

**The Church of Scotland's historic approach to partnership in mission:
1929-1965**

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Abstract

The Church of Scotland has exercised a long term commitment to mission and its twentieth century expression, partnership in mission. However, its theory and practice have often been at odds with one another. This has raised issues of trust, integrity, responsibility, sensitivity and mutual accountability. A key requisite is consultation also often more honoured in the breach than in its observance. The struggle has been how to make partnership in mission an authentic two-way process. This article examines this development until 1965 when a novel approach, the partner church consultation, was introduced.

Introduction: the background

While the missionary outreach of the Church of Scotland (CoS) can be traced back to the formation of the church at Pentecost, it is with the Reformation that we first see a clear commitment to mission. Prefaced to the text of the Scots Confession (1560) was a distinct statement of missionary intent: "And this Gospel must be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations, and then the end shall come" and concludes with the prayer "let all the nations come to Thy true knowledge" (Hewat 1960:1, cf. Cochrane 1966:159-184). Certainly, it was the intention of the nascent Scottish Church that world mission was a priority. However, for more than two centuries this did not materialise. Ross (1986:33) acknowledges the insignificant missionary impulse and indifferences on the part of the established church, claiming that mission had always been integral to the life of the church "despite its high and low points". In the interim mission work was taken up enthusiastically by voluntary societies. It was only in 1824, that the Church of Scotland gave its blessing to the cause of foreign missions.

However, Presbyterianism in Scotland was sadly deeply divided and this situation was exacerbated by the "Disruption" of 1843 when a substantial section of the Church of Scotland left to form the Free Church of Scotland. In

consequence, each church formed its own missions and maintained the divided witness globally. Basically, these missionary enterprises sought to impose western Christian values on indigenous peoples, often through the destruction of their traditional religious beliefs and values; through dispossession from their lands and through education which produced paradoxical results (see Duncan 2003). They were even referred to as 'these harbingers of westernisation, who eventually sowed the seeds for future white supremacy' (Stapleton 1994:217).

While Latourette (1953:924) accords his own assessment as "superficial" there is sufficient truth in his assertion that:

... the spread of Christianity in the four and a half centuries after 1500 was an integral, secondary and inevitable phase of the world-wide extension of Europeans and their influence. That extension was partly by exploitation, partly by conquest, partly by vast migrations, and partly by commerce.

In one way or another, these were all violent processes in the way they destabilised traditional societies and cultures because the Christian advance did not occur in a vacuum. Withdrawn from the environment in which they had been reared, which, though by no means fully Christian, these local societies gave at least lip service to Christian standards, many Europeans deteriorated morally (Latourette 1953:924). A more sophisticated interpretation, depending on the work of the Comaroffs (e.g. 1991, 1997) suggests that "they ultimately contributed to the destruction of African independence through the fostering of a black, capitalist middle-class willing to challenge the traditional aristocracy".

In 1900, the Free Church of Scotland united with the United Presbyterian Church of Scotland to form the United Free Church of Scotland. A subsequent union took place between the national Church of Scotland and the United Free Church of Scotland in 1929 to form the present Church of Scotland. "Both Churches ... had roughly parallel 'schemes' [e.g. foreign mission] supported by the whole membership. These were amalgamated with little difficulty" (Burleigh 1960:410). Both churches had a proud record of missionary outreach which had a significant part in the movement towards union due to missionaries:

whose devoted labours did much to make union possible and inevitable, for on the mission fields close and intimate co-operation was natural and necessary. The reunited Church was ... a deeply committed missionary Church with responsibilities towards Christian communities growing up in many lands (Burleigh 1960:417).

Burleigh was of the view that the 1910 International Missionary Conference held in Edinburgh was the high point of nineteenth century mission and, therefore the fulcrum into the twentieth century mission with its emphasis on fraternal co-operation or partnership. This missionary outreach is the subject of our discussion in this article.

A new era

Clearly there were several changes in the air during this post-World War One period. "It was the costliest war humankind had ever seen, for it involved the entire globe. It was a war in which precisely those powers whose burden it supposedly was to civilise humanity actually dragged the entire world into their conflict" (Gonzales 1975:429). The imperialistic confidence of the great powers had been destabilised and this had an impact on the work of missions which had been closely linked with imperialism and colonialism during the "long" nineteenth century which culminated in 1918. Further destabilisation occurred with the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939 (Gonzales 1975:429). This would seem to indicate that even in the early twentieth century, the global situation had deteriorated to such an extent that the western powers' ability to be a force for good in the world was seriously challenged.

Following this war, the Church of Scotland found itself having to work in the aftermath of this vastly altered context, not least of which was the vastly altered context of the international missionary movement. This was also true of the Church of Scotland's missionary outreach programme. Politically, the Church's three main mission fields had changed out of all recognition. India and Pakistan achieved independence in 1947, the communist revolution took place in China in 1949 and the 'wind of change'¹ which would bring independence swept through Africa in the 1950s:

Parallel to these political developments was the emergence of a vigorous indigenous church in all of these fields, bringing the challenge of handing over responsibility for Christian witness from the "mission" to the "church" (Ross 2006:1).

So, there was cause for hope.

This provides the context for a study of the Church of Scotland's mission work. During the subsequent years, we will note a struggle to integrate a new concept in mission – partnership. However, this was not an easy exercise as it was far simpler to talk about partnership in mission than to realise it in practice. Nonetheless, there was a serious attempt to engage with partner churches in a novel manner which would enhance the integrity of the mutual relationships.

Church of Scotland foreign mission policy

The General Assembly of 1932, received a Foreign Mission Committee report of a substantial debt which had accumulated up to 1931 and had led to a considerable depletion of capital. This was the result of problems arising out of the 1929 union (Burleigh 1960:410) and also of no account having been taken of the increased costs of missionary work in the post-war (1914-1918) period. A project was undertaken from 1932:

to re-survey the whole of the work abroad with the view of appreciating the missionary values thereof, to prepare plans for its reorganisation at less cost in case it is found at the end of the present financial year that such is absolutely necessary, ... with power to initiate prior to such report any such plans in whole or in part as they may deem fit (GA [General Assembly] 1935:611).

Historically, it may have been too early to expect any consultation with partner churches on matters which would affect them negatively.

This issue was related to local Church autonomy for, “neither the Mission Councils nor the Foreign Mission Committee as such have any acknowledged part in the control or administration of Church affairs” (GA 1935:615). The words “as such” offer a qualification that conceals the truth of this matter. In fact, Mission Councils wielded immense power in new younger Churches (cf. Duncan 1997:104ff.). Yet, “any policy of forced and precipitate severance of missionary work from the churches in the field comes into conflict both with obstinate facts and with a true conception of the Church and its work” (GA 1935:616). There was a clear awareness that these very young churches were bereft of the benefits and endowments which the sending churches had accumulated over centuries and were the source of their wealth which enabled them to engage in mission in the first place. Too quick withdrawal would defeat the positive results of over a century of mission work for:

these young and immature Churches, consisting for the most part of the poorer classes of the community, are all attempting the very exacting task of maintaining their existence from the beginning on a purely voluntary basis ... To withdraw the moral support and leadership of the missionaries would almost certainly bring about material collapse (GA 1935:627).

In the light of concurrent developments in the ecumenical movement, the Church of Scotland would have been ill-advised to contemplate any action which might lead to a complete break with any of the Churches which she

had been involved in birthing (GA 1935:628). Even at this stage there was a recognition that “material collapse” did not imply or indicate spiritual failure.

In 1946, a reassessment of the work of overseas mission was undertaken and commissions were sent by the Foreign Mission Committee (FMC) to China and West Africa. The report stressed the “worldwide fellowship of giving and receiving” (in Lyon 1998:39) and thus anticipated one of the outcomes of the imminent Whitby meeting of the International Missionary Council IMC (1947). Concurrently, the Church of Scotland celebrated the formation of the Church of South India, where one of its constituent missions entered this union which represented the zenith of ecumenical achievement in the twentieth century, “the ecumenical event surpassing all others” (Lyon 1998:40).

A primary task facing the CoS was the integration of the work of institutions (medical and educational) into the life of the young and developing churches. These had been separated from the work of the local churches and were dominated by missionaries through the existence of Mission Councils which operated quite separately from the young churches and reported directly to the CoS. The main concern was to promote integration which would facilitate a partnership between two churches in freedom with the entire work being transferred to the younger church. This required a new approach. In 1945 a special committee had been set up to consider the relationship between older and younger churches in India. This was done at the initiative of the National Council of Churches in India:

The time has now come when the missions from the West should carry on their activities in and through the organisations of the Church, wherever these have been developed, and cease to function through Mission Councils or other organisations which are not an integral part of the life and work of the indigenous Church (in Lyon 1998:43).

However, the outcome of the work of the special committee for India was that the FMC affirmed its desire to continue to be involved in the development of policy:

which meant in practice continuing to exercise the control from which it had seemed to be saying it wanted to withdraw. ... No rhetoric of partnership could conceal the reality that the Church of Scotland, through its missionaries and its grants of money, still exercised an inappropriate control (Lyon 1998:46, 47).

Attitudes between these two churches which were replicated throughout the missionary domain were largely determined by disparities in wealth. It was often a source of deep frustration and resentment that comparatively wealthy

missionary agencies held the power of life or death over, for instance, the continued existence of a primary school.

The year 1947 signalled the beginning of the movement towards greater devolution of the missionary task in each country to the Church in each locality. It also saw the process of the integration of mission and church resulting from the establishment of autonomous churches throughout the world.

A wind of change

In 1946, Rev James Dougall became the General Secretary of the Foreign Mission Committee. He was well aware of the changing world situation and the need for the church to change to meet this new context:

Some of us feel very strongly that the time has come for a new approach to our missionary obligations and that without any presumption on our part that we know better than our fathers, but simply that the situation has changed in all fields as well as in the Church at home' (Dougall to Morton, 7 March 1950, in Ross 2006:1).

The General Assembly of 1947 noted three points concerning the development of relations with "younger" churches. First, "the growing significance of the Younger Churches" (GA 1947:343), especially the South India Union with its strong desire "to be free of control, legal or otherwise, of any Church or society, external to itself" and "to express under Indian conditions and in Indian forms the thought and life of the Church Universal". Second, was the Partner Plan Scheme which was to become "the main instrument of missionary education" (GA 1947:345). This entailed mission partners writing regular letters to partner congregations and presbyteries in Scotland informing them of aspects of their work and requesting prayer for specific topics. Partner congregations would appoint correspondents to keep in touch with mission partners and keep them informed of developments in their congregations, presbyteries and the Church of Scotland at large. As an educational tool, the partner plan has never been surpassed and this has been attested regularly by the Church of Scotland (e.g. GA 1978:334-335; GA 1983:349). Arising out of this, in the course of time, there developed links between congregations and presbyteries in Scotland and overseas (GA 1983:349) and then the concept of partner visits both to and from Scotland which served to give Church of Scotland members and members of partner churches an opportunity to experience one another's church life in greater depth than is possible simply by correspondence. These would become opportunities for

“awareness building and spiritual strengthening for their congregation” (GA 1978:334).

Third, an emphasis was made on the oneness of missionary enterprise which was recognised as the responsibility of all Christians and not the preserve of overseas fanatics:

We Christians of the Older Churches can no more stand alone in this post-Christian era without the fellowship of the Indian, Chinese and African Churches than they, without us, can be perfected in their mission. We need each other as we need Him who is able to make both Home and Overseas one. ...

Is this not God’s call to His people to close their ranks and to rejoice in their conversion from individualism and isolationism into the world-wide fellowship of giving and receiving, which is both the mirror and the means of His healing, forgiving and transforming love for all the nations? (GA 1947:345).

Here the essence of partnership is described in terms of interdependence and participation in a global Christian community. Mutuality was the new expression of the missionary relationship, but it was a contradictory mutuality for the Church of Scotland could still aver: “The Presbyterian Churches of the Dominions are all of them the offspring of Church of Scotland and delight to acknowledge their parentage” (GA 1947:421). The concepts of paternalism and trusteeship had not disappeared.

Added to this, the convener of the FMC in his eloquent address to the 1947 General Assembly raised a thorny issue which continued to bedevil the CoS:

The proverb about cutting our coat according to our cloth applies only if there is no more cloth. But there is money enough in the pockets of Church members not only to do what is now asked, but to sow the seed of truth in many wide areas we have not even touched (Gunn “A time for greatness” 1947:25ff. in Lyon 1998:64-65).

A continuing problem was the view that there was some kind of invisible barrier which separated home and foreign missions. This sometimes led to resentment when calls were issued for support of foreign missions. The FMC emphasised that foreign missions were not just a hobby for those who favoured them but the responsibility of the entire church. Clearly, there was confusion, at least in the minds of many CoS members who were asking about the purpose of continued mission overseas when many of the former missions and younger churches were asserting their independence. This

necessitated a fresh look at the missionary obligation, particularly in view of the rapidly increasing costs of maintaining overseas commitments. The FMC responded by affirming the unity of mission and by attempting to "help the Church to take the word and reality of mission into its daily consciousness and habitual attitude" (Lyon 1998:66). The change in conceptualisation was under way and there would be no retreat at least in theory, though the practical implications of theoretical implementation would persist until the present time. The 1948 report of the FMC to the General Assembly contained a "Report of the Special Committee on the Relation of the Older and Younger Churches in India":

... the Foreign Mission Committee is now resolved that the time has come for a much more general and thorough-going attempt to apply to its work in India the fundamental principle that the missionary task is the responsibility of the Church in India (GA 1948:406).

... and that the distinctive contribution of the Church of Scotland to the evangelistic task of the Church in India should be given in a manner which visibly and effectively expresses their unity in the ecumenical Church (APPENDIX I, GA 1948:407).

This led to efforts at integration which diminished the role of Mission Councils and began to emphasise the autonomy of the younger churches. This came about as a result of the Church of South India attaining autonomy and was the precursor of other attempts at practical partnership. By 1950, it was reported that, in India, the process of integration was well advanced.

The formation of the WCC in 1948 marked "the end of the beginning" inaugurated in 1910 at Edinburgh. It was hailed as: "a medium to express the unity which God has revealed to them". Here we note the emergence of the concept of the coalescence of mission and unity: "As Churches they must now learn to practise that continuous collaboration and mutual confidence which brought through their missionary agencies they have already found in the International Missionary Council." The IMC and WCC continued "in association with" one another (GA 1951:370). Further, it was at the 1949 General Assembly that note was taken of the progress made by African nations towards self-government. This would soon be linked to the movement towards ecclesiastical independence.

It is uncertain whether policy decisions were driven by financial constraints or global concerns from the beginning of the 1950s but there was a need for a policy review and a Statement of Policy was drawn up by Dougall.

Neither the Younger Churches nor the established institutions depending on support from abroad can be treated with anything but respectful consideration We have much to learn, many consultations to effect and understandings to reach, before this realignment can be worked out for each field of activity (GA 1950:401).

The theme of having much to learn and the need for consultation was one that would become tediously repetitive in the course of time. It might be asked, what was it that needed to be learned but could not be understood or learned, and why were there only references to consultation but little face to face communication in order to effect realignment? It is easy to conclude that there was no real desire to hear or understand when money was short and difficult decisions had to be taken. This implies a serious lack of trust in the integrity and ability of partner churches to participate in meaningful and effective discussions about matters which affected them and their future. This was demonstrated in a report presented by Rev Neil Barnard to the FMC in 1950 concerning the situation in Calabar:

The Church was independent, but this was just a mockery as they had neither cash nor property; co-operation between Education authority and Church was weak, missionaries showed that the church was inferior by refusing to become ministers and members, and they showed they were more interested in Mission than in Church (FMC, April 1950, Appendix: 353ff. in Lyon 1998:87).

Although this was predominantly the case, it was not universally so.

The times they are a changing

A year later, in 1951 the context of the need for policy revision was spelled out. This was based on changes in global economic, social and political conditions; growth and development of younger Churches and their desire for self-government; the establishment of WCC and its relationships with these churches; and declining financial support from Older Churches (GA 1951:371).

In addition, policy had to respond to rapid change in Africa due to:

strife for political power [which] has tended to embitter race relations. It is there above all that reconciliation is needed ...

Indeed it is in the providence of God that authority is being thrust upon the African Church by Missions rather than demanded by it from them' (GA 1951:398).

While it is true that there were instances of this being policy, the latter part of this statement is a little disingenuous as the church seemed to be responding to secular/political change rather than being in its vanguard. In a sense it was the younger churches which were wresting authority from their former ecclesiastical masters.

In 1952 (GA 1952:351), the General Assembly was reminded that:

The power of the witnessing church on the field had been accepted as the primary consideration of the report of 1935. This was even more fundamental in 1950 because the Integration of the Church and Mission meant that the Younger Church had become a responsible partner to be consulted in all decisions, and its resources in personnel and experience now more clearly defined and limited the direction and scope of missionary activity.

Assessment of mission policy was conducted using a number of "middle axioms", two of which are particularly significant:

The main contribution was to be made through missionaries. More important than money was the need to "keep alive the sense of missionary obligation and partnership in the sending church; ... evangelising communities should be the main missionary task" (GA 1952:351, I).

It was made clear that there must surely be a significant distinction between the relationships of older and younger churches which are only linked by the casual and informal contacts of individual Christian people, however strong their commitment, and those Churches which have a strong relationship founded on appointment of missionaries bound by contractual obligations who have offered and been offered, supported and guaranteed by the older church and accepted, integrated and commissioned by the younger church (GA 1952:370).

With specific regard to the situation in India and Pakistan, several recommendations were made in order to effect "a fuller partnership in the Gospel" (GA 1952:357). First, 'the CoS should be represented on appropriate church councils and boards by missionaries "appointed in consultation with the churches" (GA 1952:357). There was a danger here concerning whose interests the missionaries represented. Were they those of the CoS or the

indigenous church? And why should the representation be by missionaries? In other places, e.g. South Africa, where there were very few missionaries latterly, Church of Scotland representation was by local church people who were nominated by the local church, and this worked well. These were matters which could cause serious friction and problems for missionaries. Second, there was the matter concerning whether or not missionaries should become ministers and members of the Churches in which they serve. Third, was the issue that the receiving churches should take responsibility for the commissioning of missionaries and involve them in policy making bodies. These steps seemed to provide a logical process if the matter of partnership was taken seriously and would contribute to the development of authentic partnership. Fourth, there was the recommendation that representatives of Younger Churches be enabled to visit the CoS in order to experience its ethos. In all of this, consultation was the key approach.

Similar policy decisions were felt to be appropriate for Africa despite the considerably different and fluid political context. For instance, "... we cannot rely on this association with [a colonial] Government. For one thing it may prove an embarrassment when an African Government takes over" (GA 1952:362). This corroborates the earlier stated assumption that it was political affairs that, at least in part, dictated church policy. A strong emphasis was laid on the need to train Africans for the evangelism of their own people. It reaffirmed the principle that the primary agent of mission in a land was the indigenous church.

In all this an important qualification was made which was of universal significance:

... by acting in time and sharing with the African Churches responsibilities and powers with respect to work and finance formerly controlled by a Mission organisation, we may avoid some of the embarrassments and strains which had become a distinct source of weakness and division in India before the war. The relationship of the Older and Younger Churches is indeed more cordial and mutually helpful than ever before, but it is always subject to external as well as internal influences. Political, racial and national feeling cannot be excluded. We know that a gift offered graciously before any claim is made is worth far more than a concession granted with hesitation (GA 1952:363)

or grudging resentment. So timing was everything and it needed sensitive analysis of the total context. Change in one sector did not occur independently of the other components of society. There was an awareness at this time of the need for partnership in mission to be a two-way exchange which

“can throw some light on the problems that confront the Church in Scotland itself and what may be the lines of their solution” (GA 1952:371). This was important for the whole church because “the experience of the Younger Churches is not available for the Church of Scotland except through the FMC ...” (GA 1952:371). It is sad that despite this and other similar comments being made over many years, there has been little integration of ideas presented by partner churches concerning areas of church life in which they have experienced a measure of success.

Attention was given to issues relating to dependency, e.g.:

How is financial help to be given so that the Church on the Field will escape the wrong kind of dependence and grow stronger in its sense of mission and responsibility? Foreign money does not help the Young Church in the long run if it supports a system by which the very existence of the Church depends on this outside help (GA 1954:381-2).

Any attempt to divert funds to other and/or new work must be done in consultation and not independently of the Younger Churches. Again and again the need for consultation is emphasised but it was not a regular part of the relationships.

In 1955, the Foreign Mission Committee report to General Assembly focussed on the implications for mission raised in:

Stephen Neill's *The myth of the younger churches* which referred to frustration arising out of the inability to engage in new ventures due to existing commitments to partner churches for which they are unable to pay because they are still so small and weak and under-resourced as well as being accused of being “ignorant, and immature, and largely self centred” (GA 1955:418),

while the real situation is that they are immersed in trying to further the Gospel amidst “[p]overty and ignorance, disease and dirt, illiteracy and superstition ... The paradox lies in the fact that although his material needs must be met his ultimate needs are not material” (GA 1955:420).

One interpretation of younger churches understanding of partnership given on their behalf was that it consisted of: “understanding and prayer and personal services, it is not because they fail to grow in responsibility and self-help, but because the task is far beyond their own resources” (GA 1957:425). Again this reveals a certain paternalism revealed in the midst of sound missiological thinking: “Mission in the Biblical sense is the task of the whole Church to the whole life of the whole world” (GA 1957:426).

Integration was not considered a barrier to the development of partnership (GA 1957:432) in progress from Mission to Church. "As long as Scottish missionaries are needed and wanted, the partnership should stand" (GA 1957:433). There was a recognition of the necessity of personnel to maintain a partnership. The place and role of missionaries was clearly that they were needed and wanted, but to do exactly what? There was some confusion, even at this stage in relations about the exact nature of their responsibilities: "Sometimes it is harder for us to receive than to give" despite examples of the contribution of overseas partners' witness in Scotland (GA 1957:447). "We know that ... the contact with Younger churches can bring us not only revival of missionary interest but real instruction and encouragement in our own tasks here" (GA 1957:447).

Church of Scotland policy had from the beginning regarded its foreign missionary enterprise as an integral part of the life of the Church, arising of necessity from the very nature of the Church itself (GA 1947, min. 8799 in GA 1957:453). Here we see the younger churches asserting themselves and the consequent benefits are as much for the Church of Scotland as for their partners and this conforms to good missiological thinking. In addition, we note the beginning of the enormous and complex task of transferring property to indigenous churches.

However, by 1960, missionary activity seemed to be suffering from a form of paralysis which denied the need for reorganisation because: "the Younger Churches so often are still dependent on missionary funds and that 'the resources of the Older Churches are exhausted in helping the Younger Churches to remain where they are'" (GA 1960:445). There was an uncertainty about missionary partnerships that seemed to indicate a certain loss of nerve:

The more complete the case for exercising a measure of freedom to choose where some proportion of our resources is to be spent on frontier work in Asia and Africa – that is, after full consultation, with the Church in the area and in partnership with it (GA 1960:446).

There was a strong feeling that the relations between the older and younger churches needed sensitive handling. The administration of the sending agencies might be tempted to hold on to control too long. They had exercised too much real power. But the younger churches were not aiming at independence, because all churches must acknowledge they are, first of all, dependent first upon God and then upon each other. At the same time their relationships ought to be governed not by financial considerations but by common purpose, nor by national or racial differences but by their belonging to the same family of God (GA 1960:448-9).

While there was a clear realisation that total independence was not consistent with good missionary theology, there was also a realisation that things had to change in terms of power relations. However, it was not for the sending church alone to determine the direction to be taken. It was problematic to talk of common purpose when only one partner decided what that purpose was to be. While integration was proceeding apace, it travelled at differing paces depending on local circumstances. Although integration was achieved in a formal sense, as for example in India and Pakistan, the objective of establishing transparent and responsible partnerships between older and younger churches had not. Missionaries continued to exercise a disproportionate power and: "... [t]he more 'partnership' came to be seen as the 'way forward for effective co-operation in mission', the more that differential grew in importance" (Lyon 1998:132, 133).

The matter was reaching critical proportions and was well seen by the missionaries in place themselves:

We are still far from a free and equal partnership. The situation is bedevilled by what is sensed as imperialism, spiritual, moral and financial, on the one hand, and by humiliation and a simmering rebelliousness on the other, this despite every effort we make in personal ways on both sides (Minutes of Iona Community Meeting in Nagpur, January 1959 in Lyon 1998:133).

This situation was replicated through the mission world. In South Africa, the Church of Scotland South Africa Joint Council (an interim council established in 1963! [Lyon 1998:222]), was only dissolved in June 1981. It is significant to note that, until the transfer of power to the local church, it could not communicate directly with the sending church and had to send all communication through the mission council. Nonetheless, integration did give a measure of freedom, hitherto unknown to younger churches, though they became burdened with a plethora of committees to cope with its results.

A rose by any other name?

In 1964 the Foreign Mission Committee underwent a name change to the Overseas Council. This change of name and also partly of ethos was the result of a number of changes which were taking place in the mission world including the disappearance of Mission Councils, the emergence of national leadership and the transfer of ministry and membership by many missionaries to Younger Churches who by this time were directing their own work. In addition, the political scene had substantially changed especially with regard to political independence:

To think of the new relationship as involving an association between Churches means also that we must think more of a two-way traffic. It is no longer a matter of Scotland speaking to the overseas churches and offering experience, people and money. We now consult together and work together. And increasingly we shall realise that we can learn from the experience of the church in other lands (GA 1963:427),

if given a chance to teach anything. At the same time overseas Churches were beginning to consult amongst themselves e.g. in the formation of the All Africa Conference of Churches (1963).

It was during this period in the early 1960s that the award of block grants became the norm, though the practice had earlier precedents. This allowed churches to draw up their own budgets based on their own discerned priorities. However, there was no involvement in the decision-making process concerning the amounts to be given. This was inimical to the development of partnership relations.

Partner Church Consultation, 1965

The idea of consultation was given classic practical expression when the Overseas Council convened a partner church consultation in St Andrews, Scotland during September 1965. This consultation had its origins in a desire to take account of the rapid changes which were occurring throughout the world politically and ecclesiastically. It intended to review the policy decisions made in 1947 concerning integration and to develop a response to changes in partner relations. It was felt that simple bilateral relations were outdated and there was a need for relations that reflected the implications of Mexico City's (CWME) "Mission in Six Continents".

The consultation acknowledged the existence of a number of new factors which affected the global context for mission. These included the existence of self-governing churches, indigenous national leadership, the fact that all partner churches were engaged in union discussions and great political changes, i.e. the growth of nationalism. So the consultation aimed: "to attempt to see how best we could obey the call of God to go out together in mission" (GA 1966:497); it was to be "a Consultation about the Mission of the Church in a very contemporary world of war and division, of suffering and need" (GA 1966:498). The consultation's focus was on practical matters, property and finance. Among the topics discussed were the sense of mission in the Church, in the NT and today; the Church and its mission in the contemporary world; building the Church for mission; the place of the

missionary and the Christian abroad; the future of institutions; property and finance; and working relationships.

A good spirit prevailed in the discussions so that it could be affirmed, "We met together as delegates of sister Churches and we humbly praise God that our church has been used in the proclamation of the Gospel of Christ throughout the world and in the creation of these various Churches" (GA 1966:499). The Overseas Council could claim that the ethos of the mutuality of partnership was firm:

... although they are self-governing, the churches of Asia, Africa and the West Indies made it clear that they still want our co-operation in people and in money, partly because they value this inter-racial emphasis and partly because, at this stage of their lives, they need our help.

... the Scots were conscious that there were aspects of church life in which we could learn badly needed lessons where the overseas Churches felt that our Church was complacent and self-centred, unconscious of its own dependence on other Churches. In particular we could learn from others about the training of the laity and the place of women in the Church. And we saw church unity as a necessity arising from evangelism, with disunity as a hindrance to the proclamation of the Gospel of the one Saviour to the non-Christian (GA 1966:500).

Rev William Stewart, in his opening address focussed on a prime issue in partnership – the need for mutual consultation:

The whole field of thinking opened up by recent writing on "Joint Action for Mission" points to this. The missionaries from another land will share in the policy making, but they do so within the Church in which they serve and not as guardians of some remoter interest. For this reason one longs to see the Church of Scotland willing to be represented much more frequently in active thinking by its representatives who come on visits for that very purpose, and longs to see more responsible thinking from all participants when decisions are taken (Report of St Andrews Consultation 1965: 71 in Lyon 1998:192).

It became clear that some partner churches took the relationship seriously as was clear from the Presbyterian Church of Ghana's (PCG) decision in 1966 to send a gift of £1,000 to the Church of Scotland as a token of thanks for all the assistance she had received over the years. The gift was accompanied by a request for missionary ministers to enter its ministry rather than remain

ordained ministers of their sending churches (Lyon 1998:200). A few years earlier, in 1960 and 1961, the General Secretaries of the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian Synods had become symbols of partnership when they visited Scotland (Lyon 1998:215). A “fraternal worker” was sought from Scotland by the PCG to be a Secretary for Inter-Church Relations. This marked a move away from the term “missionary”. Rev Colin-Forrester-Paton was appointed. Mutual appreciation of the relationship in mission was expressed between the CoS and the PCG which in the same spirit began to send fraternal workers to Europe and the USA (Lyon 1998:200-201). This consultation marked “the transition from an Edinburgh-run chain of foreign missions to a network of Partner Churches spanning the globe” (2002:25/4).

A year later, reflecting on the value of the consultation, the Overseas Council stated:

From the particular angle of a Western Church, the astonishing growth in authority and capability of the “younger” churches sets limits to our freedom of action, but these limitations spring from a new mutuality and present tremendous new possibilities. ... The Overseas Council acts in genuine concert with the Churches overseas and not only with them but with other churches and Missionary societies in the West which are equally involved in a missionary partnership with the very same Churches. Moreover Joint Action for Mission (which might be taken as the best summary of the significance of the Consultation) means that equal and reciprocal obligations are laid on us all and these are not the arbitrary demands of the “older” on the “younger” or vice versa but the spelling out of the law of Christ for the Churches in seeking to bear one another’s burdens (GA 1967:620-621).

Here was a sign of a clear recognition that the Church of Scotland was no longer the sole focus and originating point of vision. Rather the churches of Asia, Africa, and Latin America have become the main object of attention and the CoS as one of their partners yet essentially bound to them in a close relationship. This became a clear expression of the ethos of Mexico City (1963) where all churches worldwide are part of the whole fellowship of missionary Churches in six continents.

These are grand statements, and can be interpreted as a serious struggle with the meaning and implications of partnership not only in missiological terms. However, there was no actual discussion on the issue of financial resources and who controlled them and this was a serious lacuna in the consultation because it meant that issues of actual power and control were not articulated and resolved.

After the consultation

There had developed a growing realisation that partnership implied relations between churches and not committees such as the FMC, Overseas Council and missionary committees on the mission field. This had implications for the financing of overseas mission which was the responsibility of a General Assembly committee and not the General Assembly itself. Hence, now that a holistic approach to mission had been adopted, it was necessary to have a holistic view of the financing of that mission. In 1961, the Co-ordinated Appeal became church law in Scotland so every congregation was obliged to contribute to the work of the entire range of activities engaged in by the church. At this stage, finance was a matter of concern for the Church of Scotland as membership was beginning to drop significantly. In 1960, it had 1,301,280 members; by 1966 this number had dropped to 1,233,808.

An awareness had developed that world mission could not advance by a sending body deciding independently where, with whom and how it would engage in mission. In the context of political and ecclesiastical independency, the Overseas Council acknowledged:

Our service is within other independent Churches to whom we go by invitation. As we see it, our main contribution must continue to be in terms of people, of men and women of a wide variety of qualifications who, through their work and daily living, witness to Christ and build His Church (GA 1970:483-484).

While there was silence on the role of money, there was a clear commitment to offer assistance through skilled personnel who were committed to Christ, his Church and God's mission.

Reflection

Kritzinger *et al* (1994:22) prefer the terms "mutuality and interdependence" to partnership although all of these terms imply mutual giving and receiving though this was hardly a reality. For them, relationships soured as the result of a number of false assumptions relating *inter alia* to autonomy and indigeneity. These assumptions included a misconception about the two way process of giving and receiving, the indigenisation process as emanating from the "Christian" West to the "non Christian" Third World, and mission perceived as a movement from the West to the Third World. "Mission in six continents" was represented as a continuance of the *status quo* with a trickle of "missionaries" from younger churches as a weak attempt at counterpoise.

For Bosch (1988a:87) this was an error because it reduced mission to a “trade in the same commodities”. He summarises his view with an illustration from DT Niles:

The older churches are not wealthy store-owners handing out free bread to the impoverished younger churches. Both older and younger churches are beggars, who can only, while sharing God’s true bread of life, tell each other where to find more of that bread of life (Bosch 1998a:91).

All this seems to reflect accurately the predicament of the Church of Scotland in its journey towards authentic partnership in mission.

Conclusion

From the time of the 1929 union, but having its roots in the earlier 1910 International Missionary Conference held in Edinburgh, independent foreign missions attempted to operate through co-operation with one another. Concurrently, we noted the growing independence of younger churches in the context of a growing desire and demand for independence in these same nations. During this period (1929-1965), the Church of Scotland, through its mission agency, made a serious commitment to develop new forms of relationship arising out of the novel concept of partnership in mission, despite problems of implementation in practice. Younger churches reacted negatively to any form of western hegemony, while older churches recognised the need for fellowship, yet found it difficult to express this and work constructively with its partners to achieve the desired goal.

Important principles of partnership in mission which emerged were interdependence, participation in community, collaboration, mutual confidence and help, respectful consideration, mutual consultation, the need for reciprocity, a holistic approach to partnership and mutual accountability. All the ingredients of faithful partnership in mission relationships were there. They just needed to be taken seriously and implemented with conviction.

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¹ A phrase used by Harold Macmillan, UK Prime Minister during an address to the South African parliament in February 1960, regarding the development of a world-wide non-racial and democratic spirit (Hastings 2005:414).