'DISTURBANCE' AS A NEW PARADIGM FOR MISSION: A CRITICAL ASSESSMENT OF THE GLOBAL CONSULTATION OF THE WORLD EVANGELICAL ALLIANCE

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Introduction

Given the chaotic, messy and unpredictable realities of the world we are confronted with on a daily basis, a reflection of these circumstances and their implication for mission is much needed. The 12th Global Consultation of the Mission Committee of the World Evangelical Alliance chose therefore to reflect upon these realities and chose as its theme for their consultation "God's disturbing mission."[1] A bold choice, given the negative association of the word disturbance and its usage in connection both with "God" and "mission". This conference, which hosted 200 people from over 40 countries, signifies a growing awareness among evangelical leaders of the changing contexts in which mission is carried out. Given the profound implications these new considerations might have for both mission theology and mission praxis, this article calls for a theological engagement of the topic of disturbance.

The article will, after exploring the meaning of disturbance as it was defined during the conference, elaborate upon what I have labeled 'the hermeneutic of disturbance', i.e. disturbance as a hermeneutical tool for interpreting God's actions in the world. Finally, it brings in the topic of eschatology, a defining theological locus which was nevertheless surprisingly absent from the conference. In concluding, a modest attempt is made to describe a way forward, trying to find a

[1] The original conference website has already been removed. See for a short overview of the conference: http://www.worldevangelicals.org/commissions/list/?com=mc (accessed September 11, 2012).

position which avoids both an extreme glorification of disturbance and a naive 'business-as-usual' approach to mission.

Disturbance Explained

According to the programme narrative of the conference, disturbance has to be thought in connection with the following circumstances: "New mission senders pursue fruitfulness from and into contexts characterized by religious confrontation, political uncertainty, economic power-imbalance, ecclesiastical competition, chaotic politics and different contexts of pluralism."[2] These disturbances are acknowledged to have been present for a much longer time: "The MC [Mission Committee, EDH] also recognizes that for a younger generation of Evangelicals in both the South and the North, these disruptions are the context in which they have already begun to pursue missional faithfulness."[3]

During the conference, attention was paid to most of these elements, although significantly the context of pluralism was not touched upon. By affirming a strong connection between God's actions in the world and the current face of mission, God was credited with an active role in disturbing the traditional ways of missionary praxis. When old ideas of mission fade away, practitioners are opened up to new and surprising realities. When framing disturbance in this particular way, it acquires a positive meaning, since it is being perceived as a fruitful development. Crediting God with such an active role leads to an affirmation of the Missio Dei, where God is not just in a formal way the source of mission, but works in a concrete and active fashion. Nevertheless, the consequences of this position were not clearly articulated. From a theological perspective it is highly problematic to perceive of God as direct actor of present evils, even though they work in the end for the common good.

The idea of disturbance was not only connected with the acts of God, but also with direct consequences for the participants of the conference. At the very beginning of the conference it was stated that the attendees were likely to be disturbed if they held "strict and orderly views" on world mission. It was even called "dangerous" to participate, because "God might disturb your plans." God is perceived here to be working disturbances in two different, but interrelated ways: in the world at large, and through these larger, encompassing issues in the lives of the mission

[2] Programme Narrative: The Mission Commission Global Consultation "Germany 2011".
[3] Ibid.

practitioners, through a disturbance of previous plans and ideas as a direct result of the larger disturbances.

Disturbance even acquired a pneumatological dimension, when it was stated in the program narrative that “God is blowing his holy wind in places and accomplishing His mission in ways that we could never have imagined just a few years ago”. Implicit reference is made here to the southward shift of Christianity, which indeed poses profound challenges for a reconfiguration of mission. Stressing this time of uncertainty, some plenary speakers suggested even, half-jokingly, to replace ‘missiology’ with ‘messiology’, placing emphasis on the messy character of mission. Although this suggestion is not tenable in practice, it shows their willingness to take the messy character of the current state of the world with utmost seriousness.

The Hermeneutic of Disturbance

Some of the speakers used the given of disturbance as a hermeneutical tool to interpret the actions of God in the world. By focusing on how current ways of missions are becoming obsolete, a new way of doing missions might be discovered. In this way, the given of disturbance moves far beyond being just a situation to acknowledge, but acquires its own function as a catalyst for new developments. These disturbances are interpreted in the light of the Biblical texts, and these texts function on different levels in this hermeneutic exercise. These functions are illustrated by these quotations of Christopher Wright who says: “So a missional hermeneutic must include at least this recognition – the multiplicity of perspectives and contexts from which and within which people read the biblical texts.”[4] Some lines earlier, he commented upon the existence of hermeneutical differences: “The phenomenon of hermeneutical variety goes right back to the Bible itself, of course. The New Testament was born out of a hermeneutical revolution in reading those Scriptures we now call the Old Testament. And within the early church itself there were different ways of handling those same Scriptures, depending on the context and need being addressed.”[5]

In general, the conference acknowledged the truth of the first part of Wright’s assertion: the multiplicity of perspectives and contexts. This was explicitly mentioned and the organization of the conference even took a certain pride in the different perspectives which were represented

[4] Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible’s Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 39.

[5] Ibid., 38–39.

through the variety of speakers from different countries. However, the second step was never taken: the acknowledgment of the hermeneutical variety in the Biblical texts themselves. Therefore, the Bible functioned as a source book from which different examples of disturbances could be gained.

The following three examples of disturbance in Biblical characters were made by ever so many speakers. John the Baptist was being disturbed, since Jesus behaved not as a traditional prophet, and therefore behaved differently than John would have expected. Daniel was disturbed by the visions he had seen. Rebecca experienced an “embryonic disturbance” when she learned she was pregnant with what would become two different nations. The speaker who used the last example, contended as well that “the Biblical narrative is an actual sequence of God’s disturbances in human history, both in events and in lives of people.”

The Biblical stories are thus interpreted by an external concept. Since the theme of the conference was disturbance, the speakers assume that the Bible is recounting tales of disturbances as well, from which insights can be gained in order to deal with the current face of disturbances. Moreover, not only individual stories witness this disturbance, but for one speaker, these are a common theme that the Biblical stories share: “an actual sequence of God’s disturbances”.

Another type of usage of the Bible for dealing with disturbances was made by a plenary speaker from Rwanda, who lost over hundred family members in the 1994 Rwandan genocide. He wondered about the possibility of genocide in a land which claims that 95 percent of its inhabitants are Christians. He attempted to solve this difficulty not by asking about the role of the church during, but before the genocide. He then concluded that apparently the gospel message was not rooted in the hearts and minds of the Rwandan people, otherwise the genocide would not have been possible. The antidote to these abhorrent events is to be found in rootedness in the Biblical texts. Christians need to be knowledgeable about their faith and need to act accordingly. For him, there is “no mission without message, and there is no message without the Bible”. This speaker thus aligned mission, message and Bible intimately with each other, to the point in which they nearly collapse into each other. Identifying rootedness in Biblical knowledge as a key theme, these proceedings with the Biblical texts mainly function to ward off and resist grand-scale disturbances from occurring.

Finally, still another type of hermeneutics of disturbance was found in the message of a plenary speaker from Russia who foregrounded doctrine as a beacon of light in the midst of disturbances. He elaborated upon James quoting the Hebrew Bible fluently as described in Acts 15 and cited this fluency as an example for contemporary Christians. He lamented that missionaries usually do not pay enough attention to doctrine, but in light of Acts 15 sound theology is of utmost importance. According to him, individual Christians should be gospel-centered: the gospel should be found in the life of every church member. According to this speaker, Biblical theology provides stability, safety and security in the midst of ever-changing circumstances and is thus used as a method of dealing with disturbances.

Resuming, different types of a hermeneutic of disturbance have been found, proving a genuine variety of perspectives among the plenary speakers. As most significant stands that a variety of speakers chose to read the theme of disturbance back into the Biblical texts, which is remarkable given that such an endeavor is not without problems. One should take into account that disturbances do not automatically result in a 'happily ever after' but cause real pain and affliction in the lives of those involved. One could thus describe this type of hermeneutics as more or less naive, since the consequences of this usage were overlooked. Another explanation might be a tendency to use the Biblical texts as a sourcebook for the illumination of pertaining concepts. This is not to say that attempting to sketch the contours of a Biblical theology of disturbance is neither possible nor desirable, but merely to point out the danger of a one-sided approach and to advocate the need for a balanced perspective on this theme.

Exclusions and Omissions

Having discussed extensively the content and method of the concept of disturbance, an analysis which focuses on the exclusions and omissions from the concept will be helpful in order to explore the gaps in the textual terrain which is woven around the idea of disturbance. These exclusions may point to sensitivities, ambiguities, ambivalences and uncertainties, which need to be attended in order to move beyond taking the concept of disturbance at face value towards a deeper evaluation of the meaning and consequences of the idea. However, one needs to proceed very careful here, in order not to impose one's own agenda in pointing out rhetorically indispensabilities which can, at least from the viewpoint of the author, only be neglected at great costs. Nevertheless, we propose here that much of non-evangelical Christianity, including the

rapid growing and spreading of charismatic groups, was uncomfortably out of focus during the conference. Yet, plurality in forms, expressions, doctrines, practices and possibly even futures within the Christian family is on the rise, leading to an ever greater diversification.[6]

Many recent interpreters have tried to illuminate the current "state of affairs",[7] while at the same time acknowledging the complexities of a globalized and polycentric Christianity. The silence regarding the subject of acknowledgment, recognition, collaboration and engagement of other Christian families becomes poignant when one realizes in full the importance of unity and its non-negotiable character.[8] David Bosch points here accurately to the indispensable character of Christian unity. Yet he does not plead for an easy or shallow unity, but recognizes very well the inherent tensions and frictions involved in the quest for unity.[9] Intentionally searching for the uncomfortable spots, long-term taboos, implicit fears and heritages from the past spilling over in the present might be daunting and even dangerous, but will eventually or at least hopefully lead to greater understanding of each other in the face of difference.

Without wanting to design here a complete theology of ecumenical matters, assuming general knowledge of this topic on part of the reader, a profound awareness of the whole church as the body of Christ could prevent a comfortable but harmful parochialism. It is exactly this parochialism, or poignantly still, denominationalism, which poses a genuine threat to a dialogical mutuality.

Boundaries and Balances

After having reviewed the content and limitations of the idea of disturbance and the hermeneutical use of this concept, a probing of the usage is called for. As is outlined above, some seminal elements of disturbance were not touched upon. The face of evangelical missiology

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[6] "Increasing Christian plurality means that the reservoir of what Christians have in common is getting smaller." Kirsteen Kim, "Mission's Changing Landscape: Global Flows and Christian Movements," *International Review of Mission* 100 (2011): 258.

[7] Inus Daneel, Charles Van Engen, and Hendrik Vroom, *Fullness of Life for All - Challenges for Mission in Early 21st Century* (Amsterdam, Netherlands: Rodopi, 2003); Ogbu Kalu, Peter Vethanayagamony, and Edmund Kee-Fook Chia, eds., *Mission After Christendom: Emergent Themes in Contemporary Mission* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010); Andrew F. Walls and Akintunde E. Akinade, *A New Day: Essays on World Christianity in Honor of Lamin Sanneh* (New York: Peter Lang, 2010); William R. Burrows, Mark R. Gornik, and Janice A. McLean, *Understanding World Christianity: The Work and Vision of Andrew F. Walls* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2011); Ogbu Kalu and Alaine M. Low, *Interpreting Contemporary Christianity: Global Processes and Local Identities* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008).

[8] The phrasing of "non-negotiable" is used by Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, American Society of Missiology Series 16 (Maryknoll, IL: Orbis, 1991), 464.

[9] Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 464.

would be different if an honest discussion of other forms of Christian witness would have been allowed or recognized. Akintunde E. Akinade in his introduction to a volume honoring the work of Sanneh, calls attention to the multiple trajectories of World Christianity.[10] A nuanced treatment of these multiple trajectories, the influence of globalization and attention to both the negative and positive side of this diversity could and should lead to an honest and fair reflection on the role of both evangelical theology and missionary practice in this intricate conglomeration. In this sense, the conference was not disturbed enough. I am referring here to the "festival of Christianities" as commented upon so eloquently by Maluleke.

> The fact of the matter is that there is a festival of Christianities out there. There is a thousand flowers blossoming. There is a hundred schools of Christian thoughts and practices blossoming. But it is not all fair and romantic. The diversity is not always benign. There is contestation out there. There is contradiction. There is injustice and there are unequal power relations. The globalization of Christianity is neither neat nor benign. All Christianities are equal – but some Christianities are more equal than other ones![11]

Tinyiko Sam Maluleke directs attention to the "festival of Christianities", using celebratory language and therefore viewing this diversity as something which needs to be lauded. His next line is even more festive, using language related to the realm of nature, alluding to the beauty of a field of flowers, all beaming and blazing in their distinct colors. But abruptly the tone changes and celebration gives way to lament. Suddenly, on closer inspection, not everything is as beautiful as it seemed to be. Inequality and injustice appear. This viewpoint of Maluleke is very helpful in balancing two approaches with regard to responding to plurality within Christianity, or possibly even within 'Christianities'. On the one hand, a genuine celebration of diversity, of the way God is at work in a myriad of cultural settings, each reflecting something of the beauty of God the creator. The groundbreaking work of Lamin Sanneh comes to the fore here, who has pointed to the "infinite translatability" of the gospel.[12]

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[10] Akinade, "Introduction: The Grandeur of Faith: Exploring World Christianity's Multiple Trajectories," in *A New Day: Essays on World Christianity in Honor of Lamin Sanneh*, ed. Akintunde E. Akinade (New York: Peter Lang, 2010), 1–16.

[11] Maluleke, "The Africanization of Christianity and the Fate of Mission - Ten Theses on African Christianity," in *Mission Revisited: Between Mission History and Intercultural Theory: Essays in Honour of Pieter N. Holtrop*, ed. P. N. Holtrop and Volker Küster (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2011), 111.

[12] Lamin O. Sanneh, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture*, American Society of Missiology Series 13 (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1989).

On the other hand, this "infinite translatability" points as well to another reality, a reality which inevitably follows from this translatability, but is considerably less commented upon. Marion Grau highlights the category of the "infinite losses" which are the consequences of the "infinite" movements of translation which took place during Christian history.[13] Taking her argument one step further, it could be said that every affirmation leads to a negation of another possibility, thereby closing off this possibility, however good or fruitful it might have been for a particular community. It therefore leads to a genuine loss, although it might not always be remembered or reviewed in this way. A balanced treatment of the diversities in global Christianity could thus benefit from the category of lament, remembering and grieving everything that "could have been" but has been negated throughout the course of history and which cannot be brought into being any more.

Returning to the issue of a fair appropriation of disturbance and diversity, it seemed that the stress on disturbance during the conference in some instances was too overwhelming, sometimes even leading to the point of glorification of chaos. One of the plenary speakers quoted Nietzsche: "You must have chaos within you to give birth to a dancing star".[14] In this particular instance, chaos has acquired an elevated, and even maieutic status, since it is seen as a prerequisite for attaining the greater good. When chaos and the absence of any order are celebrated in this way, other important theological themes are neglected, such as God the creator who overcomes, according to the creation account in Genesis, the destructive forces of chaos. As Maluleke writes, "it is not all fair and romantic".[15]

Therefore, one needs to be cautious to ascribe these elevated functions to disturbance. On the one hand, it could be argued that focusing on disturbance is probably helpful for those practitioners of mission who still remain firmly entrenched in the old missionary paradigm in which a clear-cut distinction between sending and receiving countries exists and who continue their "business as usual"-approach. Yet for all the others, and especially for those of us who are already disturbed by all the profound injustices we witness every single day, this focus on the

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[13] Marion Grau, *Rethinking Mission in the Postcolony: Salvation, Society and Subversion* (London: T&T Clark, 2011), 20.

[14] Ich sage euch: man muβ noch Chaos in sich haben, um einen tanzenden Stern gebären zu können". Friedrich Nietzsche, *Also Sprach Zarathustra: Ein Buch Für Alle Und Keinen. Mit Einem Essay Von Thomas Mann* (Insel Verlag, 1977), 18. Citation located by my supervisor, prof. dr. M.M. Jansen, whose help is gratefully acknowledged.

[15] Maluleke, "The Africanization of Christianity and the Fate of Mission: Ten Theses on African Christianity," 111.

discovery of disturbance is less helpful. Instead, gentle guidance, mature wisdom and a reading of the signs of the times[16] is called for. Adding to that, eschatological hope can be brought in, and it is to this subject we now turn.

Bringing in Eschatology

Eschatology is intricately interwoven with both mission theology and praxis, as is indicated in the statement of Bert Hoedemaker when he posits that theology of mission has traditionally been allocated more with eschatology than ecclesiology.[17] In terms of praxis, eschatology has served as a strong and compelling motivation for actual missionary engagement.[18] Seen in this light, the total absence of any eschatological reference during the conference is surprising and calls for further investigation. The only allusion to eschatology was found in the closing moments of the conference, during the celebration of the Lord's Supper together with all participants, in the classical Eucharistic formula: "until He comes". Other than that, no reference has been made to an eschatological fulfillment. A possible explanation of the absence of the eschatological direction might be found in the fact that there have been fierce debates in evangelical circles about pre/post/a millennialism and the nature of the "rapture". Eschatology consequently has become a sensitive issue and people are tired of quarrelling about it. As Timothy Tennent puts it: "For us, eschatology is about some vague, distant events that scholars and laypeople argue about."[19]

Nevertheless, several interrelated and seminal points are at stake in the connection between eschatology and missiology, that are too valuable to lose sight of because of perceived

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[16] Cf. "Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World - Gaudium et Spes", 1965, par. 4, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_cons_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html.

[17] Hoedemaker, Anton Houtepen, and Theo Witvliet, *Oecumene als leerproces: Inleiding in de oecumenica*, 3rd enl. ed., IIMO Research Publication 37 (Zoetermeer: Meinema, 2005), 115.

[18] "The ushering in of the *eschaton* has been an important missionary motif since the last decades of the nineteenth century." David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, American Society of Missiology Series 16 (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1991), 418.In the next two pages, Bosch further elaborates upon the longstanding emphasis on eschatology within evangelicalism.

[19] Tennent, *Invitation to World Missions: A Trinitarian Missiology for the Twenty-first Century* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic, 2010), 96. Tennant continues with showing that in contrast, eschatology had a vital place in the life of the early church. See also Bhakiaraj who explains the lack of attention to eschatology in missiology as a result of the "problem associated with extreme forms of eschatological speculation". Paul Joshua Bhakiaraj, "The Future of Mission and Mission of the Future: Christian Hope and Christian Mission," in *Missiology for the 21st Century: South Asian Perspectives*, ed. Roger E. Hedlund and Paul Joshua Bhakiaraj (Delhi / Chennai: ISPCK/MIIS, 2004), 111.

uncomfortabilities and inherited sensibilities. Bosch has elaborated on the connection between missiology and eschatology and his discussion is useful here for outlining the various issues at stake. He sketches the positions of Freytag and Cullman, and concludes that their contribution to mission primarily lies in the insistence of holding mission and eschatology closely together. Bosch stresses the importance of doing justice both to the 'already' and to the 'not yet'. He therefore rejects both extremes: the extreme historicization and the extreme eschatologization of mission.

Bosch warns that when eschatology disappears, the gospel becomes finally reduced to ethics, since the ultimate perspective of fulfillment gradually fades out of sight.[20] Taking these remarks of Bosch to the actual proceedings of the conference, there was no indication of the danger of reducing mission to ethics, since the classical soteriological aspect was a driving force behind much of the conference. Historicization was neither a real danger, since God was never thought of working immanent in history: He appeared consistently as a very prominent actor in the whole of reality. Therefore, it would have been perfectly possible to hold a balanced view during the conference in which elements of the 'already' and the 'not yet' would have been treated in a sensible and prudent way.

The absence of any eschatological reference is striking when compared to its treatment in the Cape Town Commitment, published as the result of the third Lausanne Conference (2010) in Cape Town, South Africa.

> God will transform the fractured world of nations that are scattered under the judgment of God into the new humanity that will be redeemed by the blood of Christ from every tribe, nation, tongue and language, and will be gathered to worship our God and Saviour. God will destroy the reign of death, corruption and violence when Christ returns to establish his eternal reign of life, justice and peace. Then God, Immanuel, will dwell with us, and the kingdom of the world will become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ and he will reign forever and ever.[21]

The explicitly doxological language of the commitment points to a movement where God will overcome present divisions, whether they are ethnic, racial or linguistic, in a movement of

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[20] Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 506–508.

[21] "The Cape Town Commitment: A Declaration of Belief and a Call to Action" (presented at Lausanne III, Cape Town, 2010), chap. 10. On the other hand, eschatology hardly surfaces in the seminal work of Christopher Wright, *The Mission of God*, who had a distinct influence on the Lausanne conference. In *The Mission of God*, one would expect a concluding chapter in which eschatology would be discussed. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative*.

gathering. God will thus act to overcome present fractions through judgment towards redemption and worship. This language of the Cape Town Commitment shows familiarity with the wording of Anton Houtepen, where eschatology and doxology are closely interwoven in the vision of worship "of the Lamb before the throne of God".

> The gathering of God's people, finally, refers to both personal and community-experiences: it is best expressed in the idea of the communio sanctorum. God will collect our fragmented lives and our fragmented churches in the adoration of the Lamb before the throne of God. This idea of the communio sanctorum connects both eschatology and ecclesiology and may avoid the infertile polarization between the two, which has occurred so often in missionary theology and practice.[22]

Both Houtepen and the Cape Town Commitment stress the fractures and fragments of the current human condition. In opposition to these pieces stands the concept of wholeness, the final and redeemed wholeness of the *communio sanctorum*. Where Houtepen emphasizes the final gathering in the *communio sanctorum*, another relevant author, Dale Irvin, stresses the seemingly continuous movement of dispersion and gathering. Nevertheless, a salient point for Irvin is that those who are gathered will retain their own particular identities in terms of culture and history.[23] For him, as for Houtepen and the Cape Town Commitment, a strong connection exists between division, fractures, fragments, dispersion, scattering in the penultimate and the category of longed-for and promised wholeness in the ultimate. These voices are helpful in adding to the one-sided perspective of the conference. While emphasizing the category of disturbance is helpful in countering an optimistic or even triumphalistic attitude towards mission, it does not offer the necessary balance needed to address the truly gruesome, violent and obscene aspects of disturbance and hinders the vision of eschatological wholeness.

When facing disturbance, and particularly the non-helpful, violent and damaging aspects of this disturbance, an eschatological vision of hope is called for.[24] For Paul Joshua Bhakiaraj, this is expressed in a "restlessness for what can be." He writes: "This deep yearning within us, expressing in these and other ways is eloquently answered by Christian hope. (…) Hope opens us

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[22] Anton Houtepen, "Mission as Learning Process," in *World Christianity Reconsidered: Questioning the Questions of Ecumenism and Missiology: Contributions for Bert Hoedemaker*, ed. L. A. Hoedemaker, Anton W. J. Houtepen, and Albert Ploeger (Zoetermeer: Meinema, 2001), 65.

[23] Dale T. Irvin, "Ecumenical Dislodgings," *Mission Studies* 22 (2005): 187–205.

[24] See for an elaboration on this theme the section on "the reality of evil and the possibility of hope" in the 2010 book of Miroslav Volf. Miroslav Volf, *Against the Tide: Love in a Time of Petty Dreams and Persisting Enmities* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 23–52.

to the eschatological future of God and His creation."[25] This "restlessness" can serve as a strong impetus towards action, to work together for justice and integrity. "Restlessness" might thus lead to, in the famous words of Lesslie Newbigin, "hope in action".[26]

Significantly enough, the category of pneumatology comes to the fore here. Newbigin describes the Spirit as the agency who will usher in "the reality of the new world to come into the midst of the old world that is." Newbigin is helpful in balancing once again the seminal not yet and already, in positing the Spirit as the "firstfruit of the coming harvest" who serves as a guarantee in enabling us to work for justice and wholeness in the confidence that one day the fullness of God's reign will be revealed.[27]

Conclusion

Acknowledging the factor of disturbance in mission is a bold choice in light of the triumphalism that has characterized evangelical, conservative missions in the past. The choice displays humility as well, acknowledging the limited human perspective, and allows openness towards other perspectives and visions. David Bosch would have been proud.[28] As helpful as the emphasis on disturbance may be for a specific generation of leaders and mission practitioners, its helpfulness as a general lens by which mission practices might be evaluated can be disputed.

I would argue that disturbance is a helpful accompanying concept in a time of transition from a unilateral perspective of mission towards an approach rooted in mutuality and partnership. Arguably, this transition has been coming about for decades now, referring to the 1947 International Missionary Council Conference convening in Whitby, Ontario, Canada, which stressed partnership in obedience.

We are therefore looking forward to a time when there is no need to utter the statement "the time for unilateral mission is over", because the awareness of the end of this type of mission has become an axiom. It could indeed be argued that God is disturbing old ways of doing mission and opening up new perspectives. This stress on God's agency should however not overrule the awareness of the role of human agency in creating and furthering damaging

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[25] Bhakiaraj, "The Future of Mission and Mission of the Future," 110.

[26] Lesslie Newbigin, *The Open Secret*, revised ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995, 63.
[27] Newbigin, *The Open Secret*, 63.
[28] Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 489.

disturbances. When emphasis shifts from divine to human agency, space is opened up in which pertaining issues such as power imbalances and indebtedness to colonial ways of structuring mission efforts can be discussed. A space is needed in which these issues can be addressed with honest introspection.

Both academic missiological reflection as contemporary practices may aid in this process of reflection and introspection, leading hopefully to a balanced assessment of disturbance and aiding a move beyond disturbance. One possible element of this moving beyond is already outlined in the discussion of eschatology, but many more elements are to be found through conversation with partners, engaging the Biblical texts, academic discussions, attending to the "signs of the times" and expecting the gentle guidance of the Spirit.