

## Editorial

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We human beings know the Creator-Redeemer of the Bible as אֱלֹהִים, θεὸς, አዎላ ከ, 하나님, God, 天主, Olodumare, 上帝, Thượng Đế, 神, Deus, and thousands of other designations. That's because this One Creator-Redeemer has always been committed to dealing with us personally, including by using our own particular languages. We all similarly see, hear, taste, and feel creation's non-verbal witness, but the divine's verbal dealings with us are more particular, depending on which of the myriad human languages might be ours.

Into that mix come cross-cultural missionaries. Sometimes they cross into new settings as weak and helpless people, whether fleeing persecution, desperately seeking employment, or as monks who have vowed poverty. Other missionaries accompany expanding economic and military power, as has largely been the case starting 500 years ago with the modern Western missions movement. A central problem with power-wielding missionaries - even if they are personally humble servants - is that the divine message of good news spoken in people's own languages can become garbled with the external lure of wealth and threat of violent rule. The Creator-Redeemer's commitment to work through cross-cultural emissaries to bring the liberating and empowering gospel of Jesus Christ can be short-circuited, usually unintentionally and unwittingly, by an enslaving and crippling entanglement with external riches and power.

As an attempt to emulate the servant-posture of Jesus himself, as well as a corrective to missions initiated out of strength and resourcefulness, "Vulnerable Mission" points toward cross-cultural service carried out in weakness, insufficiency, and *vulnerability*. Missionaries join the Creator-Redeemer's work among other people; trying to control or even enhance that work with external resources can sow poison, lay down boulders, and otherwise choke the fruit of the good news that should grow from the indigenous soil in which it is planted. Rather than serving out of strength, missionaries must be vulnerable in their need for the friendship, resources, and collaboration of the communities among whom they live and serve. As they assume that posture, missionaries can also glimpse more fully the height, breadth, and depth of the Creator-Redeemer's character and gracious work among all the world's peoples, rather than subconsciously confining God's primary commitment to one's own people.

This issue is devoted to this multifaceted theme of Vulnerable Mission. Most of the contributions stem from a recent conference on that theme, with an additional exploration of the character, formation, and contextual relevance of "doctrine." The articles' varied character testifies to the plethora of ways that the theme needs working out, since the implications of missions by strength

also are legion and wide-ranging. However you work out the many aspect of Vulnerable Mission in your own service, we hope this issue will serve you and others well.

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