

Asian Mission in Strategic Perspective: Asian Christians for the Muslim World

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1. A New Era for Missions to the Muslim World²

As many prominent church historians and missiologists in the West have rightly observed, we are living in an epoch in which Eurocentric “Christendom” has been drastically replaced by polycentric “World Christianity” since the latter half of the last century.³ “World Christianity” is the term that depicts the trends of today’s

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² It is assumed that the readers will ascertain an Asian (particularly Korean) perspective that underlies this paper throughout; however, it does not necessarily mean that my view should represent the general trends among Asian missiologists. My perspective has been constantly built up through my encounters with people, both Christians and non-Christians (certainly including Muslims), mostly from Africa, the West, and Asia.

³ The phenomenon of the shift from Eurocentric to polycentric church history (along with its demographic figures) has been witnessed by a number of important Western scholars: such as Andrew Walls (*The Cross-cultural Process in Christian History*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), Paul Pierson (“The new Context of Christian Mission: Challenges and Opportunities for the Asian Church” in *Asian Church and God’s Mission*, Wonsuk and Julie Ma, eds. Manila: OMF, 2003), Philip Jenkins (*The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity*, NY: Oxford University Press, 2002), Wilber Shenk (*Changing Frontiers of Mission*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999; *Enlarging the Story: Perspectives on Writing World Christian History*, ed. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), and so on.

Christianity, which is quite a different phenomenon than it used to be.⁴ One of the significant phenomena in the new path of World Christianity is the emphasis on the necessity of egalitarian partnerships between Western missionaries and non-Western churches.⁵ The latter has grown from being the recipients of the gospel to very rigorous inheritors of the missionary fervor. The missionary movements that used to be almost unique to churches in Europe and North America have not only been contagiously shared with their former recipients, but the latter are increasingly becoming the major mission forces that carry out the Lord's Great Commission in the third millennium. This seems to be a very welcome move that is realistically necessary especially when we consider the gigantic need to communicate the gospel to the Muslim world. Looking at the current uneasy relationships between the West and the Muslim world, the need cannot be more highly emphasized.⁶ More often than not, evangelical missionaries from the West have been heard to express their frustration with the limitations that they have experienced in their ministries among Muslims due simply to the fact that they are "white" Westerners. For many such reasons, which I will briefly review in the next section, it seems that we have arrived in a generation that obviously demands non-Western missionary efforts partnering

⁴ "World Christianity" is a quite recent term favored especially by Lamin Sanneh over "Global Christianity." In his book *Whose Religion is Christianity?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), he distinguishes "World Christianity" from "Global Christianity." He says: "World Christianity is not one thing, but a variety of indigenous responses through more or less effective local idioms, but in any case without necessarily the European Enlightenment frame. . . . 'Global Christianity' carries vestiges still of that root imperial phase by suggesting that growing communities of professing Christians around the world are evidence of the economic and political security interests of Europe . . ." (22-23). Also see Andrew Wall's "From Christendom to World Christianity" in his book (2002:49-71).

⁵ For example, I have noticed this emphasis recurring in the writings of the authors in the monograph *Asian Church and God's Mission* (Wonsuk and Julie Ma, eds. Manila: OMF, 2003).

⁶ See Collin Chapman's discussions on that uneasy relationship from a Christian perspective (*Islam and the West: Conflict, Co-existence or Conversion?* Cumbria, UK: Paternoster Press, 1998).

with the Western counterpart towards the Muslim world for the sake of communicating the gospel.

2. A Need for Building up a Perspective outside the West on the Muslim World

Living in an unprecedented global culture today in which “Christendom as a historical reality is finished,”⁷ Christians (from all global regions, East, West, South, and North) should find a new way to present Christianity to the world that is better than how it was portrayed by Eurocentric Christendom. In this regard, Asian Christians as well as African and Latin American churches who have emerged as new mission forces in the last few decades must take up the sense of Christian responsibility for this critical task. Especially for issues relating to the Muslim world, non-Western churches ought to consider the development of effective missionary approaches⁸ to minimize the ineffectiveness that has resulted from the unfortunate relationships between the Christian West and the Muslim world. Having said this, I should remind us that many Western missiologists have also been constantly striving to better understand the Muslim world and to develop more relevant missionary methods than their predecessors did. So, in this humble paper, I would like to briefly describe the conventional Christian view of Islam and Muslims in the West to see the historical background of current dilemmas, and then I will attempt to suggest a “perspective” that might be helpful both to those Western efforts and to non-Western endeavors for the advancement of the gospel among our Muslim neighbors. It is also hoped that my discussion hereupon might be useful for the more objective appraisal of the Islamic phenomenon.

⁷ Wilbert Shenk, *Changing Frontiers of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999:188).

⁸ Many traditional mission organizations have been using the term “strategy” in discussing missionary methodology. I would rather use the word “approach” than “strategy,” since the latter sounds somewhat aggressive and militant and may give Muslims a wrong impression of Christianity.

3. Dilemmas in Western Approaches to the Muslim World

Owing to both past and current painful experiences between the West and the Muslim world, Muslims tend to be perceived by most Westerners as perilous and dangerous. Such a perception is mostly based on innumerable fitful outbursts by Muslim extremists.⁹ However, even before such ferocious attacks against Western societies, Christians in the West were apt to view Islam through a political lens shaped by the indelible sense of enmity historically built between Christendom in the West and the Muslim world. Such a negative view of Islam and Muslims has been extensively spread throughout the Christian world, and the unfavorable sentiment against them has actually been one of the most hindering obstacles for sharing the gospel among Muslims in the last centuries.¹⁰

As a matter of fact, the Western understanding of the Muslim world has been deficient in that it has been tinted by their unavoidable political rivalries. The initial understanding of Muslims by the West was entirely politically, diplomatically, and militarily colored. Therefore, the first reports on Islam and Muslims by Byzantine Christians show that their negative view of Muslims was based on either their ignorance or political sensitivities, and hardly based on any accurate information about the Muslims or theological understanding of their religion.¹¹ Rollin Armour, Sr. comments: “The conflict these [Byzantine] Christians had with Islam portended the

⁹ It however is a common view among most Islamicists that Muslim extremists cannot and should not represent the whole Islamic world.

¹⁰ Even today, for example, Samuel Huntington’s interpretation of such uneasy relationships between the two as “clash of civilization” does not seem to be helpful for the resolution of the chronic problem. See his *The Clash of Civilization: And the Remaking of World Order* (Free Press, 2002). For a view that is quite contrary to Huntington’s, see John Esposito’s *The Islamic Threat: Myth or Reality?* (NY: Oxford University Press, 1999).

¹¹ For more detailed discussions on Western reactions to the Muslim advent into the Byzantine lands, see Rollin Armour, Sr.’s *Islam, Christianity, and the West* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002).

future for Christian-Muslim relations in the Iberian peninsula, a pattern that contrasted sharply with the relatively peaceful interrelations of Jews and Muslims.”¹² The uneasy and even hostile relationships that had been further developed between Christians and Muslims in the Middle Ages unfortunately did not find any constructive remedy to alleviate pains and damages done by each other. The eight Crusades over two hundred years were calamitous enough to worsen the relationship, and this disastrous hostility continued to be exacerbated especially through the European imperialism in later centuries.

Clinton Bennett also gives a detailed account of how Western intellectuals dealt with Islam in the course of Christian encounters with Muslims in history.¹³ Although occasionally there were sympathetic views of Muhammad and Islam as seen in Charles Foster (1787-1871) and few others, the churches were concerned more with criticizing Islam for its heretical elements than with developing cogent missionary methods. On the other hand, Western academia mainly indulged in the debate on the question of whether or not the Muslim accounts of Muhammad were reliable or if he was “sincere.” Even in the missionary efforts from the time of John of Damascus in the eighth century up to now, most approaches were characteristic of intellectualism with the attitude of what I would call “correction ministry.” The spirit that governed Christian missionaries was a sort of obligation to prove enthusiastically that Islam was wrong, being at best heretical and at worst demonic.¹⁴ They were

¹² Rollin Armour, Sr. (2002:49).

¹³ See Clinton Bennett, *In Search of Muhammad* (London: Cassell, 1998). Although his theological stance is far from being agreeable due to his pluralist position, his accounts of Western scholarship on Muhammad in history provide an erudite knowledge on how the Western world has generally viewed the Islamic phenomenon at whose center should be Muhammad.

¹⁴ Such a spirit of “correction ministry” has been manifest in the works of those pioneering missionaries to the Muslim world. Even the famous Raymond Lull’s peaceful approaches were not lasting to the end; he shifted his position from a peaceful approach to a rather militant one, which indicates that he eventually was not able to overcome the worldview prevalently shared among the Crusaders in his time.

concerned primarily with the religion of Islam, which was seen only errors and falsity defying the then-established Christian orthodox doctrines, and hardly with people (Muslims). Western missionary methods among Muslims in the past were thus focused on either apologetic proclamation or polemic debates, although there were only a few sympathetic approaches.

In short, Western experiences of Muslims were mainly characterized by their political competitions throughout history, and unfortunately this served to form a very negative lens through which they see the whole of the Muslim world. Such a stereotyped view of the Muslim world by Western societies naturally affected Western Christians negatively as well. Islam was at best a heresy, and Muslims were demoniac. Consequently, even Muslim evangelism has been viewed by churches in the West to be too formidable a task. This pessimistic missionary spirit has unfortunately been transmitted to non-Western churches as well, whose experience with Islam had rarely been as uneasy as the West's. Consequently, even many Asian and African churches developed a similar tendency to view the Muslim world from a suspicious and apprehensive perspective. Therefore, it is seriously necessary today to have a rather positive look at the Muslim world as well as at Muslim evangelism. Time demands an entirely refreshed view of the people who live in and for Islam. Since the wounded history cannot be easily cured due to the size of the damage, an innovated perspective has to be developed from those who have had fewer such experiences than Western churches had. In the following, I will attempt an interpretation of the phenomenon of Islam from a perspective that can be held by people who have not yet had a bitter experience with the Muslim world.

Since the discussion of Western missionary works in the spirit of correction ministry is beyond the scope of this paper, see Clinton Bennett (1998) and Rollin Armour, Sr. (2002) for further details.

4. Understanding a Community Carrying a Spirit of Wounds

A circumspect look into the birth of Islam will point to a reasonable likelihood that Muhammad had experienced a religiously deep wound. The wound does not seem to be the kind that some scholars believe to be a psychological malady due to his unfortunate boyhood.¹⁵ His wound was more like a broken heart caused by religious frustration. His self-awareness as a prophet of God had been seriously damaged due to the unexpected rejection from different people groups around him.¹⁶ No sooner did he begin his career as the Muslim prophet than he received severe resistance and persecution from his own people, the Quraysh tribe. A number of early sources that exist today such as the Qur'an, Hadith, and earliest biographies¹⁷ show that Muhammad had undergone many ordeals and crucibles in the earlier part of his prophet-hood. His monotheistic message was rejected with even death threat from his own tribesmen because it was in direct opposition to their business that had been making them extremely wealthy through providing accommodations and water for idol worshiping traders in Mecca around the sixth century. Having been turned down by his own people, he coveted religious supports from the "People of the Book,"¹⁸ but to his great dismay he was ridiculed by Jews, who did not give him any recognition as a prophet in line with the Judaic tradition.¹⁹ Nor was his theology convincing to

¹⁵ See Bennett (1998:133-134).

¹⁶ Cf. Fazlur Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur'an*, Minneapolis, MS: Bibliotheca Islamica (1994:85-86).

¹⁷ The earliest biography of Muhammad was compiled by Ibn Ishaq (704-767 C.E.) even before the collection and compilation of the Hadith literature was done. Ibn Ishaq's work was partly translated in English by A. Guillaume (Karachi, Pakistan: Oxford University Press, 1955). There are a couple more early biographies of Muhammad; for this see Clinton Bennett (London: Cassell, 1998:28-31).

¹⁸ The "People of the Book" is the Quranic label for Jews and Christians.

¹⁹ Quranic verses 2:140 and 3:65-67 show that Muhammad was arguing with Jews concerning their ancestor Abraham. Verses 6:91 and 5:15 indicate that Jews were concealing their Scripture from Muhammad's access. He was also indignant with the fact that some Jews even sold handwritten copies of

“Nasara (Nazarenes),” who were the Christians scattered in the Arabian peninsula due to the disapproval of their Christology by the mainline church during the fifth and sixth centuries. The rejection by the Quraysh, Jews, and Christians continued even after the Hijra or his migration to Medina in 622 C.E., and his dejection did not seem to be cured until he was able to conquer Mecca in 630 C.E. without shedding blood.

Although his unfortunate boyhood could have been considered as one of the reasons for his indignation toward the ungodly world around him,²⁰ it would be more rational to infer that the frustration and rejection that he had experienced through his interaction with the People of the Book must have led him to the theology that he held later against Jews and Christians. What is strikingly noticeable throughout the Qur’an is the pattern that recurs in the lives of the Quranic prophets, such as Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus. The pattern is: 1) the holy prophets preached the monotheistic faith; 2) all of them received persecution and rejection from their own people; 3) the prophets however never compromised their faith in the monotheistic God; and 4) eventually God brought the final victory for his prophets. Muhammad identified himself with those prophets in terms of the similarity of his own experiences.²¹ In this pattern of Muhammad’s prophets, we see a clear underlying theme in Muhammad’s mind: God will eventually vindicate his prophets’ righteousness and console them for their frustration and agony resulting from the rejection by “evildoers” who persecute the prophets of God. It then is clear that the Islamic belief in the Muslims’ eventual victory over the non-Muslim world has stemmed from their prophet’s own experience and belief. It can be surmised from here that Islam has been carrying a deeply rooted

their Scripture for cheap price thus disgracing God (2:79; 5:44).

²⁰ His father had died before he was born, and he lost his mother at the age of six. So he was raised briefly by his grandfather until he died; then he was reared by his uncle. Sura 93:6 seems to be his allusion to his lowly position in his childhood. However, there is very little evidence that his boyhood had ever negatively affected the formation of his religious ideology.

²¹ Cf. See Rahman (1994:86-87, 133, 163).

sense of rejection as well as the belief of the ultimate victory as the central theme in its heart ever since the beginning of the Muslim *umma* community.

The theme of rejection and frustration also appears in one of the five pillars of Islamic duty. In the *sa‘y* ritual during the Hajj, Muslim pilgrims are supposed to walk hastily seven times between two hills (Safaa and Marwa in Mecca) for the purpose of commemorating the rejection and frustration which Hagar and her son Ishmael underwent after they had been abandoned by Abraham.²² Even though Muslims would interpret the Hagar and Ishmael’s episode differently than Christians do, it is factually admitted both by Muslims and Christians that the mother and son were abandoned by Abraham and Sarah. Genesis 21:9-21 clearly describes their unfathomable despair in the wilderness until they found a well. Reflected in the Hajj, this theme has ever been transmitted through the *sa‘y* ritual generation after generation in the Muslim world. From this fact, thus, it is inferred that the sense of being rejected, abandoned, and mistreated has been built deeply in the Muslim conscious throughout generations.²³ Muhammad must have identified his feelings with those of his ancestors, and he transmitted them to the coming generations through the institution of the Hajj.

Such a generational sense of despair has been recurring among Muslims especially whenever they were politically or militarily defeated by Jewish or Christian societies in later times. As Dudley Woodberry points out, the “sense of trauma” has grown “out of the frustration and humiliation of years under colonialism—a particularly difficult experience for Sunnis, the majority branch of Muslims, because

²² Genesis 16:7-13; 17:18-21; 21:9-21.

²³ Jonathan Culver argues that “God’s promise in Genesis 17:20 may very well be the foundational principle that has given rise to more than a billion Muslims today, the majority of whom live outside the Middle East.” (“The Ishmael Promises: A Bridge for Mutual Respect” in *Muslim and Christian Reflections on Peace: Divine and Human dimensions*, Dudley Woodberry, Osman Zümürüt, and Mustafa Köylü, eds. NY: University Press of America, 2005:72.)

they had never developed a theology of suffering.”²⁴ Muhammad believed that the only answer to his experiences of rejection, humiliation, and frustration would be a God-given victory, which was political rather than spiritual. However, despite many victories that they achieved in history, the grievances that Muhammad and his followers have had towards Christendom did not seem to be reduced at any rate; rather, the negative sense seems to be more exasperated. Having gone through the Crusades, Western imperialism and colonialism, today’s innumerable issues relating to the Israel-Palestinian problem, and so forth, the generational resentment profoundly rooted in Muslim history and culture has been steadily resurgent since the late eighteenth century,²⁵ and it has been epitomized by some extremists even in the form of terrorism today.²⁶

In this lengthy discussion of the background of the Muslim grievances, I have tried to uncover the constantly recurrent theme that has been underlying the descendents of Ishmael, that is, Muhammad and his faithful followers (Muslims). Dangerous, menacing, or threatening as they might have looked to Western Christendom, I rather see a gigantic person severely wounded in his body. His roaring voices are actually a desperate expression of his deep-seated agony: rejection, abandonment, humiliation, and frustration. Can we look at the Muslim community from this perspective? As Christians who have experienced an unconditional love from God, can we not embrace our Muslim neighbors in terms of this loving perspective rather than with a passion for the “correction ministry”? How can non-

²⁴ Quoted from Dudley Woodberry’s lecture notes on “Current Trends in Islam,” Fuller Theological Seminary (1999).

²⁵ See John Voll (*Islam: Continuity and Change in the Modern World*. NY: Syracuse University Press, 1994) for detailed discussions on the historical background of Islamic resurgence.

²⁶ For detailed discussions and evaluation on the issue of Muslim terrorism, see Woodberry’s “Terrorism, Islam, and Mission: Reflections of a Guest in Muslim Lands,” in *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, January issue, 2002.

Western Christians who did not have to go through such unfortunate relationships like Western Christendom contribute practically to the communication of the gospel in Muslim lands without sharing any sense of grievances? My answer would be very positive and optimistic. Being non-Western Christians who did not experience such political rivalries as the West did and who have shared more cultural legacy and ethos with a lot of Muslims than our Western counterpart could, we, Asian Christians, must take up the responsibility to present Christianity in a way that should reflect the genuine message of God in Jesus without any unnecessary cultural, political, or historical hindrances. In the next section, I will briefly suggest some missionary approaches particularly from the viewpoint mentioned above.

5. Some Suggestions for Missionary Approaches to the Muslim World

As I previously mentioned, we are living today in a world that does not see the existence of Eurocentric Christendom as much as in the last century. “World Christianity” is the label that we have begun to use to describe the shift of God’s mission forces from a unilateral to multilateral direction. In such a critical time as today, Asian churches should willingly respond to God’s invitation to His never-ending missionary enterprise. In the following I suggest four areas that I feel the Asian church should consider when she partakes of God’s mission for Muslims today.

(1) Importance of a Positive Perspective: Not Islam but Muslims

As many missiologists and Christian Islamicists from the West have already pointed out, historically Eurocentric approaches to the Muslim world have caused many hindrances to the presentation of the gospel. Most missionary efforts have been focused on dealing with doctrinal issues rather than with the Muslim mind. We need to reconsider the conventional tendency to think of missions in terms of “correcting

others.” It is observed that even many Korean missionaries understand Christian mission in terms of that traditional mindset. Some mission organizations are passionate about the idea of “breaking down the stronghold of Islam” by organizing spectacular mass-evangelistic meetings in Muslim lands. In their understanding it is the spirit of Islam rather than people (Muslims) that they should deal with. Such an aggressive approach to Muslim communities generally is derived from a great misunderstanding of God’s mission, which I do not have enough space to address here. It, however, should be remembered that God’s mission has to do primarily with “people” rather than their cultural systems or religious products. God’s coming to the human world in human form insinuates how He viewed us. He did not only come to save us because of our sins; He also came as a doctor²⁷ whose intention is to cure the sick. God saw potential saints in us despite our sins, faults and shortcomings. It was His positive view of us, or His unceasing love for us, that eventually saved us and enabled us to call Him our dear Father.²⁸ God’s such affective view of human beings is the primary perspective that we should restore particularly in our approach to the Muslim world.

(2) Dialogue in Sympathy and Empathy

The “Other” is a reflection of “Self” in the sense that all human beings are God’s creation created in His image. This is why Jesus tells us to love our neighbor as we love ourselves.²⁹ In order for us to obey His commandment of loving our neighbor, first we should not exclude anyone (even Muslims) from the category of Jesus’ “neighbor.” In doing so, we need to keep up the Biblically positive perception of them

²⁷ Matthew 9:12-13

²⁸ This relates to the issue of the motivation of mission. There should be more and deeper discussions on this; however, I must defer this to another opportunity due to limited space.

²⁹ Matthew 22:39

even when we do not understand them well from our human viewpoint. In other words, Christian mission requires many painstaking efforts to *understand* the “Other.” These efforts are Christian sympathies. The Christian love seeks sympathy with people different from themselves. This is actually a possible task to carry out because of the model set out by Jesus Himself: God’s love was demonstrated through His Son’s attitude of sympathy with sinners.³⁰ Such a sympathetic love towards other peoples also leads us to a deeper sense of empathy for them.

Bennett suggests “virtual insidership,” saying: the “wearing of the other’s clothes does not turn us into the other, nor do we necessarily experience exactly what insiders experience, yet there may well be a ‘genuine correspondence between’ their experience and our own.”³¹ This sounds similar to what Volf calls “inverting perspective,” in which we “see others through their own eyes” and we also “see ourselves through the eyes of others.”³² These Western scholars view it critically important to build up mutual trust between Muslims and Western Christians in order to minister peace to the world.³³ So, while Western missiologists strive seriously to

³⁰ “Our High Priest is not one who cannot feel sympathy for our weaknesses. On the contrary, we have a High Priest who was tempted in every way that we are, but did not sin” (Heb. 4:15, TEV). “Finally, all of you should be of one mind, full of sympathy toward each other, loving one another with tender hearts and humble minds. Don’t repay evil for evil. Don’t retaliate when people say unkind things about you. Instead, pay them back with a blessing. That is what God wants you to do, and he will bless you for it” (1 Pet. 3:8-9, NLT). See also Philippians 2:1-8.

³¹ Bennett (1998:9).

³² Volf (2005:13-14). Perhaps, one of the most notable Western missionaries who has been practicing Christian ministry among Muslims with this kind of sympathetic and empathetic perspective is Phil Parshall (*New Path in Muslim Evangelism: Evangelical Approaches to Contextualization*, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1983; *The Cross and the Crescent: Understanding the Muslim Mind and Heart*, Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1989).

³³ Quite a number of Western Christian Islamicists have been making scrupulous efforts for peaceful dialogue between Western Christians and Muslims. Among many the following authors are noteworthy: Colin Chapman (*Islam and the West: Conflict, Co-existence or Conversion?* cited above), Dudley Woodberry (*Muslim and Christian Reflection on Peace*, co-edited with Osman Zümrüt, and

unlearn their traditional perspective and attitude towards the Muslim world so as to undo the damage as much as possible, Asian Christians should also actively involve themselves in relating to their Muslim neighbors with the understanding that Asian churches are inherently at less of a disadvantage than Western Christians in terms of interaction with Muslims. Asian Christians can enter into a genuine, truthful relationship with Muslims more quickly and naturally than Westerners could do due to historical and cultural advantages. Sharing in almost the same historical background and cultural worldview and ethos, many Asian Christians can create a great deal of ground for peaceful dialogues, in which Christians can share their faith without disgracing one another. Only through this kind of dialogistic approach can the gospel of Jesus be presented to Muslim neighbors such that they can hear the gospel with less bias and resistance to Christianity.

Having said this, I want to propose two words of advice for Asian Christians to carry on the task. First, although Asian Christians rather inherently have great potential for peaceful religious dialogue with Muslims for the purpose of sharing the gospel, it should be noted that they also need to have some anthropological understanding and skills for effective communication of the gospel in various Muslim contexts. I will discuss these in a later section. Secondly, Asian Christians need to continue to develop their original ideas and approaches creatively with all humility yet without being influenced (or tainted) by the traditional Western stereotype of the Muslim world.

(3) Healing Approaches

All Muslims are educated from their childhood to remember the agony that their ancestors (Hagar and Ishmael) and prophets had experienced. As pointed out

Mustafa Köylü, cited above), and Christine Mallouhi (*Waging Peace on Islam*, London: Monarch Books, 2000).

earlier, the Quranic prophets' ordeals, climaxed in Muhammad, and their victory stories have been major themes in Islamic education. Muslims also believe that God has always brought a victory to His faithful servants in the end. In most cases, however, this victory is meant to be a religio-political triumph over the non-Muslim world rather than a kind of spiritual victory as usually seen in Christian endurance of suffering. Thus, the belief in a visible and palpable victory is one of the prevailing concepts in Islamic theology. Any kind of defeat is a stigma; there must be a tangible victory if Muslims obey God's will, hence hardly any theological development on the issues of suffering.

The theology of victory in Islam seems problematic; it functions as the driving cause of anxiety to win: in other words, the fear of the failure to win. For example, the Muslim world has been experiencing defeat by Western Europe particularly since the eighteenth century. The defeat by European imperialism and colonialism because of their superior weaponry, economic, and technological power in modern times has been a great stigma for Muslims. A great sense of failure has been rampant among Muslim intellectuals in the last two centuries. They have felt deeply defeated and ashamed. Such a traumatic sense can be explained as a reinforced reaction to the intrinsic trauma deeply ingrained in the mind of Muslims throughout Muslim generations. In short, it is observable that Muslims carry many kinds of fear in their life, especially when they have to deal with the world outside their own, particularly Western Christendom. Christianity then has to be presented in a manner that demonstrates that the true victory in religion (*Din* in Arabic) hardly comes through political or economic supremacy but rather through humility and even human weakness before God. Asian Christians should offer a lucid model of such religiosity based on sympathy with and empathy for Muslims, motivated by God's unconditional love, rather than the spirit of obsession to judge between right and wrong.

Another kind of fear is also observed when ordinary Muslims have to associate with Christians in their neighborhood. Ordinary Muslims usually learn how to relate to Christians in their early childhood through their domestic education as well as *madrassa*. Certainly, they learn a very negative perspective of Christians.³⁴ Such negative education actually hurts the worldview of the learners. One can imagine how difficult it would be for a Muslim person who has received this negative impression of Christians to relate to the same. They grow up with a fear that Christians may overwhelm them with their ideas or values.³⁵ This shows the grave importance of a Christian lifestyle that lives out Christ-like godliness and goodness in communicating the gospel among Muslims. Christians themselves are the Christian message to Muslims.

In relation to the aspect of fear I should also mention another issue briefly: that is, the fear of the unseen world. In my book I have extensively discussed the phenomenon of Muslim fear of the uncanny world.³⁶ Most Asians are raised up in a cultural milieu that naturally acquaints them with the spiritual environment from childhood unlike Westerners. As a result of a worldview that stems from such an enculturation (or traditional, cultural education), Asians usually feel nothing strange about spiritual dynamics that frequently surprise and embarrass western missionaries. Asians can present the gospel to Muslims in the same way that the first disciples of Jesus did in the New Testament, whereby the fear of the uncanny as well as the spiritual oppression by evil spirits were removed through the exercise of the spiritual

³⁴ I have heard from many Muslim converts about their childhood education about Christians. One, who is currently one of my students, says that her mother once made her vomit when the mother learned that her daughter ate some meat at a Christian home in the neighborhood. This may well show how negatively ordinary Muslims view Christians.

³⁵ Miroslav Volf calls such a fear *Überfremdung* in German. See his "Living with the 'Other,'" in *Muslim and Christian Reflections on Peace: Divine and Human Dimensions* (2005:11).

³⁶ See Caleb Chul-Soo Kim's *Islam among the Swahili in East Africa* (Nairobi, Kenya: Acton Publishers, 2004).

power and authority given in the name of the Lord. Most Asian Christians would not find it at all odd to do the same. They can approach Muslim neighbors with their power of prayers and hospitality.

As already discussed, spiritual wounds have been transmitted from generation to generation in the Muslim world. In my perspective Muslim communities are a “nation” that needs to be healed by God’s grace.³⁷ Healing their fears as well as their wounds has to be seriously considered in Christian missions to the Muslim world today. Positive changes will occur when they begin to see Christians as their fellow human beings and even genuine friends.³⁸

(4) Cultural Advantages and Translation of Jesus

Modern Asia has been developing a complex cultural environment due to its underlying traditional values mixed with continuous cultural influences from the West. Consequently, many churches in Asia have been showing a bicultural or even multicultural phenomenon as well.³⁹ Asia has been a cradle of all ancient World Religions and the pluralistic trends of these religions were always present in Asia even before Christianity arrived in the continent. Like those first “pagan” Christians in Paul’s time, many Asian Christians usually have a pluralistic background or are well aware of the presence and influence of a pluralistic environment and its cultural implications. Thus, their Muslim neighbors are not foreign to Asian Christians simply

³⁷ I use the word “nation” here because all Muslims share in the same religious tenets that have been transmitted from the time of Muhammad regardless of ethnic or cultural differences. This is quite similar to the way that Christians are called “a holy nation” in 1 Peter 2:9.

³⁸ Due to the limited space here I cannot conduct a detailed discussion concerning how to minister healing to Muslims, but this topic deserves another whole chapter.

³⁹ Bal Krishna Sharma describes Modern Asia as “very complex with its old religions and new religious movement” (In *Asian Church and God’s Mission*, Wonsuk and Julie Ma, eds. Manila: OMF, 2003:147). “It is colored by various cultures, traditions, social and economic diversities plus the influence of modern Western culture” (ibid).

because they usually share common cultural practices (e.g., language, food, clothes, house, customs, etc.), emotions, and even most social values. In other words, they uphold almost the same cultural ethos despite their religious disparities. This is probably the greatest asset that Asian Christians have in terms of missionary preparation. Since building up a genuine friendship first is extremely important for ministry among Muslims, Asian Christians are obviously at a greater advantage in this area than non-Asians. I have had many experiences of amicable and warm acceptance by Asian Muslims owing to our Asian-cultural connection.

It is, however, by no means my intention to imply that Asians are intrinsically superior to our Western counterpart in approaching the Muslim world. My belief is rather a modest one that the Asian socio-cultural upbringing can be extremely useful when optimized because of its cultural advantages for Christian witness among Muslims. If Asian churches are appropriately equipped to know how to utilize their assets and to learn missionary skills, they will make great contributions toward the fulfillment of the Lord's Great Commission in Muslim contexts. So, I am suggesting that we should be keen in training our Asian missionaries as a major missionary manpower to be sent to Muslim societies. In doing so, the following several areas need to be kept in mind for equipping them.

First, even though Asians share in many common cultural values and ethos that come from similar historio-cultural backgrounds, Asia is a huge region that contains various enough components to need many anthropological insights for Christian witness. What may be called the "cultural golden rule" has to be learned before they embark on the missionary journey. Based on the Lord's teaching on mutual respect,⁴⁰ the missionary should learn to appreciate others' cultural heritage and their values and emotions. A number of Asian missiologists point out the lack of

⁴⁰ "In everything do to others as you would have them do to you: for this is the law and the prophet" (Mt. 7:12, NRSV, Cf. Lk. 6:31).

cultural sensitivity and the superficial knowledge of Asian religions among Western missionaries, with whom they worked together in Asia.⁴¹ The initial “Incarnational spirit” seems to have been replaced in the course of time by a spirit of superiority and paternalistic compassion. Having said this, it is also quite disappointing to witness that a number of non-Western missionaries carry an attitude and perspective very similar to our Western predecessors. It should be remembered that “appreciating others’ values without compromising my faith” requires a combined skill of anthropology and theology. This has to be developed and learned.

Secondly, the missionaries need to differentiate between Islam as a religious system (or ideal structure) and Muslims as people who strive to fulfill the Islamic ideal in their life. This is very important because our mission is primarily aimed at helping people to understand who Jesus is as revealed in the Bible, not correcting their doctrines. In the past, Western missionaries tended to view Muslims in terms of their doctrinal wrapping. Consequently, it was difficult for them to think of Muslims separately from the religion of Islam. In fact, most Muslim populations are not as “Islamic” as missionaries used to superficially view them. Therefore, my third and last area to be considered is concerned with the question of what would be the most important goal that our missionary efforts should achieve in Muslim contexts.

I would assert that our ultimate goal is to “translate” Jesus Christ into the Muslim mind and heart.⁴² We should let them hear of Jesus in a way that their mind

⁴¹ See the chapters by Melba Meggay and Do Kham in *Asian Church and God’s Mission* (2003: 32ff, 44). Cf. See also Thomas Ohm’s conclusive chapter in his *Asia looks at Western Christianity* (London: Herder Freiburg, 1959:215-234).

⁴² Lamin Sanneh argues that Christianity was translatable from the beginning in contrast to Islam. He states: “I treat Christianity as a religious movement, or as a vernacular translation movement, in contradistinction to Christianity either as Scripture or as a dogmatic, creedal system, without, of course, denying the validity of those views. . . . Where as for Christians, mission has come preeminently to mean translation, for Muslims mission has stood stubbornly for the nontranslatability of its Scriptures in the ritual

can understand and their heart can feel through our genuine friendship. In order to do so, we need to understand first how they have learned about Jesus from their Muslim traditions and how they feel about Him now. Then, we can invite them, by using their cultural paradigms, to read and study the New Testament to know Jesus further, whom they also respect greatly. Certainly, this also requires quite an amount of Quranic knowledge and communicational skills. At all costs, however, this must be carried out. The Quranic Jesus has been explored and studied by many Islamicists and missionary scholars in order to find relevant points of contact.⁴³ Now, this important task should continue in mutual dialogical contexts. Both Muslims and Christians can read the Scriptures of their partner with full respect, and they can share their understanding of Jesus in a fair manner. Once our Muslim friends read the Gospels and hear of Jesus, we have to wait until the Holy Spirit convinces them into the saving knowledge.⁴⁴ Furthermore, in helping Muslims to know Jesus more personally than simply intellectually, the missionaries should maintain a humble attitude so that they can also *see* Jesus in them.

obligations” (Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture, Maryknoll, NY:Orbis Books, 1989:7).

⁴³ I appreciate Effendy Arintonang and Triawan Wicaksono Kho’s assertion: “The presence of Jesus in Qur’an, mentioned with honor, despite the disparity between the Qur’an and biblical accounts, can be valuable entry point for dialogue between Islam and Christianity. The titles of Jesus in Qur’an can effectively be used in this dialogue. We should not be tempted impatiently to ignore the Qur’an and hasten to the Jesus of the Bible. In fact our suggestion is that Christians ought to invite the Muslim to study the Quranic accounts of Jesus” (“A Study of Jesus’ Offices and Roles in the Qur’an” in *Naming the Unknown God*, by E. Acoba and et al. Manila, Philippines: OMF Literature, 2006:91-92).

⁴⁴ Effendy Arintonang and Triawan Wicaksono Kho give a story of a Muslim who became a friend to Christians and even read the whole Bible. Despite the fact that he came to give more respect and praise to Jesus, his view of Jesus as not God never changed. I have seen a number of cases like this even in my ministry. This story exhorts us to wait more patiently on the Holy Spirit.

Postscripts

In this paper I have addressed only the missionary issues in terms of effective approaches to Muslims with the gospel. To help ourselves (Asian Christians) to see where we are, I first had to deal to some extent with the relationships between the West (particularly Western Christendom) and the Muslim world in history. Needless to say, each section in this paper has much room to be more extensively discussed. Even important topics such as church planting and ecclesiological ministries within Muslim societies could not be addressed at all in this paper due to limited space. Contextualization issues are also absent. I have to leave all these to later opportunities for a good discussion.

Certainly, prayers must be placed in priority over all that has been mentioned. I believe that the most sincere prayers to the Lord always humble and strengthen us. It is not human power but His strength that enables us to carry on such a task that seems unachievable. It is also my sincere prayer that my humble paper presented here may be helpful for all of us, both from the East and from the West, in entering into more intimate partnership with one another than ever for the cause of the Lord's Great Commission even in the Muslim world. Amen.

