“Despite the collapse of the European empires, colonialism has never really gone away.” Comment on this assertion. Are there elements of mission today that still betray “colonial” attitudes?

Having dominated the world for over four centuries, the European empires disintegrated soon after the Second World War. This process of decolonisation, which we may date from the independence of India and Pakistan in 1947, multiplied the number of nation states and restructured global politics. Despite this significant trend, there are many who maintain that some form of *colonial relationship* remains between former imperial powers and the territories they controlled. These fundamentally unequal and disruptive relationships influence multiple areas of public and private life, and in this essay we focus especially on the ongoing relationship between colonialism and religion, specifically with regard to Christian mission.[1]

In Section I we introduce colonialism as a concept and as a historical reality. Section II takes a brief look at the historical relationship between colonialism and the Church, which is essential for understanding the relationship today. Section III defines *neo*colonialism and explains how this concept differs from traditional colonialism. This enables us to evaluate the truth of the statement “colonialism has never really gone away.” The most significant part of this essay is Section IV, where we argue that there are four areas where Christian mission remains ‘colonialistic’ today, namely power; language and culture; theology; and missiology. Section V summarises and concludes our discussion.

Section I – What is Colonialism?

Properly speaking, colonialism was not limited to the modern era, and neither was it restricted to European rule. Rather, colonialism has a long history where one territory has been subjugated and exploited by another. As Ania Loomba confirms, “colonialism… has been a recurrent and widespread feature of human history” (1998, 2). For many historians, however, historical colonialism is synonymous with ‘Europeanization’,[2] since the heyday of colonialism was when Europe was in the ascendancy and four-fifths of the world was under its control. Westerners at that time believed their Empires to be beneficial and even benevolent towards colonial subjects, under the dubious concept of spreading “civilization.” Today, however, there is greater awareness of colonialism’s negative impact and, in Britain for example, considerable post-imperial guilt, despite recent reaffirmations by apologists of Empire.

Brian Stanley (1990, 34) defines colonialism as “that form of imperialism in which the imperial power imposes governmental control on a territory without resort to large-scale human settlement,” and likewise Loomba (1998, 2) sees colonialism “as the conquest and control of other people’s land and goods.”[3] Whilst colonialism can thus be defined in political and economic terms, it invariably had profound social implications: as suggested by Ingleby (in Corrie 2007, 62), colonialism typically had “a civilizational component, not simply the occupation of territory, but also cultural and religious transformation.” This has sometimes been referred to in postcolonial studies as ‘colonization of the mind.’

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[1] The story of colonialism must be told and retold, even if it contains uncomfortable truths for those of us in the West, and even though that ‘story’ ultimately fragments into myriad narratives. The rapidly expanding postcolonial discourse has reappraised colonial history and attempted to hear the voices of all its participants, not just the empire builders. One hopes that yesterday’s subaltern can speak to Christians today too.

[2] Gründer in Müller (1998, 68) uses the phrase “Europeanizing the earth” when defining colonialism. Gründer categorizes the motives for European colonization as: (i) settlement/overpopulation; (ii) economic and socioeconomic impulses; (iii) power and prestige; and (iv) mission and civilization. The fact that the English were soon at the vanguard of global colonization has led Niall Ferguson to describe the process as ‘Anglobalization’ (2003, xxiii).

[3] *The Oxford Dictionary of Human Geography* (Johnston 1986, 59) defines colonialism as fundamentally being “The establishment and maintenance of rule by a sovereign power over an alien people” but, by specifying “[as] practised by a

Abdel-Fadil dates the emergence of colonialism to 1500-1800, initially by Spain and Portugal but soon by Britain, France and the Netherlands. Between the 1820s and the First World War, “European countries had achieved complete dominance over world trade, finance and shipping… backed by superiority in technology, applied science, organization and information systems” (in Eatwell 1986, 62). By 1914, the imperial powers had colonised 85% of the world, and empire remained the strongest political entity up until the Second World War, despite the dismantling of the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman Empires after World War One.

This brief introduction to the concept and history of colonialism would be incomplete without recognising the adverse impact on the countries and citizens that were colonised. The human cost and suffering was immense. As Ramachandra observes (2005, 119), “European colonialism not only plundered wealth from the colonies but also violently reshaped physical territories, social terrains, knowledge systems and human identities.” To those who have recently asserted that Africans, Asians and Latin Americans benefited greatly from colonialism, Robert Young’s response brings some perspective: “Colonialism may have brought some benefits of modernity… but it also caused extraordinary suffering in human terms, and was singularly destructive with regard to the indigenous cultures with which it came into contact” (2001, 6). With this reminder in place, we now turn to the historic relationship between colonialism and Christian mission.

Section II – Colonialism and the Church

In the decades immediately following the start of decolonization, Christian mission came under increasing attack for having been either a motivation for colonialism, or an aspect of it. This was colonialism understood as commerce plus civilization plus Christianity. In the last two and a half decades, however, historians as well as missiologists have acknowledged the complexity of the relationship between colonialism and the Church, even if this recognition has yet to filter through to the general public.[4]

The Traditional View

The traditional view is expressed by Horst Gründer in Müller (1998, 68), who claims that “the spread of the gospel played a decisive role in Western expansionism” and that “we should not ignore the role and consequences of Christian missionary activity” (70). Popular historian Niall Ferguson specifically claims that British missionaries were intentional in their cultural imperialism:

> “Victorian missionaries believed they knew what was best for Africa. Their goal was not so much colonization as ‘civilization’: introducing a way of life that was first and foremost Christian, but was also

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succession of European states” seems to ignore, for example, American and Japanese imperialism. Whilst some scholars differentiate between ‘imperialism’ and ‘colonialism’, many authors use the terms interchangeably, e.g. Stanley (1990). For the sake of clarity, this essay will use only the latter term.

[4] Indeed, as Etherington notes (2005, 1), “the precise connections between religion and Empire have yet to be fully delineated by historians.”

> distinctly North European in its reverence for industry and abstinence… as important as the Evangelical project was the idea that India's whole culture needed to be Anglicized. It was not only the missionaries who took this view." (2003, 94 and 115)

The charges against missionaries include not merely being "associated with… imperialism" (Porter 2004, 316) or having "complicity" with it (Ingleby 2006, 2) but also being intentional "footsoldiers of imperialism" (Comaroff and Comaroff, quoted in Gorringe 2004, 188), and even being its "advance guard" (MacQueen 2007, 21).

Responses to the Traditional View

More than twenty years ago, Gambian-born scholar Lamin Sanneh attacked aspects of colonial studies as lacking in intellectual and historical rigour.[5] Since then, there has been recognition of the dangers of generalisation; of the lack of homogeneity within colonialism; and of the complexity of the relationship between colonialism and Christian mission. For example, whilst there were certainly occasions where Christianity was forced onto people against their will, it was very often a choice made by individuals; such choice was empowering in this world and of ultimate importance for the next. Those who claim that missionary Christianity was always oppressive and controlling are themselves in danger of being patronizing, by denying the possibility that it was chosen by indigenous people capable of acting in their own interests.[6]

Further evidence that "[t]he relationship between the missions and the acquisition of empire was not straightforward" comes from Robert (2007, 10), who notes that the British East India Company for some time did not allow missionaries in its territory. Clearly, they were not always thought to be acting in the interests of empire. Indeed, a number of scholars have suggested that missionary work was influential in raising national consciousness and encouraging independence from empire. The picture is complicated further by Sanneh's suggestion (2003, 18) that, given the tremendous growth of Christianity in the post-independence South, could colonialism be regarded as having been an *obstacle* to the spread of the Christian faith?

Ultimately, we must recognise that, just as people's experiences of colonialism varied, and just as missionaries' motives varied, there were a variety of relationships between European colonialism and Christian mission. The truth is probably close to Young's assessment that "[c]olonization was not primarily concerned with transposing cultural values. They came as a by-product of its real objectives of trade, economic exploitation and settlement" (2001, 24). The interests of Christian mission, it is true, very often coincided with those of empire, but the two things were not the same. Christian missionaries very often took considerable steps to contextualise themselves, rather than imposing their own culture. This leads us to conclude that, where missionaries acted as agents of colonialism, it was not normally deliberately and that often they actually helped "curb the worst colonial excesses" (Said 1994, 166).

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[5] Sanneh (1987, 88) chastises historians who are normally "instinctively critical" for being "more credulous in perpetuating the notion of mission as 'imperialism at prayer'." The consequences of this are serious, allowing political nationalists to capitalize on this viewpoint "by strengthening the prejudice against [contemporary] mission as a discredited relic of colonialism."

[6] Porter, for example, finds many instances of "local classes and ethnic communities who were able to turn missionary offerings to their own advantage" (2004, 322).

Section III – What is Neocolonialism, and is it a Reality Today?

Whilst colonialism is generally defined in economic, political and cultural terms (Section I), ‘neocolonialism’ tends to be employed more narrowly in contemporary usage. Whereas colonialism typically describes the relationship between colony and empire, neocolonialism refers to relationships that are less direct. Control is still exerted, but this new form of colonialism sees countries dominated by transnational corporations, NGOs and other powerful institutions, as well as states. These institutions are regarded as wielding political and, especially, economic power over developing countries.

Neocolonialism Defined

Johnston (1986, 322) concurs that the essence of neocolonialism is that, for “societies of the underdeveloped world… their economic and political systems are controlled from outside.” Likewise, Marshall notes that “former colonial powers… retain economic influence and control over their former dependent territories” (1994, 352). Interestingly, Marshall adds that, in his understanding, neocolonialism is also “a continuation of the processes of cultural Westernization which guarantee the West’s market outlets elsewhere in the world,” a statement which includes the realm of culture, but only in relation to its economic impact.[7]

Bernard Adeney also notes that neocolonialism is not just an economic phenomenon: “neocolonialism is alive and well in the form of a Western- (and Japanese-) dominated international economic and cultural order” (1995, 176). Adeney is unusual in linking this cultural dominance to the Church, listing it as one of the “national institutions [which] are formally independent but actually controlled by a foreign power. In many countries, the church is still a neocolonialist institution… Businesses, universities, nongovernmental organizations and even governments have the same neocolonialist structures” (1995, 240).[8] We will leave until Section IV further discussion of the Church as a force of colonialism today, and first consider whether it is true to say that other forms of colonialism have “never really gone away.”

Economic and Political Neocolonialism

Figure 1 below shows where economic power resides today (at the national level, at least). Europe, the powerhouse of colonialism, remains strong economically: the European Union is the world’s largest ‘economy’. The ten largest national economies include the former European imperial powers of the UK, France and Spain. The United States and Japan have both been colonisers, and Russia (at number 11) was of course an empire before being a republic of soviet states. Even the smaller European imperial powers remain economically strong today – the Netherlands, Sweden and Belgium all reside in the top twenty.[9] A few former colonies have entered this list, though this is principally on demographic grounds (Canada, Brazil and India are of note). The United States occupies the unusual position of having been both colony and colonial power, and heads the table.

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[7] Likewise Young (2001, 45) defines neocolonialism as denoting “a continuing economic hegemony that means that the postcolonial state remains in a situation of dependence on its former masters, and that the former masters continue to act in a colonialist manner towards formerly colonized states.” Young does suggest, however, possible differentiation between “economic and military neocolonialism” and “cultural neocolonialism” (2001, 48).

[8] The term ‘neocolonialism’ is used pejoratively, so it is something of a surprise to find a political commentator such as William Pfaff arguing as recently as 1995 that “Much of Africa needs, to put it plainly, what one could call a disinterested neocolonialism” (p.2). Our line of argument here is that, by definition, neocolonialism is not and cannot be disinterested.

[9] Germany and Italy, of course, also held short-lived empires in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries.

Figure 1. Countries with the Largest GDP, 2007

Rank	Country	GDP (million US$)	Rank	Country	GDP (million US$)
	World	*54,311,608*			
	European Union	*16,830,100*			
1	United States	13,843,825	11	Russia	1,289,582
2	Japan	4,383,762	12	India	1,098,945
3	Germany	3,322,147	13	South Korea	957,053
4	China	3,250,827	14	Australia	908,826
5	United Kingdom	2,772,570	15	Mexico	893,365
6	France	2,560,255	16	Netherlands	768,704
7	Italy	2,104,666	17	Turkey	663,419
8	Spain	1,438,959	18	Sweden	455,319
9	Canada	1,432,140	19	Belgium	453,636
10	Brazil	1,313,590	20	Indonesia	432,944

Source: International Monetary Fund, 2008[10]

This economic power is solidified politically in the form of the G8, the international grouping of Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Russia, the United Kingdom and the USA (with the EU also a participant). Of these, China, France, Russia, the UK and the USA are also the five permanent members of the UN Security Council.

With their economic, political – and military – power, these countries are able to exert influence over the economies of weaker, developing countries. The corollary of the table above is that nearly all of the world's poorest countries (which is better measured by GDP per capita) are former colonies such as Malawi, Tanzania and Somalia (once ruled by Britain), Niger and the Comoros (France), D.R. Congo and Burundi (Belgium). It is not difficult to argue that the poverty of these countries is a direct result of their exploitation by their former overlords; that they are trapped in inherited economic structures and trading dependencies; that they continue to suffer from disadvantageous terms of trade; and that the global economic trading system is skewed against them and in favour of Western interests. Further, the very institutions charged with helping their development and facilitating global trade – the World Bank, International Monetary Fund and World Trade Organization – were established and remain controlled by the former colonial powers.[11]

As mentioned above, colonialism today takes different forms from that of the formal colonial period. Firstly, more of the control and dominance is indirect and therefore developing countries are not defined as a legally subservient entities;[12] this legal independence is seen by some as irrelevant, with ex-colonies only experiencing what is derisively referred to as ‘flag independence’. Secondly, the operators of control are today more varied. Critics of neocolonialism identify the multi- or trans-national corporation as the chief culprit (see Figure 2 below). These are profitable concerns so large, and so globally established, that they are powerful enough to influence governments, in order to increase their markets, reduce their tax contributions and gain advantages over their competitors. In the same way that countries struggled to compete against British manufactures during and after the industrial revolution, businesses in developing countries today find it near-impossible to compete with multi-billion dollar companies on their doorstep.

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[10] World Economic Outlook Database, April 2008: nominal GDP list of countries. Data for the year 2007.

[11] Despite recent debt cancellation programmes, partly as a result of the Jubilee 2000 campaign, many developing countries remain in considerable debt to Western countries. The high interest rates on these loans make them difficult to repay, resulting in a dependency that is reminiscent of formal colonialism.

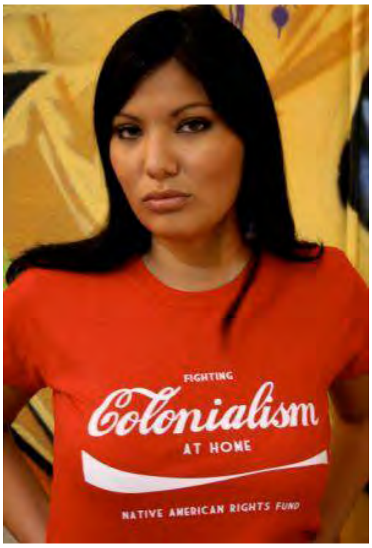

Figure 2
A young woman protests against the impact of colonialism on indigenous Americans. The styling of her T-shirt points to the perceived neocolonialism of Coca-Cola, one of the world’s largest corporations and alleged instigator of ‘Cocacolonisation,’ which has seen local drinks around the world replaced by this American export.

Cultural Neocolonialism

Broader understandings of colonialism include the impact of imperial culture, which was transmitted (whether intentionally or not) as part of the process. Likewise, it is possible today to see examples of cultural colonialism as part of ongoing globalisation. Whilst globalisation technically refers to increased connectedness between different parts of the world, it would be imprudent to ignore the underlying power structures in this process. In reality, globalisation has seen the mass exportation of Western, and especially American, culture around the world. Inevitably, this has eroded local expressions of culture in developing countries; and has been exacerbated through advances in popular technology. Whilst there have been reverse flows (such as the growing popularity of the ‘world music’ in the West) and increased ‘glocalisation’, these are massively outweighed by the relentless flow of culture from the West. This includes music, fashion, cinema, sport, entertainment and other components of contemporary culture.

Today, therefore, it is possible to see elements of colonialism in the political, economic and cultural arenas. These modern day forms of colonialism have their roots in political institutions established after the Second World War; in the economic power biases inherent in advanced capitalism; and in mass consumerism and mass media. The recent Gulf Wars (1990-1991 and 2003-) provide sufficient proof that military colonialism is also alive and well, following in the tradition of the Vietnam War, as well as ‘military interventions’ in Grenada, Panama and elsewhere in Latin America.[13] We conclude, therefore, that colonialism has indeed never really gone away, merely metamorphosed. In the next section we ask whether Christianity (specifically, Christian mission) also remains colonialistic today.

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[12] Although a small number of ‘overseas territories’ (formerly ‘crown colonies’) remain today, including Bermuda, the British Virgin Islands and the Cayman Islands. French overseas territories today include French Guiana, French Polynesia and Guadeloupe.

Section IV – (Neo)colonialism and the Church Today

In this section we consider whether elements of the Christian Church – and mission in particular – remain ‘colonial’ or neocolonial. Though there have been some criticisms of the church’s attitudes and practices as still being colonial, these are relatively few in number.[14] As well as comparatively little overt criticism within Christian literature, there has been little external criticism of the Church today as an agent of (neo)colonialism: focus is much more on multinational companies and, to a lesser extent, NGOs. Academic study of postcolonialism and globalisation makes little reference to the Westernizing impact of Christian mission around the world today, a fact which could point towards the secular nature of those studies; or to a perception that the global Church is now indigenized and contextualized.

Of the criticism that has been made of Christianity today, we saw in Section III the example of Adeney’s assertion that “In many countries the church is still a neocolonialist institution” (1995, 240). Adeney writes with particular reference to churches in Africa, although he would not limit the accusation of neocolonialism to that continent alone. In the UK, missiologist Jonathan Ingleby has alleged that “in world mission, we [in the West] have not given up our bad habits” (2006, 10) and that our mission history and missiology are “still too triumphalistic, too Eurocentric, too androcentric… too colonial” (2006, 5).

Outside of the Church, Stoll’s investigation into the work of SIL/Wycliffe Bible Translators attempted to link the activity of one mission agency to political and neocolonial interests, arguing that there was a “hidden church-planting agenda… [which had a] sweeping disrespect for religious tradition and subservient attitude toward bad government” (1982, 17). More recently, Frawley (cited in Stanley 2003, 315) claimed that “Missionary activity always holds an implicit psychological violence, however discretely it is conducted… It is about the attempt of one religion to exterminate all others… conversion is inherently an unethical practice.” These accusations, though somewhat vitriolic, need to be taken seriously and evaluated.

To find evidence of (neo)colonialism we will examine specific aspects of Christian ministry, theology and mission. This section proceeds by looking at ongoing colonial practices or mindsets in four areas: power; language and culture; theology; and missiology. This is followed by a fifth part that develops criteria for future differentiation between cultural *influence* and cultural *colonialism*.

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[13] The recent association between neocolonialism, military power and the American right has been well explored by, amongst others, Susan George in *Hijacking America* (Cambridge: Polity, 2008).

[14] Though it is entirely possible that this perspective merely reflects the Western background of this paper’s author; the generally Western nature of Christian literature; and the reluctance of Christians from the global South to be seen complaining.

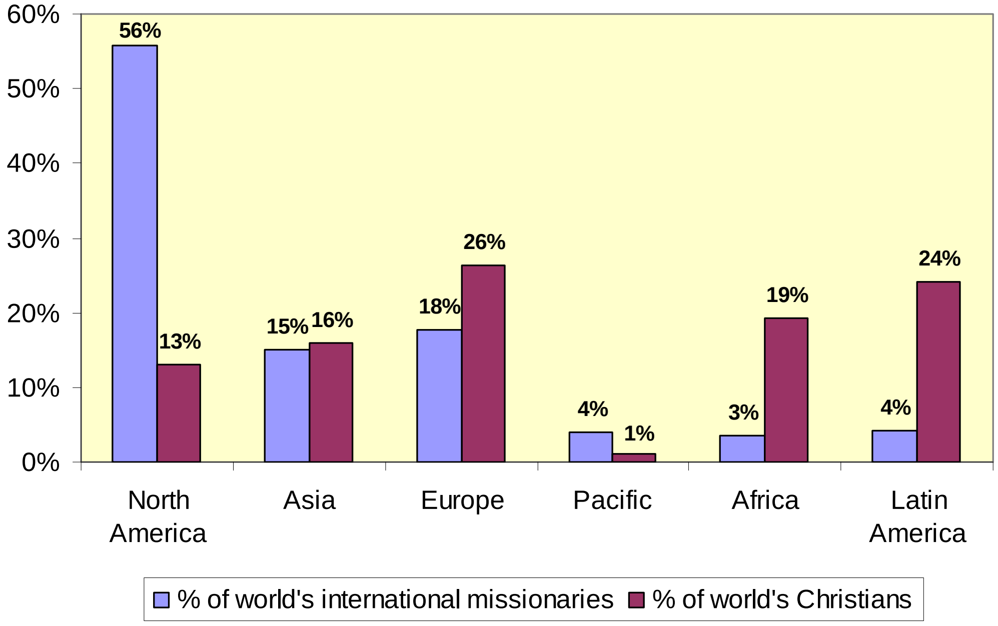
(a) Colonialism in the Church Today: Power

Are there ways in which the Christian Church, especially through mission, exerts power and control in ways that betray colonial sentiment? The fundamental issue of power is related to structures (which are the channels or guardians of power) and to finance (which enables power to be exercised).

Organisational and Financial Power

The world's largest mission agencies – for historical, financial and political reasons – are headquartered in the West, especially the USA and the UK. A sample of mission agencies shows that, in 2000-1, 64% had their headquarters or a major office in the USA, 51% in the UK, 31% in Canada and 27% in Australia. India was the best-represented developing country, with 5% of mission agencies having a major office there.[15] It is also instructive to see which countries are sending the most missionaries overseas. Figure 3 compares each continent's share of world Christians with its share of missionaries sent, using figures from the latest edition of *Operation World*.[16] If the missionary flow reflected the size of the church in each continent, each pair of bars in the diagram would be the same height. Instead, we see that the Church in North America is able to send a far great number of missionaries than its membership base alone would suggest. At the other end of the spectrum, 43% of world Christians live in Africa and Latin America, yet collectively they are able to send just 7% of international missionaries. Unless we are prepared to claim that Christians in these areas have less interest in mission, we can only conclude that mission today reflects financial might, which has the effect of maintaining Western dominance.

Figure 3. Share of Missionaries Sent Overseas and Christians by Continent, 2000



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[15] Appendix 3 in Johnstone (2001, 733-741) lists 113 evangelical mission agencies, that "are representative of the nearly 3,000 agencies that are listed" (733) in Operation World's database. In total, these represent 109,000 missionaries, as of 2000/2001. Of the 113 agencies in the sample, 1 had a major office in Brazil, 3 in Kenya, 3 in the Philippines and 4 in Nigeria.

[16] These numbers were derived from Appendix 4 of Johnstone (2001, 747-752) which shows the total number of missionaries from each continent. These are compared with the number of 'Christian adherents' given for each continent (pp. 21, 32-3, 41, 51 and 58). Latin America includes the Caribbean.

Structural Power

In 1971, Louis King alleged that leaders of the post-independence 'younger churches' were complaining that new ecclesial structures were:

> "designed to… retain influence and power… [and that] western Christians… have not functioned in a manner to promote the goal[s] of self-reliance, of modernization, and of economic progress. Missionaries have not been sufficiently aware of the nationals' aspirations or accepted their goals of development" (184).

Damningly, he concluded that "missionaries are playing the old colonial game in a new form" (ibid.). The allegation is that the colonial structures of mission were not dismantled or replaced, and that post-independence many things carried on as they had been before. Missionaries stayed on in developing countries, working for the same mission agencies on the same programmes. They had the same mindset, expectations and influence as before; there was no great discontinuity. Looking back on independence in Africa, Ndirangu Mwaura (2005, 162) concluded it "brought very few changes in the colonial Church… the colonial structure was still maintained, with *wazungus* in top leadership positions."

It is interesting to ask to what extent things have changed today. There is a new generation of missionaries from the West, who themselves were never children of Empire. And there is a second generation of post-independence leaders in African and Asian churches. Perhaps leadership and structures remain colonial where there are cross-cultural and cross-national teams, of which Western leaders tend to assume leadership. Moreover, practices such as Western churches sponsoring or supporting mission projects in developing countries can very easily be paternalistic and patronising. A colonialistic attitude fails to consciously challenge assumptions about who should control projects, who should allocate resources, and who is responsible for the future direction of mission. The fact that mission agencies tend to be headquartered in the West and staffed by Westerners, coupled with greater material resources in the West, unfortunately means that colonial patterns re-emerge, if not deliberately. Recent steps towards *wazungus* taking more of a back seat are encouraging, with greater talk of partnership between churches, empowerment of indigenous peoples, and local sustainability of development projects.

Conceptual Power

Another way in which power is a significant form of colonialism today relates to a different form of power, that of intellectual or conceptual power. The problem here is that Western ways of doing things (mission, church, culture etc.) are often regarded as *normative*, with non-Western ways being seen as abnormal or inferior. Livermore, writing chiefly to Americans, has noted that this tendency is especially prevalent in short-term mission:

> "Much of the way we interact cross-culturally continues to be filled with an 'Our way is best' mentality… a subtle sense among Americans that we have the 'right' culture and this need to 'convert' others to our ways still permeates much of our cross-cultural perspective and practice." (2006, 13)

Livermore, a leading authority on short-term mission, himself regards these as "colonialist tendencies" (ibid.). These are by no means limited to American practitioners of mission, although it must be noted that the majority of 'short-termers' are indeed from the United States. Imposing one's own cultural norms on others is undoubtedly a form of cultural colonialism that characterises (especially short-term) mission today, the arrogant claims of one worldview to dominate another.[17]

(b) Colonialism in the Church Today: Language and Culture

The second type of modern-day colonialism within world mission is that of *language and culture*. Whilst much has recently been written about how translations of the Gospel empowered and validated local cultures,[18] it should be recognised that missiology remains very much an English-based discipline. English remains the preferred medium of the major missiological publications, international mission conferences, training materials, theological institutions and so on. Whilst there are obvious advantages to sharing a common language, the fact that English is reverted to so quickly potentially suggests a cultural superiority complex.

Communication

Secondly, methods of communication may themselves be a form of cultural colonialism. Ken Gnanakan observes that Christian leaders in the developing world are copying their North American counterparts: “Asian and African evangelists deliver such confrontational messages as if they are in North America. Dressed like their American counterparts, they do not even consider the need to alter the language used” (in Walls and Ross 2008, 8). Interestingly, Gnanakan concludes that “There is arrogance reminiscent of the colonial days,” a sort of double condemnation of evangelists in the developing world *and* those they are copying. This is not ‘mimicry’ in the positive, subversive or self-empowering form, but rather an unconscious, unthinking duplication. In my own experience I have witnessed churches in former Soviet states using American contemporary worship songs (sometimes translated, sometimes not), and one wonders what cultural resonance or relevance such forms hold.

Culture and Symbols

Thirdly, other cultural elements find themselves transposed along with the gospel. In the quote from Gnanakan above, clothing is copied from American Christian leaders, and it is not unusual to see, for example, priests all around the Anglican Communion dressed in the same vestments as English vicars, be they in Uganda or elsewhere in the global South. Likewise, churches that were built by missionaries have often closely resembled churches from their home countries, although it is not clear to what extent this still happens today. Other aspects of culture that are copied include social customs, definitions of acceptable and unacceptable behaviour, religious symbols and attitudes to family life. This author has witnessed evidence that such cultural impositions are ongoing: American missionaries visiting Moldova have instructed local pastors to dress in a certain way (with suit and tie, like them), not to smoke and not to drink alcohol. Whilst these latter two may be regarded as sensible advice, they nonetheless fall into the category of cultural, rather than biblical priorities.

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[17] A similar observation is made by Rowan Williams in his introduction to *Mission in the 21st Century*, that “Even when the old colonialisms have vanished, we in the Western world are still prone to think as if there were one narrative for Christianity, in which we continue to set the pace” (Walls and Ross 2008, xi). This narrative is a combination of the biblical message, and our reading of it.

[18] See, especially, Lamin Sanneh’s excellent *Translating the Message*, which claims that missionary translation showed the intrinsic worth of each culture and that such work led not only to “cultural pride” but ultimately “begot cultural nationalism” (1987, 106).

Terminological and Ontological Concerns

Lastly is the suggestion that the entire discourse of mission studies – and this can equally be said of postcolonial studies – is a Western construct using Western terminology. The 'ethnic groups' and nations that are targeted by mission strategists can also be understood as Western constructs (Walls 1996, 127). The investigation into the impact of colonialism, and the search to hear previously marginalised or excluded voices, has been instigated by Western academics. Some have seen this as colonialism in its own right. As McLeod observes, "the concepts and nomenclature of postcolonialism have been fashioned in Western, especially American, universities and are not always adequate to meet the contemporary needs of countries with a history of colonialism, such as India" (2000, 247). In the parallel discipline of mission studies, our terminology is almost entirely based on Western (especially English) words and concepts. Even the systematic approach of ordering knowledge and categorising the world in order to understand it can be seen as a Western idea; its imposition another form of cultural colonialism (Aguilar 2002, 302-323).

(c) Colonialism in the Church Today: Theology

There are a number of ways in which Christian theology can be seen to exhibit Western biases, and such theology is shared (imposed?) in developing countries not only by missionaries but also by theological institutions in the developing world.

'Third World Theology'

We look first at what may be loosely termed 'third world theology'. Since the 1970s, with the growing acceptance of the need for contextualisation, and greater awareness of emerging theologies around the world, some theological colleges have been teaching 'contextual theology', meaning theology that has emerged in the developing world and differs from the 'classical theology' of the West. The problem here is the assumption that Western theology, including missiology, is 'normal' or somehow devoid of context. All theology is the product of particular social and cultural contexts.[19] Ramachandra (2005, 141) has questioned the legitimacy of theology that claims to originate in developing countries: "A number of dictionaries and anthologies that have appeared in recent years on 'Third World theology,' 'Asian theology,' and the like, are usually written by Western Christians or by non-Western Christians domiciled in Western academies." Room must be made for "those great jewels of the human spirit" that Sanneh (1995, 718) protests have been ignored by Western Christianity.

Liberation Theology

The most significant and influential school of theology to emerge from the developing world was the liberation theology of Latin America, based on the work of Gustavo Gutiérrez, Leonardo Boff and others, who attempted to develop a theology that related to the social conditions of their own continent. It was ironic, therefore, that Gutiérrez drew heavily from Karl Marx, a *European* political philosopher, and developed his theology whilst at university in Belgium and France. With numerous African and Asian students of theology and missiology coming to study in the West, does the assumption remain that Western thinking is required, or somehow superior? If this view is encouraged or perpetuated by Western colleges, staff and students, then we may suspect this to be an ongoing form of cultural colonialism.

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[19] And, as Rieger has perceptively pointed out, that context has often been imperial. Here we have something of a reciprocal relationship: not only does theology spread the values of empire, the values of empire have shaped modern theology. This leads Rieger (2007, 198) to provocatively ask "If modern theology is unconsciously tied to the colonial sentiments of its time, is it possible that contemporary theology, too, is affected by colonial projects? How much is our own work influenced by the neocolonialist sentiments that shape our own time?"

Christology

Finally, we consider a specific branch of theology: Christology. Who is the Christ that missionaries take with them onto the mission field? Is there a 'universal' or 'cosmic' Christ we can share or do we inevitably impart a Christ shaped by our own culture, dressed in our own clothes? Peter Phan is a Catholic missionary who has written about the development of theology in Asia where, because Christian mission was "intimately bound with Western imperialism, the imported portrait of Jesus was what has been called the 'colonial Christ'" (1996, 399). This is a genuine grievance in many parts of the world, where we have taken our images of a blue-eyed, pale-skinned Messiah. But it is not our depiction of Jesus that has been the most problematic, but rather our conceptualisation of Him. We in the West have created a 'Christ' who reflects our own values, fits within our worldview, and speaks in answer to our questions. We have then expected this 'Christ' to be recognisable and relevant to other cultures. This again is cultural colonialism, whether intentional or not.

(d) Colonialism in the Church Today: Missiology

We turn now to the actual conduct of mission, although elements of this have already been covered in the three previous parts of this section.

Mission History

Firstly, it is important to re-examine how mission history has been written. For example, mission case studies or missionary biographies tend to begin with information on the missionary's background, their calling and preparation, and move on to their arrival in a mission field abroad: the archetypal "strange land." Whilst this narrative technique is understandable, it rather gives the impression that God arrived only when the missionary did; and that the focus of the mission was the missionary himself, rather than the recipient culture (or, indeed, the Triune God and the *missio Dei*). This is a relatively small example of a general bias in mission history, which has been told from a Western perspective.[20] The senders – and not the receivers – have written the history, and have decided how the story should be told. Where this practice continues, it betrays a colonial, Western-centred, partiality.

Missiology / Missiologies

Secondly, there has been a narrowness to our missiology; the same missiological theories and themes have been dominant in academia around the world. There has been insufficient attention paid to local particulars, leading Moon and Lee (in Tiplady 2003, 13) to complain that "global missiology… is still burdened with a presupposition that missiological theories and strategies are mostly universals that fit all situations." Whilst the biblical 'constants' are unchanging, the 'contexts' vary, and so we may need to move towards Asian missiology, African missiology and Latin missiology, and away from an overarching, universal missiological framework.

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[20] As Ingleby suggests (in Corrie 2007, 63), a "sensitive reading" of the discussions and literature of postcolonialist studies might show missiologists "that they have not done enough serious thinking about the way that the history of mission has been told."

Forms of Mission

Thirdly, we must consider current forms of mission. Specifically, what is the impact of the global Church sending such a large proportion of its missionary force – and spending approaching half of its missionary budget – on short-term mission? If short-term mission is seen as an appropriate, effective missionary method, what are the implications? If mission becomes reduced to a two-week 'mission vacation', with no time to understand a culture on any meaningful level, then it is in danger of becoming a plaything, a 'worthy' holiday with only short-term impact. Moreover, it is an avenue open only to those who can afford it, namely Western (and especially American) Christians – and perhaps only those from the middle classes. If half of global mission projects are effectively open only to such Christians, they are very strong forces of cultural transfer, to say the least. The impact of four million Americans each year making short-term trips to thousands of churches and church projects must be considerable.[21] There is a clear danger that countries and denominations that are wealthiest will be able to send more and more of their young people on such mission trips, with very few flows in the opposite direction. This is the most brazen face of colonialistic mission today.[22]

(e) Cultural Colonialism Reconsidered

Throughout this essay we have eschewed too tight or legalistic a definition of colonialism, since the term has a range of meanings in different contexts and historical eras. The key aspects of colonialism, however, were noted to include control or excessive influence by one territory or society over another; and resulting in not simply an impact, but a *transformation* of social norms and cultural values. It is to some extent moot whether such impact is deliberate or not; the point is that it *does* happen. Having considered different ways in which Christian mission affect local cultures, we can now more accurately differentiate between cultural *influence* and cultural *colonialism* – after all, cultures have always and everywhere interacted and borrowed from each other.[23] I propose that Christian mission can especially be regarded as 'colonialistic' when it exhibits some or all of the following characteristics:

- Its cultural elements are difficult to resist – they penetrate deep into the recipient culture and/or they are all-pervasive.
- It replaces rather than interacts with local culture; it is a one-way, non-reciprocal process.
- It has power behind it (financial, political, etc.) that enables it to dominate or subjugate local alternatives.
- It is framed in terms of modernization or advancement, and hence implicitly claims superiority.[24]

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[21] The estimate that as many as four million Americans go abroad on short-term mission trips each year is cited in Livermore (2006, 12). Livermore also reports that American churches spend the same on short-term mission as on long-term.

[22] Livermore's timely book gives numerous shocking examples of missionary cultural insensitivity. For his PhD thesis, Livermore interviewed North American pastors who had conducted theological training in the developing world; he also interviewed the national church leaders who received the training, and compared the results, which are salutary. To give just one example, an American trainer said: "We came here to teach about the life of Christ and how he did ministry. And so *cultural differences really don't matter*" (2006, 77, italics original). The national's feedback was: "I have never met anyone more insensitive to a local culture, but he said he is transcultural and that he is not American but *biblical* in his values" (ibid., italics original). A different national leader wondered: "In some ways, he described a different Jesus than the one we know. I'm not sure what to do with that" (2006, 85).

[23] Gorringe (2004, 180), for example, observes that "Culture is transmissible and accumulative, and depends on critical appropriation for its continuing integrity."

[24] Or, conversely, if the recipient culture is depicted as 'superstitious', 'pagan', 'primitive' or 'backward'.

Section V – Conclusion

We have seen how colonialism has long been associated with Christianity, but that the relationship between the two has been by no means straightforward or uniform. In the modern era, Christianity spread as a global phenomenon because of its attachment to the European empires that colonized the great majority of our planet. Despite thereby benefiting from access to new peoples, Christian mission was never fully in step with colonialism, and in many instances spoke out against it. To an extent, it followed its own, higher agenda, but not without lapses and violations of local cultures.

When we speak of colonialism today – often termed neocolonialism – the normal referent is economic or political influence. We saw in Section III that these forms of colonialism remain today. Yet a fuller understanding of colonialism includes other forms of external control or influence, and Christian mission was and is one such influence on the world's cultures. There is a difficult line to draw between cultural imperialism, and the introduction and sharing of one culture with another. Yet some missionary encounters today are, in the light of criteria identified in Section IV(e), serious transgressions: they do not interact with local culture, they disrupt, overpower or destroy it. To a certain extent, then, the Christian church continues to be guilty today of (mostly unintentional) 'cultural colonialism' through its missionary projects around the world.[25]

There is considerable evidence that Christian mission today is more contextualised, more participative and more reflective than in previous centuries, though future generations will be better placed to judge whether this is the case. What is clear, however, is that greater effort must be taken by the global Christian community to recognise and celebrate the plurality of cultures (and thereby a plurality of Christian theologies and missiologies). It must reflect deeply on how some cultures come to dominate others, even if unintentionally. This is an important and urgent task, for we have seen that the mission of the Church remains tarnished by at least four types of colonialism – relating to missiology, culture and language, theology and, inevitably, the power formations that underpin relationships between churches in different countries. This, then, is primarily a task for churches in the West; may our Christian brothers and sisters in the global South help guide us from our excesses, insensitivities and unnecessary interference, and may God grant us the humility to walk in more modest and less colonial ways.[26] Stephen Neill (1986, 398) sagely warned us that such transformation is, however, "the work of generations, not of years."

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[25] On this issue, Kenyan mission leader Wanyeki Mahiaini speaks out against deliberate manipulation of post-imperial guilt: "Others of us from African [sic] play the guilt card whenever we remind outsiders of the effects of colonialism and insensitive missionary experiments in the continent. The effect of such comments is to frighten off criticism… this sort of manipulation must stop" (2003, 7).

[26] Indeed, we ought to think not just of what negatives we should stop doing, but also what positives we can do, for example with regard to shared material resources, multidirectional mission exchanges, space for alternative theologies and missiologies, etc.

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