

Workshop Summary:

REDISCOVERING CHRISTIAN MISSION IN CHANGING CONTEXTS

This workshop was led by Dr. Carlos F. Cardoza-Orlandi, a native of Puerto Rico, then Professor of World Christianity at Columbia Presbyterian Seminary in Decatur, GA. During the summer of 2010, he moved to Dallas, TX where he became Professor of Global Christianities and Mission Studies at Perkins School of Theology/ Southern Methodist University in Dallas. He holds degrees from the University of Puerto Rico, the Evangelical Seminary of Puerto Rico and Princeton Theological Seminary (MTS and PhD). See also "Unexpected Unity," a sermon from the closing worship service of the Crossing Borders/Cruzando Fronteras event (April 17, 2010).

The workshop was developed around several questions prompted by the presence and life of Christian communities from Africa, Asia and Latin America in U.S. contexts. They are:

- Is the Christian religion changing the world?
- Why are these changes difficult to understand?
- How should we "see, hear and interpret" the presence and vitality of immigrant Christian communities in our contexts?
- Should our mission practice be transformed?

In the 1900s, North America and Europe were the centers of vitality for Christianity. A Protestant mission map from the 1840s differentiated between these areas and other parts of the world that were considered Roman Catholic ("deficient"), Heathen ("lacking piety," e.g., Western U.S., Canada, Africa, Asia and Oceania), Orthodox (also "deficient") and Mohammedans (Muslim areas). This understanding, that true Christianity was grounded in Northern Europe, was also transmitted to those "missionized" from there.

In recent years, however, Christianity has experienced major growth in Africa, Asia and Latin America. The "heathen" and "deficient" areas of the world are now showing the most vitality! There also seems to be a correlation between a decline in religious vitality in one area and its growth in other areas. In northern Europe, Christianity is definitely in decline.

In another demographic shift, the southern Christianities, from areas with a history of colonization from the north, are now themselves *moving north*. This migration is due to war, hunger and economics. In fact, the demographics of Christianity in North America are strengthening due to migration; in the PC(USA) this is particularly attributable to migration among Koreans, Africans and Latinos. The church is no longer experiencing exponential growth; rather some regions are growing while others are declining. It is projected that in 2050, less than 1 in 5 Christians will be a non-Hispanic white.

These changes show that Christianity is a religion of translability; it has no predetermined space or language. There is no longer a geographic center; it is now polycentric, with voices emerging from Accra, Nairobi, Sao Paulo and New Delhi rather than Edinburgh, London and New York.

Implications:

- Being engaged in mission means being aware of the correlation between immigration and colonialism, displacement and migration.
- The immigrant Christian community represents the changing face of the religious landscape in the U.S.
- Immigrant Christian communities are a new space of religious vitality, where ‘old’ and ‘new’ patterns of faith are in tension with each other.
- The immigrant Christian community represents both promise and challenge to denominational structures.

Cross-cultural diffusion goes both ways, however. Immigrant communities are engaged in change too, especially as new generations emerge and groups gain in economic strength over their years in the “new land.” For affluent migrants, what does it mean to walk in solidarity with new migrants? As people move from the margins to the center, something new emerges. Mission is no longer taking the gospel to new parts of the world; rather a process of embodying the faith as it takes root in new beginnings.

Workshop summary developed from notes by Bobbi Wells Hargleroad