

## **RESPONSE TO DR. LEWIS CHAU ON LAY LEADERSHIP**

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Before dealing with specific aspects of Dr. Chau's fine paper, I would like to examine our theological and historical context. One of the 'accidents' of history was that the modern missionary movement generally accompanied western colonialism. It is true that colonialism opened many doors to missionary activity but also brought numerous disadvantages and even distortions which we all recognize. These often included the identification of the Gospel with western culture and power, which led to understandable resentment and hostility in some areas. China is an example. Then, beginning in 1945, we began to enter a new era as political colonialism ended. No longer were Asian and African 'colonies' forced to admit missionaries.

In Acts 15 a significant shift took place. The Church moved from being primarily Jewish and began to become almost totally gentile. That gentile church evolved into western Christendom which dominated western Europe and then the

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United States in both its Roman Catholic and Protestant forms for over fifteen centuries. Christendom implied a 'Christian' society with a church that was recognized and often supported by the state. That was true in most parts of Europe. It was also the case in an unofficial sense, in the United States, which for well over a century, saw itself as a Christian, Protestant nation. And the Protestant missionary movement, even though it arose on the periphery of the established churches, took that model of the church, with its hierarchical structure and ordained clergy, to Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

But today, for various reasons that I will not examine here, we can see the end of Christendom in the West. We now live in a post-western, post-christendom era. Rather than seeing this as a negative development, I believe this is a positive change for the missionary movement. It brings much more opportunity to enter new cultures, communicate the Gospel, and see churches grow that are more deeply rooted in those cultures, rather than appearing to be western transplants.

Thus in many ways we have entered a situation similar to that of the first three centuries. During that period the church often lived as a despised sect, under persecution, and the faith was spread primarily by men and women whose names do not appear in the history books. Indeed, Acts 11:19ff tells of the Greek speaking Jewish followers of Jesus, scattered after the death of Stephen, who went to Antioch and proclaimed the Good News not only to Jews but also to gentiles. That, of course, was a major missiological breakthrough. It led to the acceptance of gentiles as fully equal to Jews in the new People of God and then to the mission and theological development of Paul. And while we read of missionaries like Paul, Barnabas, Peter, Mark, and others, most scholars believe the faith spread mainly through the witness of ordinary believers; traders, soldiers, government officials, and others. Celsus, an early critic of the Christian faith, wrote with derision of "wood carders, cobblers, washermen, and other people of utmost ignorance," spreading the faith. Origen wrote,

“Some of them make it the business of their life to wander not only from city to city but from town to town and village to village in order to win fresh converts for the Lord.” And history teaches us that the church is always most effective when those whom we might call ordinary believers, who have no special status in church or society, are on the cutting edge of evangelism and mission. The growth of house churches in China and Ethiopia in the last few decades are excellent examples. The role of high school students in the Korean revival is another example,

So my first point is that in many parts of the world, especially in restricted access areas, we have entered a situation similar to that of the first three centuries. And as Dr. Chau has said, this calls us to rethink our missionary methodologies.

Along with the changes in our era, (post colonial, post western, post Christendom) we see the rapid growth of the missionary movement from Asia, Africa, and Latin America. As you well know, the Christian missionary movement is no longer a primarily western phenomenon. It is fresh movement from the newer churches, often fruit of that earlier mission. That has implications for the way in which the Christian Faith will be perceived, no longer as a “white man’s religion,” associated with colonialism and imperialism. It can be seen as it really is, the Good News of the creator God who became one with the common people of Asia, went out of His way to reach out to the poor, the marginalized, the beggars, the lepers, the prostitutes, died on a cross as a criminal, and rose triumphantly from the dead.

While there is still much to be learned from the churches and missionary movements of the past, we cannot be bound by them. We must ask ourselves if the Holy Spirit is leading us into new forms of mission and church that are consistent with Scripture but not necessarily identical with the models of the past. Indeed, beginning with Barnabas and Saul going out from Antioch, Carey sailing to India,

and many others, we can see that the Spirit has frequently led His special servants into new territory, beyond that which the established church believed to be acceptable.

This calls us to return to Scripture. First, let us look at I Peter 2:9,10. "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people (laos) of God. Once you had not received mercy but now you have received mercy." This of course is an echo of Exodus 19:5,6, when the ancient people of God were constituted. Thus, we are all the people ( laos), of God, and our function is to declare His praises, That is, the People (laos) of God, exists for mission. I note that before we begin to use terms like laymen, and lay pastors, we remember that we are all part of the laos, the people of God, and we begin to ask what that might mean for how we structure the church and engage in mission .Our traditional distinction between clergy and laity will not be relevant and may even bring disadvantages in many missionary situations.

A second passage is found in Acts 2. Pentecost is a missiological event in which each person present heard the Good News in his or her heart language. That symbolized powerfully to the church on its day of birth, that its task was to take the message to the 'panta ta ethne' in the language and cultural forms that spoke most deeply to each one. In that context Peter cited the prophecy of Joel, "I will pour out my Spirit on all people...sons and daughters, old and young, even slaves, both men and women. To me, this affirms that the whole church is called to mission and every believer receives the gifts of the Spirit which are primarily to equip the church to fulfill that mission.

The third passage is Ephesians 4:7 and following. It also asserts that the risen Christ gave gifts to his people. He gave apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers to equip the people for ministry, to build up the Body of Christ.

Now to respond to Dr Chau's paper.

First, it is important to recognize that 80% of Asia is closed to traditional missionaries. I believe we can say the same of the Roman Empire during the first three centuries. On the other hand, we recognize that because of globalization, the rapid advances in technology, communication, and transportation, it has never been as easy for Christians from one area to travel to and live in another part of the world as it is today. That is true especially if they have expertise and training seen as desirable by restricted access nations. North Korea might be an exception at the present, but now there are some signs of cracks in the barrier that separates that nation from the rest of the world..

As we discuss those who go with special expertise to restricted access areas, we need to agree on our terminology. I would like to avoid the 'clergy-laity' distinction at this point since we are all part of the laos of God. I will also avoid the term 'professional' missionary since it can be interpreted in different ways historically. What might we call them? I suggest 'cross cultural servants.' They might be physicians, English teachers, businessmen, computer experts, university professors, specialists in agriculture, for example. But their primary goal is to bear witness to Jesus Christ and His salvation.

Of course they must be very competent in their chosen professions and take their work seriously. Not to do so would be a sham. But as they work they seek opportunities, led by the Spirit, to bear witness and hopefully to disciple new believers. The lifestyle of these 'servants' will be of great importance. Research by Dr. J D Woodberry among 750 former Muslims who have come to faith in Jesus Christ indicates that the lifestyle of the Christians they knew was the most important factor in brining them to that faith. (Christianity Today, Oct. 25, 2007)

I will make a suggestion that might seem radical to some, but I believe it is biblical. I suggest we abandon the ‘clergy-laity’ distinction in such situations, which refers to status in the church, and think rather of function. A ‘servant’ like those of whom we speak might well be led to disciple and then lead a new group of believers. Then it seems logical and biblical that he or she should expound the Scriptures to them, lead in worship, baptize, and serve the Lord’s Supper? Whether or not they are formally ordained, I believe such ‘servants’ may well be called to function as pastors. Similarly, let us go to a house church in China, led by a ‘lay’ pastor, a man or a woman. That ‘layperson’ has evangelized friends and neighbors, discipled them, and leads them in worship. He or she should also be encouraged to baptize and serve Communion. After all, the sacraments were given by our Lord to the Body of Christ, not to the clergy.

Dr Chau’s citation from the article by Ming Suen Po is important. I believe there are two primary reasons for the phenomena he cites, that is, the passivity of the laity, the hierarchical organization of the church, the tendency toward an intellectual meritocracy, and the misunderstanding of Christian vocation.

First, we still live with the heritage of the medieval Roman Catholic Church with its rigid separation between priest and people. The Church taught that the saving grace of God came only through the sacraments administered by the priest, to people who were largely passive. To some extent, the Protestant Reformation, with its proper emphasis on the need for academic preparation for pastors, perpetuated the division between clergy and laity. But while we recognize a difference of function, we must reject any differentiation of status and even recognize that the difference of function is not absolute in every situation.

Secondly, we note that one characteristic of renewal movements is that the four tendencies cited in Po’s article are reversed, at least to a significant extent. That is, distance is decreased by pastors and people, between social classes, believers

become active in sharing their faith, and many discover their vocation as Christians in society, working for significant reforms. However with the passing of time, the dynamic of the movement is lost and those involved revert to the older pattern. The Methodist movement is an example. Looking at history, it is clear that only a new and powerful work of the Holy Spirit enables the People of God to reverse this tendency of a passive laity in a hierarchical, clergy dominated church.

Dr. Chau's thesis is that there is a widespread need for better training for those who go as 'lay professional' missionaries or to use my term, 'cross cultural servants.' He also speaks of the need for training for 'lay pastors' in situations like the house churches in China. Of course I agree with him.

But can we look more broadly at the whole church? First we need to ask how we are motivating and training the whole church to understand its call to mission in the world. We can begin with passages such I Peter 2 and Acts 2. Secondly, we must ask how those special 'cross cultural servants' are to be equipped for their ministries. This second issue is the main focus of Dr Chau's paper.

But I do not want us to forget the need for adequate missiological training for the whole church. Nor can we forget the estimated two million functional pastors and evangelists in the world who have no formal biblical or theological training. That is a major challenge.

Thus we need to look at the entire spectrum of need for biblical/theological education. That will range from highly trained professional 'cross cultural servants' to men and women who function as 'lay pastors' and evangelists, usually among the poor, but often have no formal preparation.

In response to the Why, Who, What, How, and Where sections of the paper, I would like to make the following observations. Dr Chau's first point in the 'why' is very important. The goal of a leader is to mentor and equip new emerging spiritual

leaders. (II Tim 2:2) The genius of early Methodism in England and the United States was its method of selecting and training leaders based on their gifts for ministry rather than their educational or social status. This took place through the Methodist class meetings. Similarly the growth of Pentecostalism in Latin America and elsewhere was due to openness in recognizing the gifts of lay leaders who, after successful ministry, were entrusted to lead congregations. In both cases, as in the house churches in China leadership came from the grass roots, people from the same social class. Leadership was not imposed from above through requirements for formal education.

Dr Chau speaks of highly trained persons who go as bi-vocational workers. It is important that their motivation and mission be clear in their minds as well as in those who support them. They should see themselves first of all as disciples of Jesus Christ, sent to glorify Him, serve Him, and communicate His love and salvation by word and deed as the Holy Spirit gives opportunities. Each situation will be unique. In some contexts the Gospel can be communicated to individuals or small groups. In others, greater caution will be needed. But each should have a clear understanding of the essentials of the Gospel of grace and salvation, what it means to affirm Jesus as Lord and become His disciple. Each should be equipped to study the Bible for himself or herself, in order to receive both spiritual sustenance and theological insight for the issues to be faced in another culture.

In addition to biblical/theological training, lay professionals or 'cross cultural servants' will need help in understanding cultures other than their own. Because we all come to know the Gospel in a specific cultural context we too easily assume that the way we worship, communicate, and live out the Gospel in our own culture is the only right way to do so. While continuing to value one's own heritage the cross cultural worker is called to encourage new believers to discover culturally appropriate ways of worship and communication and to deal with special issues in their culture in light of Scripture. The outsider, with a good biblical and historical

perspective, can help the insiders who are new believers as they seek to discover how the Holy Spirit is leading them regarding issues of faith and life. Thus the 'cross cultural servant' will need help to become culturally sensitive.

I have little to add to Dr Chau's suggestions about a combination of special courses combined with self directed study, continuing through the internet where possible. Nor can I add to his suggestions about where such training should take place.

I agree very strongly that we need a major paradigm in the church, especially in the West, to move us from the concern with how God will bless us, to the focus on how we are to participate in His mission in the world. And again, I would minimize the clergy/laity distinction. I believe it is valid and useful in many, perhaps most contexts, but when we realize we are all called to be part of the laos of God. I am really calling for the line between the two to be blurred much more, especially in pioneer situations.

And there is one question we need to pursue more. As I mentioned, some estimate there are at least two million functional pastors in the world who have no formal biblical/theological training. And yet in many situations they constitute the cutting edge of the church and its expansion, especially among those whom the more traditional churches cannot reach. What is our responsibility to them? And what can we learn from them? The continued growth and health of the church in many areas will depend on how well these grass roots pastors are trained and equipped for their ministries. We need to discover and probably devise a multiplicity of models. These will include face to face sharing of insights and problems, perhaps facilitated by an outsider, short intensive courses in a nearby venue, and other methods. In some cases the use of CD's and the internet will be appropriate but not always. The training will necessarily be in-service. Such leaders cannot be extracted from their families and ministries for any length of time. Often short courses can be taken to small groups of

leaders by existing Bible schools and seminaries if they have the vision to do so and are willing to adapt their courses and curricula for those contexts.

So my plea is that as we look at the issue of biblical/theological preparation for mission and ministry, we contemplate the whole church of Jesus Christ, including the poorest of the poor and those who minister to them.

## **Asian Mission: Strategic Perspective**

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

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### 1. A New Era for Missions to the Muslim World<sup>2</sup>

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.<sup>3</sup> “World Christianity” is the term that depicts the trends of today’s

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<sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup> 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.<sup>5</sup> 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.<sup>6</sup> 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

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<sup>4</sup> "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).

<sup>5</sup> 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).

<sup>6</sup> 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,”<sup>7</sup> 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 approaches<sup>8</sup> 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.

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

<sup>8</sup> 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.<sup>9</sup> 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.<sup>10</sup>

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.<sup>11</sup> Rollin Armour, Sr. comments: “The conflict these [Byzantine] Christians had with Islam portended the

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

<sup>10</sup> 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).

<sup>11</sup> 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).