

**Response to Caleb Chul-Soo Kim's
Asian Missions in Strategic Perspectives: Asian Christians for the
Muslim World**

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Dr. Kim's paper raises a number of important issues to consider related Asians and the task remaining. From his experience on the field, he does an excellent job of highlighting the significance and potential of Asians reaching unreached populations globally.

Allow me comment a few points:

1. Related to "Christianity"

Crucial in reaching out to the major non-Christian religions is how we look at Christianity itself. Unfortunately, the West has all too often defined Christianity. Naturally, many Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists are not aware of the changing face of Christianity reflected in books like *The Next Christendom* (Jenkins, 2003) which points to the continuing move of Christianity to the Global South.

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As Dr. Kim points out, many Asian missionaries continue missionary work in the Western tradition, promoting the kind of Christianity they were taught by Western missionaries and is practiced by their Asian home churches. Yet in many ways, we—the global body of Christ—have lost the ability to define the word “Christian” because it is defined by the actions of believers of all kinds, all over the world, throughout history. It is beyond us, and it is certainly more than any of us.

No matter where we may be from, we certainly do not want to be known as “Christian” if for example—as most Muslims in the world believe—America is a “Christian” nation and its movies and social patterns are thus “Christian.”² As Dr. Kim also suggests, we need to recognize and reject any extra-Biblical patterns—be they Western, Eastern, Northern or Southern—as we seek to extend the knowledge of Christ. We are not, after all, seeking to extend the knowledge of “Christianity.”

2. Related to Islam

How we view Islam (or Hinduism, Buddhism, etc.) is also crucial. What stereotypes do we as Believers have about Buddhism? What does the average person in your church think about Hinduism?

Dr. Kim wisely points to the background to Muhammad’s life—as one factor shaping not only his life, but the rise of Islam. Naturally, the cultural and social situation of his time shaped Muhammad’s thought and actions as our backgrounds do for each of us, yet this is often overlooked. While we do not know a lot about his background, and some of what we read is contradictory, Samuel Moffett book, *A History of Christianity in Asia* (Moffitt, 1992) says that the lack of a translation of the Bible is one of two major reasons for the raise of Islam. Without the Bible, there was

² Most Muslims believe that America is a Christian nation and thus that all Americans are Christians. Thus they believe that the movies, TV shows and loose living culture of America, reflect Christian values.

no basis to refute not only the paganism of the region, but also the heresy's of local Jews and Christians, who, at first, Muhammad seems to have sought for spiritual council.³

The Qur'an reflects an appreciation for the "people of the book" at least in its early portions. Some have suggested that this might reflect the fact that Muhammad may have been following the pattern of the Jewish Midrash. If that were the case, the Qur'an could be viewed not as a replacement *for* the Bible, but as an interpretation *of* the Bible.⁴ Without knowledge of the Bible—Old and New Testaments—many of the stories and references in the Qur'an seem incomplete. The details of the stories included in the Qur'an which are also in the Bible reflect an expectation that the reader is aware of the Bible to some degree. How much that impacted what Muhammad was thinking we may never know.

While we may never use that or other interpretations of the role or purpose of the Qur'an when we encounter with Muslims, we should consider various perspectives that might expand our appreciation for them and their cultural/religious background.

3. Examples—East and West.

There are, of course, (as Dr. Kim suggests) excellent examples of Westerners seeing successes in the Muslim, Hindu and Buddhist cultures. While Asians may have the immediate openness in cultures where they do not stand out like a "white man"

³ Some believe that the Jews and Christians of Muhammad's day would actually write down scriptures quoted from Rabbis or Pastors and keep those scripture portions "on their foreheads" or wrists. It has also been suggested that this is one reason for Muslims saying that the Bible is corrupt—because these "scriptures" were, indeed, not accurate. Of course, we would need to point out that those Scripture portions were not actually the Bible.

⁴ Most Islamic scholars from Christian background believe that better comparisons can be made between the Bible and the Hadith than between the Bible and the Qur'an.

would, any missionary will more likely succeed if they go to these people as a learners, seeking to serve and understand as much—if not more—than to be understood.

It is interesting that some of the calls for moratorium in Western missions history were not actually calls to stop as much as calls to do mission more effectively. We are seeking to reflect “Christ in you the hope of glory” not “Christ in the Western Christian models of church and mission.” Later, some realized that what was (and is) needed is Dewesternization, but it could also be called Deeasternization in some situations.

For example, in Hindu India today, identification with Christianity colors a person with much more than we might initially realize. Becoming a baptized Christian there removes one from their caste, or community, as well as their family. And the Christians are often in the news for the wrong reasons. Regularly, the newspapers in India tell stories of “Christians” in disputes over church property, purchased by the missionaries of the past, now, years later, passed on to Christians who may no longer be actual Believers, who are in turn arguing with others within those churches about who own the property. Also, in India’s large movie industry, the “bad guy” is often named after a Bible character such as John or Paul. Understanding these kinds of dynamics allow us to sensitively adjust our terminology and approach to each situation.

4. Identification of Abram’s Seed.

Of course, we also must look beyond the history of Muhammad’s time. What is happening in our own day? What happened during history related to the treatment and actions of both Muslims and Christians? How about Hindus and Christians?

One of the hot buttons for Christians and many Muslims is the West’s (and Christianities’) treatment of modern day Israel. As Genesis 12:3 teaches, we are to be

a blessing to Abram and his seed. But doesn't that include many Muslims? When we talk about the seed of Abram, we first think of the nation of Israel. Then, based on Genesis and other passages, we remember that those of us who are not of the physical seed of Abram are grafted in (Romans 9-11) so we think of the church. Yet many Muslims people groups are also of the physical seed of Abram through Ishmael. According to Genesis 17:19-20, God's perpetual covenant will come through Isaac. But of Ishmael, God says, "I will indeed bless him, and make him fruitful, and give him a multitude of descendants." In Genesis 21:13 God says, "But I will also make the son of the slave wife into a great nation, for he is your descendant too." Nowhere does God negate promises to Ishmael. He is also Abram's seed.

Of course, the point of Genesis 12 is that Abram's seed will bless *all* peoples. One could wonder why aren't there churches in the West who have TV ministries and political power seeking to bless the Arab world in obedience to Genesis, like some do for Israel?

I believe we must rethink our identification of the modern day political nation of Israel as equal with Biblical Israel. Naturally, for some, this is not an issue.

5. Approaching People of Other Faiths.

Approaches to Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism, have come from many directions, as do their approaches to us. We all realize that each of these religions is imbedded in the culture—some aspects are religious, some are cultural, many are neutral. It is difficult to separate.

By approaching people of these other faiths with a focus on Jesus Christ and letting the Bible and thus God speak—and not "Christianity"—we can allow them to determine, how they want to live out following Christ. This is one way to try and keep the spread of the gospel from being Western and it allows them to remain in their families, castes, and culture rather than being pulled into something foreign.

6. Kingdom Advance: Multiple Strategies from Multiple Teams from Multiple Nations.

Because of space, Dr. Kim's limited his statement to issues relating to Asian missionaries and the things they should learn and apply. Of course, these same ideas should be applied to believing Asian businessman, doctors, guest workers and a host of other professionals. There is much to be done and we need every believer engaged at all levels.

As Dr. Cho pointed out, leaders have been talking about Asians (and Africans, Latin Americans) in mission for almost 100 years. It is happening. I believe we should focus on how to more effectively get on with the task, in dependence on the Holy Spirit.

7. Getting Out There.

Finally, during this meeting, it was pointed out that according to an article released this month in *Christianity Today* (Oct. 2007, 80-85), Dudley Woodbury, supervised a recent study of 750 Muslims who have followed Christ. The study reports "...respondents ranked the *lifestyle of Christians* as the most important influence in their decision to follow Christ."

Another study was also released this month in the *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* (Oct. 2007). It noted that more than 85% of the Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists of the world have never met a Christian.⁵

Those two facts: (1) the lifestyle of Christians, yet the fact that, (2) most of the Unreached not having met a Christian, should burn in our hearts and convict us again.

⁵ *Personal Contact: the sin qua non of Twenty-First Century Christian Witness*, by Todd Johnson and Charles L. Tieszen, *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, Oct. 2007, pp. 494-501.

Yet God is working to advance of His Kingdom. It has been thrilling to meet many of you who are right off the field in various places here in Asia and in Africa. Thank you.

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To The New ASM: Greetings from the West

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In 1973, a third of a century ago, David Cho, Ph.D., invited several of us from the West to a meeting in Seoul, Korea which preceded the formation of the Asia Missions Association. On that occasion I presented a paper urging Asian mission leaders not to make the same mistake as Western leaders had made when the Foreign Mission Conference of North America shortly after 1900 had insisted that in God's Kingdom only denominational mission boards were legitimate. My paper was entitled, "The Two Structures of God's Redemptive Mission," which spoke favorably of both "modalities" and "sodalities." By now, of course, there are many American as well as Asian structures that are interdenominational.

Later, I often pointed out in my classroom teaching the shocking failure of the Western missions to understand the possibility and importance of Non-Western

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believers to form their own mission agencies. By now, of course, Non-Western agencies are very numerous and enthusiastic.

It would seem clear that Asian mission leaders have potentially a great advantage in being able to learn from the mistakes of Western agencies. If not, Asian mission leaders face the danger of making some of the same mistakes. One problem is that Western leaders may not know what their mistakes are, and thus cannot warn Asian leaders of what Western leaders did wrong. It is also true that not all Westerners agree about the various issues in missiology. Thus, the twelve “mistakes” of Western churches and agencies, as described below must be understood to be merely my own best understanding. Note that they are not problems of the distant past. They are all contemporary problems. In any case, Asians will have to judge their validity.

1. The Mistake of Starting Bible Schools, Not Universities

The Student Volunteer Movement, in which John Mott was a leader, is noted for the number of universities that it established around the world. The missionaries who went to China made sure there was a university in every province of China. However, in later years Evangelicals, who had never been to college, went out across the world and established Bible Schools, Bible Institutes or theological schools that either replaced or ignored the university tradition. In the last 50 years the majority of American mission agencies have not founded a single university.

The curious thing is that, even though western missionaries cannot be given credit (except in the earlier period) for establishing universities, the hundreds of thousands of national leaders who have been a product of western mission agencies have been able to see what the missionaries could not see. They have recognized the great influence of the university pattern. As a result they have taken the initiative to found over forty universities in the last forty years. I myself was, somewhat

accidentally, part of the founding of an evangelical university in Guatemala which now after forty years has 37,000 students. No missionary can be given any credit for the founding of this university. In my case I merely stood up for a photograph of the founding board of directors two weeks before leaving the country to be a professor at Fuller Seminary.

Why is it that missionaries have not realized that Bible Schools, no matter how high the quality of instruction and curricula, simply do not represent the global mainstream of the university pattern? In the last 100 years in the United States 157 Bible Institutes eventually, after sixty or seventy years, have converted over to colleges and universities. Why haven't missionaries applied the same practical wisdom in their work overseas? This has been a serious strategic mistake. We can at least be glad that national leaders have taken the initiative to found universities without the help of western missionaries.

An extension of the same mistake is seen in the fact that 90% of the money put into maintaining about 4,000 Bible institutes and seminaries around the world is being focused not on the real leaders out in the congregations. They are enrolling instead untried youth who are looking for a place to stay, some food, and perhaps English. Often their students have already failed to get into several other schools. Meanwhile, the gifted leaders of many growing church movements cannot get help from these schools. While every church movement that has decided to restrict its choice of pastors to people selected by schools not congregations is a movement that is not growing or is in decline.

2. The Mistake of Only “Salvation in Heaven,” not “Kingdom on Earth”

Earlier missionaries again were wiser than those in recent times. They realized that (as we see in the Lord's Prayer), Jesus told us to pray for God's Kingdom to come and His will to be done *on earth*. Yet we have mainly helped

people escape this world. Unlike the 19th century, many missionaries in the 20th century, who have not been influential in the upper levels of society, have been content to talk about getting people into heaven but have no longer been concerned for *transformation in this life*. They have done many good things on the *micro level of society*—hospitals, clinics, schools, vocational training, agricultural developments—they even pioneered insights into leprosy and essentially conquered that malady. But there were many things on the *macro level of society* they couldn't do without greater social influence, such as stamping out Guinea Worm or Malaria. Today, however, when Evangelicals have far greater influence than ever before, they are often asleep to the opportunities for transformation on the macro levels of society.

3. The Mistake of Congregations Sending Missionaries, Not Using Mission Agencies

Today many congregations are large enough and strong enough to feel that they don't need a mission agency through which to send their missionaries. This is a new and widespread phenomenon which ignores the great value of the veteran mission agencies which can draw upon the insights of missiology and the vast field experience which are lacking in the average congregation. It may be true that some mission agencies are more experienced and wiser than others, but to my knowledge there is no example of a local congregation bypassing mission agencies with any great success.

4. The Mistake of Whole Congregations In Direct Involvement, Not Professional Missions

A more recent phenomenon (which is characteristic of whole congregations which are highly excited about missions) is the idea of every family in a congregation briefly becoming a missionary family. In this plan, during, say, a four-year period, the intention is for every family in the church to go overseas to work on some sort of

two-week project. This is a marvelous idea for the education of people in the church about foreign lands. Yet, it is incredibly expensive and it is a very questionable contribution to the cause of missions.

5. The Mistake of Insisting That Devout Followers of Jesus Call Themselves “Christians” And Identify With The Western Church

Congregations may find it easy to believe that their people can win converts to Christianity in a ten-day short-term mission. But what very few congregations in America are prepared to understand is that dragging people out of their culture and converting them to what they think a “Christian” should look like, is not what the Bible teaches. The Bible talks of our conveying a treasure in earthen vessels. The earthen vessels are not the important thing, but the treasure is. The new vessel will be another very different earthen vessel. This is what happened when the faith of the Bible was first conveyed to Greeks. In that case the treasure of Biblical faith in an earthen Jewish vessel became contained in a Greek earthen vessel. Later it went to Latin vessels and to Germanic vessels and to English vessels, and is now contained in Muslim vessels, Hindu vessels and Buddhist vessels.

It is just as unreasonable for a Hindu to be dragged completely out of his culture in the process of becoming a follower of Christ as it would have been if Paul the Apostle had insisted that a Greek become a Jew in the process of following Christ. Amazingly, there may be more Muslims who are true, Bible-believing followers of Christ, than there are Muslims who have abandoned their cultural tradition in the process of becoming Christian. There are already more Hindus who are predominantly Hindu in their culture but who are Bible-reading believers in Jesus Christ, than there are Hindus who have abandoned their culture and become “Christian.” In the New Testament there was no law against a Greek becoming a Jew.

However, Paul was very insistent that that kind of a cultural conversion was not necessary in becoming a follower of Christ.

6. The Mistake of Sending Only Money, Not Missionaries

This has been a problem for many years. It can rarely be a good thing to send money to a mission field with little accountability for its use. There are many examples where foreign funds are used to “buy” national leaders away from their churches or away from their denominations rather than strengthening the existing churches. Money can be very helpful but there is no example of harm to the cause of missions that is more extensive than the careless use of money. Money is more easily corrupted than missionaries. This is the reason that wise national leaders talk about trade, not aid. What poor people need is *the ability to earn money*. With earnings they can buy food and medicines and not have to rely upon uncertain gifts from a foreign country. Missionaries are often ill-trained to establish businesses.

7. The Mistake of Sending Short-Termers, Not Long-Termers

This is not a case where one of these things is good and the other is bad. Neither should take the place of the other. However, there are now almost two million short-termers leaving the United States each year compared to 35,000 long-term missionaries. Note that the overall cost of short-termers is at least five times as much as the overall cost of long-term missionaries. This means that instead of doubling or tripling the number of long-term missionaries we’re investing at least five times as much money in short-termers. Short-term trips are wonderful education, but a very small accomplishment in missions. Worse still, a short term is often scary enough or useless enough to turn a young person away from being a missionary at all.