cultures and enabling individuals and communities to experience God's transforming power.***





### **Transformation**

If that is mission, what is transformation? Is transformation a set of ideas or theories or a way of doing mission? Transformation means 'empowerment' – that's an idea. It means justice and freedom. That too is an idea. So we get a collection of ideas. But transformation means more than that. Sometimes it is a set of ideas used as a strategy especially by development agencies. It certainly is a narrative, 'that is what happened to that village, that's what happened to that community' – men women and children. There are many testimonies of transformation.

The best way to understand transformation is go back to the New Testament and find out how the Bible describes it. The focus of transformation in the New Testament is the person, Roman 8: 19,20,21. Creation is waiting to be transformed. Why? Transformation of creation is linked with the people of God. The Bible talks about human person's transformation. So who is this

human person who needs to be transformed and what is the biblical understanding of the human person? What is our doctrine of personhood? What does a person mean? Is a child a person? Understanding the biblical view of person is going back to the image of God (Genesis 1: 2&3). The heart of creation is human person.

The image of God has two dimensions – vertical and horizontal (Gen. 1-3). The vertical dimension is where God by his grace constitutes this person and gives that person the ability to relate to him. So a person is someone in relationship. The horizontal aspect has several dimensions – mutuality, interdependence and relating to others. Transformation has to do with experiencing Christ and lives being transformed. That's what happened to anyone who encountered Christ. There is a total reorientation of that individual and relationships, and reconstitution of his/her identity and the gift of looking at the world in an entirely new way.

Secondly, in this human person, it is not only reorientation but also empowerment. The call of Christ empowers us, orients us, reconstitutes us, recontextualizes us and sends us with a mission. Transformation has to do with character. One of the missing elements in secular development theory is the role of the development character. Very few people talk about development character among the poor. We have such romantic ideas about the poor. If you live with them you begin to realize that they know they need character as much as

anyone else, especially as their situation has distorted their potential to love, forgive and ability to cope with stress and sacrifice. They need their personhood to be restored, reconstituted through grace and through an engagement with them over a period of time, open them up to the vertical and the horizontal dimensions, enabling them to reorient all their relationships, to develop a character that copes with all of life.

*Transformation has to do with experiencing Christ and lives being transformed. That's what happened to anyone who encountered Christ. There is a total reorientation of that individual and relationships, and reconstitution of his/her identity and the gift of looking at the world in an entirely new way.*

## Questions for discussion groups:

1. "Mission" and "Transformation" are words that have each been used to mean many different things throughout history and in recent years. In your group, take turns sharing some of the common ideas and connotations that members have heard regarding these two words. You might want to take notes on a whiteboard.
2. Now, contrast these ideas and connotations with the paradigm of "Mission as Transformation." What are similarities and differences? You can refer to the text you read as well as other experiences you've had with this term. (Continue taking notes on the whiteboard if using).
3. This year, we are "revisiting" this paradigm, so what from Mission as Transformation do you still find particularly relevant or useful? What do you believe is worth challenging?



## Reference Texts

- Mission as Transformation by Vinay Samuel (full article)
  - Samuel, Vinay. (2002). Mission as Transformation. *Transformation*, 19(4), 243–247. <https://doi.org/10.1177/026537880201900404>
- An Integral Transformation Approach: Being, Doing, Saying by Ruth Padilla DeBorst
  - Padilla DeBorst, Ruth. "An Integral Transformation Approach" in *The Mission of the Church: Five Views in Conversation*, edited by Craig Ott (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016).
- After Wheaton '83: Structural and Theological Developments by Al Tizon
  - Tizon, Al. "After Wheaton '83: Structural and Theological Developments" in *Transformation after Lausanne: Radical Evangelical Mission in Global-Local Perspective*, by Al Tizon (Regnum Books, 2008).

## Introduction

At the same time (and even before) theologian-practitioners on a global scale were engaging around Mission as Transformation, a similar movement began specifically in Latin America, called "Integral Mission." Integral Mission and Mission as Transformation share a lot of the same commitments, having emerged in conversation with one another and in response to similar challenges being faced across the Majority World. Some people like René Padilla, author of [What is Integral Mission?](#), were intimately involved with both movements through the Latin American Theological Fellowship (FTL), at a regional level, and INFEMIT, at a global level. As we prepare for this forum in Latin America, it is essential to engage with Integral Mission as a movement aligned with Mission as Transformation that is particularly rooted in this region.



*The following excerpt from **What is Integral Mission?** highlights four aspects of Integral Mission that resolve major issues presented by the traditional missions movement, which has often equated the mission of the Church with transcultural mission.*

***How might Integral Mission challenge you or the church with which you serve?***



## INTEGRAL MISSION: A NEW PARADIGM<sup>3</sup>

Rene Padilla

From the perspective of integral mission, transcultural mission does not exhaust the meaning of the mission of the church; far from it. Mission may or may not include a crossing of geographical frontiers but in every case, it means primarily a crossing of the frontier between faith and no faith, whether in one's own country (at home) or in a foreign country (on the mission field), based on Jesus Christ's testimony as Lord of the whole of life and of the whole creation. Every generation of Christians in every place receives the power of the Spirit that makes possible being witness to the Gospel 'in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth' (Acts 1:8). In other words, every church, wherever it may be, is called to share in God's mission – a mission that is local, regional and worldwide in scope – beginning in its own Jerusalem. In order to cross the frontier between faith and no faith, crossing geographical boundaries is not indispensable; the geographical factor is secondary. Commitment to mission is the very essence of being the church. Therefore, the church that is not committed to the mission of witnessing to Jesus Christ, and thus to crossing the frontier between faith and no faith, is no longer the church but becomes a religious club, simply a group of friends, or a social welfare agency.

When the church is committed to integral mission and to communicating the Gospel through everything it is, does and

---

<sup>3</sup> Padilla, René. "Integral Mission: A New Paradigm" in *What is Integral Mission?*, by René Padilla (Regnum Books, 2021).

and says, it understands that its goal is not to become numerically large; or materially rich; or politically powerful. Its purpose is to incarnate the values of the Kingdom of God and bear witness to the love and the justice revealed in Jesus Christ, by the power of the Spirit, for the transformation of human life in all its dimensions, on a personal and community level.

Fulfilling this purpose presupposes that all members of the church, without exception, by the very fact of having become a part of the body of Christ, receive gifts and ministries for the exercise of their priesthood, to which they have been ordained through their baptism. Mission is not the responsibility and privilege of a small group of the faithful who feel called to the mission field (usually in a foreign country), but of all members, since all are members of the royal priesthood and as such, have been called by God 'that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light' (1 Peter 2:9) wherever they may be. As Brian D. McLaren aptly states, 'To Christ, his called ones (which is what the Greek term for church really means) will also be his sent ones [or missionaries]... In this line of thinking about the church, we don't recruit people to be customers of our products or consumers of our religious programs; we recruit them to be colleagues in our mission. The church does not exist in order to satisfy the consumer demands of believers; the church exists to equip and mobilise men and women for God's mission in the world.'

***[The church's] purpose is to incarnate the values of the Kingdom of God and bear witness to the love and the justice revealed in Jesus Christ, by the power of the Spirit, for the transformation of human life in all its dimensions, on a personal and community level.***

According to this view, what is the role of the local church in mission? We have already expressed the answer in McLaren's words: 'to equip and mobilise men and women for God's mission in the world' – not exclusively in the temple, which may or may not exist, but in all fields of human life: at home, in one's business, at the hospital, at university, in the office, in the workshop... basically everywhere, since there is no place that is not within the orbit of the lordship of Jesus Christ.

Understood in these terms, this new paradigm for mission is not so new; rather, it is the recovery of the biblical concept of mission since, in effect, mission is faithful to the teaching of Scripture to the extent that it is placed at the service of the Kingdom of God and his justice. Consequently, it focuses on crossing the frontier between faith and no faith not only in geographical terms, but in cultural, ethnic, social, economic and political terms for the purpose of transforming life in all its dimensions, according to God's plan, so that all people and human communities may experience the abundant life that Christ offers them.

As such, integral mission resolves the dichotomies mentioned above in the following ways:

***[Integral Mission] focuses on crossing the frontier between faith and no faith not only in geographical terms, but in cultural, ethnic, social, economic and political terms for the purpose of transforming life in all its dimensions, according to God's plan, so that all people and human communities may experience the abundant life that Christ offers them.***

**1** In theory, all churches send and all churches receive. In other words, all churches have something to teach and something to learn from other churches. The road mission follows is not a one-way street – it does not just go from Christian countries to pagan countries – it is a two-way street. A clear testimony of this is the missionary movement from the countries in the South, which are sending a growing number of cross-cultural missionaries, even to countries in the North.

**2** The whole world is a mission field and every human need is an opportunity for missionary service. The local church is called to demonstrate the reality of the Kingdom of God among the kingdoms of this world, not only by what it says, but also by what it is and by what it does in response to the human needs on every side.

Francis of Assisi was right when, as he sent his followers out to proclaim the Gospel, he exhorted them to proclaim it by every means at their disposal and, if necessary, to use words. The proclamation of the Gospel includes everything we do moved by the Spirit of Jesus who, 'when he saw the crowds, had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd' (Matthew 9:36).

**3** Every Christian is called to follow Jesus Christ and to commit to God's mission in the world. The benefits of salvation are inseparable from a missionary lifestyle and among other things this implies the practice of the universal priesthood of believers in all spheres of human life, according to the gifts and ministries that the Spirit of God has freely bestowed on his people. It is the responsibility of pastors and teachers 'to equip his people for works of service [diakonia] so that the body of Christ may be built up' (Ephesians 4:12).

**4** The Christian life in all its dimensions, on a personal and community level, is primary witness to the universal lordship of Jesus Christ, and the transforming power of the Holy Spirit. Mission is much more than words: it is about quality of life – it is demonstrated in the life that recovers God's original purpose for the relationship of man with his Creator, with his neighbour, and with all of creation.

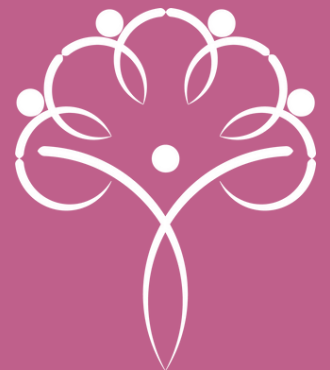
In conclusion, integral mission is the means designed by God to carry out his purpose of love and justice revealed in Jesus Christ, within history, through the church and in the power of the Spirit.

*Mission is much more than words: it is about quality of life – it is demonstrated in the life that recovers God’s original purpose for the relationship of man with his Creator, with his neighbour, and with all of creation.*



## Questions for discussion groups:

1. Reflecting on this quote, “The local church is called to demonstrate the reality of the Kingdom of God among the kingdoms of this world, not only by what it says, but also by what it is and by what it does in response to the human needs on every side,” what are the particular needs of your community, nation, or region, to which the Church must respond?
2. What are examples of this kind of mission paradigm being embraced and lived out in the world today?
3. What questions or concerns do the paradigms of Integral Mission and Mission as Transformation raise for you?



## Introduction

Now, we turn to the Church's task of imagination. How can she respond creatively and redemptively to the needs of the world today? Proponents of Mission as Transformation have always insisted that a fuller understanding of the mission of the Church will lead her to tangible acts rooted in context and that her vision of the Kingdom of God will allow her to offer a prophetic alternative to the current state of things in society. Walter Brueggemann offers a helpful orientation to this task through his work *The Prophetic Imagination*.



*This Stott-Bediako Forum approaches the topic: **Transformation Revisited: Mission and Gospel Imagination**, so some questions to ponder as you prepare to engage might be: How can we effectively root our imagination in the Gospel? What issues demand an imaginative engagement in our communities, societies, and world today? Where is our imagination calling us to make significant or meaningful shifts from the witness of the Church in the past? Where and among whom are prophetic imaginations emerging today?*

# The Task of Imagination

## EXCERPT FROM *THE PROPHETIC IMAGINATION*<sup>4</sup>

Walter Brueggemann

The hypothesis I will explore here is this: *The task of prophetic ministry is to nurture, nourish, and evoke a consciousness and perception alternative to the consciousness and perception of the dominant culture around us.\** Thus I suggest that prophetic ministry has to do not primarily with addressing specific public crises but with addressing, in season and out of season, the dominant crisis that is enduring and resilient, of having our alternative vocation co-opted and domesticated. It may be, of course, that this enduring crisis manifests itself in any given time around concrete issues, but it concerns the enduring crisis that runs from concrete issue to concrete issue. That point is particularly important to ad hoc liberals who run from issue to issue without discerning the enduring domestication of vision in all of them.

*Prophetic ministry has to do not primarily with addressing specific public crises but with addressing, in season and out of season, the dominant crisis that is enduring and resilient, of having our alternative vocation co-opted and domesticated.*

<sup>4</sup> Brueggemann, Walter. 2018. *The Prophetic Imagination*. Pages 3-4. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt22nmcmx>.



The alternative consciousness to be nurtured, on the one hand, serves to *criticize* in dismantling the dominant consciousness. To that extent, it attempts to do what the liberal tendency has done: engage in a rejection and delegitimizing of the present ordering of things. On the other hand, that alternative consciousness to be nurtured serves to energize persons and communities by its promise of another time and situation toward which the community of faith may move. To that extent, it attempts to do what the conservative tendency has done, to live in fervent anticipation of the newness that God has promised and will surely give.

In thinking this way, the key word is *alternative*, and every prophetic minister and prophetic community must engage in a struggle with that notion. Thus, alternative to what? In what ways alternative? How radically alternative? Finally, is there a thinkable alternative that will avoid domestication? And, quite concretely, how does one present and act out alternatives in

a community of faith which on the whole does not understand that there are any alternatives or is not prepared to embrace such if they come along? Thus, it is a practice of ministry for which there is little readiness; indeed, not even among its would-be practitioners. So my programmatic urging is that every act of a minister who would be prophetic is part of a way of evoking, forming, and reforming an alternative community. And this applies to every facet and every practice of ministry. It is a measure of our enculturation that the various acts of ministry (for example, counseling, administration, even liturgy) have taken on lives and functions of their own rather than being seen as elements of the one prophetic ministry of formation and reformation of alternative community.

***My programmatic urging is that every act of a minister who would be prophetic is part of a way of evoking, forming, and reforming an alternative community.***

The functional qualifiers, *critical* and *energizing*, are important. I suggest that the dominant culture, now and in every time, is grossly uncritical, cannot tolerate serious and fundamental criticism, and will go to great lengths to stop it. Conversely, the dominant culture is a wearied culture, nearly unable to be seriously energized to new promises from God. We know, of course, that none of us relishes criticism, but we may also recognize that none of us much relishes energizing either, for that would demand



something of us. The task of prophetic ministry is to hold together criticism and energizing, for I should urge that either by itself is not faithful to our best tradition. Our faith tradition understands that it is precisely the dialectic of criticizing and energizing that can let us be seriously faithful to God. And we may even suggest that to choose between criticizing and energizing is the temptation, respectively, of liberalism and conservatism. Liberals are good at criticism but often have no word of promise to speak; conservatives tend to future well and invite to alternative visions, but a germane criticism by the prophet is often not forthcoming. For those of us personally charged with this ministry, we may observe that to be called where this dialectic is maintained is an awesome call. And each of us is likely to fall to one side or the other.



## Questions for discussion groups:

1. Reflecting on your own life and the faith community around you, do you feel like you fall more toward one side of the dialectic between criticizing and energizing? If so, why? How do you feel about embracing and moving closer to the other qualifier in this dialectic?
2. What historical or present movements among followers of Christ provide helpful examples of a prophetic imagination that both criticizes the dominant consciousness and energizes a new way of being? Share these with one another.
3. Identify a gap in your society today that is in need of a prophetic imagination. What might it look like for the Church to offer both a critique and an alternative to this present reality?



## Introduction

When we consider contemporary realities that are in urgent need of prophetic imagination, one of the first that inevitably comes to mind is the war in the land of Palestine-Israel. In our reflection and conversations this year, we cannot neglect this reality that has devastated so many people. Christian brothers and sisters in Palestine participated in a prophetic exercise late last year when they issued [A Call for Repentance: An Open Letter from Palestinian Christians to Western Church Leaders and Theologians](#). Their critique of the Western Church and their invitation to participate in the creative construction of nonviolent resistance demand our attention as followers of Christ enmeshed in a global system in which our actions and words have ramifications far beyond our neighborhoods. We invite you to engage with their statement as you ponder what prophetic imagination can look like in today's global context.



***How can the global Church engage in prophetic imagination for an increasingly interconnected world?***

# Prophetic Imagination in Today's Global Context

## A CALL FOR REPENTANCE: AN OPEN LETTER FROM PALESTINIAN CHRISTIANS TO WESTERN CHURCH LEADERS AND THEOLOGIANS

“Learn to do right; seek justice; defend the oppressed” (Isa 1:17).

We, at the undersigned Palestinian Christian institutions and grassroots movements, grieve and lament the renewed cycle of violence in our land. As we were about to publish this open letter, some of us lost dear friends and family members in the atrocious Israeli bombardment of innocent civilians on October 19, 2023, Christians included, who were taking refuge in the historical Greek Orthodox Church of Saint Porphyrius in Gaza. Words fail to express our shock and horror with regard to the on-going war in our land. We deeply mourn the death and suffering of all people because it is our firm conviction that all humans are made in God's image. We are also profoundly troubled when the name of God is invoked to promote violence and religious national ideologies.

Further, we watch with horror the way many western Christians are offering unwavering support to Israel's war against the people of Palestine. While we recognize the numerous voices that have spoken and continue to speak for the cause of truth and justice in our land, we write to challenge western theologians and church leaders who have voiced uncritical support for Israel and to call them to repent and change. Sadly, the actions and double standards of some Christian leaders have gravely hurt their Christian witness and have severely distorted their moral judgment with regards to the situation in our land.

We come alongside fellow Christians in condemning all attacks on civilians, especially defenseless families and children. Yet, we are disturbed by the silence of many church leaders and theologians when it is Palestinian civilians who are killed. We are also horrified by the refusal of some western Christians to condemn the ongoing Israeli occupation of Palestine, and, in some instances, their justification of and support for the occupation. Further, we are appalled by how some Christians have legitimized Israel's ongoing indiscriminate attacks on Gaza, which have, so far, claimed the lives of more than 3,700 Palestinians, the majority of whom are women and children. These attacks have resulted in the wholesale destruction of entire neighborhoods and the forced displacement of over one million Palestinians. The Israeli military has utilized tactics that target civilians such as the use of white phosphorus, the cutting off of water, fuel, and electricity, and the bombardment of schools, hospitals, and places of worship—including the heinous massacre at Al-Ahli Anglican-Baptist Hospital and the bombardment of the Greek Orthodox Church of Saint Porphyrius which wiped out entire Palestinian Christian families.

Moreover, we categorically reject the myopic and distorted Christian responses that ignore the wider context and the root causes of this war: Israel's systemic oppression of the Palestinians over the last 75 years since the Nakba, the ongoing ethnic cleansing of Palestine, and the oppressive and racist military occupation

that constitutes the crime of apartheid. This is precisely the horrific context of oppression that many western Christian theologians and leaders have persistently ignored, and even worse, have occasionally legitimized using a wide range of Zionist theologies and interpretations. Moreover, Israel's cruel blockade of Gaza for the last 17 years has turned the 365-square-kilometer Strip into an open-air prison for more than two million Palestinians—70% of whom belong to families displaced during the Nakba—who are denied their basic human rights. The brutal and hopeless living conditions in Gaza under Israel's iron fist have regrettably emboldened extreme voices of some Palestinian groups to resort to militancy and violence as a response to oppression and despair. Sadly, Palestinian non-violent resistance, which we remain wholeheartedly committed to, is met with rejection, with some western Christian leaders even prohibiting the discussion of Israeli apartheid as reported by Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, and B'Tselem, and as long asserted by both Palestinians and South Africans.



Time and again, we are reminded that western attitudes towards Palestine–Israel suffer from a glaring double standard that humanizes Israeli Jews while insisting on dehumanizing Palestinians and whitewashing their suffering. This is evident in general attitudes towards the recent Israeli attack on the Gaza Strip that killed thousands of Palestinians, the apathy towards the murder of the Palestinian–American Christian journalist Shireen Abu Akleh in 2022, and the killing of more than 300 Palestinians including 38 children in the West Bank this year before this recent escalation.

It seems to us that this double standard reflects an entrenched colonial discourse that has weaponized the Bible to justify the ethnic cleansing of indigenous peoples in the Americas, Oceania, and elsewhere, the slavery of Africans and the transatlantic slave trade, and decades of apartheid in South Africa. Colonial theologies are not passé; they continue in wide-ranging Zionist theologies and interpretations that have legitimized the ethnic cleansing of Palestine and the vilification and dehumanization of



Palestinians—Christians included—living under systemic settler–colonial apartheid. Further, we are aware of the western Christian legacy of Just War Theory that was used to justify dropping atomic bombs over innocent civilians in Japan during World War II, the destruction of Iraq and the decimation of its Christian population during the latest American war on Iraq, as well as the unwavering and uncritical support for Israel against the Palestinians in the name of moral-supremacy and “self-defense.” Regrettably, many western Christians across wide denominational and theological spectra adopt Zionist theologies and interpretations that justify war, making them complicit in Israel’s violence and oppression. Some are also complicit in the rise of the anti-Palestinian hate speech, which we are witnessing in numerous western countries and media outlets today.

Although many Christians in the West do not have a problem with the theological legitimization of war, the vast majority of Palestinian Christians do not condone violence—not even by the powerless and occupied. Instead, Palestinian Christians are fully committed to the way of Jesus in creative nonviolent resistance (Kairos Palestine, §4.2.3), which uses “the logic of love and draw[s] on all energies to make peace” (§4.2.5). Crucially, we reject all theologies and interpretations that legitimize the wars of the powerful. We strongly urge western Christians to come alongside us in this. We also remind ourselves and fellow Christians that God is the God of the downtrodden and the oppressed,

and that Jesus rebuked the powerful and lifted up the marginalized. This is at the heart of God's conception of justice. Therefore, we are deeply troubled by the failure of some western Christian leaders and theologians to acknowledge the biblical tradition of justice and mercy, as first proclaimed by Moses (Deut 10:18; 16:18–20; 32:4) and the prophets (Isa 1:17; 61:8; Mic 2:1–3, 6:8; Amos 5:10–24), and as exemplified and embodied in Christ (Matt 25:34–46; Luke 1:51–53; 4:16–21).

Finally, and we say it with a broken heart, we hold western church leaders and theologians who rally behind Israel's wars accountable for their theological and political complicity in the Israeli crimes against the Palestinians, which have been committed over the last 75 years. We call upon them to reexamine their positions and to change their direction, remembering that God "will judge the world in justice" (Acts 17:31). We also remind ourselves and our Palestinian people that our *sumud* ("steadfastness") is anchored in our just cause and our historical rootedness in this land. As Palestinian Christians, we also

continue to find our courage and consolation in the God who dwells with those of a contrite and humble spirit (Isa 57:15). We find courage in the solidarity we receive from the crucified Christ, and we find hope in the empty tomb. We are also encouraged and empowered by the costly solidarity and support of many churches and grassroots faith movements around the world, challenging the dominance of ideologies of power and supremacy. We refuse to give in, even when our siblings abandon us. We are steadfast in our hope, resilient in our witness, and continue to be committed to the Gospel of faith, hope, and love, in the face of tyranny and darkness. "In the absence of all hope, we cry out our cry of hope. We believe in God, good and just. We believe that God's goodness will finally triumph over the evil of hate and of death that still persist in our land. We will see here 'a new land' and 'a new human being', capable of rising up in the spirit to love each one of his or her brothers and sisters" (Kairos Palestine, §10).

Your Kingdom come!

## Questions for discussion groups:



1. What parts of the critique offered by this Call resonate with or convict you?
2. In what ways does this call energize you? Are there creative and transformative actions that come to mind that you/your community might participate in to offer an alternative to the current state of things?
3. Palestine is just one poignant example of how what we do or neglect to do can affect realities on the other side of the world. If the Church is to offer a prophetic alternative to injustice and oppression worldwide, what other "calls" must we issue? If there is time, choose one issue that you've identified and work on crafting a call together. If you do this, please send it to us at [admin@infemit.org](mailto:admin@infemit.org)!

## Introduction

The International Fellowship for Mission as Transformation – INFEMIT is “primarily a community, a global fellowship. We care for one another and champion diverse voices in the global church. We are united by 1) our passion for contextual theologies that emerge from and transform every area of life; 2) our love for the gospel, gratitude for those who came before us, and excitement for those who will follow; 3) our agitation against a shallow gospel and theologies that colonize, restrict, and exclude; and 4) our joy in learning and growing together as a lifelong process” (quote from our website).

While we embrace this unity, we also value the great amount of diversity among those who engage with us, both demographically (reflected in the age, geographical, and gender diversity among us) and in our ideas and approach to the work of mission as transformation (we welcome, scholars, practitioners, and artists; we embrace constructive dialogue and disagreement).



*In this group discussion, we invite you to consider INFEMIT itself as a movement and how it has lived out its commitment to Mission as Transformation. We offer one example of a moment in which this required Gospel Imagination: the issuing of the Call for Biblical Faithfulness Amid the New Fascism upon the inauguration of Donald Trump to the U.S. presidency in 2017. While this statement was written now several years ago, we lament that it has continued to be extremely relevant to our global context.*

***How does this call hold up in light of Walter Brueggemann’s definition as an exercise in prophetic imagination?***



## A CALL FOR BIBLICAL FAITHFULNESS AMID THE NEW FASCISM VOICES FROM THE GLOBAL EVANGELICAL COMMUNITY

A new form of dangerous political leadership is emerging in different parts of the world. Although this is not the first, and likely not the last time, the threat today of what can be called the new fascism is real. As an ideology characterized by fundamentalist, militant, nationalistic, and racist policies, fascism threatens especially the “other,” be it the poor, the oppressed, or the disenfranchised—people for whom God has a special concern.

As members of the global evangelical community, we, the undersigned, feel compelled by the Spirit to call the church worldwide, first and foremost ourselves, to hear the clarion call of the Gospel to radical biblical faithfulness amid the new fascism and to renew its commitment to live out the peace, justice, and hope of the kingdom of God in Jesus Christ.

*[We] call the church worldwide... to renew its commitment to live out the peace, justice, and hope of the kingdom of God in Jesus Christ*

Though we witness this form of dangerous political leadership emerging in other parts of the world, we are issuing this statement around the inauguration of Donald J. Trump as the 45th President of the United States, because of that nation's global influence. We are keenly aware of the anxiety and fear being caused around the world by the actions, stated positions, and inflammatory foreign policy remarks of the President-elect.

As followers of Jesus, we also feel compelled to issue this call because we find it disturbing that many self-identified evangelicals in their respective countries contributed in no small part to the new fascism by the way they voted in a number of recent referenda (e.g. Colombia, United Kingdom) and national elections (e.g. Philippines, United States). In the case of the U.S., we mourn the reduction of the gospel that resulted in single-issue voting, even as we acknowledge the complexity of the political process and the agony of many over the options available. It is true that for many evangelicals, their vote was more against the other candidates than it was for the one they elected. Nonetheless, we grieve the part that evangelicals played in electing a person whose character, values, and actions are antithetical to the Gospel. Furthermore, we find it inadmissible that some high profile

evangelical leaders have hailed the President-elect as a Christian and a prophet. It does not surprise us that many people, especially from the younger generation, are abandoning the evangelical world altogether.

As representative members of the global evangelical community, we stand with all who oppose violence, racism, misogyny, and religious, sexual and political discrimination by resisting the leadership of a person whose life, deeds and words have normalized and even glorified these postures. Our voices represent solidarity with them both in their grief over the results of the elections and in their resolve to speak to power in word and deed in these troubling times.

As a challenge to the new fascism, we call the whole church to biblical faithfulness in:

- the merciful and just treatment of immigrants, refugees, strangers, and racial and religious minorities;
- the rejection of all sorts of objectification of women and commercialization of sex;
- the responsible and just regard for the care of God's creation, including taking seriously the reality and dangers of climate change;
- the commitment to world peace in the face of the war industry, military rhetoric and action;
- the courageous and self-sacrificing pursuit of the welfare of the poor, marginalized, people with disabilities, and other vulnerable groups, including children and youth.

Finally, we call to account the incoming U.S. President and his administration in the power of the Gospel, warning them that God holds each nation, each leader, and each individual responsible for how they act on behalf of the poor and the oppressed. And we encourage all God's people to pray for the United States and its leaders, for the sake of the welfare not only of the U.S. citizens but of all people around the world.



## Questions for discussion groups:

In a way, the call to “Revisit” our paradigms through this year’s Stott-Bediako Forum is an invitation to review INFEMIT’s own history and its future in light of the present context. As participants in our community and, therefore, stakeholders, we invite you to discuss the following questions with the intention of continuing this exercise together after the forum. Whether you are someone with a long history with INFEMIT or are entirely new to our community, your observations and feedback are welcome! You may also find it helpful to take a look at some of the reference texts below as you discuss.

1. From what you are aware of, what is something in INFEMIT’s history that you celebrate and something that you would wish to challenge?
2. What is something in your experience with the INFEMIT community that you celebrate and something that you would wish to change?
3. What do you believe should be the role of INFEMIT in the future of global mission?

## Reference Texts

- [Welcome to INFEMIT](#)
- [Vision and Mission](#)
- [History](#)

