

**A Response to
Asian Mission: Towards a Theological Perspective**

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I am greatly privileged to respond to Dr. Garcia's article with Dr. Jonathan Bonk, the editor of IBMR (International Bulletin of Missionary Research). As we enjoy diversity, we like seeing different responses to the same paper. I'd also like to say "many thanks" to Dr. Garcia who worked hard to write this paper focused on theological perspectives on Asian missions. Generally speaking, any response cannot avoid subjective thought and perspective due to our different knowledge and experiences. Dr. Garcia, who also knows this, predicts that: "my presentation might raise more questions and controversy than solutions. That is alright; a healthy interaction is one purpose of a conference." Based upon his insightful comment, I have the boldness to write such "healthy interactions" as follows:

The author suggests three things to be seriously considered about theological perspectives on Asian missions: "(1) biblical revelation, (2) history of mission, and (3) the concrete socio-political and cultural context." This consideration can be a

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good starting point for “doing theology for Asian missions.” The author, however, organizes four parts to do this in a slightly different format: (1) Mission and Evangelism Distinguished, (2) Theological Perspective on Mission Strategy in Asia, (3) Theological Perspective on Asian Context for Missions, and (4) Suffering and Witness in 1 Peter: A Theological Perspective for Asian Missions. So, I’d like to share my responses in this order.

Distinction between Mission and Evangelism.

The author starts with distinction between mission and evangelism. What a mission is has a long history since the Gospels, or even traced back to the creation activity of God in order to understand the real sense of *Missio Dei*. David Bosch also tells us that the Scripture does not give us a clear answer to the definition of the word ‘mission’.² The author’s attempts to distinguish mission from evangelism surely challenges us to reconsider contemporary evangelism-oriented missions which are too narrow to express the holistic God’s redemptive activities for the world in terms of the Kingdom of God.

Even though Dr. Garcia’s comments like “the evangelism is not the mission” or “it [evangelism] is an integral part of mission” can be accepted, the expression such as “mission is the first and foremost movement of God through the church” or “It is high time to restore the rightful place of the church in the mission of God” makes me a little confused to figure out what Dr. Garcia wants to say. For almost 100 years, the definition of mission has been argued. The results of the mission have been swung from the right to the left depending on the definition of the word mission.³ Does Dr. Garcia mean that the church means our present static and

² For detailed argument on this diverse spectrum of the definition of the mission, see his book, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, (Naryknoll, New York, Orbis Books, 1991), pp.389-510.

³ For an interesting presentation on this, see Christopher R. Little, “What Makes Mission

institutionally westernized visible church having been shaped since the period of Constantine? Historically the church has been quite different image from that of post-Constantine Christendom.⁴

The author continues to say, “The New Testament knows no mission body except the church, and no missionaries except those sent by the church from among its members.” Adding to this, the author boldly suggests that “we (probably Asians) should perhaps start thinking of mission board-less missionaries.” Well, this is also a good comment but a little radical one in terms of diverse tools to accomplish God’s mission. Surely all Christians who sense the divine calling for the world should do the mission of God whatever they have and wherever they are. This thinking leads us to so-called ‘missional church’ or ‘missional ecclesiology’ which has been discussed for more than one decade.⁵ We live in our contemporary context where the divided blocks between Christianity and Non-Christianity cannot exist any longer due to the global growth of Christianity. So churches all over the world cannot distinguish between mission providers (so-called the sending churches in developed countries) and mission recipients (the receiving churches in developing countries) due to global church growth.⁶ The mission field is present wherever you are. We should not deny that God splendidly used all missionaries despite their pride and mistakes for this global growth. Such Christian global growth naturally calls for the emphasis of missional ecclesiology.

Christian?” EMQ 2006 Jan, https://bgc.gospelcom.net/emqonline/emq_article_read.php?ArticleID=3559.

⁴ See Andre Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books).

⁵ Paul S. Minear, *Image of the Church in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960); John Driver, *Image of the Church in Mission* (Scottsdale, PA.: Herald Press, 1997); Darrel L. Guder ed., *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 1998).

⁶ David B Barrett, Todd M. Johnson, and Peter F. Crossing, “Missiometrics 2005: A Global Survey of World Mission” (*International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, Jan 2005), pp. 27-30; Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

At the same time, we should not disregard God's providence that many modalities as well as sodalities had to exist to play their own unique roles and functions in God's mission history.⁷ Most mission boards, if not all, cannot exist without the support of the church. Mission boards are functionally interrelated to the church in doing the mission strategically. Sometimes the mission boards may carry potential problems keeping their independence from intimate cooperative relationship with local churches. But I do not think that this functional cooperation with the church itself does not seem to be problematic with completing the Asian mission. Is there really no room for regarding the mission boards as excellent tools assigned by the church in the continuum of functional cooperation for the effective mission?

For example, ARILAC (Asia Research Institute of Language and Culture) which has recently been established to train more Asians effectively can be a good example of such functional cooperation with diverse organizations. ARILAC provides international MA level applied linguistic training courses in Korea for any NGO candidates who want to be involved in language related ministry such as bible translation, multi-language education, or even translation consultants. One of the interesting things is that this organization was created with the full cooperation of mission boards, churches, and universities, such as SIL (Summer Institute of Linguistics), GBT (Global Bible Translators in Korea), Korean Diaspora Churches, and Handong Global University (One of the prestigious universities with Christian ethics and philosophy). And the university grants all graduates MA degrees. Mission board-less thinking can work in certain contexts, but if we deny these historical

⁷ Ralph Winter, "Two Structures of God's Redemptive Mission" (USCWM Series No. 01-995, 1995), pp. 1-16. Winter does not deny the functions and roles of modalities; however, he presented that God has been using very different structures such as sodalities in doing His mission in God's mission history. In reality, the Church could not send missionaries until the seventeen century. See a brief history, David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1991), Pp.245-248. For a more comprehensive survey, see Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of the Expansion of Christianity: Three Centuries of Advance, A.D. 1500- 1800* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1939).

factors God uses, we might make the mistake of assuming that only our own church can do everything for diverse Asian contexts. Rather, we should keep a mutual cooperation with “self-constraint” and “servanthood” much more than before when doing God’s mission in Asian contexts.⁸

Dr. Garcia’s stretching from the evangelism-oriented mission to a mission centered on God’s Kingdom is indispensable in giving strong impacts to Asian countries. This mission may include professional areas such as schools, universities, and even technical institutes rather than bible schools and seminaries. This challenges us to reconsider our present mission strategies in Asia. Adding to this, my final response on this section is: If the author were to show how the different concepts on the mission proposed by the Lausanne Committee and WCC have been affecting Asian mission very differently for the last three decades or so, it would be much more persuasive.

Toward a Theological Perspective on Mission Strategy in Asia

The author did a good job on pointing out that “a theological perspective for Asian missions” requires critical reflection on the “the practices of mission hitherto done in Asia for the future direction of Asian missions.” And such reflection needs “analyses of history of theology of mission and mission practices in certain contexts.” As a result, these analyses require self-criticism and open interaction among Christians from different traditions that will hopefully enrich, expand, and deepen ones’ view of the mission of the church.” I think this is also a good insight to keep critical reflections on Asia missions, because all Christians are always required to become reflective practitioners to the world.

⁸ These two terms are expressed by Francis Viscount who consulted SIL (Summer Institute of Linguistics) International and WBTI (Wycliffe Bible Translators International). See his evaluation paper, “Asia Areas Innovations in Macro/country Level Strategy” (March 2007).

I think, however, that this section should have clearly articulated such analyses from self-criticism and diverse interactions shaped on different mission histories in Asia because the present Asian context is an arena of practicing almost all kinds of mission strategies oriented from different theologies. All expatriates who work in Asia have diverse theological backgrounds, and as a result Asian contexts cannot but accept such theological implementations without reflecting their own contexts properly. For example, the early Korean churches were affected by Western missionaries who had the Pietism; the fundamentalisms prevailed in the 19th century, and even American middle class materialism.⁹As a result, Korea's contemporary theological trends have been keeping more church-oriented theology, so called evangelism, which keeps its distance from social transformation.

In this context, we have to ask something more to be considered seriously such as: 'What are such practices and missions having done in Asia from different theological approaches?' 'If such different results cause different problems in this Asian context, what attempts should be done to seek for the will of God for the Asians based upon such previous mission strategies?'... Well, as the author predicted, I have raised more questions and controversies than answers in this section. Yes, as Dr. Garcia points out, we have to clarify theologically contemporary controversial issues such as 'Insiders Movement', 'Churchless Christianity' or 'C 1-5 Contextualization'.¹⁰ It seems to me that Dr. Garcia couldn't have proceeded on these things more specifically due to the limited pages.

⁹ A. J. Brown, *The Mastery of the Far-East* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1919). See also Hyung Gi Lee, "한국복음주의 신학의 역사적 기원과 한국의 개혁주의적 복음주의 신학" [The Historical Origin of Evangelical Theology and Reformed Evangelical Theology of Korea] *성경과신학* [The Scriptures and Theology]. 1983:197.

¹⁰ For more detailed study, see the references that Dr. Jonathan Bonk presents in his response paper in this conference.

A Theological Perspective on Asian Context for Mission

The author stresses that analytical reflections on Asian historical cultural contexts in Asia are not enough to actualize an Asian contextualization. Rather, the more important thing is to “understand in what ways our Christian obedience should be expressed in certain contexts in order to realize God’s purposes for the church and the society in which the church is located.” All Christians should keep their faithful loyalty to the Lord at any costs. And, as one of the Koreans, Dr. Garcia’s comment on the shameful moral degeneration in spite of commemorating church growth in Korea is a good proof that of how wrongly motivated theological orientations can produce as their fruits. All we missionaries who worked and have been working in Asia cannot avoid such blame if they came from the lack of insincerity.

Then, what are real contexts in Asia in order to interact with biblical revelation at the moment? Is it true that religious nominalism and religious extremism are really imminent and representative issues in Asia? Surely so many Asian Christians in many areas are suffering from antagonistic attacks. However, I observe that secular materialism with high-speed global networking in many Asian areas is also sweeping throughout almost all areas. Asian Christians tend to be exposed more and more to such a globalized attack, and be tempted by religious syncretism, religious pluralism, and even material secularism.

As the author hinted in this section, I think each country has its own historical and missional context in terms of the growth of Christianity such as the Philippines, Korea, Indonesia, Myanmar, Nepal, India, and Vietnam... etc. Asian Christians living in different contexts have to cope with different strategies to the world. Maybe it will be not enough to give all examples of these countries where how Christians are struggling to keep their faith. When Christianity developed in a certain context, Christians in that context have to pass through worldview changing process. Since their worldviews are deeply-rooted in their cherished hearts for long periods, such changing needs a very long period. Unfortunately, many Asians did not have

enough time to equip themselves with proper theological reflections to cope with the tempted world. Prior to changing their worldviews by themselves, they had already been influenced by outside pressures of the world.¹¹

When Asians become Christians, generally they want to be loyal and faithful to the Lord in their mind and hearts. But due to the lack of comprehensive knowledge and holistic approaches to responding to the world, they often lose the battle against the world. This is not a problem of faith or loyalty, but a problem of a lack of wisdom on dealing with the world as wisely as a snake. I think that Asian missions should provide specific guidelines or strategies to change their worldview for Asians who will be able to correct their habitual religious activities which have been one of their customs for long time. However, I genuinely admit that some flaws in our mission theology, as the author pointed out, also contributed to the present Asian Christian contexts.

A Theological Perspective for Asian Mission

The Scripture was written under specific contexts to give spiritual insight to God's people as we all know. Whether we accept the Scripture as a case study or not, the theme(s) of the Scripture can always be applied to the world beyond time and space. The reason the author has chosen I Peter as an example for theological perspectives for Asian mission is due to such a parallel communicative functions between text and context. This is very true, however, it is also true that not only is I Peter a missionary document, but all messages of the Scriptures can also be missionary ones in terms of redemptive history, can't they? I understand the author emphasizes the suffering expressed in I Peter which can be applied to our modern world especially in Asia and also in hostile contexts. But isn't the theme of

¹¹ See Paul G. Hiebert, *Anthropological Reflections on Missiological Issues* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House 1994). Also see Charles Kraft, *Anthropology for Christian Witness* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996).

Christians' faithfulness and obedience to the Lord one of the most important themes in the Scripture? Dealing with diverse themes in 1 Peter might probably have been a separate article.

Surely many Asians live in hostile contexts and the sufferings from such hostile contexts are anticipated. Then, what about the sufferings of others or from other contexts? In other words, what does suffering mean here? There are many reasons for sufferings with diverse reasons, aren't there? For example, suffering from poverty, suffering from unrighteousness, suffering from human rights, suffering from dictatorship, suffering from economic exploitation, suffering from child abuse, suffering from ideology, suffering from underground churches, suffering from racism, suffering from social class or structural problems... on and on and on. These diverse sufferings often require different strategies when battling against the world.

A hostile environment in 1 Peter can be one of the ways of applying theological perspectives for Asians. I agree with Dr. Garcia's exegesis on 1 Peter, and theological applications to Asian contexts are very appropriate considering their very difficult situations. In these similar analytical perspectives, Korean Christians, have to struggle with materialistic laxity more urgently nowadays when in a non-hostile-context. Their sufferings come likely from material abundance as economic development plans promoted by so many multi-national companies will rapidly spread over other Asians. Historical suffering from hostile environments awakened Christians to keep their faith more strongly; however, suffering from economic abundance requires different strategies for Asian Christians to keep their purity and loyalty to the Lord. Thank you so much for sharing.

