

## **ASIAN MISSION: TOWARDS A THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE**

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The theme of our conference is “Asian Mission: Past, Present and Future.” It means that we will review the past, examine the present, and anticipate the future with regards to Asian mission from historical, theological, and strategic/practical perspectives. I am given the task of presenting a theological perspective of Asian mission. I believe to do this is not apart from or independent of the other perspectives. A theological perspective deals not only with the biblical material on mission, but with the strategies that have been done in the course of history in certain socio-cultural contexts and the theologies that undergird such strategies. The mission strategies are evaluated in the light of the biblical revelation in order to guide the church in the future. The same is true for the other perspectives of Asian mission. The historical and strategic/practical perspectives are not independent of each other. The strategic and practical perspectives are informed, or supposed to be informed, by historical analysis and certain theological basis. A historical analysis, on the other hand, may cover a history of theology of mission, not merely study of movements, practices, or lives of missionaries. Thus, any aspect of Asian mission can be

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approached inter-disciplinarily, although it is important that the focus of the presentation is clearly defined.

So what do I propose to do here in this paper? First of all we need to raise some question with regards to the topic assigned to me. When we speak of Asian mission from a theological perspective, do we mean a theological reflection on the mission practices hitherto done in Asia, e.g., theology of the church growth? Or, do we mean maybe a contextual theology on Asian situation or culture for the interest of mission, e.g., *Ying-yang* theology, or *Minjung* theology? Or, maybe a doctrine developed with the Asian situation and mission in mind, e.g., Christology or ecclesiology in Islamic contexts? Any of these approaches can yield theological perspective for Asian mission, and they are all valid approaches to understanding Christian mission in Asia, although we may not necessarily agree with their underlying presuppositions and actual content. I believe any theological perspective on Asian mission, or any region for that matter, would have to take into account seriously three things: biblical revelation, history of mission including historical theology of mission, and the concrete socio-political and cultural contexts. My presentation is more of a proposal of how to do theology for Asian mission rather than a theology itself. Part of it is merely raising issues for a theological perspective of Asian mission. Thus, I have revised the topic assigned to me into “Asian Mission: Towards a Theological Perspective.” The last part of my presentation is about the theme of suffering and witness based on I Peter as an example of what I believe to be a relevant theological perspective for Asian mission.

My presentation might raise more questions and controversy than solutions. That is alright. A healthy interaction is one purpose of a conference. All that I hope to accomplish here is to incite further serious theological reflection on Asian mission.

### **Mission and Evangelism Distinguished**

Before we proceed we need to make a distinction between mission and evangelism. In this conference, I hope we share a common understanding of mission and evangelism and that we are talking not just about evangelism but mission as well. Otherwise, if we only mean evangelism, then missiology is not the proper subject for our conference and name for our society; evangelology is perhaps more appropriate than missiology. This is not to suggest a value judgment on either evangelism or mission, and definitely this is not to downgrade evangelism. The reason why we need to raise this distinction is that many Christians especially evangelicals still tend to confuse mission and evangelism and think that mission is synonymous with evangelism /church planting. No wonder evangelism and strategic considerations are always dominant in any evangelical gathering, and for them that is mission. This can be seen from their writings and names of their conferences and institutions; they usually use “evangelism” or “evangelization” e.g., Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization (LCWE), although in the case of Lausanne, it was careful to define what evangelism was and was not—it is proclamation of the cross and not socio-political involvement— and discussed issues other than evangelism.

Ecumenicals, on the other hand, distinguish mission and evangelism, as can be seen from, for instance, the name “Commission on World Mission and Evangelism” (CWME) of the World Council of Churches. They are right in making this distinction, but they are wrong in their tendency to place evangelism outside the purview of mission, which is mainly understood as engagement with society and the world. At times also evangelism is confused with diaconal works and solidarity with the poor.

Mission and evangelism are two distinct although related concepts. Simply put, mission is the redeeming action of the triune God towards peoples and the creation, the goal of which is the restoration of human relation to God in Christ and bringing every aspect of life under the lordship of Christ. The mission of the church

as a partner of God is based on this mission of God; the *missio ecclesiarum* reflects the *missio Dei*. The church has no mission except that which God intends to do in the world. The chief end of mission is that God may be glorified, first among his people and then, through them, in every aspect and area of life.

The mission of God and of the church has several aspects; one of them is evangelism, the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ and establishing his people into a worshipping and serving community. Thus, evangelism is not the same as mission, but it is an integral part of mission. Mission cannot be said to have taken place without evangelism. And yet evangelism alone, in its strict biblical sense as rightly understood by the evangelicals, does not exhaust all that God intends to do for humanity and the world. The Bible tells us that God is concerned about injustice, poverty, suffering, wickedness and idolatry at every level of life and that his restorative action includes, among other things, works of justice and righteousness and *shalom*, all of which make known the glory and will of the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ. Some Christians, many of them evangelicals, object to this too broad a definition of mission, fearing that if everything is mission then nothing is mission. This can be a danger, we must admit, but we need to clarify that mission is not anything that any people of goodwill can do. An action is mission or takes missionary character when it is motivated by the Kingdom of God, when it exhibits something of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and is done by the church, the people of God who have received that gospel and come under the demands of the same Kingdom.

Therefore, I suggest that the other aspects of mission, aside from evangelism, are service to suffering humanity (*diakonia*) and work for justice and righteousness in society, which the Dutch missiologist Verkuyl calls *missio politica oecumenica*. All these are essential aspects of the gospel and of the Kingdom and therefore comprise the mission of God and of the church. In this view of mission, we do not necessarily think in terms of mission boards and missionaries (as members of those boards). We think of the one church of Jesus Christ with all its members. The New Testament

knows no mission body except the church, and no missionaries except those sent by the church from among its members. And even with the ordained missionaries, mission is not limited to them but it is done by every member of the congregation. In other words, it is the church, not the mission boards, that does mission.

We should, perhaps, start thinking of mission board-less missionaries. The engineers, doctors, business people, academics, politicians, social workers, and all Christian professionals engage in mission when they, with profound sense of calling, practice their profession with full integrity and commitment, being salt and light in this decadent world. This is the vision we should have for mission in Asia. And for this, what we need are not just seminaries and missionary training centers, but Christian schools and universities that integrate the Christian faith and ethics in the curriculum and in the teaching of so-called secular courses. In case we are wondering whether this is feasible, we see this already taking place all over the non-Western world. The mission board-less professionals and Christian educational institutions are in better and strategic positions and are creating greater impact than the mission board missionaries and seminaries.<sup>2</sup> Mission is first and foremost a movement of God through the church.

The study of mission in all its aspects, including the evangelistic aspect, is missiology. Missiology as a theological discipline should not be an area reserved only to professional and ordained missionaries and theologians. It also belongs to those engaged in various professions, who see their work as part of the redeeming action of God. These professionals should be invited to missiological discussions. This is not to denigrate the mission boards and professional missionaries and missiologists, but it is high time to restore the rightful place of the church in the mission of God.

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<sup>2</sup> See *Mission Frontiers*, Special Edition on the Global Christian Education, no date.

A theological perspective for Asian mission, therefore, should start from such a distinction and definition of mission and evangelism. This starting point and this distinction must be reflected in any study of mission.

### **Towards a Theological Perspective on Mission Strategy in Asia**

One way to come up with a theological perspective for Asian mission is to reflect critically on the practices of mission hitherto done in Asia for the future direction of Asian mission. Theology of mission, as any branch of theology, is not simply a justification for the traditional and current practice in mission, but it is engaged in a continuing search for the will of God for the church and for the situation in which it finds itself. This involves a dialectical reflection between God and the Word of God and the church. To be sure, there are certain unchanging core beliefs, e.g. the Bible as the Word of God, the substitutionary character of the death of Christ, and the basic task of proclaiming the gospel, all of which guide and protect the mission of the church. But the scope and shape of that mission have to be settled by a sustained critical reflection between the Word of God and the praxis of mission in certain contexts. Thus, to think of a theological perspective for Asian mission does not assume beforehand a certain missionary strategy and practice for which our theological task is simply to provide justification. At times theologies of mission, whether we realize it or not, are simply providing a rationale for what beforehand has been decided upon as to what the church should be doing in the world. A theological perspective for Asian mission should avoid this pitfall. Grappling with a theological perspective for Asian mission should be a sincere search by the church for the will of God in the region.

This does not mean, however, that missiology discards everything of the past and delights in novelties. Missiology, as a theological discipline, is never done in a vacuum and it takes critical character. Among its stuff for reflection are analyses of history of theology of mission and mission practices in certain contexts, and all these

it treats critically for it cannot simply assume that theologies and practices are infallible. This requires self-criticism and open interaction among Christians from different traditions that will hopefully enrich, expand, and deepen one's view of the mission of the church. This can happen when the whole biblical revelation as the only authority becomes the arbiter on issues and disagreements we raise.

The last three decades have witnessed significant progress in the theology of mission both among evangelicals and ecumenicals. The Lausanne Covenant of 1974 is considered to date the best mission document coming from the evangelical movement. No other evangelical document has combined evangelistic zeal and urgency with responsible sensitivity to socio-political and cultural issues in such a fine manner. And yet it cannot be denied that the progress is due to some extent to the challenges posed to the evangelical movement by the WCC. It should be recalled that years before the Lausanne the WCC, through its assembly in Uppsala in 1968 and the CWME conference in Bangkok in 1973, issued provocative statements on mission of the church. Largely through the influence of Dutch missiologist J. C. Hoekendijk, the conciliar movement took a stance that the world, not the church, was the place where God was at work. Hence, the church should participate in movements for humanization and emancipation perceived to be currently taking place in the world. This view created a wild storm in the missiological world, but for some evangelicals it was an occasion to reflect afresh on the mission of the church. Not that the evangelicals threw off their pietistic heritage and the concerns of the then developing Church Growth movement. What happened as a result of the polemics was more of a recovery of the deeper and broader implications of the gospel and biblical revelation, without contradicting their most cherished evangelistic values. Thus the Lausanne Covenant affirms, for instance, that evangelism and socio-political involvement are both part of Christian duty (art. 5). With this statement and the whole Covenant mark

a significant milestone in evangelical missiological thinking. Thanks are due to the controversy incited by the WCC.<sup>3</sup>

There has been a similar influence on the conciliar missiology from the evangelicals. A few years after Lausanne, the WCC adopted in 1982 a document, "Mission and Evangelism: An Ecumenical Affirmation," which is considered to be a benchmark statement and warmly acclaimed by both conciliar and non-conciliar (evangelical) churches. Another noteworthy document is from the Stuttgart Consultation in 1987 sponsored by the WCC and participated in by both conciliar and evangelicals. It is based on the "Ecumenical Affirmation" and covers a broad range of issues. It served as a bridge between the conciliar Christians and evangelicals in the period before San Antonio (CWME, 1989) and Lausanne II (LCWE in Manila, 1989). In both "Ecumenical Affirmation" and Stuttgart statement, evangelism is affirmed well enough to the satisfaction of the evangelicals.

The point here is not simply to suggest that a theological perspective for Asian mission should be different than one that simply provides reasons for one's church's current strategy and practice. It is to encourage Christians from different traditions for a sustained self-criticism and interaction with the word of God in order to seek the will of God for the peoples of Asia.

This approach has never been as critical as now. The Insiders' Movement is one phenomenon in Asia that certainly requires a theological response. Also called churchless Christianity, Ralph Winter calls this the largest new factor in mission strategy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>4</sup> Most of us, if not all, are familiar with the C 1-5

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<sup>3</sup> On the debate, see Donald McGavran, ed., *Eye of the Storm* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1972) and R. Hedlund, *Roots of the Great Debate in Mission* (Madras: ELS, 1981). For an assessment of the debate, see Arthur F. Glasser, "The Evolution of Evangelical Mission Theology since World War II," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research (IBMR)*, (January 1985), 91-13; John Stott, "Twenty Years After Lausanne: Some Personal Reflections," *IBMR*, (April 1995), 50-55.

<sup>4</sup> "The Largest New Factor in Mission Strategy in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century," *New Global Partnership in Mission*, ed. Timothy Park (IAMS, 2004), 65-71. *International Journal of Frontier Missiology (IJFM)* has

contextualization spectrum and the relevant debate that ensued as a result of the emergence of the Insiders' Movement. A cursory survey of the issue will give us a hint that much of the debate is theological, more than a strategic issue. Christology, soteriology, and ecclesiology are in the center of the storm and we are witnessing a theological ferment similar to what took place in the early church. If the movement is from God— as I believe it is, not that it is perfect— it will change our theology, let alone mission strategy, without, hopefully, being incompatible with traditional theology. A theological perspective for Asian mission would have to reckon with this phenomenon and with the theological insights that have come out as a result of it.

### **Towards a Theological Perspective on Asian Context for Mission**

Another way of developing a theological perspective for Asian mission is to reflect on an Asian situation or culture in the light of the Word of God for the interest of mission. In a sense this is related to what we discussed above, for the past and current practice of mission is a part of the situation of Asia. But the focus in this section is not on the practice or strategy but on the context of mission. This is a valid approach, for at times theology is defined, and rightly so, as critical reflection on historical context in the light of the faith or biblical revelation. The historical context means not just past events, but also the present that is going on in history, and includes not just the religious but also the cultural, political, economic, and social aspects of life. This is one way of proposing a theological perspective for Asian mission, that we reflect theologically on a historical-cultural context in Asia and draw implications for mission in the region.

This approach raises, as far as this is concerned, a fundamental question: which Asia? Asia is perhaps the most varied and complicated continent on earth. There is affluent and developed Asia, and there is poor and suffering Asia. There is

Islamic Asia, Buddhist Asia, Hindu Asia, and Roman Catholic Asia. There is Dutch, British, or Spanish previously colonized Asia. And there is modern Asia as well as primitive one. Mission practitioners usually pay serious attention to Asian contexts, particularly the religious contexts, for strategic purposes. Evangelical mission bodies, for instance, are beginning to structure mission fields in terms not of geo-political boundaries but religious blocks. In contrast, the older strategy defines mission fields in terms of nation-states, within which are the different ethnic groups seen in their totality that includes the religious, socio-economic, cultural, and so on. Time will tell which is more effective strategy, but it seems that the older strategy of discipling a whole nation in all its aspects is more in keeping with the Great Commission and our understanding of mission (cf. Mat. 28:19, “make disciples of all nations”). At any rate, all this indicates the value of paying attention to historical context.

For a theological perspective of Asian mission, however, it is not enough just to analyze historical-cultural context for strategic purposes. Much of contextualization discussion and study on cross-cultural communication have this in view. This is not wrong, and we should continue to find creative ways to communicate the good news. But this serves only the evangelistic goal of mission (Remember the distinction between mission and evangelism). For a theological perspective of mission in Asia, the more important thing is to understand in what ways our Christian obedience should be expressed in certain context in order to realize God’s purposes for the church and the society in which the church is located.

This concern raises another important question for a theological perspective of Asian mission: which understanding or perception of Asia? Evangelicals and ecumenicals have different views of the situation, which influence their strategy and the shape of their obedience. Referring back to the 1960s again, the evangelicals spoke of the unreached billions of Asia, while the ecumenicals, the impoverished societies. They have different answers to the questions: in what way/s does God work or might work in Asia and in what ways sin is expressed in individuals and society

and culture? Their views are not necessarily incompatible and the strategic implications are merely a matter of emphasis. But any view of the context is to be seen in the light of biblical revelation. Thus, a theological perspective of Asian mission requires two kinds of exegesis: exegesis (analysis) of the context in Asia and exegesis of the biblical revelation on the perceived context. The exegesis of the context needs the tools of social sciences, while the exegesis of the texts needs grammatico-historical method. The principle of hermeneutical circle of text and context applies here. The general questions to ask and answer here are: how does the Bible shed light on a *critically analyzed* context? How would God like the church and the Christians to respond, based on what we learned from the Bible, to the analyzed context?

We recognize the danger of the context becoming dominant in theological reflection. This is the danger we see in Latin American liberation theology and its Asian counter-parts, like *Minjung* theology and other similar Asian theologies, in which biblical revelation is marginalized by a view of historical context that is pregnant with the ongoing liberating praxis by the poor. Liberation theology, as a methodology and adapted in Asia, is a reflection on the context in the light of faith. But the context takes the upper hand in practice and even this is seen from a Marxist perspective. Be that as it may, it does not warrant us to ignore the historical context altogether; otherwise, we might lose the Asianness of our theological perspective for mission. It is not our intention to discuss the theoretical relationship between the text and the context. There have been a lot of studies on contextualization, and we are seeing good theologies coming out of Asia and even from among evangelicals as a result. Suffice it to say that, from missiological point of view, these contextual theologies are significant in that they are non-Western ways of expressing the gospel

in all its aspects that bear upon not just the religious but the cultural and socio-political life of Asians. They are essential to the mission of the church in Asia.<sup>5</sup>

One pressing problem in Asia that needs to be analyzed critically is religious extremism, sometimes called religion-inspired terrorism. It is a complex issue that casual and thoughtless comments may not help at all. Some call it satanic, not just terrorism itself but the religion that inspired terrorism. Some say it has something to do with US foreign policies especially in the Middle East. Each one of us might have a take on the problem, and it would do us good to study and assess it as much as we can. But we should also look at the problem missiologically, from the standpoint of what God might be telling the church and how she should respond to it, for two reasons. On the one hand, it is affecting the life of the church and Christians, making their mission more challenging. We are all aware of the persecution of Christians in some parts of Asia. The recent abduction of Korean Christians in Afghanistan is still fresh in our memory. This situation will surely trigger some hard missiological thinking.

On the other hand, it is a missiological issue in a sense that—and this is hardly recognized so far—that Christians themselves may be contributing to the growth of religious extremism in Asia. They need to search their hearts whether they, with their scandalous lifestyle, are contributing indirectly and unconsciously to religious extremism and, thus, making the life and witness of the church more challenging. Religious extremism is a militant reaction to the perceived morally hopeless situation in the established religions like Christianity.<sup>6</sup>

It is often said that Christianity has experienced unprecedented growth in Asia, as anywhere else in the world. This is well documented and we need not cite the statistics here. Thanks are due to the Charismatic movement and to the Church

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<sup>5</sup> See for instance *The Bible and Theology in Asian Contexts*, ed. Bong Rin Ro and Ruth Eshenaur (ATA, 1984).

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Christiane Amanpour, "God's Warriors," *CNN Documentary*, August 2007.

Growth movement. And yet we have to go beyond mere statistics. Here we see the value of critical analysis of the situation. Due to our too much pre-occupation with numbers, we fail to see the larger picture of the situation. The larger picture tells us that there is a steady moral decline even among Christians and even among evangelicals. Indonesia and the Philippines remain the most corrupt societies in Asia. South Korea, in spite of the growth of Christianity and its being called the Antioch of Asia for sending out untold number of missionaries, has one of the highest divorce rates, is second in pornography revenue, and eighty percent of its young people is addicted to internet games. We can easily add more to this sad list. The picture that Ronald Sider paints in his book, *The Scandal of Evangelical Conscience*,<sup>7</sup> is not only true of the many American evangelicals but also of Christians in Asia.

We are now reaping the result of what D. Bonhoeffer called “cheap grace.” The long years of missionary work in the region have not made any significant dent in society and culture or have not prepared the Christians to overcome the forces that now destroy church and society. The current situation compels us to ponder whether the church in Asia is doing the will of God. Somehow there is a serious flaw in our mission theology and practice. And how should we react to religious extremism? By declaring the religions that espouse it satanic? Or, maybe God’s chastisement on Christians’ scandalous lifestyle or disobedience? These are difficult questions, but we need to face them, if we want to do God’s will for Asia. A theological perspective for Asia mission would have to deal with Christian nominalism and the religious extremism that the nominalism has helped brought about.

### **Suffering and Witness in I Peter: A Theological Perspective for Asian Mission**

We have indicated above that theological reflection on the strategy/practice and context of mission is done on the basis or in the light of biblical revelation.

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<sup>7</sup> Translated in Indonesian by Inter-Varsity Fellowship-Indonesia, (Perkantans, 2007), to which I gave endorsing remarks.

Biblical revelation in this regard does not simply refer to a few isolated verses or texts thought to be speaking of mission. The choice of certain texts already assumes a certain understanding of what mission is; it is this pre-understanding that influences the choice of texts and their interpretation. The mainline evangelicals would usually refer to Matthew 28, the book of Acts, and relevant Pauline epistles, while the conciliar missiologists would draw from the prophets and Jesus in the gospels.

But if we think, as we must, of the entire Bible and every doctrine as the basis of mission, we are on to surprising discoveries, profound insights that may further enrich our view of mission. Not only do the writings of the apostles, but the prophets and Jesus Christ provide the foundations for mission in all aspects: rationale (why), message (what), practice (how), agents (who), and so on. The biblical drama consisting of creation, fall, redemption, and consummation can be seen in its missiological aspect. It speaks of the works of God, the need for redemption, and how he intends humankind and his people to participate in his works. Any part of the drama may serve as a theological perspective for Asian mission if seen in the light of a problem in the region, for instance, creation and the problem of pollution and global warming. The doctrine of creation, of course, is not apart from the doctrines of the Trinity, the redemption in Christ, and even eschatology. A similar approach may be done with other doctrines.

Missiological studies have also benefited from the biblical theological approach, in which a theme is treated historically as it develops in the history of redemption from the time of the Patriarchs down through the time of the apostles. Usually the main theme or themes of a Scripture is chosen because it is thought to parallel a current situation and to give guidance for such situation in which church finds itself. Here we take the theme of suffering from I Peter as an example. I have chosen this Scripture because the situation of the church in Asia is similar to that of the first readers of the letter. In I Peter we have the word of God addressed to the church struggling to live out its faith and witness in a hostile environment. Its

message regarding suffering is relevant for the mission in Asia. Although suffering is not something strange in the life of the church (4:12), it is never an ideal state to be pursued or accepted passively. The message of I Peter is simple: in the midst of a hostile environment, the church is called to faithful and active obedience to God even if it means suffering. Doing God's will in that context may accomplish his purposes for church and society. Suffering has missiological meaning when, by doing good, it witnesses to the suffering and love of Christ. The question this section intends to wrestle is, how does the church live out its faith and witness to the love of God in Christ in the midst of suffering.

A number of studies of I Peter have shown the letter's missiological thrust. It would be proper to cite a few here. John H. Elliot has done an extensive background study on "royal priesthood" (2:5). He concludes that "holy priesthood" as he translated it as "body of priests" was the appropriate term with which the task and function of the elect and holy community should be associated, and this task "consists in the exercise of holy life of obedience and well doing *coram Deo* and *pro-hominibus*. This activity is basically a witness oriented toward the world and complements a second aspect of the community's responsibility, the proclamation of the world of salvation and mercy."<sup>8</sup> John Holdsworth, for his part, explores the possibility of suffering having an eschatological reference usually associated with apocalyptic writings. He investigates a number of relevant terms in I Peter and concludes that the epistle contains "the basic elements of a missionary theology which sees a constant, ongoing, and necessary disjunction and struggle between powers antipathetic to the gospel and the gospel itself."<sup>9</sup> The political apocalyptic nature of its language is meant to produce a theodicy, or a "mission rationale in terms of the

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<sup>8</sup> J. H. Elliott, *The Elect and the Holy: An Exegetical Examination of I Peter 2:4-10 and the Phrase *basileion ierateuma**, (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1966), 224.

<sup>9</sup> J. Holdsworth, "The Suffering in Peter and Missionary Apocalyptic," *Studia Biblica*, ed., E. A. Livingstone, (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1980), 230

universality of God, and his, in fact, having a purpose for his people within history.”<sup>10</sup> P. J. Robinson, on the other hand, takes I Peter as a missionary document, which deals with the most basic question about the church in the world, its existence in society as new and distinct community with a totally new lifestyle. Robinson presents two significant facts about the church and its mission:

First, it (I Peter) perceives the congregation’s presence as mission. The missiological principles laid down by this letter are intimately intertwined with what the church is. The congregation itself (that is, its being) is part of the message it proclaims. Second, it is of utmost importance that the congregation should heed its identity as a witnessing community. Every aspect of its life and work should be in line with nature and so directed as to strengthen that particular identity.<sup>11</sup>

There are other approaches to I Peter that are not formally missiological but rather focus on the liturgical and ethical nature of the document. But even from these studies can be derived some missiological implications. It is not our intention to discuss these studies here. Our focus is on the relationship of suffering and the witness of the church.

That suffering is a major theme in I Peter, very few doubts. One of the important issues raised in the study of I Peter is the relation of suffering to baptism. This is quite strange since baptism is mentioned only once in the letter (3:21). There is no doubt that baptism is the Christian’s participation in the suffering of Christ. This is clear from Paul (cf. Rom. 6), but this is probably not the idea of the author of I Peter, who emphasizes the suffering of Christians, not baptism, as a participation of Christ (4:12, 13). If we relate baptism and suffering, there is a clear congruity

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 230

<sup>11</sup> P. J. Robinson, “Some Missiological Perspectives from I Peter 2:4-10,” *Missionalia*, 17/3 (1989), 185.

between these two themes in I Peter. As C. F. D. Moule says, “Suffering is connected with baptism (through Christ’s baptism which meant the cross) and baptism is an epitome of the Christian doctrine of suffering.”<sup>12</sup> While I Peter is not a baptismal document, its message may have been intended for those newly baptized Christians. The missiological implication may be drawn: in their life and in the context of their suffering, they have to bear witness to the love of Christ, who suffered for them. Baptism is the initial testimony or witness of commitment of a Christian and his/her willingness to share in the experience of those who were at the time suffering because of their faith. How would they show this witness?

First of all, we make a note here on the *paraenetic* approach, which refers to a literary genre, consisting of various practical moral instructions aimed at changing the readers’ behavior. Our interest here is in the basis or motivation for the ethical exhortation and admonition in I Peter as these have some bearing on suffering. There are at least three ways of looking at *paraenesis* in I Peter. Here we shall cite three studies. W. C. van Unnik believes that “doing good” is a key word in the letter. He examines some parallels in the Greek-Roman and Jewish understanding and then concludes that Peter’s conception is closely related to the Greek-Roman meaning except for its foundation. For the Christian, the foundation, according to Unnik, is God’s calling and not human goodness; its aim is different, not to earn glory for oneself, but to make the way for the gospel towards the disobedient.<sup>13</sup> Doing good has evangelistic motivation here.

J. Ramsey Michaels for his part views the motivation for “doing good” eschatologically, that is “salvation for the heathen and glory to God at the last day.” In v. 2:12, for Michaels, Peter’s emphasis is upon the missionary calling of the church.

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<sup>12</sup> C. F. D. Moule, “The Nature and Purpose of I Peter,” *New Testament Studies*, 3(1956-1957), 11.

<sup>13</sup> W. C. van Unnik, “The Teaching of Good Works in I Peter,” *New Testament Studies* 1(1954-1955), 108-109.

Although the people of God are being slandered, Peter holds the hope that the slanderers may “have their eyes opened” and thus “glorify God on the day of visitation.” The theme of 3:17, which is the focus of Michaels’s exegesis, is the suffering of the church and the author’s confidence that God will finally vindicate the righteous and punish the wicked.<sup>14</sup>

Lastly, Frederick W. Danker examined the OT citations from LXX and Dead Sea scrolls and compared these with the Petrine passage I Peter 1:24-2:17. From Danker’s analysis, it is apparent that the author of I Peter places great emphasis on the fact that the new community (church) is an authentic continuation of OT Israel. The consolatory note in I Peter lies in the fact that the all OT citations (Pss. 33, 117, Isa. 40, 43, Hos. 1, 2, and Prov. 24) affirm deliverance from suffering and tribulation. There is a difference, however, between Israel and the church of Christ with respect to suffering. “In the case of the OT Israel, sufferings were often viewed as the result of disobedience and Israel’s validity as God’s people was called into question. The sufferings of the new community, on the other hand, come not because of disobedience but in spite of obedience.”<sup>15</sup>

To sum up, here we have three ways at looking at the paraenesis in I Peter: Greek-Roman parallels (Unnik), eschatology (Michaels), and OT background (Danker). These three tracts are not to be taken mutually exclusive. Rather, they complement each other and together bring out the fuller significance of the message. With these we have three kinds of motivation for the Christian conduct especially in a hostile environment: sharing Christ’s glory (Unnik), vindication (Michaels), and distinctiveness as the new people of God (Danker). These are meant to encourage the readers not to give up and to be holy in all their conduct (in the midst of suffering) for

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<sup>14</sup> J. Ramsey Michaels, “Eschatology in I Peter 3:17,” *New Testament Studies* 13(1966), 397, 400.

<sup>15</sup> F. W. Danker, “I Peter 24-2:17 – A Consolatory Pericope,” *Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 8(1967), 100.

the one who called them is holy (1:15). Holiness is missiological: “that (they) may see (their) good works and glorify God when he comes to judge” (2:12).

It should be pointed out, however, that Michaels and Danker, and those who follow their lead, neglect some important features of biblical revelation. Michaels tends to view eschatology as merely future with his too much emphasis on final vindication. Indeed I Peter as well as the whole NT is eschatological in orientation. But the eschaton is not purely future; it is also present. The motivation for Christian living in the midst of suffering is not only God’s future vindication, but also what he has done, and is doing, for his people through and in Christ.

On the other hand, Danker correctly locates the background of I Peter where it should be, i.e., OT. His contrast of old Israel and new Israel, however, is quite simplistic: the suffering of OT Israel is due to disobedience, while the NT Israel in spite of obedience. There are instances in the OT where the righteous suffer. Similarly, there are instances in the NT where the church also suffers because of disobedience (cf. Rev. 2,3) But the more significant factor that Danker overlooks is that suffering, by whatever cause, always takes place often in relation to other nations. The reason for this is clear enough: the God of Israel is also the God of all nations, a God of justice and righteousness. In dealing with his people, either by way of blessing or punishment, he is at the same time showing his glory and will to the nations.

## **Conclusion**

I have outlined the way we should draw a theological perspective for Asian mission. We need to reflect critically in the light of biblical revelation on our current mission strategy and practice in the context of historical-cultural reality in Asia. I have tried to make a study of a theme from I Peter, as an example, that I believe may give meaning to the present experience of the church in Asia. I submit that the theme of suffering from I Peter become the theological perspective for mission in Asia. In and of itself suffering is not a witness. Obedience to God in the midst of hostilities

and persecution is a form of witness. It is a witness that may commend the truth of the gospel and make way for the hearing of the Word. Suffering is a form of witness when the church is faithful to its identity and to its calling in the midst of hostilities. There should be nothing that can intimidate the church from worshipping God, from doing good, and following Christ. When the church is ready to accept suffering as a part of Christian experience, and learns how to respond to hostilities for Christ's sake, then it can overcome the problems of nominalism, relativism, and other problems thought to be challenges to the church and mission. I believe the greater challenge to the church and mission than these isms is the church's tendency to compromise with them. The problem is perhaps the church feels too at home with the world. The problem may be is that at times the church fails to respond properly to the challenges to its calling and identity. I suggest we learn from Peter.

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