

## ABSTRACT

The course of Christian mission in Malaysia spans a period of almost five hundred years. It traversed a path that began as a military crusade but then fell short of its goals in the centuries after and has now arrived once more at the crossroads. This dissertation reflects upon the course taken thus far and from its present juncture ponders the passage ahead.

The starting-point is mission as it was perceived in the past: an enterprise of “saving souls” and “planting churches” with the inculturation of the Christian faith all but neglected. Viewed as an institution of Western colonialism, the Church attained a degree of prestige and influence in society that has since been unsurpassed. With the birth of the new Malaysian nation in 1963, however, the marginalisation of the Church is increasingly apparent. Within the Church itself there is tension as it strives to understand mission not just in the traditional terms of conversion and church growth but as public engagement for common life in the Malaysian plural society. Such tension is evident in the different responses of the church hierarchy and the laity in the Malaysian Borneo state of Sabah to the powerful force of state-sponsored Islamisation during the early 1970s.

In the final analysis this study finds that socio-political forces operative in the contemporary Malaysian situation provide the greatest impetus for the emergence of a new approach to mission. This involves looking beyond church-centered goals to making a positive Christian contribution to national life. The fact that the Christian community is a marginal minority articulating its Christian viewpoint from within a context of religious pluralism means that the emphasis must necessarily be placed on interfaith dialogue as an integral part of the development of Christian missionary understanding today.