Editorial

Powers, Inequalities, and Vulnerabilities: Mission in a Wounded World

Special Issue for IAMS 50th Anniversary and the 15th IAMS General Assembly

In 2022, the International Association for Mission Studies (IAMS) celebrates the 50th anniversary of its founding in 1972. It will have the occasion to celebrate this anniversary when it gathers for the 15th General Assembly in Sydney, Australia from July 7th–11th, 2022. This is the first time the Assembly takes place in Oceania as it will meet at Morling College in greater Sydney where it will be hosted by the Australian Association for Mission Studies. As the Assembly will take place amid the extraordinary circumstances of the COVID pandemic and the Russian invasion and war in Ukraine, at a time when restrictions are imposed on gatherings and travel is more difficult and expensive, in-person participation by missiologists and missionary-practitioners from all continents will be more limited and therefore the conference will take place in hybrid format.

The IAMS Academic Committee chose the theme of “Powers, Inequalities, and Vulnerabilities: Mission in a Wounded World” for this Assembly, seeking to name and explore the perception that missionary activity is now and has always been undertaken in a world constituted by wounds in many forms. At the same time, the events since the beginning of the pandemic in early 2020 and the invasion of Ukraine by Russia in February 2022, in a most vivid, and sometimes painful way, show what powers, inequalities, and vulnerabilities truly mean in our contemporary world. The assembly would like to consider Christian mission as addressing powers, inequalities, and vulnerabilities from a variety of perspectives across the spectrum of mission studies and mission practice.
As we engage with these challenges throughout the conference and in the keynotes, the IAMSCall-for-Papers-Sydney-2022 has offered us a preliminary understanding of these. Power is a constitutive aspect of Christian mission, an inescapable context in which it is pursued. Powers, understood collectively, name such realities, as well as the ways that life-enhancing and life-diminishing structures can take a social and cumulative quality. Of course, those powers are understood differently depending on one’s theological assumptions – that is, as spiritual or material, political or economic, human or non-human, individual or collective. Most Christians understand Christ as one who wielded power, gave up power, and confronted power, though in surprising and counter-intuitive ways.

Inequality has always shaped Christian mission. In the first place, one meaning of mission has always been to bring the Gospel to those who do not know it – who thus are unequal compared to those who bear the Good News. Aware of this longstanding notion, we also acknowledge other inequalities that have shaped Christian mission – contexts of inequality in which mission has proceeded, that have shaped mission, been exploited by missionaries, and to which Christian mission has responded. These include inequalities based on gender and race shaping historical processes such as colonial and imperial domination, economic exploitation, corrosive corruption, lack of access to health care, education or security, as well as numerous discriminations based on a variety of other social distinctions – for example, ecological circumstances, culture, language, social class, sexuality, geographic location, ethnicity, age, physical or other disability. Christians acknowledge that Christ was born into a world shaped by inequalities and that he responded to them with compassion and, at times, prophetic denunciation.

Vulnerability is a human constant, shaping every human life. Yet vulnerability is also distributed differently across the wide range of human groups, part of ever-present inequalities in power experienced by human beings. Self-critical practitioners of Christian mission embrace their own vulnerabilities as they share the missio Dei. They also seek to mitigate the vulnerabilities that render so many human lives precarious. In addition, mission has, at times, exploited and increased the vulnerabilities of people, often in situations where power is unequally distributed.

In order to allow for a more intense celebration of this 50th IAMSm anniversary by all our IAMSmembers and all others interested in or receiving Mission Studies, whether attending the conference physically or only remotely, we want to provide you in this issue with fuller access to the presentations at the conference. In its first part, this special issue publishes the four keynote lectures...
of the Assembly in advance of the conference, allowing for prior and parallel reading during the convention.

Paul Kollman’s inaugural address reflects on the need for urgent missiological discernment in a wounded world. After reflecting on wounds and woundedness in Christian mission, he develops a framework for “prioritizing mission” amid the urgent demands of a wounded world shaped by powers, inequalities, and vulnerabilities. Borrowing the medical terms triage, diagnosis, therapy, and prophylaxis, he sketches areas of missiological priority: rampant religious disaffiliation among onetime Christians, as well as intra-Christian polarization and divisions, and proposes that these are particularly urgent issues for missional engagement and contemporary mission studies.

Emmanuel Katongole’s contribution brings us into Christianity’s reality in the global south where poverty, climate change, ecological degradation, and marginalization are the daily, lived experience of the majority of the world’s population. In search of a model for doing mission and theology in such contexts, he presents a case study of the Bethany Land Institute in Uganda which has been inspired by Pope Francis’ encyclical Laudato Si’, and he proposes integral ecology as a lens for missiological reflection and practice in an era marked by World Christianity and global ecological crisis. Jooseop Keum focuses on putting justice, equality, and liberation at the heart of Christian mission as a way of transforming discipleship in a pandemic-stricken world. He claims that resources for this can be found in the biblical concept of shalom and the Korean concept of sangsaeng, which are both relevant missional concepts that enable us to respond to the current challenges caused by the global pandemic. In her keynote, Rosalee Velloso Ewell, examines the missionary calling and character of the people of God through the themes of discipleship, suffering, and identity. To be a disciple means to submit to a kingdom and a way of life that challenge the powers of this world and nationalistic understandings of identity. Discipleship also implies that following Christ entails bearing the wounds of a broken world as a testimony to the work of Christ.

Apart from the conference, the celebration of the 50th anniversary of IAMS has provided an opportunity to invite fresh contributions which revisit long-standing themes and address novel fields, from across the spectrum of our scholarly engagement with mission studies and its related fields, intercultural theology and interreligious studies. The second part of this issue, therefore, adds two samples of our members’ wider scholarly pursuits within the context of this celebration. Rolf Kjøde’s article revisits a long-standing theme in missiology, namely missio Dei, which has become a common and valued expression in most wings of the church over these past five decades. Raising
the issue of the extent to which we mean the same thing when we use this term, he explores the understanding of the concept *missio Dei* in contemporary conciliar and evangelical contexts. David Emmanuel Singh, on the other hand, engages in the fairly novel field of interfaith studies and explores the Scottish missionary John Nicol Farquhar’s relatively unknown writings on Islam which offer an approach to Islam differing from how Farquhar otherwise conceptualizes religious traditions in their Christ-ward journey. He asserts that for Farquhar, Islam stands alongside Christianity as an ally, as a catalyst of reform in religions, and as such, Islam is not just an object of Christ-ward transformation.

Finally, given the evil destruction, cruelty, and inhumanity the world is currently witnessing in Putin’s and Russia’s disastrous war in Ukraine, we are republishing here, in lieu of an editorial statement, a historic document drafted by Orthodox theologians from across the Orthodox churches. The “Declaration on the ‘Russian World’ (*Russkii Mir*) teaching” critically denounces the complicity of the hierarchy of the Russian Orthodox Church in one of the war’s ideological foundations. It is a document of urgent missiological discernment in the face of an evil and diabolic war, and it resonates strongly with the themes of the convention in Sydney.

In conclusion, on the occasion of IAMS 50th anniversary, the upcoming 15th Assembly of IAMS wants to present and discuss new perspectives on Christian mission in the context of a wounded world. Pressing global and regional concerns reflect such wounds, including those linked to the cruelty of war, the forced dislocation of populations, discrimination toward migrants, increasing economic inequality, rising nationalisms, vulnerability to the spread of diseases on a global scale, and the challenges of climate change. It is our hope that such new insights on issues linked to mission, and reflective of a world shaped by power, inequality, and vulnerability, will emerge from theological or from any other disciplinary perspectives, mindful of the interdisciplinary nature of mission studies today.

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