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Mission Round Table

The OMF Journal for Reflective Practitioners



To the Ends of the Earth

"I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth." Isaiah 49:6

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Editorial

Walter McConnell

In the first verse of the book of Acts, Dr. Luke reminded Theophilus that he had written his previous book—his Gospel—to record "that which Jesus began to do and to teach." Though unstated, his purpose for this second book was to record that which Jesus *continued* to do and teach through his apostles. Their job was not to speculate about when Jesus might restore the kingdom to Israel, but to wait for the Spirit to empower them so that "you will be my witnesses, not only in Jerusalem, but also in all of Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8, my translation). This phrase undoubtedly lays out the structure for the book that describes the spread of the church from Jerusalem to the world beyond.

But Luke's second account does not conclude with the work Jesus began to do and teach being completed; "the ends of the earth" was not reached when Paul arrived in Rome. Each generation of Christians must receive power from the Spirit and bear witness of Jesus. And though some try to personalize the progression and speak of "my Jerusalem, my Judea, my Samaria, and my ends of the earth" in geographic and/or cultural terms, the original context anticipates the gospel spreading from first-century Jerusalem until Christ returns. One might say that just as humankind in Genesis 1:28 was commanded to "fill the earth and subdue it" as God's image-bearers, Christians in Acts 1:8 were instructed to bear witness of Jesus to the whole earth as his image-bearers.

The desire to see the story of Jesus proclaimed throughout the world lies behind this issue of *Mission Round Table*. All but the opening article were originally produced for the June 2019 OMF Mission Research Consultation that focused on sharing the gospel. The first, written by Koyuki Sami—OMF's new Executive Director of Japan—addresses a very important question about the extent to which Asian sending centers of an international mission organization can be considered indigenous. As she shows, the OMF Asian home centers, while approved of by local church leaders, were founded at the instigation of foreign missionaries. And though various stresses and strains have emerged, she believes that God has used this for the best of the mission and the church in Asia.

Taking a half step back from the Asian scene, Song Tsai examines the mission theology of Johan Herman Bavinck, the Dutch missionary who split his time between ministry in Indonesia and the academy in the Netherlands. Of special interest is his "conception of missions in light of the theme of the kingdom of God, the interplay between general and special revelation, and the relationship between missions, church, and the world." Mission practitioners who are unacquainted with Bavinck's thought will discover that he challenges us to establish churches that are more worshipful, more focused on God's glory, and to reject a sacred-secular dualism by raising divine truth above mere anthropological concerns. Thinking rightly about the mission of God is essential for everyone involved in gospel ministry.

Challenged by Song's reflections on Bavinck, Michael Widmer has examined some of the writings of the Dutch theologian and produced "a wider investigation into the nature and purposes of God's mission and how this relates to his kingdom and the commissioning of the church." Following Bavinck, he believes that God's mission is intrinsically tied to the kingdom of the Messiah and can only be accomplished as God reveals himself. Amazingly, God welcomes his people to join him as co-workers who take up the royal crown and priestly mantle in proclaiming the good news of the Messiah, responding compassionately to human need, and embracing the whole of creation. Christ's role as Prophet, Priest, and King should be reflected in the church so that every mature believer lives out a balanced, threefold spirituality and ministry.

For the gospel to be proclaimed, messengers must be in place. Toward this end, Ian Prescott considers the relationship between the gospel that does not change, the community that is inescapably enculturated, and the need to engage with other cultures. Messengers who gain entrance to a society through a particular "platform" may find themselves with much or little time for gospel ministry. Many will feel a tension between the necessities of maintaining their platform and their desire to learn more language and culture or share the good news about Jesus. Wisdom is needed to select the best platforms as possible, understand that everything we do shapes our message, always act with integrity, and develop structures that encourage effective work.

The last two articles are concerned with producing healthy, contextualized disciples who, as Samuel Lim says, "understand the gospel, critically reflect upon it, and articulate the Christian faith within their own social and cultural frameworks." Lim encourages us to take seriously the spiritual worldview of others and consider how to understand and respond to the role that ritual materiality plays in the context of Thai Folk Buddhism. He suggests that, in many cases, it is better to give new meaning to old rituals than to remove them. Even so, we must move beyond pure materiality as we show that the power of the gospel helps us on our spiritual journey.

Ricky and Winny Leung respond to Lim's article from a Japanese perspective in "Let the Gospel Enter the Heart Underneath the Kimono." Underlining similarities and differences between Japanese and Thai, the Leungs move the conversation on. They echo Lim's belief that messengers must develop a deep understanding of local culture since some "notions are profoundly different from, and diametrically opposed to, the Christian faith while" others "have at least a superficial similarity to Christian teaching." While similarities should be pursued and ritual materiality may be a first step for young Christians, they conclude that "it is not sufficient and should not be relied on too much."

Wherever you are, we hope that these articles stimulate your mind as the Holy Spirit empowers you to proclaim the gospel to the ends of the earth.

How Indigenous Are the OMF Asian Home Councils?

Tracing the History of their Establishment.[1]

Koyuki Sami



Koyuki Sami joined OMF in 1992. She worked among the urban and rural poor in the Philippines for thirteen years, as mobilizer and Serve Asia Coordinator for the Japan Homeside for five years, and as Human Resources Coordinator for New Horizons for six years. She took up the Executive Director's role for the Japan Home Council in April 2019.

Introduction

I have always been interested in how OMF's Asian Home Councils came into being and how they developed over the years.[2] It has been a blessing and privilege to be a member of this international organization for more than twenty-seven years, particularly as CIM/OMF is held in high regard by Asian churches due to the legacy of Hudson Taylor. However, I have been keenly aware that many Asian members and Asian Home Councils have faced significant struggles and frustrations within the organization.

When I overheard someone ask whether Asian Home Councils should be considered indigenous mission movements, I began to think about Asian Home Councils from the perspective of indigeneity. How does our existence fit this perception? According to Andrew Walls, a traditional mission agency is basically "a product of the concomitance of certain political, economic, and religious conditions at a certain period of western history."[3] From Walls's perspective, OMF is clearly one of those traditional mission agencies. When it opened the door for Asians to join in 1965, it was a thoroughly Western organization. Since their inception, OMF Asian Home Councils have struggled to fit into this Western organization and at the same time to indigenize the function of a Home Council. My thinking about the place of Asian Home Councils in the organization has been further motivated by my recent experience working with a team that mobilizes and accepts workers from countries where OMF does not have Home Councils. The difficulties faced are all part of God's stretching and molding of the organization in ways which have resulted in more people engaging in mission and in changes in the overall ethos and practice of the organization.

This paper will paint a portrait of the birth and development of OMF's Asian Home Councils, point out the key issues faced by these councils, identify changes that have emerged over the years, and consider whether Asian Home Councils can be legitimately considered indigenous. While preparing the paper, I had access to the archives of OMF that are held in Singapore. However, as material that is less than twenty-five years old is not available for public use, I only had access to council minutes up to 1993. In order to gain more information about the Asian Home Councils, I prepared interviews and questionnaires for both current and former Home Council leaders. Sadly, many of the early Asian Home Council leaders have gone to be with the Lord during the last ten years. This fact makes me wish that this study could have been done earlier.

Brief history of CIM/OMF International (1865–today)[4]

Birth of China Inland Mission

The reality that millions of Chinese living in inland China were dying without hearing the gospel of Jesus Christ urged James Hudson Taylor to found a new mission organization. He prayed for twenty-four skillful workers, and, in faith, opened a bank account with the name of the China Inland Mission (CIM) on 25 June 1865. The CIM was born. The following year, Taylor together with his family and sixteen new workers, sailed for China. In subsequent years, God faithfully answered prayers for additional workers. The sending countries also expanded from the UK to several other Western countries.

Trials and Expansion

In 1900, the Boxer rebellion broke out, and hundreds of local Christians and missionaries lost their lives, including fifty-eight adults and twenty-one children from the CIM. Despite the tragedy and political upheavals that occurred throughout China during the early 1900s, God continued to add more workers to

the harvest field. By 1939, the CIM had more than 1300 missionaries.

In 1949, when communism took over China, the mission faced one of the most significant milestones in its history. All missionaries were forced to leave China by 1953 in what is often referred to as the "Reluctant Exodus".[5] Concerns for Chinese believers inside the country and for the future of the organization on the outside lay heavily on the leaders' hearts. After much prayer and discussion, CIM leadership decided that when God closes a door, he opens another, and shifted their ministry to other neighboring East Asian countries. By 1951, the international headquarters had been established in Singapore.[6]

A new beginning and today

Almost immediately discussions began about whether it would be possible to accept non-Caucasian members (1953) and continued until the decision was finalized in 1961 when the Minutes of Overseas Council stated that the acceptance was limited to those "who are born citizens and reared in our homelands (where CIM had Home Councils)."[7] Reflecting on this, Rosemary Aldis comments that "While this may be seen as a minimal step forward after a decade of debate, the decision was to have far-reaching consequences."[8]

One of the consequences that Aldis pointed to came out in a 1964 decision by the Overseas Council—the highest decision-making body in the organization at that time. A paper prepared for the Overseas Council by G. A. Williamson titled "The Greater Potential" emphasized "the resources and potential of the churches in Asia and the Mission's possible contribution through them."[9] The General Director, J. O. Sanders, presented a paper titled "Future of the Mission" which suggested that the Fellowship should "work more closely with Asian churches and not separately as a missionary organization," and "find some way in which Asian nationals called to serve in other lands may be associated with us." He emphasized the need to "Destroy the concept of 'foreign' missions and substitute a working fellowship of compatible missionaries of all origins – truly international."[10] Some interesting discussions must have taken place. The minutes of the following week read, "The Fellowship will thus cease to be an agency for sending missionaries from Western lands to lands of the East and will instead be an instrument of the Church of God in every land from which its members are drawn…"

On the last day, a Special Council was summoned and made two big decisions. The first was called a "New Instrument."[11] It determined that "the name China Inland Mission is obsolete and recommended that from June 25, 1965 (the 100th anniversary of the Mission) the name should be Overseas Missionary Fellowship (OMF)." The second concerned a new structure that would allow the organization to form a new Fellowship together "with Asian colleagues and the pattern jointly received from God Himself."[12] In this way, a new chapter in the mission's history began in 1965 when it formally adopted the name "The Overseas Missionary Fellowship" (OMF) and work began to set up Asian Home Councils in East Asian countries where OMF had been working.

Over the years, Asian Home Councils have been set up in nine countries to mobilize the Asian churches for missions and send out their missionaries. Since 2012, OMF has renewed its efforts to receive workers from like-minded indigenous mission agencies and churches around the world where OMF does not have Home Councils or sending centers and to reach out to East Asian people both in East Asia and globally.

Formative period of Asian Home Councils (AHC) 1965–1985

Preparations

To implement the second decision, the General Director sent letters to Area (Field) Directors who were instructed to identify and interview National Christian leaders regarding the possibility of setting up OMF Asian Home Councils. It is intriguing to read the reports on the meetings between Japan Area representatives and Japanese Christian leaders which took place in March and April 1965. These discussions mark the moment when the OMF Japan Home Council was conceived. After some discussion on the subject, Dr. David Tsutada, a leader of an emerging Japanese indigenous church group called Immanuel General Mission, concluded the time by admitting that "God had led us in this formation of the New Instrument," but predicted problems would arise due to cultural differences between the East and West.[13] Rev. Haga, who later held the chairmanship of the Japan Home Council for thirty years, said, "The OMF was not born in the heart of Japanese. It has come to us from outside and we need to learn of it."[14] He emphasized that "the chairman should be one who is well versed in the OMF approach and preserve in the Council the OMF atmosphere" and suggested that the OMF Field Superintendent should serve as Chairman at the early stage. Dr. Tsutada countered this idea by suggesting that having a Japanese Chairman or possibly a Japanese co-chairman would avoid giving an impression to the public that the new OMF was a Western organization. Rev. A. Hatori, who was widely known as the Radio Pastor, was sympathetic with the new Fellowship and interested in assisting in implementing the idea. Shortly after, he was appointed to be the first Chairman of the Japan Home Council and served in the capacity until Rev. Haga took over in 1974.

Inauguration of Asian Home Councils

Similar interviews and meetings took place in five different countries in East Asia where OMF was working, and similar responses came out that it was the time for them to form missionary sending councils. Christian leaders from these countries expressed similar concerns as the Japanese, such as OMF being seen as a Western mission organization and the lack of adequate personnel to lead a Council. Nevertheless, as a result of

It is noteworthy that although many Asian leaders were positive about forming OMF Asian Home Councils, it was not Asian churches or believers who initiated the partnership, but CIM/OMF. ... Nevertheless, it came as a sign of the providence of God.

those meetings, Home Councils were inaugurated in Singapore/Malaysia (November 1965), Japan (January 1966), the Philippines (early 1966), and Hong Kong (September 1966) around the time of CIM/OMF's 100th anniversary (1965). In May 1977, a new Home Council was formed in Malaysia, as they separated from Singapore. Korea took a couple of years of preparation before formally launching their Home Council in June 1980. Taiwan also formed their Home Council in 1980, Indonesia was added in 1985, and Thailand finally joined in 1990 at the time of CIM/OMF's 125th anniversary.

It is noteworthy that although many Asian leaders were positive about forming OMF Asian Home Councils, it was not Asian churches or believers who initiated the partnership, but CIM/OMF. While there may have been some individual suggestions from Asian believers, the interviews and questionnaire conducted with Asian Home Council leaders testify that the idea was from OMF, not from them. Similarly, no council meeting minutes expressly say that the opening of Asian Home Councils had been requested by Asian churches.

Table 1. Member statistics from Asian Home Councils 1965-2018

	1965	1970	1975	1980	1985	1990	1995	2000	2005	2010	2015	2018
Hong Kong	2	4	2	3	6	15	16	12	24	35	56	74
Indonesia				1	1	1		14	11	16	29	28
Japan			4	4	8	4	13	15	15	20	17	15
Korea					4	17	38	48	57	52	58	58
Malaysia		*	*	4	5	7	6	14	25	25	31	28
Philippines		6	6	9	11	13	10	18	44	37	33	36
Singapore		2	4	8	7	16	26	47	52	74	78	77
Taiwan				1	1	5	6	6	9	14	13	21
Thailand							3	3	6	8	9	8
Total	2	12	16	30	43	78	118	177	243	281	324	345

* The numbers sent by the Malaysia and Singapore Home Councils are combined under Singapore.

Slow but steady progress

The OMF Asian Home Councils began with a mixture of excitement and struggle. Early on, most of the Councils met quite frequently, some meeting almost every month. This shows their enthusiasm and sense of urgency. However, the early years were also marked by a high turnover of Council members. According to some leaders, discouragement came because pastors and other Christian leaders were too busy and there was a lack of missionary candidates to send out. Asian Home Councils thus progressed slowly during the 60s and early 70s, and by 1975, OMF had accepted only sixteen Asian missionaries (Table 1).

Table 2. Ratio of members from Asian Homesides to total number of members 1960–2018

Year	1960	1965	1970	1975	1980	1985	1990	1995	2000	2005	2010	2015	2018
Total no. of members	656	779	779	792	788	892	1029	937	1030	1174	1344	1385	1357
Members from Asian Homesides	0	2	12	16	30	43	78	118	177	243	281	324	345
Percentage of total members	0	0.2	1.5	2.2	3.8	4.8	7.5	12.6	17.2	20.7	20.9	23.6	25.8

Note: This table shows demographic trends from Asian Home Councils and gives figures for every five years and March 2018. The data was retrieved from OMF archive personnel data (up to 2005) and International Personnel System (2010–2018).

Nevertheless, it came as a sign of the providence of God. The Councils formed at a time when the social and economic landscape of Asia was rapidly and radically changing. Asian countries were gaining confidence in their status in the world. Spiritually, Asian churches, as well as parachurch groups, were growing and becoming active.[15] Billy Graham publicly declared Singapore to be the Antioch of Asia at the Singapore Billy Graham Crusade held in December 1978.[16] Asian churches were ready to take up the challenge of getting involved in world mission, and OMF needed Asian colleagues to advance the mission to reach out to East Asians with the good news of Jesus Christ.

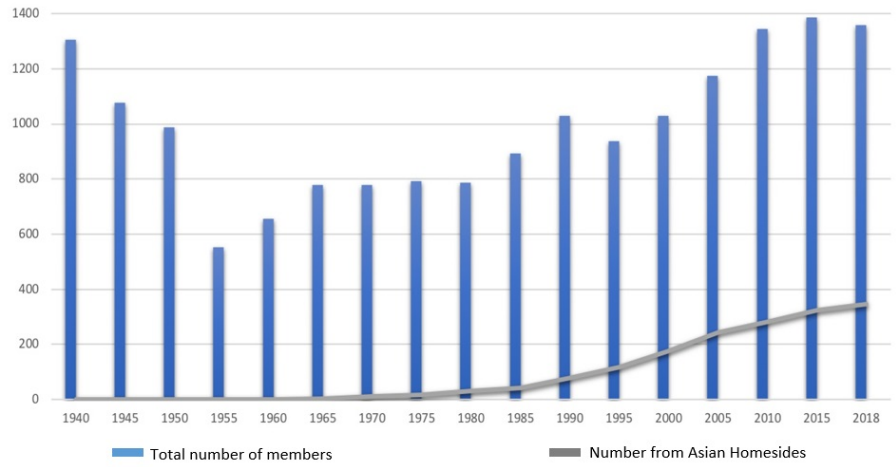
Some other struggles and issues also surfaced, such as the great mission needs at home, which discouraged many from considering overseas mission; frustration over the need to learn the English language and the Western nature of the organization; lack of mobilization tools in Asian languages; the relationship between Field and Home Councils, etc. While Field leaders attended Asian Home Councils meetings to give support, in reality, some Field leaders chaired some of these Councils in the early years. As time went by, frustration on the field sides and international leadership arose as they wanted to see Asian Home Councils become indigenous. An international leader stated, "We have tended to hand over completely to our Asian brethren on the national councils the responsibility of carrying on a normal home department. Not much progress is being made by these Councils: for one thing, there is the difficulty of having a full-time man…"[17] At one point, the frustration felt by international leadership led to a somewhat disrespectful action as they approached someone to serve as a Home Council Director without first consulting the Asian Home Councils.[18] A report from the Japan Home Council by a field leader reads, "It is worth pointing out to the General Director that it is important that we have the man of Japanese choice than some brother who happened to have caught our fancy."[19]

Despite the obstacles, Asian Home Councils made steady progress. At the Central Council meeting in 1976,[20] the reports from Asian Home Councils were all encouraging. Japan had sent their first two couples abroad, and financial support was constantly above 100% despite the fear that Japanese churches might not understand OMF's non-solicitation policy. Hong Kong appointed its first part-time home staff person as chairman/administrator and office secretary. Singapore/Malaysia accepted three new workers. The Philippines appointed its first Executive Secretary. The chairman of the Central Council expressed appreciation of the high standards maintained by Asian Home Councils and emphasized that the quality of the candidates was more important than their quantity.[21]

At the same time, new challenges and issues were arising. These included the education of the children of Asian missionaries, the mission's responsibility for the maintenance of missionaries' family members (particularly parents), the need of furlough arrangements more suited for Asian missionaries, the needs for special training for Asian candidates, and preparation and care for new Asian missionaries. The Extension Secretary was appointed to assist the Asian Home Councils (1969), and the newly formed Asian Home Council Chairmen Consultation (1981) became a platform to share the concerns and issues unique to Asian missionaries and Asian Home Councils. Some of these concerns were brought up to the Central Council for further discussions and decisions. The Council minutes of the Central Council 1982 reads, "The Council endorsed the need for multicultural emphasis throughout the Fellowship for mutual integration of all members and their host country."[22]

The Asian candidates' lack of cross-cultural training and English proficiency were among the top concerns faced by Asian Home Councils. To help overcome these problems, a training institution called Asian Missionary Training Institute (now called Asian Cross-cultural Training Institute) was launched in 1984. This institution and a short-term program called SPOT (Summer Program of Overseas Training) helped Asian people and candidates gain cross-cultural mission experience and training. As the common Asian practice of providing financial support for one's parents was recognized, Asian Home Councils were given liberty to allow members to make it part of their support budget (1984). More flexibility regarding the length of one's furlough was given considerations, as Asians didn't need to travel far, the cost of air flights were reduced, and requests from their sending churches were recognized.

Fig. 1. Total number of members and number of members from Asian Homesides 1940–2018



Development and growth of Asian Home Councils (1986–1999)

From the mid-1980s through the 1990s, the number of members from Asian Home Councils proliferated. Members of OMF from Asian Home Councils made up only 4.8% of the total workforce in 1985. By 2000, it had grown to 17.2% (Table 2).

The rapid growth of missionaries from Korea and Singapore during this period is also remarkable (Table 1, Fig. 2). Reasons for this are said to be related to the growth in maturity of the national churches and their commitment to world mission.[23]

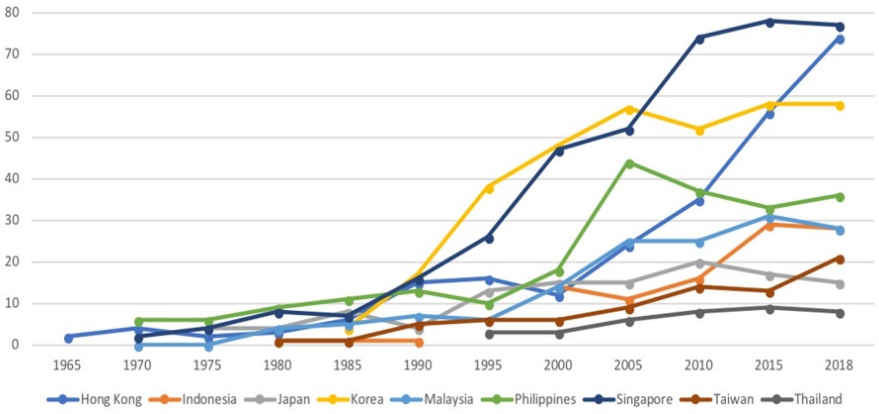
Field Council and Asian Home Council relationship

From the year 1986 on, the amount of time given to Asian Home Councils in the agendas of Overseas Council and Central Council meetings decreased greatly. This shows that the Councils were considered to be well established. However, as Asian Home Councils were established and grew, the role of the Field was to change from leading and supporting to being equal partners with national leadership or, in some countries, to come under the Home Councils. Thus, the need for mutual interaction, better communication, and cooperation between Field Councils and Home Councils were addressed by the General Director at the Asian Home Council Chairmen Consultation in 1987:

> This does not mean that the separate and independent nature of either field or home council should be altered, but that there is room for much greater communication, counsel, and cooperation if we are to avoid unnecessary misunderstanding, costly duplication and embarrassing mistakes; and if we are to maximize the complementary role the two councils can and should exercise.[25]

Even so, an Asian Home Council leader questioned the power imbalance that existed in some countries between field and home. This is particularly an issue in fields with a large number of workers in that their added voice gives them more power.

Fig. 2. Number of members from Asian Homesides 1965–2018[24]



National leadership[26]

The most remarkable thing that happened during the 80s and 90s is that each Asian Home Council (with the exception of Indonesia) found full-time national leaders. Councils were thus able to grow in terms of their mobilization efforts and in the number of missionaries sent. Many exciting reports began to fill the Home Council minutes.

The Philippines Home Council was the first to appoint a full-time Executive Secretary in 1978. William Layda was one of the first Asian missionaries sent out in 1970 to Indonesia by the Philippines Home Council. After two terms, however, he had to return home for family reasons. At that time, he took up the full-time Executive Secretary role at Philippines Home Council until he and his wife were ready again to go back to the field. In later years, the position was taken by others until it was renamed as Home Director in 1991.

In 1987, Singapore became the first of all the Asian Home Councils to have a Home Director. Seeing experienced field workers restricted to homeside ministry at the peak of their missionary career, Kenneth Tan, who was a Council member, felt that he should take the role so that the others could continue to work on the fields. He later became the National Director of Singapore which is responsible for both homeside and field ministries in Singapore.

The Korean Home Council was formed later than some other Asian Home Councils. However, they had a full-time Executive Secretary very early after its formation in 1980, and in 1992 the first Home Director was appointed.

Hong Kong had its first Executive Secretary in 1988, Thailand in 1991, and Malaysia in 1992. The Home Council of Indonesia was formed in 1985 and is still looking for a full-time Home Director.

An interesting process took place in both Hong Kong and Japan in that International leadership appointed Dr. James Taylor to serve in Hong Kong and Alan Mitchel in Japan as Acting Home Directors. Both of them were well experienced and respected field missionaries; however, appointing foreigners rather than nationals at this stage of development looked like a setback from the nationalization/ indigenization of those Asian Home Councils. Both Taylor and Mitchel expressed the desire to hand over the responsibility to national leaders as soon as possible. However, in my opinion, it was a necessary transition for both Councils to accept at that time. Unlike the previous period, suddenly almost a dozen missionary candidates appeared one after another in Japan.[27] There was no way for a full-time pastor/part-time Chairman to handle the sudden increase in candidates for mission. Chairman Haga used to say, "The church ministry is my priority, if it had to suffer, I would resign from OMF."[28] The Hong Kong Council probably faced a similar situation. During 1985 to 1990, the number of candidates increased rapidly (Table 1). Thus, it was a timely and vital step to have experienced and capable full-time persons to move candidates forward until the appointment of National Directors in 1992 for Hong Kong and 1994 for Japan.

Asian Home Councils' cooperative efforts

New Workers' Introductory Course (1994–?)

Preparing Asian candidates for the new workers' Orientation Course at OMF International Headquarters was one of the tasks that Asian directors had to tackle. Many Asian missionaries struggled with the lack of English proficiency and cross-cultural experience, so their first encounter of a multi-cultural environment at the Orientation Course was overwhelming. While some Western Home Councils ran one- to two-week in-house candidate courses as a part of the candidate process, many Asian Home Councils had no comparable course. The first Japan Home Director, Makino-san (appointed in 1994), having previously served as the Orientation Course Superintendent at International Headquarters, worked with some other Asian leaders to organize a joint Asian candidates course called the New Workers' Introductory Course. It required a lot of work and coordination but proved beneficial for many Asian candidates. Eventually, as Asian Home Councils began to have more candidates and gained experience to run their own candidate courses, this joint effort ceased.

Asian Frontiers Mission Conference (1996–today)

Asian Home Councils also joined together in a mobilization effort called the Asian Frontiers Mission Conference. Its aim is to introduce different mission opportunities to young Asian professionals. It is an encouraging time for participants to meet with hundreds of other Asians who are interested in missions and also learn about what God is doing on various mission fields and explore how God might use them with their professions.

Cross-Cultural Missions (CCM) at home

From the beginning of the Asian Home Councils, the great need for missions at home was always mentioned, particularly in Indonesia and the southern Philippines where many remain unreached. Home Councils often found it frustrating that OMF was not open to accepting missionaries to work within their own countries. However, in 1993 OMF officially recognized the need and opened the door for cross-cultural missions at home.[29] Subsequently, both the Home Councils in Indonesia and the Philippines experienced a significant period of growth in the number of workers. (See Table 1, Fig. 2.) Indonesia, which had only sent out one member since the establishment of Home Council in 1985, received fourteen workers between 1995 and 2000. The Philippines saw an increase in the number of workers from ten in 1995 to forty-four in 2005,

Fig. 3. Short term workers sent by continent 2017[32]

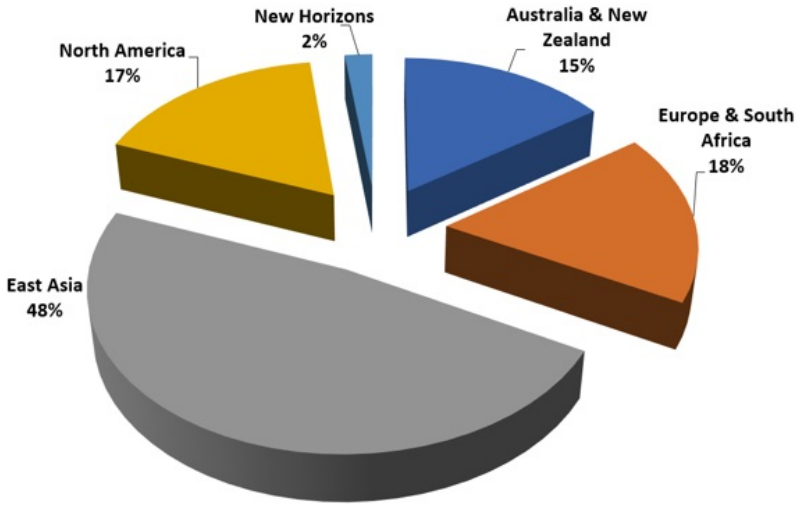
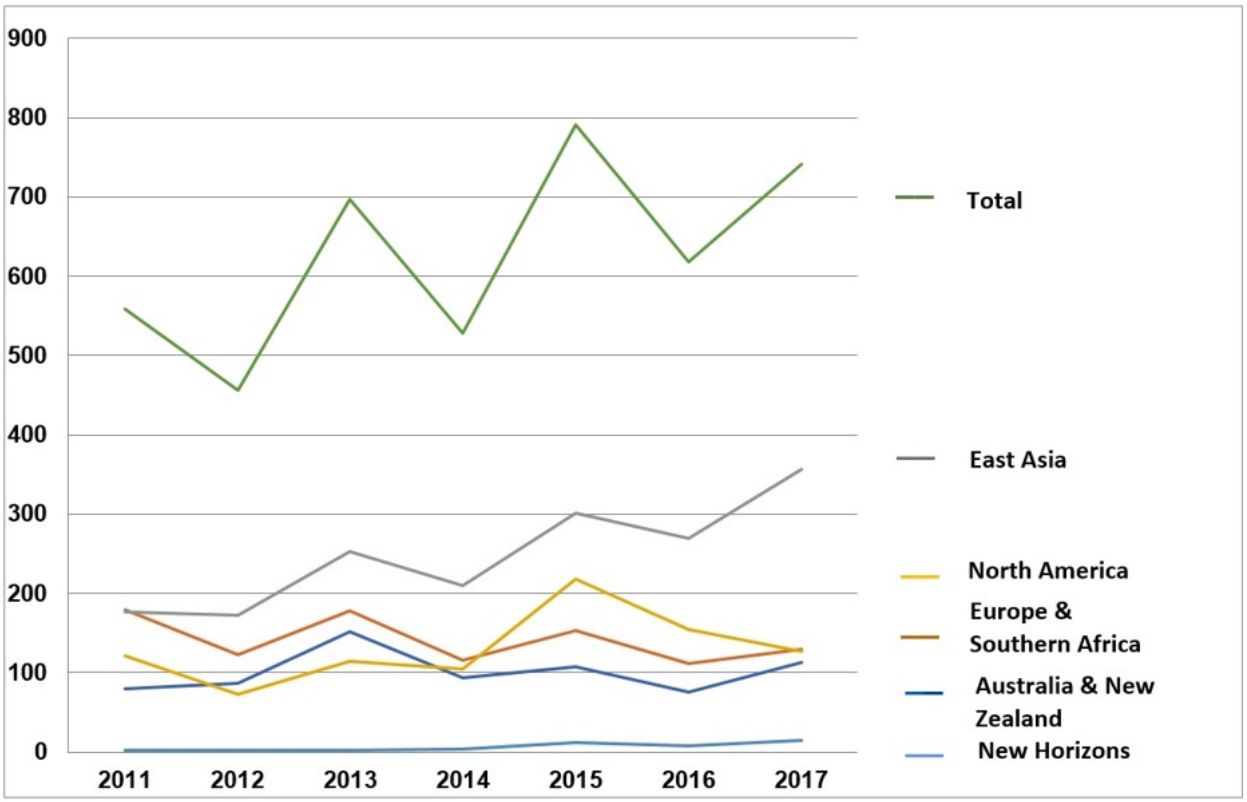


Fig. 4. Short term workers sent by continent 2011–2017[32]



*New Horizons: Countries where OMF does not have sending centers, such as Africa, Latin America, and some parts of Europe.

many of whom are cross-cultural workers in their own country.[30] The original idea was for national workers to work alongside expatriates as OMF workers. However, the program created some struggles and tension among the workers, misunderstandings among the national churches, and pushed for a structural change in OMF. The process was painful. "Though CCM was under our Home Council, it was not recognized as part of OMF for there was no place in the structure… It took more than two OMF Central Councils to make this change," said one of the Home Council leaders. While he believes that this type of cross-cultural work is indigenous mission, he does not think it is big enough to call it a movement.

Although it is not considered to be "missions at home," it is probably noteworthy that one of the reasons for the rapid growth of missionaries from Hong Kong, Singapore, and Taiwan (particularly for short-term) from this period onwards is Chinese-speaking workers sent to work among other Chinese speakers.

The maturing of Asian Home Councils and new challenges (2000–today)

Mobilization

Asian Home Councils have gained good experience and tools in the area of mobilization and have continued to develop. Many prayer groups have been established, and mobilization and follow up events have been planned and executed by dedicated home staff. The Singapore Home Council has been helping other Asian Home Councils by sharing mobilization and follow up ideas. Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Singapore share some mobilization resources, such as magazines and videos in the Chinese language. Korea has developed a book ministry to connect with their supporters.

Asian Home Councils, with their Asian perspectives, have challenged OMF to be less Western and become truly international.

The Philippines Home Council has a number of trained and enthusiastic volunteers.[31] Japan has been building meaningful relationships with several Bible colleges, some of which have sent students and teachers on mission exposure trips with OMF short-term programs. Indonesia is exploring diaspora ministries at home.

Short-Term Mission (Serve Asia)

One of the significant developments in the last ten years or so is the growth in short-term workers sent within Asia (Fig. 4). While short-term mission was already a trend in the West during the 90s, Asia seems to have caught up. Last year, about half of OMF's short-termers were sent by Asian Home Councils (Fig. 3). Some adjustments have been made to the program to accommodate for people from Asia, such as length of service, English proficiency requirements for individuals and teams, etc.

New challenges

Globalization has led to new modes of communication and changes in organizational systems. In 2000, OMF made a big change to its financial system. Before that, all support funds received were pooled and shared

throughout the Fellowship. Although the new financial system still has some sharing components, it has become more individualized. This change has impacted the Asian Home Councils of lower-income nations.

While email, online systems, and websites have speeded up our communication, they have produced a massive volume of information for everyone to deal with. OMF introduced a new computer data system in 2008 which performs many different functions, such as personnel management, candidature, finance, training, etc. Many Asian Home Council leaders find it very challenging to keep up with the amount of information they have to deal with and to learn the technical matters of using the system.

One Asian leader said, "It is particularly difficult for smaller Homesides to keep up with things due to lack of manpower and makes them feel guilty." Others mentioned similar concerns as everything needs to be done in English. The struggle with the English language seems to be a never-ending issue. There is also a strong element of centralization in a system in which everything is standardized and manual steps are expected to be followed exactly. One Asian Home Council leader commented, "Everything is templated. I don't use them. I evaluate my staff in the indigenous way."

Thoughts on indigeneity of Asian Home Councils

Asian churches did not initiate the Asian Home Councils. Thus, the Councils were not indigenous from the beginning.



Cover of Dec 1980/Jan 1981 issue of *East Asia Millions* (North American edition).

All Asian Home Council leaders agree that it is impossible for Asian Home Councils to be indigenous as they are part of an international organization.

However, all the Asian Home Councils are now led by national leaders and self-governed, thus, nationalized/indigenized. In the area of mobilization, some policies, member care, and a certain degree of candidature, are practiced in more indigenous ways, which result in an increased number of workers both long-term and short-term.

However, one leader commented, "Once you are 'in' OMF, it is Western." Many Asian Home Council leaders said that the use of English, decision-making procedures, and the structure of the organization still strongly reflect Western philosophy or values, and Asians have to conform to a certain extent. Some pointed to the lack of Asians in the high levels of leadership, while others suggested that more Asian Home Council Directors should become National Directors to lead both the field and home operations of the country, as OMF endorses indigenous mission movements. However, all Asian Home Council leaders agree that it is impossible for Asian Home Councils to be indigenous as they are part of an international organization. This is, in a sense, ironic.

Some leaders emphasized the positive aspects of being in an international organization. One former leader thinks that being indigenous is somewhat dangerous as they tend to see things from a mono-cultural point of view. Some leaders do not explain the issues as a Western versus Eastern dichotomy, but rather suggest that we should embrace the differences and the joys of working in an international organization.

Conclusion

Although each Asian Home Council is at a different stage of development, they have learned to do mission mobilization and become missionary sending centers with the help and patience of Western colleagues and pursued the goal of being indigenous in some aspects over the last fifty-four years. At the same time, Asian Home Councils, with their Asian perspectives, have challenged OMF to be less Western and become truly international. OMF needs to work continuously on some areas where Asian Home Council leaders strongly feel the need for change, namely the use of English, decision-making processes, and the tendency to be more structure-oriented than relational. Such changes will bring an open door not only for more Asians to join but also for workers from the rest of the world that OMF has begun to engage in the last seven years.

As we work together for the shared vision and mission of reaching the peoples of East Asia, each one of us needs to be humble, sensitive, and respectful to each other. By doing so, we will advance the work and bring glory to the God of mission. **MRT**

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[1] An earlier version of this paper was submitted for the course "History of the World Christian Movement" held at Biola University during Spring 2018.

[2] Home Councils, Homesides, and lately Sending Centers are used in our organization almost synonymously. This paper regularly uses Home Councils to avoid confusion. The other terms are frequently found in quotations.

[3] Andrew F. Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1996), 258.

[4] See "CIM/OMF Timeline: pre 1865 to 2015," https://omf.org/blog/2015/02/27/cim-omf-timeline/ (accessed 27 September 2019) and Roger Steer, *J. Hudson Taylor: A Man in Christ* (Singapore: OMF, 1990).

[5] See Phyllis Thompson, *China: The Reluctant Exodus* (Sevenoaks: Hodder & Stoughton, 1979).

[6] See David Huntley, "The Withdrawal of the China Inland Mission from China and their Redeployment to New Fields in East Asia" (PhD thesis, Trinity Theological Seminary, 2002).

[7] "Seventh Session of the Overseas Council, Minutes of Overseas Council meeting held in Singapore on Wednesday, November 15, 1961" OMF Singapore Archives (OMFSA) AR 5.2.4 Box 1.7.

[8] Rosemary H. Aldis, "Unity in Diversity: Partnership between East Asians and Westerners in OMF International" (MA thesis, All Nations Christian College, 1999), 17. The details of the process are further described in Aldis, "Unity in Diversity," and Warren R. Beattie, "OMF International: An Assessment of the Impact of Internationalization and Interactions with the Korean Missionary Movement from 1964 to 1998" (MSc thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1998).

[9] "Ninth Session of the Overseas Council, Minutes of Overseas Council meeting held in Singapore on Saturday, October 3, 1964," OMFSA AR 5.2.4 Box 1.9.

[10] J. O. Sanders, "Future of the Mission," paper presented at the "Ninth Session of the Overseas

Questionnaire to OMF Asian Home Council Present and Past Leaders

(Customized versions were sent to each)

1. How did your Home Council start? Was it a vision of Asian church or from OMF (totally Western organization then)?
2. What were the joys and struggles of the Home Council?
3. What were the key factors (events, personnel, decisions, etc.) that impacted the development or setbacks of the Home Council?
4. Do you consider your Home Council as an Indigenous Mission Movement (IMM) or a representative (sending center) of OMF International?
5. What aspects of Home Council's ministries are indigenous? Did/do you wish to be more indigenous? Did you need to put aside your indigenous way to go along with the OMF International way?

For the Home Councils that have CCM:

1. How did your Home Cross-cultural mission (CCM) come to be?
2. Is your CCM considered to be an indigenous mission?
3. What are advantages of and disadvantages of being in OMF?

Remarks

- The above Questionnaire was sent by email to all nine Asian Home Council centers and some former leaders as well as international leaders.
- Face to face interviews were also conducted with the above questions with some Asian and international leaders.
- In total, five current Asian Directors, four former Directors/Chairmen, and three current international leaders replied to the questionnaire or answered to the interview.
- Beside above formal questionnaires and interviews, the author had informal but insightful conversations about Asian Home Councils and Indigenous Mission Movement with several international leaders over meals or in the offices at OMF International Center for which she is grateful.

Council meeting held in Singapore on October 8, 1964," OMFSA AR 5.2.4 Box 1.9. Underline by Sanders.

[11] See Denis Lane, *Turning God's New Instruments: A Handbook for Missions from the Two-Thirds World* (Singapore: World Evangelical Fellowship, 1990).

[12] "Meeting of a Special Council comprising the Directors and members of the Overseas Council of the China Inland Mission Overseas Missionary Fellowship, called by the General Director and held at 33 Chancery Lane, Singapore on Wednesday, 14th October 1964," OMFSA AR 5.2.4 Box 1.9.

[13] "Visit to Dr. David Tsutada Mar. 27, 1965," OMFSA AR 6.2.2 Box 1.15.

[14] "Notes of Interviews with Japanese Christian Leaders – April 1965 Re Formation of Japanese OMF Advisory Council," OMFSA AR 6.2.2 Box 1.15.

[15] For Singapore, see Violet James, "The Church and the Missionary Movement in Singapore," in *Mission History of Asian Churches*, ed. Timothy K. Park (Pasadena: William Carey, 2011), 183. For the Philippines, see Tereso C. Casiño, "The Rise of the Filipino Missionary Movement: A Preliminary Historical Assessment," in *Mission History of Asian Churches*, 206, 208, For Japan, see 中村敏,日本キリスト教宣教史ーザビエル以前から今日まで. いのちのことば社, 2009 [Satoshi Nakamura, *History of Mission in Japan: From Pre-Xavier to Today*. Tokyo: Word of Life, 2009], 314–25.

[16] John S. Tay, *A Short History of Indigenous Mission in Singapore: With a Special Focus on the Pioneering Role of Dr. Tan Kok Beng* (Singapore: Armour, 2010), 74.

[17] "Seventeenth Session of the Overseas Council 12–25 October 1974, Headquarters Report, Development of Asian Missionary Programme," OMFSA AR 5.2.4 Box 1.17.

[18] A similar incident took place in another country in 1981 when international leadership extended an official invitation for someone to join OMF for a possible appointment as Home Director. The alarm was raised by an Asian Home Council member who saw this as a dangerous action ("Minutes of a meeting of the Philippines Home Council April 25, 1981 at the OMF Mission Home," OMFSA AR 6.2.3 Box 2.1).

[19] "Japan Home Council – April 24th 1974," Letter from D. J. Abrahams to Denis [Lane], 1 May 1974, OMFSA AR 6.2.2 Box 1.14.

[20] At that time, the Central Council was the highest decision-making body in the mission, consisting of directors and chairmen from both Home Councils and Field Councils. Meetings were held every three years.

[21] "Minutes of the Central Council meeting held in Singapore on Friday, October 8, 1976," OMFSA AR 5.2.4 Box 2.1.

[22] "Minutes of the Central Council meeting held in Singapore on Wednesday, September 15, 1982," OMFSA AR 5.2.4 Box 2.7.

[23] Timothy K. Park, "Missionary Movement of the Korean Church," in *Mission History of Asian Churches*, 165–7, 182–5; Tay, *A Short History of Indigenous Mission in Singapore*, 75–9, 83–4).

[24] Andrea Roldan, "International Facilitator for Serve Asia Coordinators' Report 2017," unpublished paper.

[25] "Asian Home Council Chairman's Council, July 23, 1987, Field / Home Council Relationships," OMFSA AR 7.1.2 Box 1.2.

[26] While an Executive Secretary worked under the Home Council, a Home Director was appointed and accountable to the International Director of Home Ministries. In later years, some Home Directors became National Directors and led both home and field ministries in the country while other Home Directors became Executive Directors.

[27] I was one of them, beginning my candidature in 1991 and joining OMF in 1992.

[28] *OMF 日本委員会, 温故創新ーOMFの軌跡と展望ーRemember, Rejoice and Renew.*イーグレープ [OMF Japan Home Council. *Trace and Future Vision of OMF: Remember, Rejoice and Renew*] (2015), 79.

[29] "Minutes of the Central Council meeting held in Singapore Tuesday, September 14, 1993"; "Internal Communication to OMF Members, OMF Central Council 1993, Pioneering – with New Local Mission Partners!," OMFSA AR5.2.5 Box 1.1.

[30] Another cause for this growth may be the DAWN [Discipling a Whole Nation] 2000 church planting movement. See Jim Montgomery, *DAWN 2000: 7 million Churches to Go* (Pasadena: William Carey, 1989).

[31] However, their mobilization efforts do not always pay off in terms of the number of missionaries sent because churches in the Philippines generally send people overseas as tentmakers. Casiño, "The Rise of the Filipino Missionary Movement," 216.

[32] Roldan, "International Facilitator for Serve Asia Coordinators' Report 2017."

One Kingdom Theology as a Paradigm for Gospel Ministry:

A Commendation of the Thoughts of J. H. Bavinck

Song Tsai



Song Tsai is an MA Student at Oak Hill College. Previously, he was an associate member of OMF, serving for two years in student ministry in Taiwan and a year in mobilisation in the North of England.

Bavinck's work is: "the most theologically rich, missiologically erudite and pastorally sensitive in the [reformed] tradition. If my work does nothing more than republicize and champion… J. H. Bavinck to a new generation of Christians, then I shall have achieved much."[1]

Prologue

I was sitting on the patio of OMF's Cluny Road centre in Singapore when I first read these words commending the works of the Dutch missionary to Indonesia: Johan Herman Bavinck.[2] My wife and I were expecting our first baby. We were on holiday escaping our jobs, the cold British winter, and the decision of where to go for theological training for ministry.

At a conference I attended a few months prior, I picked up a newly published book by the main speaker, Dr. Dan Strange, partly because it was on sale and it is always difficult for a Chinese person to resist a bargain,[3] but mostly because I was interested in the question the book dealt with: "How should evangelicals understand and engage with other religions?"

I came back to the UK after two years as a student worker in Taiwan brimming with missiological questions, some of which surrounded this area, and I was keen to start answering them even before getting to seminary. I finished the book over the course of the week and arrived at two conclusions: firstly, if possible and under the providential leading of God, I would like to study under Dr. Strange, and secondly, that I would explore the thoughts of Bavinck in more detail if given the opportunity.

God is faithful, and he answers prayers—I am now finishing off my fourth year at Oak Hill College, where Dr. Strange is the college director and lectures in culture, religion, and public theology, and over the course of the four years, I have had opportunities to dip into the works of Bavinck for assignments and occasionally for extra-curricular reading.

As most of Bavinck's publications were in Dutch, it is no surprise that he is largely unknown to English-speaking evangelicals. However, as his works have been gradually translated to English, interest in both the UK and North America has been sparked regarding his work as a missiologist.[4] I have appreciated reading him and I would echo the sentiments expressed above. The aim of this essay, therefore, is to commend his work to the wider missionary community—especially those who are busy on the front line of the works of the kingdom and do not have the time to explore the works of people from other traditions and backgrounds. It is, of course, impossible to provide comprehensive coverage of all of Bavinck's thoughts in a relatively short essay. For this reason, particular focus will be given to Bavinck's conception of missions in light of the theme of the kingdom of God, the interplay between general and special revelation, and the relationship between missions, church, and the world.

Introduction

The beloved British pastor-theologian John Stott famously changed his mind on the definition of "missions". At the 1966 World Congress on Evangelism in Berlin, he considered the nature of this mission to be exclusively one of evangelism and proclamation.[5] However, ten years later when he wrote *Christian Mission in the Modern World*, he asserted that responsibility for social action is not simply a consequence of people being converted through evangelism, but is a part of the mission itself.[6] For Stott, the mission of the church was no longer simply the proclamation of the gospel, but that proclamation and demonstration are bound together as an integral whole.

The "mission of the church" remains a live debate today. The year 2006 saw the publication of Chris Wright's *The Mission of God*,[7] followed by the publication of Tim Keller's *Generous Justice* in 2010,[8] both of which advocate for integral mission. A response from DeYoung and Gilbert came in 2011 arguing that the mission of the church is exclusively "proclamation and disciple making" and doing good works should be understood as a part of discipleship.[9] As recently as 2017, Zondervan published *Four Views on the Church's Mission*.[10] In the same year, DeYoung was asked to speak on the "Mission of the Church" at a national conference for British evangelical pastors. Even within OMF, though consensus has largely been reached on integral mission, the interplay between missions and ecclesiology remains a live topic for discussion as it formed the main theme of a recent issue of *Mission Round Table*.[11]

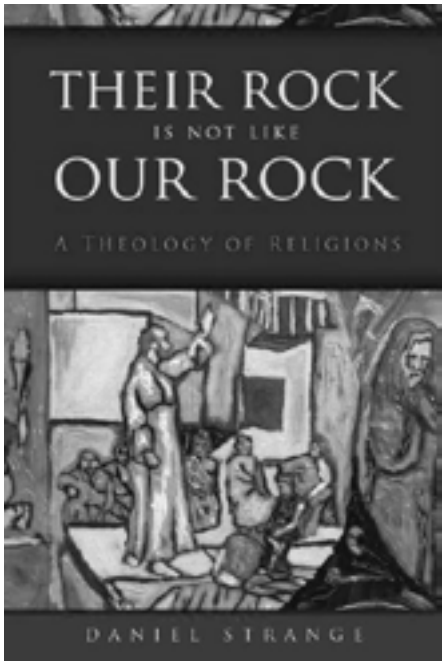
On the side line, and ignored by much of the debate, is the Dutch reformed theologian Johan Herman Bavinck, who guards against the naivety of the exclusive proclamation model.[12] He does so through his insistence that the sovereign rule of God over his kingdom as restored by Christ is the central theme by which to understand all of human life and, by extension, the mission of the church. Additionally, his interesting work on special and general revelation helps us to understand that proclamation is not exclusively (but never excluding) verbal. Furthermore, because he identifies the church as the primary locus of missions, he is able to emphasise the importance of ecclesiology and verbal proclamation, while still advocating for a holistic approach to missions.

Each of these three themes of Bavinck's teaching will be submitted for the reader's consideration, along with a reflection of how Bavinck's teaching will help us today, followed by some concluding remarks.

J. H. Bavinck's vision of the "Mission of the Church"

The foundation of missions: God's kingdom

For Bavinck, the coming of the kingdom of the Lord is the "almost always forgotten chapter of doctrinal theology, that is one of the most dominant ideas when we are dealing with missions."[13] It "resounds like a majestic chorale



through the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation. The Psalms, especially, sometimes tremble with ecstasy when they extol this kingdom."[14]

From the very beginning, in primordial time or the *Urzeit*, God's kingdom was cosmic in nature—it comprises the whole of creation, not just humans, but animals, plants, and even the angels have a place in the total harmony of God's kingdom.[15] God's sovereign rule over his kingdom is the single motif that gives meaning to the whole of creation, as all of creation lives in harmony or *shalom* with itself, united by the one common goal: the devout obedience to the well-ordered rule of God.[16]

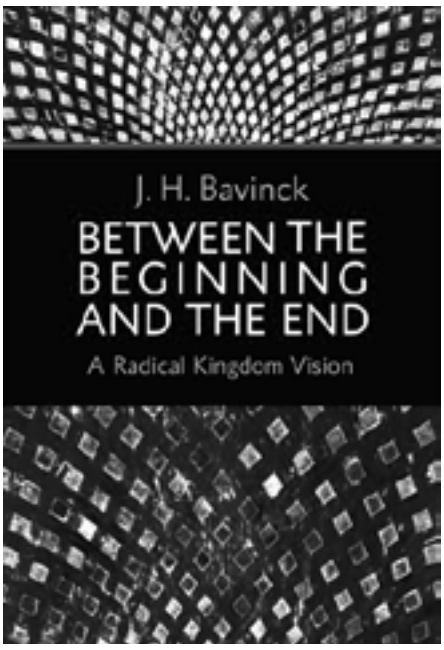
God's kingdom was always intended to be dynamic. From its inception it contained the potential and power to develop and unfold.[17] The human race was installed over it as stewards of God's kingdom. As stewards, we were simultaneously both subject and king. It was given to us to rule—to steward, foster, and develop the potential of creation's innate dynamism—but we do so in God's service.

Humanity has ruptured the *shalom* of God's kingdom through our rebellion against him. By rebutting the will of God and falling into sin, we have brought dissonance where there was to be harmony, chaos where there was to be order, and war where there was to be peace.[18] In this chaos, we are no longer over creation in order to glorify him and to serve him. We work simply to survive;[19] for now, by the sweat of our brow, we will eat our food.

God's kingdom was not completely abandoned after the fall, however. Despite the chaos and fragmentation, it will once again be fully realised in the eschaton. Until then, it is constantly "being born" or near, but not yet.[20] The nation of Israel is a prefiguration of this eschatological kingdom of God which will finally be realised in the Lord Jesus Christ.[21] Just as the harmony of the kingdom of God was shattered by Adam's sin, so Christ, through his suffering and death, unites in himself all things under God's rule and reinstates the kingdom of God.[22] This reinstatement of the kingdom of God is not simply a case of individual salvation, but is cosmic in scale. The goal of our lives is not individual salvation, but rather "becoming part of the wider context of the kingdom of God, where all things are again unified under the one and only all-wise will of him who lives and rules forever."[23]

The kingdom of God should not, of course, be separated from (though it can never be fully identified with) the church as a body of believers who are "in Christ". They not only acknowledge and obey Christ as King, they also have an irresistible pull towards the eschatological kingdom of God which they seek to manifest in the present.[24] The church will always have a "theocratic tendency"—one that looks back to the prefiguring Jewish kingdom of David and Solomon and forward to the eschatological kingdom of Jesus Christ.[25]

The Christocentrically-orientated conception of the coming of the kingdom of God as developed by Bavinck forms the most important biblical-



theological criterion for missionary approach, or in his words: Mission takes place in the service of the coming of God's kingdom "and in that immense work of God we are his hands."[26]

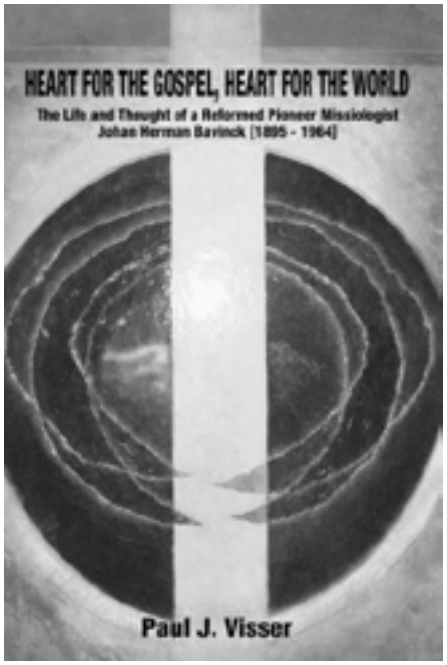
God's means of accomplishing the mission: God's revelation

As Creator, God is the legitimate ruler over all. The expansion of his kingdom, then, is not an expansion in space and time; rather it is through people consenting to live in obedience to him and acknowledging him as King. God reveals himself to a rebellious, sinful humanity, calling them to repent and to faithfully obey him as King. God issues the call in two ways: general revelation and special revelation.

Significant numbers of theologians have deployed the term general revelation to denote a disclosure of divine truths that are accessible through reason, apart from the revealed word. General revelation, so understood, is impersonal. Whatever divine truths we may learn outside of his revealed word is incidental rather than a direct communication from God. Bavinck warns against this understanding of general revelation:

> If we wish to use the expression "general revelation" we must not do so in the sense that one can logically conclude God's existence from it. This *may* be possible, but it only leads to a philosophical notion of God as the first cause. But that is not the biblical idea of "general revelation." When the Bible speaks of general revelation, it means something quite different. There it has a much more personal nature. It is divine concern for men collectively and individually. God's deity and eternal power are evident; they do not let go of him, even though man does his best to escape them.[27]

Visser helpfully gathers together five different Bible passages which Bavinck uses to point to this understanding of general revelation from a number of different publications.[28] Firstly, from Job 33:14–18, it is clear that God speaks to every person throughout their lives, through dreams and visions in their sleep, even speaking in their ears to turn them from wrongdoing. Secondly, from John 1:4, 5, 9, Bavinck concludes that the activity of the Word is universal in extent and is intended to bring light into the darkness of people's minds. Thirdly,



from Acts 14:15b–17, God's great deeds of kindness in providing for unbelieving sinners testify to his mercy. Fourthly, from Acts 17:26–27, God's determination of national boundaries was intended to lead people to "seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us" (NIV 2011). Lastly, according to Visser, Romans 1:19–32 is the most important passage for Bavinck in developing his thoughts on general revelation. From this passage, Bavinck concludes that people are not only permanently connected to fellow humans and the whole of creation, there is also a permanent connection between humans and God. There is a constant dialogue between God and the person, a dialogue that God continuously initiates. This general revelation or dialogue from God takes the form of the whole of creation, in human conscience and in human history;[29] in short, in the totality of human existence. In Bavinck's thoughts all three persons of the Trinity must be involved in this act of personal communication due to the unity of the Godhead. He sees the Holy Spirit as God's instrumental means for general revelation,[30] and Christ as the "eternal power"[31] which God the Father, through the totality of human existence and the work of the Holy Spirit, communicates to us.

Though Bavinck had a fairly novel conception of general revelation,[32] his conception of special revelation is entirely uncontroversial—it is the revelation of God which is outside of the realm of general revelation, namely the "mystery of Christ which was not made known to men in other generations" but "has now been revealed by the Spirit" (Eph. 3:5)."[33] In other words, whereas general revelation reveals the character of God and Christ, special revelation is required to reveal the redemption we have in him.

Bavinck sees numerous similarities between general revelation and special revelation. Both consist of the self-disclosure of God. Both are the work of the whole Godhead—all three persons of the Trinity. And though special revelation is more explicit in its communication to humanity, neither are enough for a full disclosure of the essence and being of God. For Bavinck, we shall only know fully when we see God face to face in the eschaton.[34]

The agent and approach of the mission: God's church and missionary proclamation

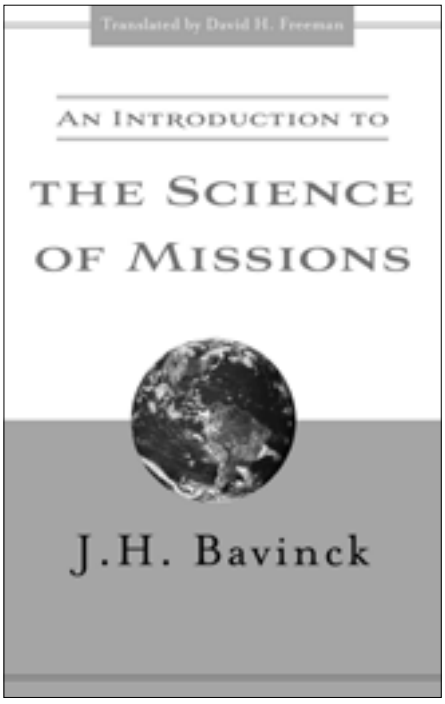
From the above, it should be clear that in Bavinck's thought God is the primary agent in missions; it is his kingdom that grows through his revelation of himself. For Bavinck, although this is theologically true, it is unsatisfying. For although God is the one reconciling all things to himself in Christ and nothing we do can add to or subtract from his work, it is also true to say that he has tasked the church with this ministry.[35] Even this statement is somewhat unsatisfactory, for we then have to ask the question, "what is the church in question here?" Is it the local church? Is it a denomination? Is it every Christian as they are living

The Christocentrically-orientated conception of the coming of the kingdom of God as developed by Bavinck forms the most important biblical-theological criterion for missionary approach, or in his words: Mission takes place in the service of the coming of God's kingdom "and in that immense work of God we are his hands."

out their faith in the world? Is it made up of evangelistic societies and other organisations? Though Bavinck places the primary responsibility of the mission on the shoulders of the local church and, in particular, her office bearers, missionary work is by no means restricted to them.[36] Based on his consideration of all of Scripture concerning missions, he concludes that each member of the congregation must also be involved and makes a distinction between official missionary service as manifest in the sending out of missionaries and the non-official proclamation of the gospel by individuals or missionary societies and organisations.[37]

How then should the agents of God's mission serve the coming of his kingdom? Bavinck advocates a two-fold approach in line with his views on general and special revelation and the all-encompassing kingdom of God. He terms them the comprehensive approach[38] and the kerygmatic approach.[39]

It is important to make a distinction between Bavinck's conception of the "comprehensive approach" and the "comprehensive approach" that was introduced at the International Missions Conference at Jerusalem in 1928. The latter speaks of the "four-dimensional character of missions," in which missions is simultaneously preaching, education, medical care, and social-economic aid. Bavinck objects to Jerusalem's construction of the "comprehensive approach" on three grounds.



Firstly, the reasoning behind the Jerusalem conference's comprehensive approach is based entirely on anthropological and opportunistic grounds. Instead, Bavinck believes that a proper theory of missionary approach must find its basis in Scripture.[40]

Secondly, Bavinck was unhappy with the Jerusalem conference's comprehensive approach which stated that man's spiritual life is "entirely rooted in his environment." For Bavinck this implied that any elevation of a non-Christian's physical circumstances can potentially bring about the flow of proper spiritual life. He thought it would be more biblically accurate to say that a person's spiritual life is so interwoven with all the conditions of life that changes in a person's spiritual life would have material impact on all areas of life and vice versa.[41]

Bavinck found the concept of a four-dimensional mission to be misleading, as it considers education, medical care, and social-economic aid to be of equal value to the preaching of the gospel, when in reality, the Bible only calls the church to "preach the gospel." For Bavinck, it would be far more accurate to say that preaching is a multi-faceted endeavour, involving more than simply verbal proclamation of a message, but also a demonstration of the message.

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Despite these objections, Bavinck thought that the comprehensive approach on the mission field was "unavoidable".[43] A missionary living as a Christian in a foreign context would see the needs of the people and, because of their innate "theocratic tendency" of wanting to see the perfect eschatological kingdom of God manifest in their lives and the lives of those around them, would want to meet them in some way. In these acts, they are part of God's general revelation of his goodness and provision to a rebellious and sinful humankind. Furthermore, by virtue of their presence and life in their midst, they cannot help but reveal things of God to the people they are trying to reach. To sum up, the comprehensive approach in an individual can be thought of as simply "being a Christian" and being part of God's general revelation to sinful humanity.[44]

As previously stated, however, general revelation only reveals God's character to us. It does not reveal the redemption that we can have in Christ, which is the work of special revelation. Similarly, the good life and charity of a missionary can never reveal the redemptive plan of the Lord Jesus. Accompanying their good lives and works of charity must be verbal proclamation of the good news of the forgiveness of sins and the hope of life everlasting we have in the Lord Jesus. This verbal proclamation is the second aspect of the two-fold approach which Bavinck terms the kerygmatic approach.[45]

The local church, like the individual, has the missionary task of undertaking the kerygmatic approach by verbally proclaiming God's means of redemption to his people, and also undertaking the comprehensive approach in revealing God's character to his people and those outside of the church. Furthermore, the doxological church worships and praises God Sunday by Sunday through singing hymns and spiritual songs, through hearing God speaking to them in his word, and through expressing their reliance on God in prayer. By performing their doxological function week by week, they are not only outposts of God's kingdom, they are also agents wielding the means of God to enlarge

his kingdom and one day bring it to fruition as they baptise each new member as they enter the kingdom of God.

Bavinck's famous definition of missions can be used to summarise this section:

> Missions is that activity of the church—in essence it is nothing else than an activity of Christ exercised through the church—through which the church in its interim period, in which the end is postponed, calls the peoples of the earth to repentance and to faith in Christ, so that they may be made his disciples and through baptism be incorporated into the fellowship of those who await the coming of the kingdom.[46]

Reflections for today

Having seen Bavinck's vision for the mission of the church, it is important to turn to our present context and reflect on what his thoughts have to teach us in our ministries. Three separate areas will be considered in light of Bavinck's missiological insights: OMF's broader vision and mission, missionaries engaged in kerygmatic work, and missionaries engaged in the comprehensive approach of proclamation.

Bavinck and OMF's vision and mission

OMF's vision statement reads: "Through God's grace we aim to see an indigenous biblical church movement in each people group of East Asia, evangelising their own people and reaching out in mission to other peoples."[47]



OMF's mission statement reads: "We share the good news of Jesus Christ in all its fullness with East Asia's peoples to the glory of God."

Although unexamined in this essay, there is much in Bavinck's practical missiology that is in agreement with OMF's vision and mission as stated above. As a Dutch missionary to Indonesia, he played an active role in encouraging the establishment of an independent, indigenous church.[48] He undoubtedly would have been keen to see the indigenous church take on the task of reaching their own people and sending missionaries beyond their own borders.

As a Reformed missiologist who vigorously applied the doctrine of the sovereignty of God in all areas of theology, he would have appreciated the inclusion of the phrase "Through God's grace" at the beginning of the vision statement.

With regards to the mission statement, including the clarifying document from Peter Rowan,[49] there is little to which Bavinck would have objected. For him, the kingdom of God exists for the glory of God, and he would have appreciated the full gospel that OMF seeks to proclaim.

There is perhaps one small challenge he would want to issue. Where the vision statement describes the biblical church movement, the word "worshipful" ought to be added before the word "indigenous". In our keenness to bring the gospel to the nations, it is important for us to remember that churches do not simply exist to plant more churches—they exist first to bring glory to God by worshipping him.

Bavinck and the kerygmatic approach to missions

Bavinck would undoubtedly want to remind those of us who are in ministries proclaiming the special revelation of God that we should not be concerned only with the task of verbal proclamation, but also to be aware of all the non-verbal forms of proclamation in our contexts. Additionally, we should all be looking for opportunities to demonstrate the love of God not just in word but also in deed. When considering these things, he would undoubtedly want to encourage us not just to think anthropologically on these matters, but to orientate ourselves by and to the glory of God. It is not simply the needs of the people we are trying to reach that matters, but we should do things in obedience to God for his glory.

Bavinck and integral mission

For those involved in ministries concerned with providing aid, it is perhaps first worth pointing out that whatever ministry you are engaged in is also functioning to proclaim truths about God. For this reason, such ministries should never be considered second-rate ministries.

As with Bavinck, we should be constantly and consciously vigilant against the Western church's propensity towards a sacred-secular dualism. We should steer clear of the trap of thinking that the bettering of people's lives is an end in itself. The goal is always to reveal something of God's character to them. Yet again, all that we do should be directed to the glory of God rather than answering anthropological concerns.

This danger is ever present even in the most well-meaning of us. At a recent OMF conference, the speaker on creation care was himself alerted to the danger when he spent several days working with some non-Christians on a joint environmental project. In his time with them, he did not attempt to share the gospel with them even once though he was completely at liberty to do so. God, however, works despite our weakness as eventually they asked him to share the gospel with them.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Bavinck grounds the foundation of the mission of God in the coming of his kingdom. He uses both general and special revelation to bring it about, and the primary responsibility of taking up the task falls to the local church, although individual Christians and missionary societies and organisations should by no means be excluded from the task.

His construction shows not just the naivety of the "proclamation only" model of missions, but also points to some potential dangers in integral mission. His

In our keenness to bring the gospel to the nations, it is important for us to remember that churches do not simply exist to plant more churches—they exist first to bring glory to God by worshipping him.

two-fold comprehensive and kerygmatic approach to missionary proclamation ensures that we see each aspect of proclamation in its proper place and maintain the balance of proclamation in word and deed.

> In our time we still struggle with the idea of the Kingdom of God. For a long time Christians have overemphasised the fact that the Christian faith is something that concerns mankind's innermost being and is the way to salvation, without paying enough attention to the fact that faith places men and women in the perspective of the kingdom. That includes the fact that the believer must strive after a new world. Something of the power of the new life in Jesus Christ must penetrate social and economic life, commerce and industry, science and art. We must not leave any sector of individual or social life to its own devices. God wants us to gather together right now all things in this world under one head, Christ.[50]

Epilogue

Three of Bavinck's works available now in English are particularly to be commended. At one time, *An Introduction to the Science of Missions* was considered *the* standard textbook for Reformed and Presbyterian missionaries. In this work, Bavinck lays out his practical missiology which provides a guide for interacting with other worldviews and religions. His *Between the Beginning and the End* is a wonderful devotional work, laying down his kingdom theology as related above and describing how the Lord Jesus fulfils it all. Additionally, his *The Church between the Temple and Mosque* remains a classic study in the interaction between Christianity and other religions.

There is some anecdotal evidence that one of the major influences on Keller from his time at seminary was Dr. Harvie Conn who, in turn, was greatly influenced by Bavinck.[51] My hope is that this paper will whet the appetite of other missionaries to read more of Bavinck and be similarly influenced by him. **MRT**

[1] Daniel Strange, *For Their Rock Is Not as Our Rock: An Evangelical Theology of Religions* (Nottingham: Apollos, 2014), 34.
[2] Not to be confused for the much more famous systematic theologian Herman Bavinck. Johan Herman Bavinck was the nephew of Herman Bavinck and was named after his grandfather and famous uncle.
[3] Seriously, for those missionaries who are working in Chinese contexts, if you are struggling to understand why it is difficult to get into people's houses, I have little doubt that it is mostly due to the fact that people are embarrassed by the state of their houses because they are crammed full of things they have no use for, which they purchased on a whim because they were on sale. Thankfully, this was not the case with Dr. Strange's book.
[4] John Bolt, "The Missional Character of the (Herman and J. H.) Bavinck Tradition," *The Bavinck Review* 5 (2014): 57.
[5] John R. W. Stott, *Christian Mission in the Modern World*, IVP classics (Downers Grove: IVP, 2008), 37. He characterises this mission of evangelism as "exclusively a preaching, converting and teaching mission."
[6] Stott, *Christian Mission in the Modern World*, 37.
[7] Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Nottingham: IVP, 2006).
[8] Timothy Keller, *Generous Justice: How God's Grace Makes Us Just* (New York: Penguin, 2010).
[9] Kevin DeYoung and Greg Gilbert, *What Is the Mission of the Church?: Making Sense of Social Justice, Shalom, and the Great Commission* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2011), 27.
[10] Jonathan Leeman et al., *Four Views on the Church's Mission*, Counterpoints: Bible and Theology (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017).
[11] The issue title is "The Church in Mission and the World." *Mission Round Table* 13, no. 3 (September–December 2018), https://omf.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/MRT-13.3-Sep-Dec-2018-The-Church-in-Mission-and-the-World.pdf (accessed 11 September 2019).
[12] J. H. Bavinck, *An Introduction to the Science of Missions*, trans. David H. Freeman (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1961), 87.
[13] Johan Herman Bavinck, "Theology and Mission," *Free University Quarterly* 8 (1981): 63.
[14] J. H. Bavinck, *Between the Beginning and the End: A Radical Kingdom Vision*, trans. Bert Hielema (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 27.
[15] Bavinck, *Between the Beginning and the End*, 28.
[16] Bavinck, *Between the Beginning and the End*, 29.
[17] Bavinck, *Between the Beginning and the End*, 29.
[18] Bavinck, *Between the Beginning and the End*, 31.
[19] Bavinck, *Between the Beginning and the End*, 32–3.
[20] Bavinck, *Between the Beginning and the End*, 34.
[21] Bavinck, *Between the Beginning and the End*, 36.
[22] Bavinck, *Between the Beginning and the End*, 35.
[23] Bavinck, *Between the Beginning and the End*, 35.
[24] P. J. Visser, *Heart for the Gospel, Heart for the World: The Life and Thought of a Reformed Pioneer Missiologist, Johan Herman Bavinck, 1895–1964* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2003), 239; summarising Johan Herman Bavinck, *The Impact of Christianity on the Non-Christian World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948), 36.
[25] Bavinck, *The Impact of Christianity on the Non-Christian World*, 37.
[26] J. H. Bavinck, *The J. H. Bavinck Reader*, eds. John Bolt, James D. Bratt, and P. J. Visser (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 75.
[27] Johan Herman Bavinck, *The Church Between Temple and Mosque: A Study of the Relationship Between the Christian Faith and Other Religions* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966), 124.
[28] Visser, *Heart for the Gospel*, 120–4.
[29] Visser, *Heart for the Gospel*, 125–6.
[30] Visser, *Heart for the Gospel*, 126–7.
[31] Visser, *Heart for the Gospel*, 130.
[32] It is worth noting that his novel understanding is well in line with the Reformed tradition with which he identifies.
[33] Visser, *Heart for the Gospel*, 132–3.
[34] Visser, *Heart for the Gospel*, 133.
[35] Bavinck, *An Introduction to the Science of Missions*, 58.
[36] For Bavinck, who held a Dutch Reformed ecclesiology, the local church is the primary agent in fulfilling the Great Gommission as he sees it as the only place where baptism can occur, and so the local church remains the only institution where the "Great Commission" can be carried out in full. Bavinck, *An Introduction to the Science of Missions*, 60. Furthermore, it is the office bearers of the church who can administer the sacraments: both the Lord's Supper and baptism. Therefore, the office bearers of the church have the particular responsibility to both help the congregation carry out the missionary task of God and to do it themselves.
[37] Bavinck, *An Introduction to the Science of Missions*, 68.
[38] Bavinck, *An Introduction to the Science of Missions*, 90–120.
[39] Bavinck, *An Introduction to the Science of Missions*, 121–52.
[40] Bavinck, *An Introduction to the Science of Missions*, 108.
[41] Bavinck, *An Introduction to the Science of Missions*, 109.
[42] Bavinck, *An Introduction to the Science of Missions*, 109.
[43] Bavinck, *An Introduction to the Science of Missions*, 112.
[44] I have not come across anything in Bavinck's thought in English that explicitly ties the comprehensive approach to his conception of general revelation. They seem so organically and logically connected, however, that it seems difficult to deny the link.
[45] Similar to the statement in the previous footnote, I am unaware of Bavinck making a direct link between special revelation and the kerygmatic approach, but the link seems so organic and logical it's hard to deny it.
[46] Bavinck, *An Introduction to the Science of Missions*, 62.
[47] "About OMF International," OMF | Missions to East Asia's People, n.d., https://omf.org/about-omf/ (accessed 11 September 2019).
[48] Bavinck, *The J. H. Bavinck Reader*, 18.
[49] Peter Rowan, "What Is Our Mission?," *Billions* (15 May 2015), https://billions.omf.org/what-is-our-mission/ (accessed 11 September 2019).
[50] Bavinck, *The Church Between Temple and Mosque*, 148.
[51] I owe this insight to a conversation with Dr. Dan Strange.

God's Mission, the Messianic Kingdom, and the Calling of the Church

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This essay started as a response to Song Tsai's paper, "One Kingdom Theology as a Paradigm for Gospel Ministry: A Commendation of the Thoughts of J. H. Bavinck," and evolved into a wider investigation into the nature and purposes of God's mission and how this relates to his kingdom and the commissioning of the church.[1] My explorations are done in loose interaction with Song's paper from which I have adopted and slightly adapted the structure:

1. God's Mission and the Messianic Kingdom

2. God's Means of Accomplishing the Mission: God's Revelation

3. The Agents and Scope of Mission

4. The Dynamics between the Calling of the Church and the Threefold Office of Christ and some Implications for OMF

First, I will comment on these from a biblical theological perspective. In the final section, I will attempt to relate my findings to OMF's mission statement, especially with regard to "sharing the good news of Jesus Christ in all its fullness." Moreover, I seek to participate in the ongoing debate on the relationship between evangelism and social action in the mission of God. The issue of how kerygmatic and compassionate ministry relate to each other has been discussed for decades among biblical scholars and missiologists. A number of recent publications and discussions, however, show that this remains a live debate today.[2] To put it crudely, there are churches that look to the Gospels for guidance as to what the mission of the church ought to be. They find Jesus announcing the coming of the kingdom of God, healing the sick, and attending to the poor (e.g. Luke 4:18–19). Then, there are those churches that look to Paul and his letters, where the focus seems to have shifted from the announcement of the kingdom to the proclamation of a gospel of forgiveness of sin through the death and resurrection of Jesus (Rom 5:1–11; 1 Cor 15:1–4). Bultmann famously described the phenomenon as: "The proclaimer (of the kingdom) has become the proclaimed (of the church)."[3]

Herman Bavinck seeks to respond to this divide between those who advocate a social gospel and those who exclusively engage in evangelism in the narrow sense of the term. He does this by promoting an integral approach. Bavinck argues that social action ought to be understood as a manifestation of preaching (or of the gospel). He writes that if social actions are "motivated by the proper love and compassion," then they "become preaching."[4]

In seeking to grasp the nature and purpose of biblical mission, Bavinck rightly points to the importance of understanding the concept and complexity of the kingdom of God.[5] Song writes:

> The Christocentrically-oriented conception of the coming of the kingdom of God as developed by Bavinck forms the most important biblical-theological criterion for missionary approach, or in his words: Mission takes place in the service of the coming of God's kingdom "and in that immense work of God we are his hands."[6]

Modern scholarship agrees that "the Kingdom of God was the central message of Jesus."[7] Moreover, it is largely agreed that, as Waltke writes, "the ultimate theological truth that unifies the whole of Scripture is the irruption of the merciful King's rule to his glory."[8]

In the following pages, I shall argue that it is God's mission fully to re-establish his kingdom among his people

and the nations, as well as to restore creation to his original intent. In order to accomplish this mission, God called and commissioned "mission agents" such as Abraham, Moses, Israel, the prophets, his Son, his Spirit, and now his church. Among these, the sending of his Son is central, as Jesus came as the culmination and fulfillment, not only of the sending of God's prophets (Heb 1:1–2; 3:1), but also of Israel's priestly and sacrificial system (Heb 7–10) and the Davidic monarchy (Heb 1:3; 4:16). First, let's take a brief look at the nature of God's kingdom and how this relates to God's mission.

1. God's mission and the messianic kingdom

Starting with Genesis 1, Bavinck points out that God's sovereign rule encompasses the whole of creation.[9] As part of the kingdom scheme, God appointed humans as his "royal-image-bearers" to rule (רָדָה) over all living creatures and to subdue creation (Gen 1:26–28). When the divine King established order and finished his work of creation, God looked at everything that he had made and judged it to be "very good" (Gen 1:31). Genesis 3, however, records how the kingdom-shalom was ruptured by the disobedience of Adam and Eve. Yet, in spite of human rebellion against the Creator-King, God did not abandon his commitment to sinful humanity and his creation (Gen 3:21; 9:9–11).

Following the opening chapters of Genesis, the Bible tells the story of how God set out on his mission to restore his kingdom, humanity, and creation to their original purpose. What was God's original purpose? Beale perceptively writes:

> The penultimate goal of the Creator was to make creation a liveable place for humans in order that they would achieve the grand aim of glorifying him.… (cf. Isaiah 45:18). God's ultimate goal in creation was to magnify his glory throughout the earth by means of his faithful image-bearers inhabiting the world in obedience to the divine mandate.[10]

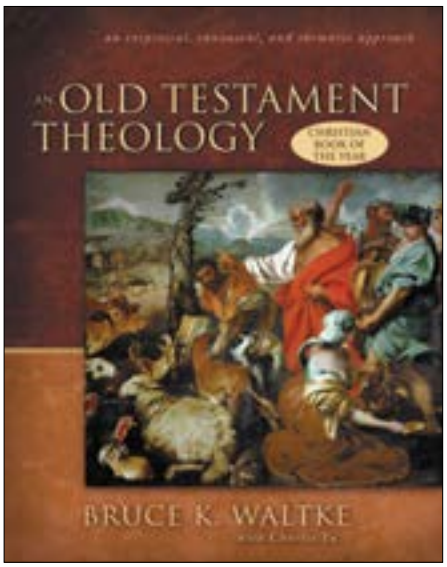
How does God set out to achieve this goal? Through a long, slow, and fragile process of restoration.[11] It started with the election of an elderly, infertile couple who were called to become a blessing to all nations (Gen 12:3; 18:22–33). The principal goal of God's promise to Abraham, as Bauckham discerns, is "that blessing will overcome the curse. It does so when the seed of Abraham, the Messiah, becomes 'a curse for us…so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles' (Gal 3:13–14)."[12]

More than 400 years after Abraham, God redeemed a weak and enslaved people who were called to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation, a light to the nations (Exod 19:6; cf. Gen 15:13–14). In due course, God advanced his purposes through the youngest of Jessie's sons, with the aim to provide an earthly manifestation of his righteous heavenly reign. Psalm 72 (ascribed to Solomon) is an implicit plea to God to establish a holistic shalom that encompasses the people of God, the nations, and creation through his messianic king (cf. Ps 72:3, 16–17).

> [1] Give the king your justice, O God,
> and your righteousness to a king's son.
> [2] May he judge your people with righteousness,
> and your poor with justice.
> [3] May the mountains yield prosperity for the people,
> and the hills, in righteousness.
> [4] May he defend the cause of the poor of the people,
> give deliverance to the needy,
> and crush the oppressor. …
>
> [11] May all kings fall down before him,
> all nations give him service. …
>
> [16] May there be abundance of grain in the land;
> may it wave on the tops of the mountains;
> may its fruit be like Lebanon;
> and may people blossom in the cities like the grass of the field.
> [17] May his name endure forever,
> his fame continue as long as the sun.
> *May all nations be blessed in him;*
> may they pronounce him happy…
>
> [19] Blessed be his glorious name forever;
> may his glory fill the whole earth.

After several centuries of largely rebellious and sinful monarchs, the messianic hope in a righteous king grew stronger (Pss 2; 89; Isa 9:1–7; 11:1–5; Zech 9:9). In the fullness of time, Jesus entered Jerusalem on a donkey at Passover. It was the time when Israel was remembering God's victory over Pharaoh and expressed a hope in the Lord's redemption for his people from God's enemies. By riding on a donkey (as David and Solomon had), Jesus was implicitly saying two things. Firstly, that he was the expected Messiah and, secondly, that he was fulfilling the Exodus story of God establishing his kingdom against the idolatrous "pharaohs" of the world. The Gospels essentially tell the story of how God has and is achieving this victory through the cross and resurrection of his Son. Before we take a closer look at Jesus' messianic mission, we should briefly consider its eschatological fulfillment, when God's sovereign rule is finally realized, creation restored, and all nations worship before the heavenly throne and the Lamb (Rev 7:9–12; 21–22). Keeping the end vision in mind, Piper's famous dictum about the ultimate purpose of mission comes to mind: "Mission exists because worship doesn't."[13]

This condensed overview of God's mission to reestablish his reign makes it evident that God's kingdom has three dimensions. It is universal (encompassing creation and all nations), it is particular (based upon election and covenant), and it has an eschatological dimension. It is evident that God's kingship is not fully realized. Chaos continues (Ps 74; Isa 27:1), the nations rage against God, his anointed one, and Israel (cf. Pss 2; 44; 89), and even God's own people rebel against the divine rule (1 Kgs 18; Ps 55:12–15). This gave rise to the hope that one day—"the Day of the Lord"—God will come to judge and fully establish his kingship on earth by putting everything right (Pss 96; 98). So when Jesus came



and announced: "The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand" (Mark 1:15), he was claiming that all the Old Testament hopes were about to be fulfilled (Luke 4:18–19). Both Jesus' teaching on the kingdom and its historical reality make it evident that there is still a future dimension to God's ultimate rule (Matt 6:10; Rom 3:9–20, 7:21–25). The messianic kingdom is both here and not yet fully established and fulfilled.[14] Thus Ladd memorably describes the theological situation as follows: "While God is King, he must also *become* King."[15] Until the consummation of time, the church lives in this "now and not yet" tension (Rom 8:18–39).

So what does this brief overview teach us about the nature and purpose of God's mission and his kingdom? It shows that God set out to restore his kingdom in all its dimensions and that he does it "by the way of the least" (i.e. Abraham, Israel, David, the Suffering Servant, a crucified Messiah, and a group of weak disciples).[16] Moreover, we can see that God works from the particular to the universal (from Abraham to the nations, from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth),[17] and his work is not yet complete (Phil 2:1–11). God's mission often involves hardship. All this is powerfully attested by the suffering of the prophets, the death of the Messiah, and the persecuted church.

When Jesus rode into Jerusalem, the people rightly recognized him as the expected Messiah (Luke 19:28–38). However, they had a distorted understanding of God's Anointed One and his reign. Nobody could see that God was establishing his reign through a suffering and dying Messiah (Matt 16:21–23; Mark 10:45). Even to the disciples, the vindicated Jesus had to teach from the entire Scriptures that

> the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. (Luke 24:46–48)

The resurrected Lord says to his disciples: "As the Father has sent me, even so I send you" (John 20:21). John Stott comments:

> In both these sentences Jesus did more than draw a vague parallel between his mission and ours. Deliberately and precisely he made his mission the model of ours … Therefore our understanding of the church's mission must be deduced from our understanding of the Son's.[18]



*The Procession in the Streets of Jerusal*em by James Tissot. Opaque watercolor over graphite on gray wove paper, 22.5 x 17.6 cm. From Brooklyn Museum, https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/objects/454 (accessed 13 October 2019).

The risen Christ commissions his followers to carry on his mission from Jerusalem to all the nations in the power of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8).[19] In the final part of this essay, I shall argue that understanding the nature of and applying the dynamics of Jesus' messianic mission will help us to maintain a balanced view of kerygmatic and social approaches to ministry. First, however, I would like to unpack another essential aspect of God's mission: revelation. Only with the revelatory help of Father God could Simon Peter discern and confess that Jesus is the "Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt 16:16–17). Only when Jesus opened the spiritual eyes of the disciples could they recognize him as the risen Messiah. Only when Jesus opened to them the Scriptures did their hearts burn within them (Luke 24:30–32).

2. God's means of accomplishing the mission: God's revelation

Karl Barth has probably argued more than anybody in modern times that fallen humanity cannot know God unless the initiative comes from God himself.[20] According to Bavinck, God does this in two ways, namely through *general* and *special revelation*. These are two well established categories in biblical studies, but the Dutch missiologist uses them in distinctive ways. Usually, general revelation is understood as God revealing himself through nature (Ps 19), (salvation-) history (Exod 7–15; Ps 106), wisdom (Pss 90, 119), goodness/ethics (Ps

111), aesthetics (Gen 1:31; Exod 35:30–36:3; 1 Kgs 10:4–9), and providence (Ps 104; Matt 5:43–44).[21] On the basis of general revelation, Paul reckons that the nations have no excuse for not knowing God through his creation (Rom 1:18–20). The apostle does not say that general revelation imparts salvific knowledge about God. Yet, Paul affirms that the entire creation through its beauty, design, and usefulness bears witness to God's nature. Bavinck, quite possibly influenced by Barth ("Nein!" to natural theology), however, warns that if

> we wish to use the expression "general revelation" we must not do so in the sense that one can logically conclude God's existence from it. … When the Bible speaks of general revelation … it has a much more personal nature. It is the divine concern for men collectively and individually. God's deity and eternal power are evident; they do not let go of him, even though man does his best to escape them.[22]

Bavinck illustrates and supports his understanding of general revelation through a number of specific Bible passages.[23] He summarizes that general revelation reveals the *character* of God and Christ, while special revelation reveals *the nature of redemption* that we have in Jesus.

Based on the time-honored understanding of general revelation (as outlined above), Bavinck's perception is helpful, but seems to be too narrow. Of course, when God reveals himself through nature, history, aesthetics, etc., humans can discern aspects of God's nature, but these witnesses do not necessarily have the personal focus as Bavinck ascribes to *general revelation*. Packer helpfully clarifies:

> From the natural order it is evident that a mighty and majestic Creator is there.… General revelation is so called because everyone receives it, just by virtue of being alive in God's world.… God actively discloses these aspects of himself to all human beings, so that in every case failure to thank and serve the Creator in righteousness is sin against knowledge … God's universal revelation of his power, praiseworthiness, and moral claim is the basis of Paul's indictment of the whole human race as sinful and guilty before God for failing to serve Him as we should (Rom 1:18–3:19).[24]

It seems to me that Bavinck's understanding of general revelation comes close to what has traditionally been called *specific revelation*, such as God's appearance to Moses or to Israel on Mount Sinai. Specific revelation is often associated with the prophets, who have access to the divine council (Num 12:6–8; Jer 23:18) and then are sent to speak into specific situations on behalf of God. Based on revelatory visions and their own prayerful reflections on the covenant, the prophets proclaim God's character and his redemptive and punitive ways to the people and could intercede accordingly (Amos 7–9; cf. Gen 18:11–33).[25]

God's revelation always serves the knowledge of God and often also the understanding of his redemptive purposes. For example, the Exodus, one of the greatest revelatory acts in Israel's history, served (primarily) the purpose of demonstrating to Egypt and the nations "that there is no one like YHWH in all the earth" (Exod 9:14, 29; Isa 45:5–7). God's ongoing revelation to Israel, even after tragic acts of apostasy and idolatry (cf. Gen 3; Exod 32; Num 13, etc.), is a clear sign of divine grace and commitment to his people (Exod. 34:8–9). When God reveals his will through the prophets, it often serves to call Israel back to the covenant faith (1 Sam 12; 1 Kgs 18), and thus ultimately serves the restoration of humanity to God's original creation design.[26] In other words, revelation is essentially redemptive.

Revelation, however, requires a human response in order to fulfill its purpose. After God initially revealed himself to Abraham, to Moses, to Israel on Sinai, to the prophets, and to Paul, they all needed to respond in trust and obedience to the calling in order to understand God's deeper salvific plan. The Old Testament prophets were empowered by the Spirit of God to speak on behalf of God. This was the same Spirit who was poured out on the day of Pentecost to lead the church into all the truth, and convict the world of sin with regard to sin and righteousness and judgment (John 16:8–13). The Holy Spirit reveals the nature of God's salvation and empowers the church for God's mission (Luke 24:47–49; Acts 1:8).[27] This makes the Triune God the prime missionary. It is equally clear that God chooses to work with and through his Spirit-enabled people (Matt 28:18–20; Luke 24:48–49; John 20:21–23).

God's mission often involves hardship. All this is powerfully attested by the suffering of the prophets, the death of the Messiah, and the persecuted church.

This brings us to the human agents of God's mission and thus to two of our central inquiries, namely, the scope of the church's mission work and the relation between evangelism and social service.

3. The agent and scope of God's mission

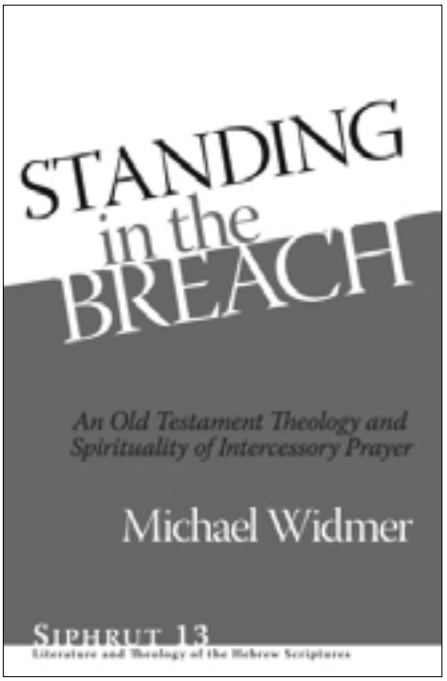
From the beginning to the end, Scripture witnesses that "God is on a mission, and we, in that wonderful phrase of Paul, are 'co-workers with God'" (1 Cor 3:9).[28] Just as God has commissioned Israel and the prophets, so the Father sent the Son, the Father and the Son sent the Spirit, and finally the Triune God is sending the church to continue his mission.

Returning once again to the early chapters of Genesis, it is clear that God's mission for his people is much broader than evangelism. We have already referred to Genesis 1:26–28 where God creates Adam and Eve in his royal image and commissions them to rule over creation. It is sometimes missed though that the first two chapters of the Bible qualify God's kingdom rule through priestly categories. Genesis 1–2 presents God not only as Creator and King (who subdues, forms, and orders), but in many ways also as the archetypal heavenly Priest, who separates (בדל) darkness from light, day and night, water and land,[29] who blesses (Gen 1:22, 29), and sanctifies the seventh day (Gen 2:3). Solomon built the temple in seven years (1 Kgs 6:38), while God built his "cosmic temple" in seven days.[30] When Moses was instructed to build the tabernacle, God revealed to him the heavenly sanctuary as a model (pattern) to copy (Exod 25:9, 40; Heb 8:5). The parallels between God's cosmic sanctuary and Israel's earthly sanctuary become further evident by the juxtaposition of the language of Moses and God after they finished their "sanctuaries." "Moses *saw all the work*" which the people "did" in constructing

the tabernacle; "and Moses completed the work" and "blessed" the people for their labors" (Exod 39:43; 40:33). When God finished his creation, he "*saw everything that he had made*, … *God finished the work that he had done*, and … *blessed* the seventh day … (Gen 1:31; 2:1–3). There is good reason to argue that the building of the tabernacle was intentionally portrayed in the image of the world's creation.[31] On the seventh day, God completed his creation and moved into the cosmic tabernacle (cf. Ps 132:7–8, 13–14). According Hebrews, the risen Christ entered the heavenly sanctuary as our High Priest to appear before God on our behalf (Heb 7:25, 9:24–28).

Given this wider framework, it is interesting, for our purposes, that God not only commissions humans to govern (subdue and have dominion) over all animals and creation (Gen 1:28), but also commands them to *serve* and *keep* the garden sanctuary (עבד and שׁמר, Gen 2:15). "To *serve* and to *keep*" are exactly the same Hebrew words used later when Moses commissions the Levites for their priestly service in the tabernacle (Num 3:7–8; 18:7).[32] So already in Genesis 1–2 emerges a picture of God—the archetypal King and High Priest—creating humanity in his royal-priestly image (Gen 1:26), commissioning them to govern, to serve, and to protect the sanctity of the garden temple.

The royal and priestly nature of God's people and their work is confirmed in Exodus 19 when God reveals to Moses the deeper purpose behind the Exodus. Why did God redeem Israel from Egypt?



God's mission has at least three dimensions: (1) it is word-based: proclaiming and teaching the good news about the Messiah and his kingdom as a response to the reality of human sin; (2) it is compassionate: a response to the holistic needs of humanity; and (3) it embraces the whole of creation.

Not only to deliver them from slavery, but primarily to make himself known, not least through his people. "Let my people go so that they can serve me" (Exod 7:16; 8:1) as a "kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exod 19:6). God called his people out of idolatry to be distinct from other nations (i.e. holy). As a people set apart for God, they ought to mediate between a holy God and an unclean and idolatrous world.

Although God intended this "high-calling" for Israel as a people, already after the Golden Calf apostasy, the priestly role was transferred to the Levites only (Exod 32:28). Nevertheless, God blessed Israel so that his saving ways might be known among all the nations (Ps 67:1–2). Israel is called to be YHWH's witness (Isa 43:11; 44:6–8), to bring forth justice and light to the nations (Isa 42:1, 6). Israel, however, has not fulfilled its mission. Isaiah speaks of a blind and deaf people (Isa 42:18–20). Hence, God commissioned another servant to restore Israel so that they can be the intended royal priesthood (Isa 49:1–7; 52:13–54:17; 61:6). The sacrificial death of the "Suffering Servant" (as a guilt offering, cf. Isa 53:10) prepared the way for Jesus to give his life as a ransom for many (Mark 10:45). Through his substitutionary death (Rom 4:25), God "has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins" (Col 1:13–14; Gal 3:13–14; Rev 1:5–6). The Exodus theme is taken further by Peter when he describes how God's original plan for Israel reaches its fulfillment in the church: "Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people."

> … you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. (1 Pet 2:4–10; cf. Exod 19:4; Rom 15:16)

Peter develops further the imagery surrounding the new priesthood by saying that the church is called to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ (1 Pet 2:5). What do these spiritual sacrifices entail? They may vary, but proclaiming the one who brought them from darkness to light, is an essential aspect of the church's mission (1 Pet 2:9). Moreover, in line with the Old Testament, the priestly church is not to conform to this world but to conduct themselves honorably among the Gentiles as a testimony for God (1 Pet 2:11–12; cf. Rom 12:1–2). It also includes offering sacrifices of praise to God and doing good and sharing one's possession (Heb 13:15–16). The letter to the Hebrews particularly underlines the teaching that the royal-priestly church is to serve under Christ's heavenly High Priesthood.

Once again, the end time vision of Revelation discloses that, thanks to the atoning work of the Lamb of God on the cross, believers are redeemed from their sins and restored to their original royal priestly role before God (Rev 1:5–6; 5:10; Gen 1:28; 2:15).

Conclusion

God's mission has at least three dimensions: (1) it is word-based: proclaiming and teaching the good news about the Messiah and his kingdom as a response to the reality of human sin; (2) it is compassionate: a response to the holistic needs of humanity; and (3) it embraces the whole of creation.[33]

God's mission is evangelistic

Although God is the one who reveals himself and reconciles to himself all things "by making peace through the blood of his cross" (Col 1:20), it is also the Triune God who commissions his people to cooperate with him in making himself and his reign known (1 Pet 2:9) and to proclaim repentance and

forgiveness of sins in Jesus' name to all nations (Luke 24:48; cf. Isa 43:10). The gospel of the kingdom is that God, in and through his Messiah, has won the major battle against Satan, sin, and death, yet the war is not yet completely over (Heb 7:25).[34]

With Bavinck, Song reminds those who engage primarily in kerygmatic ministry that God's kingdom needs to be *authenticated* by character and good deeds. As we have noted, Israel was called to be a holy people. Peter applies this commandment to the church by insisting that we should "live such good lives among the nations that they may see your good deeds and glorify God" (1 Pet 2:12). In other words, we should shine as a light to the nations. There is no mission without proper biblical ethics.[35]

God's mission demonstrates compassionate service

Flowing from God's mercy and grace (Exod 34:6–7), and embodied in Jesus' life and ministry (John 1:14), the church is called to compassionate service. Words and deeds belong together. Just as Jesus' words interpreted his deeds and his deeds embodied his words, so should evangelism be a partner of social services.[36] Jesus did not only announce the good news of the kingdom; he performed visible signs of the kingdom. If people did not believe his words, Jesus said that they should believe him "because of the works themselves" (John 14:11). Or as Wright argues, since the world is in a holistic mess due to the fall, God's mission must equally be holistic.[37] Holistic mission from a biblical theological perspective includes the care and eventually transformation and renewing of creation. This is "in a manner analogous to the resurrection of his Son." The new creation is the "habitation for the resurrection bodies of his redeemed people."[38]

Mission embraces the whole of creation

The earth and all in it belongs to the Lord (Exod 19:5; Ps 24). From Genesis 1–2 it is clear that God created humanity in his royal, priestly image and commissioned them to govern, to serve, and to protect the sanctity of the garden temple. The church is called to responsible stewardship of God's creation.[39]

Having briefly summarized the three fundamental aspects of God's mission, I'd like to finish by exploring how these three characteristics relate to each other, to Jesus' messianic mission, and to OMF's mission statement and values.

4. The dynamics between the calling of the church and the threefold office of Christ and some implications for OMF

According to Packer, one of Calvin's greatest contributions to Christian thought was that the New Testament writers expounded Jesus' mediatorship in terms of the threefold office of prophet, priest, and king as found in the Old Testament.[40] Moreover, the Genevan reformer was convinced that these three major offices inform the church about its calling.[41] Having seen how the threefold office is actually rooted in the Triune God himself and is thus reflected in his reign and mission, I would like to suggest that the three offices stand in an inseparable, mutually enriching, and correcting relation to each other when we think of the character and mission of the church.

The priestly role of the church, as seen above, has manifold senses and include protecting, maintaining, and contextualizing the teaching and sacraments of the church (e.g. 2 Chr 15:3; Neh 8:9). Interceding—particularly praying for and mediating God's blessings for the church and the world—is also an abiding priestly responsibility. Moreover, the calling to be a "holy people" has particular relevance for missionaries. Consider OMF's value: "Depending on God for holy living." That is, we need to display distinct lives in our cultural and religious contexts (Ezek 22:26). Keeping and protecting the "garden sanctuary" comes as an order to look after the "heart sanctuary," and has implications for creation care. Creation care is an important part of the church's "priestly mission" (Gen 2:15).

The prophetic role of the church includes making God's redemptive work known—through preaching and evangelism, and expositing Scripture (Eph 4:11–13). A "prophetic", kerygmatic ministry includes both encouragement and warning. The "prophetic church" is called to assess its own "spiritual health" based on Scripture, and if necessary to speak self-critically to its "priestly" contingent (e.g. Moses vs. Aaron, Exod 32; Amos vs. Amaziah, Amos 7).[42] The prophetic warning goes hand in hand with interceding for God's grace and mercy in Christ (OMF value: constantly evaluating our vision).[43] Although the prophetic church has a calling to be a "sentinel" to its own people (i.e. upholding truth and holiness, Ezek 3:16–21; 33:1–9), collectively it also has a responsibility to speak into secular society, especially with regard to injustice and corruption (Amos 1–2). The people of God who are faithful to their prophetic calling will most likely invite criticism, suffering, and even persecution in the name of Christ (Matt 5:10–11). One could perhaps surmise that, on the one hand, without the prophetic voice, the priestly service of God's people might encourage rice-Christians, spiritual lethargy, or syncretism. On the other hand, if the church sees its calling predominately in (prophetic) preaching, evangelism, and teaching, it is in danger of losing touch with its (host) culture, becoming legalistic, hypocritical, and possibly even fanatical (Luke 18:11). This is in line with OMF's value: "We practice incarnational ministry."

The "royal role" of God's people includes the assurance that we are part of God's royal household ("you

One of Calvin's greatest contributions to Christian thought was that the New Testament writers expounded Jesus' mediatorship in terms of the threefold office of prophet, priest, and king as found in the Old Testament. . . . The three offices stand in an inseparable, mutually enriching, and correcting relation to each other when we think of the character and mission of the church.

are a royal priesthood"). The "royal calling" expresses itself through servant leadership that understands itself to be under the authority of Christ and his law (Deut 17:18–20; Eph 5:22–24; Phil 2:1–11). As Psalm 72 helpfully draws a vision of the messianic kingdom, the church is called to protect and provide for the vulnerable in its midst. This coincides with OMF's value of sharing resources. Moreover, following the creation mandate, the people of God are called to look after (rule) creation as responsible stewards of God's world (Gen 1:26–28; Ps 24). Again, if the royal role of the church's mission is not kept in check by the prophetic contingent (e.g. Samuel vs. Saul; Elijah vs. Ahab), church leaders will be in danger of exploiting their leadership roles, be tempted to over-emphasize the victorious aspect of Christianity, and forget that Christ's followers are called to take up their crosses and serve each other.

Depending on gifting and context, the emphasis of this threefold "messianic" calling might vary slightly, but ideally the threefold office ought to be balanced in any group of Christians. Every mature follower of Christ should aspire to a balanced threefold spirituality and ministry. If these three roles are not balanced, the church runs the risk of distorting messianic kingdom dynamics and thus the nature of God's holistic mission.

God's mission flows from the nature of the Triune God, and the missional calling of the church is intrinsically related to the threefold office of Christ and his messianic kingdom. Keeping the biblical tension between the priestly, prophetic, and royal aspects of God's calling is, to my mind, a suggestive way of talking about integrated mission and resolves to a large degree the uneasy relationship between evangelism and social action. **MRT**

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[1] Both Song Tsai's paper and this response were originally delivered at OMF's Mission Research Consultation in June 2019.

[2] For example, St. Paul's Cathedral, "The Kingdom of God with the Rt Rev Dr Tom Wright," 21 Oct 2015. Video, 1:28:48, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rLiy-WlS9mA. Song's paper "One Kingdom Theology" refers to a number of recent publications. Moreover, OMF has addressed this issue in "The Church in Mission and the World," *Mission Round Table* 13, no. 3 (2018), https://omf.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/MRT-13.3-Sep-Dec-2018-The-Church-in-Mission-and-the-World.pdf (accessed 8 Oct 2019).

[3] Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, vol. 1 (London: SCM Press, 1965), 33. See also David Wenham, *Paul: Follower of Jesus or Founder of Christianity?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 1–15.

[4] J. Herman Bavinck, *An Introduction to the Science of Missions* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1960), 113.

[5] J. Herman Bavinck, *Between the Beginning and the End: A Radical Kingdom Vision* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 27.

[6] John Bolt, James D. Pratt and Paul J. Visser (eds.), *The J. H. Bavinck Reader* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 75. See Song's paper, p. 14.

[7] George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Guildford: Lutterworth, 1979), 57.

[8] Bruce K. Waltke and Charles Yu, *An Old Testament Theology: An Exegetical, Canonical, and Thematic Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 61. See also Walter Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament* vol. 2 (London: SCM, 1985).

[9] Bavinck, *Between the Beginning and the End*, 29.

[10] Gregory K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2004), 82. See also Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God's People: A Biblical Theology of the Church's Mission* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 39–47.

[11] One of Bavinck's strengths is that he views missiology on a grand scale. He evaluates missiology in the light of God's work that stretches over generations. Bavinck presents a holistic view of cultures coming under the Lordship of Christ. See *The J. H. Bavinck Reader*, 362–3.

[12] Richard Bauckham, *Bible and Mission: Christian Witness in a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 34–5.

[13] John Piper, *Let the Nations be Glad* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1994), 11.

[14] This is usually referred to as "inaugurated eschatology."

[15] Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, 61.

[16] This is further confirmed in the Sermon on the Mount which tells that God is building his kingdom through the needy, the humble, and those who are persecuted for righteousness (Matt 5:3–12).

[17] See Bauckham, *The Bible and Mission*, 27–49.

[18] John Stott, *Christian Mission in the Modern World*, IVP Classics (Downers Grove: IVP, 2008), 37–8.

[19] See Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2006), for a masterful exposition of this grand theme.

[20] Karl Barth, *Die Kirchliche Dogmatik: Die Lehre vom Worte Gottes* 1.1 (TVZ, 1932), 238–41. In my study, *Moses, God, and the Dynamics of Intercessory Prayer* (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), 9–14, I try to show how Barth's "revelatory theology" has influenced a number of prominent Old Testament scholars.

[21] See Jean-Georges Gantenbein, "The Good News in a World of Aesthetics," *Mission Round Table* 14, no. 2 (2019): 11–17, https://omf.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/MRT-14.2-May-Aug-2019-Sharing-the-Good-News-of-Jesus-Christ-in-all-its-Fullness.pdf (accessed 8 October 2019).

[22] J. Herman Bavinck, *The Church Between Temple and Mosque: A Study of the Relationship Between the Christian Faith and Other Religions* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966), 124. I am indebted to Song Tsai for this reference.

[23] For example: Job 33:14–18; John 1:4–5, 9; Acts 14:15–17; 17:26–27; Rom 1:19–32.

[24] J. I. Packer, *Concise Theology: A Guide to Historic Christian Beliefs* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 1993), 9–10.

[25] I explore the process from God revealing himself to the prophets to the actual delivering of a prophetic speech in my book *Standing in the Breach* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2015), 498–502.

[26] God sometimes makes revelation dependent on prayer (cf. 1 Kgs. 18:37; Isa. 37:17–20).

[27] Max Turner, *The Holy Spirit and Spiritual Gifts: In the New Testament Church and Today*, rev. ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2005), 7–21, 39–45.

[28] Wright, *The Mission of God*, 531–2.

[29] To separate and distinguish (בדל) between holy and common, between clean and unclean is a priestly activity (Lev 10:10; 20:24–25). See Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, Vol. 1, Word Biblical Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2014), 18–19.

[30] Beale, *The Temple*, 29–121, John Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2009), 71–6.

[31] Beale, *The Temple*, 61, following M. Fishbane, *Text and Texture* (New York: Schocken, 1979), 12.

[32] T. Desmond Alexander, *From Paradise to the Promised Land: An Introduction to the Pentateuch*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012), 123–5, Beale, *The Temple*, 81–3.

[33] Wright, *The Mission of God*, 416. The Anglican Church helpfully divides mission into five marks, saying that the mission of the church is the mission of Christ: (1) To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom; (2) To teach, baptise and nurture new believers; (3) To respond to human need by loving service; (4) To transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and pursue peace and reconciliation; (5) To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth. Anglican Consultative Council, "Marks of Mission," https://www.anglicancommunion.org/mission/marks-of-mission.aspx (accessed 8 October 2019).

[34] To use Oscar Cullmann's image, *Das Gebet im Neuen Testament* (Tubingen: Siebeck, 1994), 177–82.

[35] Wright, *The Mission of God*, 369–92.

[36] Stott, *Christian Mission*, 42.

[37] See Wright, *The Mission of God*, 429–41.

[38] Wright, *The Mission of God*, 416.

[39] Chris Wright gives a helpful overview of what this might concretely involve. Wright, *The Mission of God*, 417–20.

[40] Packer, *Concise Theology*, 131–3.

[41] The so called *Munus Triplex* (threefold office) also provides the basic structure of Barth's Christology in his *Church Dogmatics*. The Heidelberg Catechism interprets the title "Christ" in terms of the threefold office:
Q. Why is he called "Christ," meaning "anointed"? Because he has been ordained by God the Father and has been anointed with the Holy Spirit to be: i) our chief prophet and teacher who perfectly reveals to us the secret counsel and will of God for our deliverance; ii) our only high priest who has set us free by the one sacrifice of his body, and who continually pleads our cause with the Father; iii) and our eternal king who governs us by his Word and Spirit, and who guards us and keeps us in the freedom he has won for us.

[42] Atsuyoshi Fujiwara, "*A Theology of Japan: Prophetic and Priestly Theology of the Believers' Church,*" in *A Theology of Japan: Origins and Task in the Age of Globalization* (Saitama: Seigakuin University Press, 2005), 103–115, helpfully explores the dynamics between prophet and priest and takes it as a guideline for "healthy" contextualization.

[43] For a discussion on the logic of the twofold role of the prophet, see my study, *Moses, God, and the Dynamics of Intercessory Prayer*, 80–6.

Article taken from *CHINA'S MILLIONS* (April 1877): 44, 46,
https://archive.org/details/chinasmillions1877chin (accessed 14 November 2019).

PLAN OF THE OPERATIONS OF THE CHINA INLAND MISSION

The study of the Acts of the Apostles leads to the conclusion that a plan of missionary operations, somewhat like that adopted by them, would prove the most effective wherever the needy territories are large, and the labourers are few. In China we might mass our missionaries; but the early missionaries appear rather to have scattered themselves. They visited important centres, usually in twos and threes, stayed there only long enough to commence a work, and then trusted much to the keeping of God, and to such help as could be afforded by epistles and occasional visits for its further progress. They had advantages which we do not possess in China; the godly Jews and proselytes already acquainted with the Old Testament Scriptures, who were found everywhere—when converted soon became able to lead and instruct the converts from among the heathen. We may therefore anticipate the necessity of a somewhat prolonged residence in our districts, for the purpose of instructing in the Word of God those who may be converted. Still, the general principle, if a true one, should be kept in mind. Our desire, therefore, is:

First, to send two missionaries with two native converts to each unevangelized province of China, who may begin by itinerating through the province, and gathering believers, as the Lord enables them; locating themselves for a period of years in some important centre (say the capital of the province if practicable) when He gives an open door.

Next, with the aid of converted natives of the province, to extend the work to the capitals of the circuits, then to prefectural cities, and subsequently to the county cities, from which it may easily be carried to the more important towns and villages of the county itself.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE PLAN

I. LOCALIZED WORK

Our missionaries cannot go into distant provinces without knowledge of the language, customs, habits, &c. of the people; and those who will become native assistants need, in the first instance converting, and then instructing; and require to show themselves possessed of gifts and of suitable spirit for such work.

Commencing from the basis of Ning-po, where God had already used us in gathering a church, we began our operations as a mission by occupying the capital of the province, Hang-chau, for a few years. Thence we extended our work to the capitals of the four circuits into which the province is divided; and have since sought to occupy as many of the prefectural and county cities as we have been able. In other words, we have endeavoured to gain experience and suitable labourers by carrying out among the twenty-eight millions of Cheh-kiang (the province to which God first called us) the plan which we wished to see worked in each of the others.

From that province, again, we extended our operations to Kiang-su, to the (then) wholly unoccupied province of Gan-hwuy, and also to stations in Kiang-si and Hu-peh, as bases for further operations in the regions beyond. We have gradually gathered around us a number of native Christians, and a staff of seventy-six native assistants, by whose instrumentality mainly we are carrying on work in fifty-two stations—most of them important centres, and most of them occupied by our mission alone.

II. FURTHER EXTENSION

The preliminary operations of the mission having reached the stage of development mentioned in the above extract, the time appeared to have come for extending the work to the nine unevangelized provinces shown in the following table:

THE NINE UNEVANGELIZED PROVINCES OF CHINA

NAME.	AREA.	POPULATION.
Northern.	*Square Miles.*	
1. Kan-suh ...	154,000	16 Millions.
2. Shen-si ...		14½ Millions.
3. Shan-si ...	55,268	15½ Millions.
4. Ho-nan ...	65,104	25½ Millions.
Central.		
5. Si-chuen ...	166,800	27 Millions.
Southern.		
6. Yun-nan ...	107,969	8 Millions.
7. Kwei-chau .	64,554	7½ Millions.
8. Hu-nan ...	74,000	10½ Millions.
9. Kwang-si ...	78,250	25½ Millions.
TOTAL ...	765,945	150 Millions.

Men and means were therefore asked of God, and were given by Him. Mr. M. Henry Taylor set out on his first journey to Ho-nan *(River-south province)* in the beginning of April, 1875.

Messrs. Stevenson and Soltau left for Burmah (with the hope of ultimately reaching Yun-nan) about the middle of the same month. And Mr. Judd first visited Hu-nan *(South-Lake province)* in June. Bhamo was reached by Messrs. Stevenson and Soltau on October 3rd, 1875. By January, 1876, they had obtained a site for building; and ere the house was quite finished, they were joined by Dr. and Mrs. Harvey and Mr. Adams. In August, 1876, Messrs. Baller and King first set out for Shen-si *(West-passes)*; one man has professed to put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and has been baptised; the first-fruits of this journey. Mr. Budd accompanied Mr. King on his second journey to this province. About the middle of October, Messrs. Turner and James left for Shan-si (*West Hills*), and a few days later Messrs. Easton and Parker left for Kan-suh. In December 1876, Messrs. Cameron and Nicoll left for I-chang, en route for Si-chuen (*Four-streams*); and in January, 1877, Messrs. Judd and Broumton left for the Kwei-chau province (*Noble-land*). We hope and trust that before the year terminate, Gospel work may have begun in the only two remaining provinces of this vast and needy land.

This article describes the CIM's plan to move into the nine inland provinces lacking missionary witness. The journeys made by these young men covered thousands of miles. Traveling by foot, horseback, and boat, they faced danger from the terrain, bandits, and illness. More details of these amazing journeys can be found in A. J. Broomhall, *Assault on the Nine*, Hudson Taylor and China's Open Century (Sevenoaks: Hodder and Stoughton and OMF, 1988).

The Gospel and the Cross-Cultural Gospel Messengers:

Issues of Identity and Platform in Bringing the Good News

Ian C. H. Prescott



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Cross-cultural Gospel Messengers

The relationship of the gospel and the gospel messengers

The gospel is not a pizza. It is not a question of making the right selection of ingredients to suit the customer, putting them together in an attractive and tasty way, and then delivering it. The essence of bringing the gospel to people is that it is incarnated. God sent his Son both to deliver the message and as the message. God continues to send out his people with his message but also as his message.

In one sense, the gospel is an unchangeable, world-defining event. It is "a factual statement":

> Namely, that at a certain point in history, the history of this world, God who is the author, the sustainer, the goal of all that exists, of all being and all meaning and all truth, has become present in our human history as the man Jesus, whom we can know and whom we can love and serve; and that by His incarnation, His ministry, His death and resurrection, He has finally broken the powers that oppress us and has created a space and a time in which we who are unholy can nevertheless live in fellowship with God who is holy.[1]

The gospel, as the historical fact of God's mighty work through Jesus, does not change it is the same for every time and place.

In another sense, the gospel is always contextualized in the lives of those who bring it. The "gospel does not come as a disembodied message, but as a message of a community which claims to live by it and which invites others to adhere to it."[2] The gospel does not come as some pure, culture-free message. The gospel, because it comes through people—that is, through languages and communities with traditions—is always embodied in culture.[3]

This is not an unfortunate complication or a weakness that we need to overcome, but God's intention. Jesus did not write a book, a task which would have been quite possible in that day and age and would have left us with a definitive record of his teaching. Instead, he entrusted his legacy to a community of witnesses. They are witnesses to what Jesus did and said but also witnesses to what it means to follow Jesus. The gospel is a call to put ourselves under the kingship of God in Christ and it is best preached by demonstrating what that means in our own lives as well as explaining what that means with our words. That is not just an individual calling, but a corporate one. Thus, a key part of the gospel testimony is how we relate to one another in the body of Christ in love.

It therefore matters not just that we manage to get into other countries and cultures to bring the message, but how we do that. That is not secondary to our communication of the gospel, but part of our communication of the gospel. Who we are and what we are are inextricably tied up with what we have to say and how it is received. It shapes the message, the perception of the messenger, and the Christian community that comes into being as a result of receiving the message.

Cross-cultural gospel messengers

The focus of this paper is on *cross-cultural* gospel messengers. That they are cross-cultural means they are alien to the community that they are trying to reach. Often that means they are foreigners from another country or, if not foreigners, then from a different ethnic group or culture. Thus, they start as outsiders who have to make an effort to get into the group if they are to bring the gospel message to them. And their embodiment of the gospel

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is in a culture different from those that they are taking it to. There may also be insiders—Christians within the group—and the issues and considerations for them may be different. However, the need for outsiders may mean there are few Christian insiders to do the work of gospel sharing.

Who is welcome?

Being an outsider already defines part of their identity to the people to whom they are going. As an outsider trying to get an "in", a key question is "who is welcome?"

If they are from outside the country, the first question asked is often about visas. Is one required? If so, who qualifies for one? The answer to that question revolves around the issue of what kinds of foreigners the government allows in. In most cases, they welcome those who contribute something that they value, whether that is cheap labour, the money of tourists and overseas students, foreign expertise, or investment and jobs created by businesses.

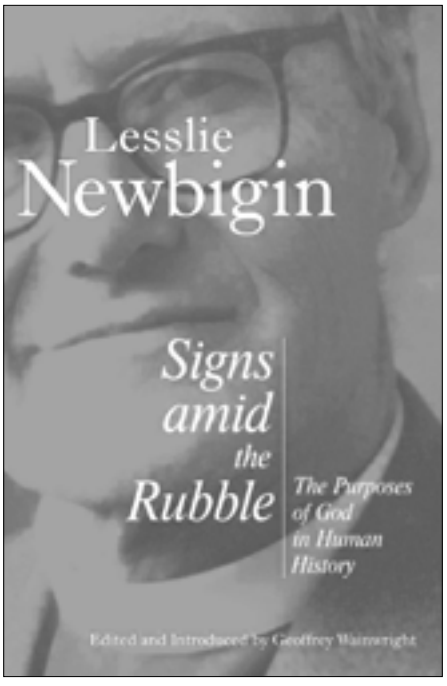
But having got in, "who does the community welcome?" Who are they pleased to see and eager to learn from? How can we serve them, earn their trust, get close enough for them to see our lives, and win a hearing for our message? Are we doing a job and maintaining an identity that they think add value to the community? (Or is it one that takes away value? For example, one that takes away jobs, or is an agent for an unwelcome business or program.)

Why are they welcome?

We stand at an interesting point in the history of economic ideas. Following the collapse of the USSR in 1991 and of European communism, we entered a period with only one prevailing economic ideology—that of the free market. A few voices with other perspectives have grown a little louder since then, but the free market is still the dominant economic ideology driving government decisions around the world.

That includes the communist world. I regularly hear that Communism is dead. However, as more than 1.5 billion people in the world live in a Communist state,[4] I have to query that. Communism in China and Vietnam seems alive and healthy. In fact, sometimes it seems healthier and more stable than many democracies, including my own home country. However, the current version of Communism in China and Vietnam—perhaps best described as Market Leninism[5]—may not be what Marx envisaged though it is what is defining these countries' directions.

In fact, it was primarily policies driven by issues of economics that opened up the communist countries of East Asia. This is what transformed them from closed



countries (e.g. China in the period 1950 to 1979, Vietnam 1955 [North] and 1975 [South] to 1986) to what we call creative access countries. The opportunities created by China's Open Door Policy (1978) and Four Modernizations (1979) and Vietnam's *Doi Moi*/Renovation (1986) are what created the many open doors that we have been enjoying for mission.

This is not new. The unequal treaties and the opium trade which opened up China in the nineteenth century were driven by economics. Missionaries, of course, took advantage of this openness because of the access it gave them to the people to share the gospel. Some of them were critical of the opium trade and colonial policies.[6] Very few today are critical of globalization and free market capitalism even as we seek to ride the wave of the opportunities it presents.

In a key note address at the OMF Global Fellowship Consultation held two years ago, David Smith warned us that globalization is

> the carrier of an ideology and a worldview which presents the most direct challenges to the gospel of Jesus Christ.… faith in the transformative power of free markets constitutes the non-negotiable core of the ideology of globalization … what began life as an economic theory has, over time, expanded into a culture which claims universal validity.[7]

Smith drew our attention to Lesslie Newbigin, who argued that in the twenty-first century three factors

> will compete for the allegiance of the human family: the gospel, the free market, and Islam.… As to the free market: the crucial question is going to be whether the Christian church can recover its confidence in the gospel in order to be able to challenge with confidence the enormous power of this ideology which now rules us. We are dealing here with an idol, the idol of the free market, and idols do not respond to moral persuasion.[8]

This particular idol is often not the object of missiological critique. Are we too overwhelmed by the size of the opposition to know where to begin, or have we already been seduced by the spirit of the age? Some of the writing from the Business as Mission factory

Table 1. Missionary and professional callings

Type	1	2	3	4	5
Call	Missionary	Missionary (Professional)	Professional (Missionary)	Professional	Professional
Self-identity is	Missionary calling	Missionary calling	Professional calling	Professional calling	Professional calling
Sense of vocation	Reach a people No professional skills, or no sense of calling to use their professional skills, so seek a way to reach people without using professional skills	Reach a people And use their professional skills to help reach a people IF their professional skills can be used If not, find another way	Serve in their profession And use their professional skills to help reach a people IF their skills can be used If not, find another place	Serve in their profession Witness wherever they end up Ended up in Asia	Serve in their profession Witness wherever they end up Remained at home
Relationship to Agency	MISSIONARY	TENTMAKER	TENTMAKER	FIELD FRIEND	SUPPORTER
Issues	Can't get into creative access situations	Often regard "3" as uncommitted, unfocussed, lacking zeal	Often regard "2" as unprofessional, lacking integrity		

feels as though capitalism with Christian values is God's answer to the world's problems.[9] And I can't help wondering if the Lausanne movement's recent call to the church "to embrace wealth creation as central to our mission of holistic transformation of peoples and societies"[10] may be in danger of giving uncritical endorsement to the current economic ideology.

The forces of globalization have made people more accessible. But is it undermining the gospel in other ways? The message of the gospel is a compelling metanarrative that both shows us the way to God and also makes sense of the world. However, part of the globalization package is the message that such metanarratives are optional. The only metanarrative that matters now is the one of increasing prosperity through free markets. Previously, a frequent problem was that the gospel was perceived as Western and therefore not relevant to Asians. Today, the West is declaring that the gospel is not needed in the free market and therefore not relevant to anyone.

At the very least, this should mean that we evaluate political and economic events against the larger framework of God's purposes and desires for humankind and not, for example, "welcome a brutal tyranny because it allows the entry of foreign missionaries rather than a more humane regime which puts difficulties in their way." Newbigin does not see this as an opportunity for the gospel of Jesus but rather as "a sign against the gospel of Jesus."[11]

What can different platforms contribute?

The title I was originally given for the paper was "ways to approach people with the good news: vehicles or platforms available today—positives and negatives." I have written extensively about this previously[12] and so will not rehearse all that here, although there are fresh things that could be said as many people have given a lot more thought to it since I wrote.

Key things to keep in mind in evaluating any potential platform or vehicle are the quality of the contact that it gives you with the focus people, the opportunity for ministry that it affords, and the impact of the platform on the ministry. In addition, it is important to consider how much time and effort is required to create and maintain the platform and how sustainable it is.

English teaching

Let me apply this quickly to one of our most popular platforms: English teaching.

This is one of the easiest and most obvious of platforms. The demand for English teaching is enormous and the demand is for "native speakers" to do it, so our foreignness often becomes an asset. The entry barriers are often very low with a one-month intensive CELTA or TESOL training being sufficient for many situations.[13] And in many situations, a language teacher will be paid enough to live on.

It also gives quality contact with one's focus people. It is highly relational with the student-teacher relationship being a particularly important one in Asia, with the bond often continuing long after the formal relationship has ceased. It is in the education business, so is already in the business of changing minds.

There are also challenges. Even when English teachers have had the opportunity to start with a substantial period of studying the national language, they often struggle to deepen or even to maintain their language as they are spending so much time using English and students often expect and want to interact with their English teacher in English. As a result, ministry is often

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through the medium of English which may not be the best language for evangelism and discipleship.

The problem becomes even more acute when we look beyond the immediate language and discipleship to our goal of multiplication. We want disciples who will make disciples who will make disciples and churches that will plant churches that will plant churches. But the model of English teaching as a platform for evangelism is not one that is reproducible by nationals. I have often seen churches catch a vision for evangelism and then follow a line of reasoning that goes like this: we want to reach more people, we've seen that English classes or clubs are a good way to do that, so we need a foreigner so that we can do evangelism.

We could examine a host of other platforms in this way and in a great deal more detail, and there is a great deal more literature to interact with,[14] but I want to focus this paper on other issues.

The question of call and vocation

This whole discussion on selecting a platform or profession based on the advantages and disadvantages of that particular platform or profession presumes that we are not already committed to a particular profession. This takes us to the question of calling.

Missionary calling and professional vocation

I have found it helpful to recognize two different kinds of callings. I have called these the missionary calling and the professional vocation. I realize that vocation and calling are really just two words for the same thing. However, distinguishing these two kinds of calling has been found helpful by many.

By the missionary calling,[15] I mean those whose vocation is getting the good news to people who haven't heard it. They want to know how they can best do that. By separating them out, my intention is not to put them on a missionary pedestal but to recognize that their calling is to make their major life choices around the question of "how will they hear?" And our calling as an organization has been to support those with such a calling, help them get trained and equipped, team them with others where possible, and support them in practical and strategic ways, so that their faithfulness to God's calling results in effective ministry.

By professional vocation, I mean a calling to practice a particular profession.[16] I would not necessarily say a secular profession because the sacred-secular divide is both unbiblical and unhelpful, and the profession could actually be that of a religious professional, such as pastor or a theological educator.

For many of our colleagues, it is not one or the other but both together. They feel both a calling to mission and a calling to a profession. Both callings are from God. Several years ago, after spending many hours relating to a variety of people wrestling with this, I put together the following scale which tries to capture some of the issues in how these two callings intersect for different people. Although this scale has been circulated internally, it has not previously been published in English. (See Table 1.)

All those in this table are assumed to be committed Christians who are wholeheartedly devoted to the Lord and to pursuing his will and calling. No position on the scale is assumed to be superior to another. It just represents a different balance of callings. At one end are those whose primary sense of calling is a "missionary" calling—to devote themselves to reaching the people in a particular place or people group with the good news of Jesus Christ. At the other end are those whose primary sense of calling is a "professional" calling—to serve God faithfully through the practice of their profession.

In the middle are those who sense a dual calling: to serve God in their profession and to be personally involved in reaching a people.

Bi-vocational workers: The "2"s and "3"s

The "1"s are the traditional, straightforward church-planting missionaries. They were the core of our Fellowship[17] until the closed countries of East Asia started opening up and becoming creative access countries. To serve in these contexts, we needed people with the professional skills that these countries welcomed. In the wider missions world, these people were often called tentmakers. Within OMF, we called them Professionals Serving in Asia for a while (though that term has fallen out of use). In this discussion, I will refer to the "2"s and "3"s as "Bi-vocational Workers."

For the "2"s, their missionary calling is primary. They regard their professional skills as a tool that they may use to open doors for ministry. However, their skills are only tools, and if they are not useful to the task of reaching a people, they will set them down, find other tools, and try another way.

So, for example, I have known someone who over the course of several years taught as an English teacher, then ran a business, afterwards became a farmer, and finally ran a processing plant. All of these positions served the goal of effectively reaching his focus people. Changing professional roles like this is not unusual. One of my team recently commented that he feels like a chameleon as he has sought to reinvent himself several times over the last few years as he figures out the best identity and platform for ministry in his context. They do not do this in a spirit of deception but in the spirit of Paul who said, "I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some" (1 Cor 9:19–22).

Then there are the "3"s, for whom their sense of professional vocation is primary. They regard the practice of their profession as a fundamental part of their God-given calling. They are willing and eager to use their profession to help reach a people. However, if they find that they cannot contribute with their professional skills, they will usually see that as God's direction to seek another place where they can use those skills.

A lot of tensions occur because of misunderstandings between these two groups. You can find this in the literature on tentmaking, in the various pronouncements by advocates of tentmaking, and among bi-vocational workers in the field.

The "2"s tend to regard the "3"s as uncommitted, unfocused, and lacking in zeal for the mission cause, while the "3"s tend to regard the "2"s as unprofessional, lacking a biblical view of work, and lacking in integrity. Some writers try and tackle this by advocating a "holistic" balance between the two. While the concern for holism is valid, the solutions offered rarely satisfy. "Holistic" tends to

be used to label the user's own preferred position, thus labelling all other positions as inadequately unholistic and not always recognizing that different balances are right for different people.

The "2.5"s and their schizophrenia

Of course, to divide bi-vocational workers into "2"s and "3"s is too simplistic. They are a spectrum, and most bi-vocational workers are not at the end of the scale but somewhere in the middle—around what we might call "2.5"!

They feel a strong sense of both missionary calling and professional vocation, and are struggling to understand what God is saying about how they should exercise their dual calling. While the "2"s and "3"s are often self-confident about the rightness of their respective positions, the "2.5"s often feel schizophrenic[18] and torn between the two. Their feelings of schizophrenia and confusion are often exacerbated by the strong arguments of the "2"s and "3"s that they should be more focused on reaching people ("2"s) or on pursuing professional excellence ("3"s).

There are other issues that are worth mentioning too:

The "1.5"s and issues of integrity

There is another possible category that could be added to our scale—the "1.5"s who use their professional qualifications to get a visa but don't do the job that they have contracted to do. Real questions should be raised about the integrity of this approach. They have made a commitment to do something but haven't kept their word. Questions can also be raised about the impact that their behaviour has on the spread of the gospel. While they may achieve their short-term goals in evangelism, literature distribution, etc., the long-term impact is often very negative. Numerous stories testify to this.

This integrity question should be distinguished from the charge that is sometimes made against the "2"s—that because they have sought out their job with the intent of using it as an entry or platform for achieving their mission goals, they lack integrity. I would vigorously defend them against the charge that this automatically lacks integrity. As long as they do the job that they have committed to do, and do it well—not short-changing those they work for—they have kept their word on that issue. If they have other motivations in obtaining the job, that is fine; they do not have to live for their professional work alone!

In fact, we often hear that we should be aiming to be the very best that we can possibly be as a professional (e.g., Scott praises "A young nurse in a closed country [who] seeks to be the best nurse in the hospital"[19]). Is this "be the best" focused on God or on our individual competitiveness? Is it putting work first? It seems to me that we are all given a number of callings that compete for our time, energy, and focus. These include our callings as children and parents, and husbands and wives, as well as our professional and missionary callings. Our challenge is "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters" (Col 3:23). We should do a good job with integrity that honours the Lord as well as those we work for and with. However, we must also fulfil our other God-given responsibilities and callings in a way which honours him too.[20] We should pursue professional excellence but it should be excellence in the service of God and not excellence in the place of God.

Another area that bears mentioning is that of part-time jobs. If a visa has been granted to a bi-vocational worker for a job that is essentially only part-time, then let us rejoice in the freedom that that gives. There is no lack of integrity in doing only a part-time job if that is all that you have committed to and been given a visa for. For the "2"s or "2.5"s, it may give much greater time and freedom to pursue the mission part of their calling.

The "2"s that are forced to be "4"s

The prevailing paradigm for funding mission has been that this has been paid for by those in the sending countries: sending churches and other supporters. This has worked OK while mission has been "from the West to the rest." Having led the industrial revolution, the West was significantly wealthier than the rest and so Christians have had the wealth to fund mission "to the rest."

For some people, one of the attractions of serving as a professional is that "you don't have to raise your support, you have an employer who pays you." For those of us who are privileged to come from wealthier countries, that is a choice we can make. Raising support is challenging, but by no means impossible.

However, as we all know, the centres of gravity of Christianity have shifted. Most Christians now live in the majority world. That includes many churches with an enthusiasm and confidence for sharing the gospel that is often lacking in the West. With a few exceptions (Korea is a major one) their national economies do not match their Christian numbers or mission enthusiasm. Consequently, their mission sending under this "sender pays" model is cramped by lack of finances.[21]

Table 2. Missionary and professional callings of bi-vocational workers

Type	2	2.5	3
Call	Missionary (Professional)	Missionary and Professional	Professional (Missionary)
Self-identity is	Missionary calling	Missionary and Professional calling	Professional calling
Sense of vocation	Reach a people And use their professional skills to help reach a people IF their professional skills can be used If not, find another way	Reach People/ Serve in a profession Feel a dual calling If there is a conflict, not sure which should take pre-eminence	Serve in their profession And use their professional skills to help reach a people IF their skills can be used. If not, find another place
Relationship to Agency	Tentmaking Professional	Tentmaking Professional	Tentmaking Professional
Issues	Often regard "3"s as uncommitted, unfocussed, lacking zeal	Often feel schizophrenic and pulled in both directions	Often regard "2"s as unprofessional, lacking integrity

That doesn't mean their missionary enthusiasm has been completely quenched. Many are still venturing overseas with a strong mission calling and vision, while sustaining themselves through taking paid employment in the field country. This has good biblical precedent as Paul's tentmaking was primarily about self-support. It was also the way missionaries were often funded in the early centuries of the church. However, because of the urgency of having funds to live, most do not have the opportunity for substantive language study. Most Asian languages take the best part of two years of full-time language study to master (unless one has the advantage of already speaking a closely related Asian language). But without language, the contribution of these people is much less than it could be.

To release the missionary potential of the churches in these countries, we need a fresh approach in which mission (a) is paid for by employment (tentmaking) and (b) still provides opportunity for the worker to learn the language and culture as foundations for effective, long-term ministry.

To take this forward we need to recruit people with the intention that, in the long term, their support will be provided by employment on the field. Therefore, they need to be potentially employable and willing to take this route. In addition, they need sufficient support to cover two years of full-time language study, culture acquisition, and initial training and experience in ministry. This could be a lump sum rather than an annual commitment.

People move!

This scale is not intended to be a series of boxes in which we fit people but a tool that will help us understand people and for them to understand themselves. And people will move along the scale—in both directions!

Those who came as "3"s, or even as "4"s, may end up as "2"s or "2.5"s. We have seen this in a number who first linked with us informally because their profession had taken them to a country where we worked, but over time they have become long-term co-workers with us.

On the other hand, those who came thinking that they were "2"s or "2.5"s may discover that their profession is a much more integral part of what God is calling them to be and do than they had recognized or can expect to realize in a developing East Asian situation.

Understanding and following God's calling is part of a lifelong pilgrimage with the Lord. It takes time and different experiences for us to understand his call. But that call is not a static thing. It is also changing! We may be called to major on one type of vocation for a while, but then the Lord calls us on to be something else.

Marketplace professionals

Up until now our organizational focus has been on recruiting, deploying, and supporting the "2"s and "3"s in creative access situations (maybe only up to about "2.7" or "2.8"). One of the defining values and practices has been our emphasis on ministry preparation and language study. Those who have joined us have usually had a strong enough sense of missionary calling to pause their professional career for several years in order to become equipped for effective disciple-making in the cross-cultural context.

However, with our new focus on marketplace professionals, we are expanding those we have in view to embrace the "3" pluses, "4"s and also to challenge some of the "5"s.

These are the people who Andrew Scott, President and CEO of Operation Mobilization USA, describes.

> They believe they should be an engineer, businessperson, artist, mechanic. Their skills and excellence in them have given them great credibility in their environment, and their environment is where those who do not know Jesus are—and they are not typically in our churches. These folks love doing what they do but have never been given the framework or permission to see that as part of their God-given purpose in life, yet they firmly believe that their passion and talents for business are from God. I am convinced that if we are to see significant change in our world through the light of the gospel going out, we need to set a generation free to be all God has created them to be, using what He has given them to use for His purposes.[22]

The incarnational answer?

Mobilizing marketplace professionals is presented as a key strategy for reaching people where they are today—which is in the marketplace. Along with missional business, this provides "organic opportunities" for "incarnational witness" and ministry.[23] There are clearly many ways in which cross-cultural marketplace professionals can contribute. Many are already employed in workplaces in East Asia. They may need a fresh vision for how God can use them, but they do not need to be urged to go as they have already gone. There, they will have opportunities to relate to people who it may be difficult for others to reach with the good news. Different contact in a different context will often lead to new opportunities for sharing. The workplace is where many people spend the majority of their waking hours and "The gospel needs to be shared where the people who need to hear it are concentrated."[24] A key part of their witness will be demonstrating by their lives how their faith affects how they do their work and how they relate to other people—showing how faith impacts the marketplace.

There are also challenges to the effectiveness of people who work in this way.

They don't usually have the opportunity to learn the local language. Most Asian languages require far more time for concentrated language study than expatriates are able to invest. I have not met anyone who has succeeded in learning Vietnamese to a satisfactory level if the only time they have been able to devote to it is Saturday mornings. This means that their in-depth interaction

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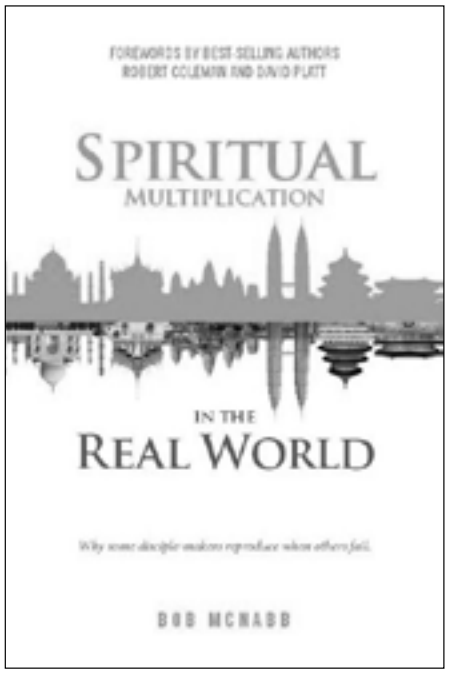

with local people will largely be limited to those with good English. There must be a number of these in their working environment for them to do their job, but still the scope of who they can interact with will be limited. If all witness and discipleship is going to be done in a foreign language, and most probably with foreign materials, the presentation of the gospel will be severely impacted.

They may find it very difficult to relate to the local church. As well as the language issue, there may be other government barriers to them joining events with local Christians. The result is that their witness is divorced from the witness of the local church and they may find it hard to introduce those who believe into local fellowships.

Though we may rejoice in the potential for these marketplace professionals to bring their faith into the East Asian marketplace, the unfortunate reality is that many have not figured out how to do that in their home context. In fact, the prevailing ideology in many of our Western sending countries sees little or no place for faith in the workplace. It regards religion as a private matter that does not belong in the marketplace. We do not want to export this to East Asians who are often more accepting of religion generally, though they may be antagonistic to Christianity specifically.

Are we asking the wrong question?

The question about vehicles or platforms is often framed as a "which is best?" question.

Is it best to go as something closer to the traditional missionary: theologically trained, financially supported by churches, and spending a few years learning the language, before selecting the profession or platform that seems to best facilitate the ministry? Or is it best to go as a marketplace professional: using the qualifications one already has and seizing the professional opportunities in unreached countries; not pausing for years to go through theological or language study; staying on top of one's professional game and simply scattering to the ends of the earth with one's profession and the good news of Jesus?

In many ways, the "which is best?" question is often only a relevant question for the traditional missionary. For professionals, serving in their profession is a given. They feel called to serve in their profession. The question is not whether to stay in their profession but whether, while staying in their profession, they can also serve God's purposes in mission.

Nor is it an either-or question but both-and. The question is not whether the unreached will be reached by tentmaking missionaries or by marketplace professionals, but whether they will be reached at all and how God will use the glorious variety of his people to do that. There is clearly value in having people in as diverse a range of occupations and platforms as possible so that the gospel witness can reach the greatest variety of people.

The question of effectiveness

This leads me to conclude that the value of discussing the contribution of marketplace professionals is not to answer the "which is best?" question but to help address the "how can we ensure they are effective?" question.

Bob McNabb, who spent a decade in Thailand before returning to the United States, addresses this question in his book *Spiritual Multiplication in the Real World: Why Some Disciplers Reproduce while Others Fail*. He was vexed by the question as to why people who had been fruitful disciple-makers while in college seemed to bear so little fruit in the workplace.

> Does it matter what kind of church a person attends? What kind of lifestyle would be needed? Does the type of job one works or where one lives matter? Is there a certain approach to evangelism that yields more fruit? Should the use of materials in discipling be encouraged or discouraged? *Why do some people successfully multiply their lives year after year while others, who have received similar training, flounder and fail to reproduce?*[25]

Some of the early theories he considered and rejected included: "the poor job and living situation" theory. That people weren't seeing fruit because "They lacked extended and meaningful daily contact with lost people their own age and gender. They needed to select a job and living situation that daily immersed them in significant contact with lost people like them." However, his research, which was international in scope, showed

> there are other factors far more important than where you live or with whom you work. In fact, we found no statistically significant relationship between where one lives and effectiveness in disciple-making, nor between the number of lost people with whom one works closely on a daily basis.[26]

He examined the correlation between how much evangelism training people had had and their effectiveness in making disciples. While some evangelism training was better than none, there was no clear correlation beyond that.[27]

His key finding was that:

> the *single greatest determining factor* as to whether people multiply themselves

The value of discussing the contribution of marketplace professionals is not to answer the "which is best?" question but to help address the "how can we ensure they are effective?" question.

> is *not* the level of their maturity, the amount of training they have received, the receptivity of the lost in their context or how long they have been discipled. But it is whether or not they are *immersed in a disciple-making team*.[28]

Ideally, this team included: top leaders casting and modelling vision; ongoing coaching and mentoring; large ministry events that help the disciple-makers' micro-ministry events; and a ministry culture that expects, prays, and works together to multiply.[29]

A key conclusion of their research was the importance of *ongoing* training:

> Our research shows that receiving ministry training on a weekly basis is what most increases effectiveness in disciple-making. We found that 48.5 percent of highly effective disciple-makers were involved with churches or ministries that offered weekly ministry training…. Survey participants were questioned regarding how frequently they had received coaching during the three-year period our study investigated. Nearly three quarters (74.9 percent) of those who had not received any coaching were found to be non-effective. That percentage dropped to 26.1 percent for those who had received coaching every other month.[30]

As we seek to get more involved with those who are regular workers in the marketplace, we need to grapple with this. Is helping these marketplace professionals stay focused on disciple-making and multiplication a ministry being carried out by the local or international church in a given city? Are they focused enough to be effective? Many churches have some kind of small group fellowships. However, their purpose is usually for Bible study, fellowship, and mutual support; not for multiplication. "Most groups that function well as a disciple-making team define multiplication as their reason for existence."[31] If supporting these marketplace professionals is something that we wish to get more involved in, we need to make sure that it is for more than help with cross-cultural awareness, member care, and crisis assistance.[32]

Conclusion

Our challenge is to select the best platforms when we have the choice, to be aware of the way our choices shape the message that we bring, to serve with integrity in everything that we are called to do, and to develop structures that will give the training, support, and ongoing mentoring and encouragement so that professionals of all kinds will be effective in contributing to indigenous, multiplying church movements in every people group of East Asia. **MRT**

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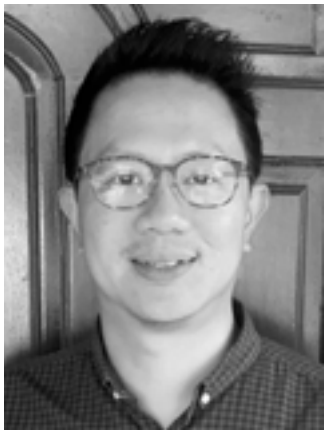
[1] Lesslie Newbigin, *Signs Amid the Rubble: The Purposes of God in Human History* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 113.
[2] Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans, 1989), 141.
[3] Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 144.
[4] China (1.419 billion), Vietnam (97 million), Cuba (12 million), Laos (7 million). Worldometers, http://www.worldometers.info (accessed 1 May 2019).
[5] The phrase was used as early as 1993 in the *New York Times* (Nicholas D. Kristof, "China Sees 'Market-Leninism' as Way to Future," *New York Times* (6 September 1993). It has been extensively used by Jonathan London, Senior University Lecturer of Global Political Economy–Asia at Leiden University, NL ("Viet Nam and the Making of Market-Leninism," *The Pacific Review* 22, no. 3 (2009): 375–99; "Market-Leninism," *SSRN Electronic Journal* 10, no. 2139 (2011); "Varieties of State, Varieties of Political Economy: China, Vietnam and the Making of Market Leninism," in *Asia After the Developmental State: Disembedding Autonomy*, eds. T. Carroll and D. S. Jarvis (Cambridge: CUP, 2017); "Welfare and Inequality in Market Leninism: China and Vietnam," in *Welfare and Inequality in Marketizing East Asia: Studies in the Political Economy of Public Policy* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018); "Consolidating Market Leninism," *Asian Survey* 59, no. 1 (2019): 140–6.
[6] See, for example, Kathleen L. Lodwick, *Crusaders Against Opium: Protestant Missionaries in China 1874–1917* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1996) and Kyle Johnson, "Missionaries vs. The Opium Industry," *Mission Frontiers* (Sept/Oct 2019): 30–1, https://www.missionfrontiers.org/issue/article/missionaries-vs.-the-opium-industry (accessed 10 Oct 2019).
[7] David Smith, "Understanding the Changing Landscape of Global Mission," unpublished paper presented at the OMF International Global Fellowship Consultation, Chiang Mai, Thailand, September 2017, 6.
[8] Newbigin, *Signs Amid the Rubble*, 118–19.
[9] Ken Eldred, *God is at Work: Transforming People and Nations Through Business* (Ventura: Regal, 2005) feels very much like this.
[10] Lausanne Committee on World Evangelization, "Wealth Creation Manifesto" (Global Consultation on "The Role of Wealth Creation for Holistic Transformation," Chiang Mai, Thailand, March 2017), https://www.lausanne.org/content/wealth-creation-manifesto (accessed 10 October 2019).
[11] Lesslie Newbigin, "Evangelism and the Whole Mission of the Church," *The Auburn Report* 10, no. 4 (August 1998): 4.
[12] Ian Prescott, "Creative Access Mission in East Asia" (D.Miss Thesis, Fuller Theological Seminary, 2001).
[13] This must be one of the lowest professional entry requirements of any profession!
[14] See for example: Bradley Baurain, *Religious Faith and Teacher Knowledge in English Language Teaching* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2015), Jan Edwards Dormer, *Teaching English in Missions: Effectiveness and Integrity* (Pasadena: William Carey, 2011), Kitty Barnhouse Purgason, *Professional Guidelines for Christian English Teachers: How to Be a Teacher with Convictions While Respecting Those of Your Students* (Pasadena: William Carey, 2016).
[15] One might also call this an "apostolic calling" as in Eph 4:11. This helps recognize both that it is a biblical calling and that we are not expecting that everyone should be called in this way. However, "apostolic" is used to mean so many different things in today's church that using the term will probably increase confusion rather than diminish it.
[16] I would emphasise that I am using "vocation" as a synonym for "calling," not as a synonym for "profession." Thus God may call someone to leave their profession but it makes no sense to talk of him calling someone to leave their vocation; he is calling them to a new vocation.
[17] The core but never the entirety of our Fellowship. There have always been people balancing the two callings. However, it was the push for professionals to serve in the newly open creative access countries that pressed these issues to the fore.
[18] Medical professionals have told me that I am misusing the term "schizophrenia", but many bi-vocational workers have told me that it captures exactly how they feel.
[19] Andrew Scott, *Scatter: Go Therefore and Take Your Job with You* (Chicago: Moody, 2016), Kindle , loc. 240.
[20] So this is not the best paper I could possibly write, but I have worked reasonably hard and faithfully on it in the midst of other demands.
[21] I realize another paradigm is that these countries provide the manpower and churches and Christians in the wealthier countries provide the finances. This is working to a limited extent, but it cannot fund the full potential of the missionary movement from these countries.
[22] Scott, *Scatter*, loc. 194.
[23] The term "incarnational" is used five times in "Looking at OMF International's Creative Space in the Missional Business and Marketplace," unpublished paper, 2018.
[24] "Looking at OMF International's Creative Space," 1.
[25] Bob McNabb, *Spiritual Multiplication in the Real World: Why Some Disciplers Reproduce while Others Fail* (n.p.: Multiplication, 2013), 24. Emphasis his.
[26] McNabb, *Spiritual Multiplication*, 47.
[27] McNabb, *Spiritual Multiplication*, 60–1.
[28] McNabb, *Spiritual Multiplication*, 67–8. Emphasis his.
[29] McNabb, *Spiritual Multiplication*, 68 and expanded in the following chapter.
[30] McNabb, *Spiritual Multiplication*, 76, 78.
[31] McNabb, *Spiritual Multiplication*, 78.
[32] These often seem to become the focus, particularly once we start looking at "payment for services models."

The Gospel Expressed Through Ritual Materiality for Discipleship in the Context of Thai Folk Buddhism

Samuel Lim



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Thailand has had a strong missionary presence for many years. As early as 1662, French Jesuit missionaries were allowed to preach Christianity and were even given permission to operate a seminary in the capital.[1] From that time on, the nation of Thailand has witnessed the hard work of Christian missionaries. While it is a delight to hear that the Thai population has demonstrated a greater openness to the gospel message since the 1970s,[2] listening from the ground, from local Thai Churches, one hears a cry for help instead.

In an article in *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, Daniel Kim reported that when influential Thai Christian leaders were asked what they saw as the greatest need of Thai churches, the majority responded that the Thai church is ineffective in making active and mature disciples after evangelizing people.[3] Proper discipleship takes time, investment, and much work. And without proper contextualized discipleship, allowing the gospel to become integrated with life and challenge the everyday life issues of the people, the church becomes ineffective and irrelevant to its soil.

Thus, the importance for the gospel to be understood in context cannot be underestimated when it comes to efforts in discipleship. If there is any hope of seeing an ongoing missional movement that will produce growth among indigenous churches, we must realize that it is not enough to help grow an indigenous Christian community of faith demographically. Rather, we must recognize the importance of encouraging these communities to understand the gospel, critically reflect upon it, and articulate the Christian faith within their own social and cultural frameworks.

This paper proposes that, in Thailand, the gospel needs to be understood in the context of Thai folk Buddhism for discipleship to effectively bridge the critical gap between theory and praxis. It expresses a specific interest in exploring the role of ritual materiality. The paper will begin with a brief presentation on the basic religious outlook of Thai folk Buddhists followed by a discussion of how ritual materiality reflects vital expressions of spirituality that reveal the way Thai folk Buddhists see the world. The paper will continue by identifying possible redemptive expressions in the realm of ritual materiality through which the gospel can be articulated when discipling converts from Thai folk Buddhism. In conclusion, the paper hopes to show that the emphasis in presenting the gospel through ritual materiality in discipleship among converts from Thai folk Buddhism is driven by the innate need in these converts to understand their new allegiance in ways and forms that they are accustomed to.

Basic religious outlook of Thai folk Buddhists

Buddhism is often seen as the pillar of Thai society. It inevitably has effects and influence on cultural issues and the worldview of the Thai people. Understanding this basic religious outlook is a prerequisite for any effective dialogue on religion and spirituality amongst the Thai people. Although Thai Buddhism is one form of Theravada Buddhism, if studied more deeply, it is clear that the Buddhism practiced in Thailand, even by a large majority of monks, cannot be considered a pure form of Theravada Buddhism. The form of Buddhism in Thailand is better described as Thai folk Buddhism. This paper defines Thai folk Buddhism simply as a veneer of Buddhist philosophy undergirded by animistic beliefs expressed through Brahmin-influenced rituals. Although Buddhism through its teachings and philosophy puts forward a rather impersonal worldview, Thai folk Buddhism readily accommodates the concept of personal spirits and deities, which is diametrically opposed to an impersonal worldview.[4]

This profound incongruence of having three major belief systems in a single religious worldview bothers many who are trained to think dialectically. I once asked a Thai monk about the contradictions of Thai folk Buddhism and was silenced when he replied, "Only those brought up with a Western-influenced education struggle to deal with contradictions. We have no problem with it." What that conversation surfaced was a view of religion and spirituality that transcends coherent, cognitive engagement. The ability to conceive and compartmentalize all three belief systems in a peaceful co-existence so as to fulfill different practical needs in daily living further accentuates this point. It must be noted that the accommodation of Brahmanism and Animism served a practical role when Buddhist teachings left many questions unanswered in the everyday life of a Thai, such as basic needs relating to forces of nature and one's survival and well-being in the material world.[5]

Thai folk Buddhism can then be aptly elucidated by Edmund Leach's concept of "practical religion"[6] in which religion and spirituality are not only preoccupied with life hereafter but actually speak to the realities of daily living. Thai folk Buddhism thus allows a form of pragmatism to surface.[7] That is to say, Thai folk Buddhists are most concerned with practicing what they believe to work for them in accordance to their understanding of how the world is ordered.

Ritual materiality in Thai folk Buddhism

Ritual materiality, or rituals and materiality—used interchangeably in this paper—are the expression of the combined roles of religious rituals and religious materiality or religious symbols/objects in understanding spirituality. While the idea of "ritual" and "materiality" may evoke a somewhat negative view in Protestantism, it should not be seen as an unfamiliar expression of faith. In Protestantism, many are more accustomed to terms like liturgy, ceremony, service, or celebration to express the concept of ritual. One can also see the role that materiality plays within the confines of Protestant worship with examples like the use of the pulpit and pews, the clergy/pastoral robes, or the lighting of candles.

In Thai folk Buddhism, both rituals and materiality are closely united aspects of one's expression of spirituality. "Rituals chart the geography and define the architecture of sacred space and are expressed in the material symbols that are manipulated in the rituals."[8] This explains why Thai folk Buddhism is visually engaging within Thai society. The observances with ritual materiality are not entirely religious accessories or visual stimuli. Underlying the use of religious objects and symbols is the belief that these ritual materials either help ward off evil powers or can be used to manipulate powers for good. That is why tattoos of Pali-Sanskrit writings are very popular among Thai folk Buddhists—they are seen as charms providing spiritual protection.

Another illustration comes from a Thai taxi ride. From the time one gets into a taxi in Thailand, one's visual senses will be overloaded as the car may be filled with pictures of monks, sacred amulets, or jasmine garlands hanging on and around the rear-view mirror or Pali-Sanskrit drawings on the ceiling. These active engagements with rituals and materiality reveal how Thai folk Buddhists see the world.

Ritual materiality as windows

The animistic tradition of power play between spiritual forces and human beings conditions Thai folk Buddhists to have a heightened recognition of the spiritual and supernatural world and its interaction with the material world. The world of a Thai folk Buddhist is occupied with more than just human affairs. To them, the world is an integration of man, spirit, nature, and things.

Ritual materiality has the potential to address the dimensions of time and space in understanding spirituality and cosmology. Rituals are like windows that allow us a glimpse into the worldview of the people.[9] Underlying every expression of spirituality acted out through rituals is a set of beliefs that directs, inspires, and promotes.[10] More specifically, rituals in Thai folk Buddhism reveal the cosmological order of the people, or as Stanley Tambiah succinctly puts it, "In rituals we see cosmology in action."[11] That is why Tambiah's study of Thai folk Buddhist rituals begins with the exposition of cosmology rather than doctrines.[12] Ritual materiality, then, becomes a tangible and visible way by which meanings of the order of the world are stored and dramatized to serve as a reminder of "what is known about the way the world is, the quality of the emotional life it supports, and the way one ought to behave while in it."[13]

An example of ritual materiality giving a glimpse of cosmology would be the *ton kathin* (kathin tree), also known as the money tree, in the merit-making rituals for *thod kathin* (kathina) ceremonies in Thailand. The *ton kathin* is a colorful tree decked vividly with banknotes as its leaves. These trees as cash gifts are offered as donations to temples as a form of merit-making for Thai folk Buddhists. Where then does the idea of decking trees with banknotes come from? In Thai folk Buddhist cosmology, the fourth level of heaven, called *Tusita*, is the most attractive of heavens because it is a place where all desires are satisfied.[14] In *Tusita* grows the *ton kamaphruk* (kalpa tree), a wish-fulfilling tree that produces fruits of gold, silver, and jewels.[15] This specific imagery and meaning of wealth in Thai folk Buddhist cosmology is thus expressed through a simple ritual material called *ton kathin*.

Ritual materiality strengthens identity

In Asia, believers of different religions are actively engaged with the tangible and material because these are what shape the character of their faith among other competing belief systems.[16] It is in Asia, with its plurality of religious beliefs, that the apparent importance of ritual materiality is brought out. Commonplace objects in rituals, such as statues of



Ton kathin

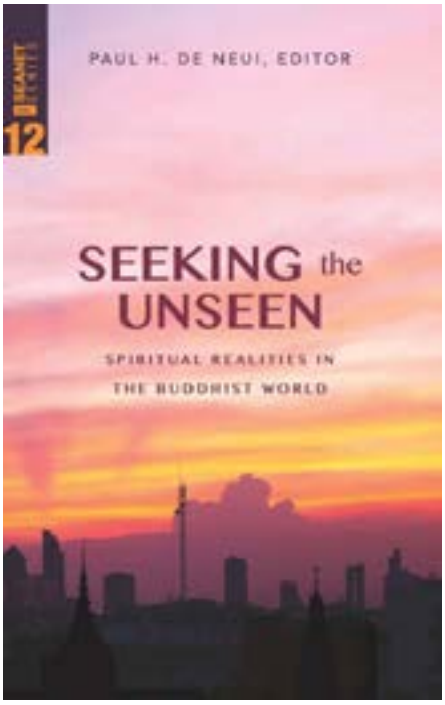
deities, candles, incense sticks, strings, spirit houses, amulets, and objects of offering, are not merely conduits towards a cognitive world of divine ideas and beliefs, but are actually significant aspects that craft and determine the character of one's belief.[17]

If we move the application of ritual materiality in strengthening identity from a personal to communal and national levels, we discover why the visibility of Thai folk Buddhism is important in Thailand, where culture, community, and religion are closely interwoven. Thus, the common expression, "To be Thai is to be Buddhist," is not to be taken in its entirety as a statement of religious belief. Rather, it reflects a need in Thais to belong and be identified as a Thai national united by the spirit of Buddhism. The veneer of Buddhism practiced through ritual materiality plays a significant role in that it provides avenues for the strengthening of Thai identity by surfacing religious allegiance through one's engagement in ritual materiality.

For many Thai folk Buddhists, the engagement in rituals and materiality is not solely motivated by the ultimate aim of attaining Nirvana; it is also driven by the desire for belonging and identity, or rather, a sense of fear in losing one's acceptance in the community. Thus, ritual materiality acts to visibly characterize and enhance a Thai person's religious allegiance. What better way to articulate, "To be Thai is to be Buddhist," than to wear an amulet, get a sacred tattoo, or have a spirit house in one's property?

Redemptive expression in ritual materiality for the gospel

Any discourse on the redemptive possibilities of understanding the gospel through ritual materiality has to move away from just seeing it as idolatry. Neither is it to be watered down into just an "aesthetic predilection of the faith."[18] Understanding the role of ritual materiality will point one toward understanding the formation and maintenance of belief from a host of practices and feelings conditioned by tangible things.[19] Therefore, it is of value to appreciate that the forming and maintaining of belief comes in accepting a wider perspective that belief



is not solely a cognitive transmission of doctrines, theologies, or Scriptures.[20] This then highlights the need to resituate the role of ritual materiality when presenting the gospel and discipling converts from Thai folk Buddhism.

Replacement not removal of materiality

A total repudiation of any ritual and materiality is futile because animistic beliefs have been deeply ingrained in Thai culture for many generations. One must not be naive to think that animism is disappearing, as Alan Tippet did in 1973 when he gave animism "ten years, at the very utmost twenty" to disappear.[21] Therefore, any presentation of the gospel that does not attempt to address this dominant worldview of Thais, but instead seeks to remove all practices of rituals and materiality may only succeed in burying animism underneath the façade of Christianity. The gospel presented to converts from Thai folk Buddhism must seek to engage the dominant animistic worldview with the hope of transformation towards Christlikeness.

The history of Israel demonstrates that God's chosen people were actually influenced by animism, and God called them out from the midst of animistic societies (Josh 24:2–3).[22] God acknowledged the existence of other gods in the lives of the Israelites. We also note the mention of Elisha's approval of Naaman bringing the earth in Israel back to Syria to worship God there and how it seems acceptable that Naaman's obligation to serve his master may require certain actions that might be seen as compromising to Naaman's newfound allegiance (2 Kgs 5:15–19).[23] All these point towards the issue of transference of allegiance and loyalty and the role ritual materiality plays in such a transition when it comes to engaging with animism.

Instead of demanding an immediate removal and repudiation of ritual materiality, God was more interested in the condition of the person's heart and allegiance. He thus allowed time for the transformation of their allegiances.[24]

Having examined how ritual materiality speaks specifically to the issue of transference of allegiance and also a show of loyalty in Thai folk Buddhism, we now turn to the exploration of the theory of replacement in ritual materiality that is centered on the visible confession of allegiance towards Christ in understanding the gospel. We will draw from the theological principle in Matthew 12:43–45 that speaks of the man who was swept clean of evil spirits, but, being unoccupied, was repossessed when the evil spirit returned with seven stronger spirits to occupy him. The last state of the man became worse than the first. In adding the qualifier "unoccupied" before providing the image of being "swept and put in order," Matthew presents the stark picture that the emptiness of the house is calling for a new tenant.[25] Something else was expected to take place after the clearing of the demonic occupation, but did not. Jesus is teaching that deliverance from demon possession alone is not enough, because "ownership by the devil must be

If we move the application of ritual materiality in strengthening identity from a personal to communal and national levels, we discover why the visibility of Thai folk Buddhism is important in Thailand, where culture, community, and religion are closely interwoven.

replaced with ownership by Christ."[26] Being cleansed is not enough if it does not lead to a new allegiance because the devil will exploit the void that is left behind.[27]

Recognizing the importance of replacing and not merely removing, the theory of replacement advocates the use of ritual materiality as a visible confession of allegiance to God. This is because the language of a Thai folk Buddhist is not mainly doctrinal words, but rather rituals and materiality. A verbal confession of faith alone does not speak to the heart of a Thai folk Buddhist in the same way as when it is accompanied with a visible confession of faith. While removing idols from the life of a Thai folk Buddhist, the theory of replacement proposed here takes a further step to encourage visible religious materiality that speaks of the Christian faith, be it a cross or the Bible.

The theory of replacement is not an end in itself. Rather, it is an important first step in understanding the gospel when discipling converts from Thai folk Buddhism. The New Testament teaching on belonging and new identity in Christ becomes important because now the new convert, having made the visible confession of allegiance, is constantly reminding himself and his community that God is the only true God in his life.

Since the ideas of allegiance and loyalty are key when engaging Thai folk Buddhists, it is vital to recognize the possible role that ritual materiality can play in the presentation of the gospel to bridge one from Thai folk Buddhism to Christianity and help disciple them how to better articulate this newfound allegiance.

Give new meanings to old rituals

The idea of giving new meanings to old existing rituals is not novel. The model of the tabernacle that was central to Israelite worship of God was not an original one. Craig Keener argues well to show the presence of an Egyptian setting for the biblical material in the model of the tabernacle that God provided Israel.[28] It is interesting to note that even in the ritual of tabernacle worship, a new meaning to understanding the God who is worshipped is given to the Israelites in the mold of an existing and familiar structure of surrounding cultures. Much of the furniture of the tabernacle parallels what surrounding cultures placed in temples and, therefore, most ancient Near Eastern people were able to acknowledge the presence of deity with the Israelites.[29] Ultimately, it is the proclamation of a God-given theology that renews and distinguishes Israel's worship of God from that of surrounding cultures.

Can the gospel message be presented through the lens of prevailing rituals of the Thai folk Buddhists, redeeming them for Christ by renewing their significance and meaning for the Thai Church? Yes, and most certainly so. An excellent application of this can be read in depth from DeNeui's work on Thai *Sukhwan* rituals in an Isaan church in Northeast Thailand.[30] To the Isaan people, there is not a more important ceremony than the *Sukhwan* ceremonies, in which the essence of life of a person is brought back, or insured that it continues residing with the person for the success and well-being of day-to-day survival. Without going into the details about *Sukhwan* rituals, it will suffice to note that cotton strings tied to the wrist are the central visual representation of the ritual through which blessings and protection are sought for the person. The church in Northeast Thailand referred to in DeNeui's writing adopted the ritual and used the same cotton strings in church, but now understood the strings as a visual representation of the love and power of God available to followers of Jesus Christ. The tying of the strings on the wrist of believers is followed with oral blessings affirming again that while the strings will break, the love of Jesus Christ will never break and never be removed.[31]

This example of redeeming the *Sukhwan* ritual in the Isaan context shows that giving new meanings to old rituals through the engagement of prevailing ritual materiality can indeed be helpful. DeNeui notes that with such engagement, the gospel message of Jesus Christ became less foreign and closer to the Isaan people and, as a result, the Isaan church has seen many of their Buddhist neighbours come to Christ.[32]

The diversity of ethnicity and culture in Thailand reminds us that one should not rush into adopting a particular way of contextualized ritual into another faith community. What may work for Thai Christians from Northeast Thailand may not work for Thai Christians from Central, South, or North Thailand, because the prevailing Thai folk Buddhist ritual that is being contextualized may not be of equal significance or identification with the realities of daily life in different regions of Thailand.

A case in point is that Thai Christians from North Thailand have not adopted the contextualized *Sukhwan* ritual because the *Sukhwan* ritual amongst Thai Buddhists in the North is not as popular and significant in its practice and meaning as compared to their Isaan neighbours in Northeast Thailand. Instead, Thai Christians in the North are more likely to practice the old ritual of *Kheun Baan Mai* (house warming) by redeeming its significance with the message of the gospel. Without expounding the details, the old ritual of *Kheun Baan Mai* sees the owner of the new house inviting Buddhist monks to chant a blessing over the new house and gifting it with protective cotton strings, with guests usually giving gifts of framed pictures of Buddhist monks or Buddha. Thai Christian owners of new houses



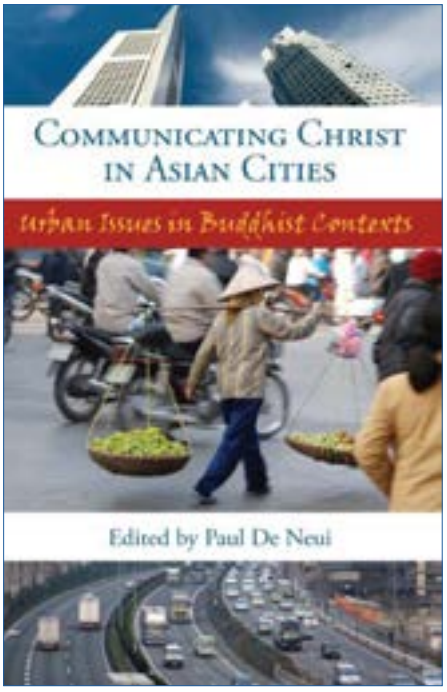
Presenting gifts with prayers for a new home

in the North have, in ritualistic order, the Christian pastor give a message on the protection and blessings that Christ brings to a new house, pray a blessing over the new house, attach a cross near the main door of the house, and unlock the doors to the new house as an invitation for the presence of Christ to dwell in it. After this, fellow Thai Christians enter the new house to sing worship songs and usually guests give gifts of crosses or framed pictures of Bible verses.

From the two examples above, one can see how the gospel message becomes more relevant with the approach of giving new meanings to prevailing rituals because the faith lessons are now identified with the realities of daily life and understood through ritual materiality familiar to the recipients.

Provide new solutions to old problems

As noted earlier, the animistic tradition of power play between spiritual forces and human beings conditions Thai folk Buddhists to have a heightened sensitivity toward the spiritual and supernatural world and its interaction with the material world. The world of a Thai folk Buddhist is more than just human occupation. To them, the world is an integration of man, spirit, nature, and things. The gospel presented in context requires this aspect of their cosmology and worldview to be addressed.



Understanding the Thai folk Buddhist cosmology is important for any gospel engagement with Thai folk Buddhists because their worldview is interpreted through their notion of cosmology.

Understanding the Thai folk Buddhist cosmology is important for any gospel engagement with Thai folk Buddhists because their worldview is interpreted through their notion of cosmology. Thai folk Buddhist cosmology highlights the various powers in the experience of a human being. To understand these powers is to understand the order of the cosmos and the general rule of the cosmos. Thus, a Thai folk Buddhist's fear of the power play between spirits and humans is wrought from their cosmology "as an arena of competing a-moral powers with unpredictable results."[33]

Therefore, if we can appreciate the fact that repentance during one's conversion experience is seen as a "repudiation of lesser lords,"[34] then in the context of a Thai folk Buddhist, the gospel being presented has to emphasize the experiential aspect of the power of Christ over all spirits. When the gospel is proclaimed, a spiritual power encounter ensues that challenges and confronts existing worldviews. It is not merely an introduction of right beliefs producing right behaviors; it is primarily a confrontation of spiritual power and authority.

The usual way in addressing this old problem is with what many would term "power encounters"—encouraging new converts to experience the healing power of Christ over illness and the power of Christ over evil spirits. Recognizing this old problem of spiritual power play in the life of a convert from the Thai folk Buddhist context, this paper proposes a new solution in addressing this old problem. This is to elucidate the power of the gospel of Christ by promoting the role that ritual materiality can have in building up the faith of the convert because of the convert's already heightened sense in understanding spiritual lessons through the expression of rituals and materiality. This can be done with the celebration of the Eucharist as often as believers meet for fellowship.

The visual and material effect of the Eucharist is capable of communicating the power of the gospel deeply to the convert by engaging the various senses of sight, touch, and taste. Together with the teaching of its rich theology, the Eucharist can actually be a powerful pedagogical tool to address the old problem of the fear of evil spirits. In a way, the Eucharist, as a material ritual acts like a visual mnemonic, reminding the new convert of the assured covenant and promise in the completed works of Jesus Christ. The Eucharist is able to bring the believer into an "extraordinary eschatological consciousness"[35] that is the confidence that is needed to help address the fear of spiritual power play in converts from Thai folk Buddhism.

Firstly, the Eucharist as a material ritual should be introduced, as a sharing of the end time banquet where what is being celebrated is the surety of God's final judgment and victory over all powers. Secondly, by partaking of the Eucharist the person is reminded of God's real presence with the believer. If these lessons are taught to converts from Thai folk Buddhism on a regular basis, the Eucharist as a material ritual may well offer a transforming alternative to addressing the old spiritual power play problem.

The way forward

The proposed applications in this paper are based on the innate need in these converts to understand their new allegiance in ways and forms that they are accustomed to, thus advancing the possible role that ritual materiality has in gospel expression amongst Thai folk Buddhists. The paper also recognizes that while presenting the gospel through ritual materiality is an essential early step in the discipleship of these converts, it is not sufficient, and should not be an end in itself.

Dionysus the Areopagite rightly observed that objects have the power to shape and form one's spiritual path, therefore surfacing the need to start one's spiritual path with embodied realities and limitations of humanity.[36] Discipling converts from Thai folk Buddhism

towards a holistic understanding of the gospel cannot stop with the dependence on rituals and materiality, but their role and power in bridging the gap of faith between the cerebral and the visceral experiences must not be dismissed. A similar observation is Pannyas Bhadrankarvijaygani's expression that the role of matter and spirit in a person's spiritual path is one of ordered procession:

> It is an ordered procession from that which has form (*murt*) to the formless (*amurt*), from using a support (*salamban*) to not using a support (*niralamban*), from matter (*dravya*) to spirit (*bhav*), and from the gross (*sthul*) to the subtle (*sukshma*).[37]

Although Bhadrankarvijaygani is expressing a person's spiritual journey from the perspective of Jain theology, there is much value in understanding how he sees the interaction between the role of matter and spirit in an ordered procession. In his view, the aim of the procession between matter and spirit is eventually towards a destination, a state of a pure, living soul.

We can modify Bhadrankarvijaygani's expression to bring out the power of the gospel of Christ—while the Christian ordered procession is towards a destination, that destination is not in a state, but rather in a person, the person of Jesus Christ. The gospel that enlightens one towards the incarnation and resurrection of Jesus Christ charges us not to be satisfied with either a cerebral or a visceral spiritual experience because growing in Christlikeness is both a cerebral and a visceral experience, both of matter and of spirit. "But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image (*eikon*) from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit (*pneuma*)" (2 Cor 3:18).

Therefore, the Christian spiritual journey moving towards Christlikeness demands us to live in a tension of moving back and forth, a cyclical progression in growth of moving *to and fro* from form to formlessness, *to and fro* from using support to not using support, *to and fro* from matter to spirit, *to and fro* from the gross to the subtle.

Conclusion

This paper is driven by the remembrance of the cry of the local Thai church leaders who desired to make more effective and mature disciples of Jesus Christ. Considering the rich history of missionary efforts in Thailand and the steady growth in openness towards the gospel message, one must constantly relook and rethink whether gospel proclamation and discipleship are transforming the foundational needs and worldview of converts from Thai folk Buddhism.

In setting forth practical suggestions towards redemptive expressions of ritual materiality for the gospel in discipling converts from Thai folk Buddhism, the paper concludes by putting forward the notion that while it is necessary to engage with this visible expression of spirituality in Thai folk Buddhism, it is in itself insufficient to move the convert towards spiritual growth and maturity. The way forward to grasping the power of the gospel in such a discipleship process is not to stop at just engaging at the material level, but to encourage a Christian spiritual journey that accepts the tension that growth in Christlikeness includes moving back and forth between a cerebral and a visceral experience.

There is much more that can be expanded and worked on, but recognizing the magnitude of such a study and the limitations and constraints of this paper, it is my hope that this paper will become a stepping stone for more deliberations to see a growing movement of indigenous Thai churches robustly articulating the power of the gospel within their own social and cultural frameworks. **MRT**

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Let the Gospel Enter the Heart Underneath the Kimono

Ricky and Winny Leung



Ricky and Winny Leung served as youth pastors in their home church in Hong Kong before joining OMF in 2014. During their first term, they were involved in the ministry of church revitalization in the rural area of Hokkaido, Japan.

Introduction

Through Samuel Lim's paper and presentation, we saw the vital role of ritual materiality in expressing the cosmology and spirituality of Thai folk Buddhists, and by giving new meanings to old rituals, these can contribute to the presentation of the gospel which helps to bridge one from Thai folk Buddhism to Christianity and to disciple these new converts at least in an essential early step. In one of the articles that Lim quoted in his paper, Paul DeNeui identified four areas where missionaries can learn from Thai folk Buddhists in doing contextualization. One of these is that "communication involves all signal systems." That means we should consider questions like, "When the Thai Folk Buddhist hears about Jesus for the first time, what do they actually perceive? Is the setting in the church familiar enough for them to be comfortable, and does it clearly communicate to an outsider? What type of music speaks to the heart of the Thai folk Buddhist?" Asking such questions makes it more likely that the gospel can be communicated through the five senses and through the spatial and temporal signal systems.[1] Lim's paper similarly illustrates how ceremony as one kind of ritual materiality can bring up the visual and material effect to communicate the power of the gospel and bridge the gap of faith between cerebral and the visceral experiences.

Similarities and differences between Japanese and Thai Buddhism

We cannot examine the differences between Buddhism in Thailand and Buddhism in Japan to any depth. In short, however, Thai Buddhism is Theravada/Hinayana while Japanese Buddhism is Mahayana. There were thirteen schools and fifty-six branches (十三宗五十六派) of traditional Buddhism in Japan.[2] Theravada Buddhism is the oldest form of Buddhism and has a monastic tradition while Mahayana does not.[3] Buddhism itself underwent a process of sinification, becoming confused with Chinese Confucian thought, before being introduced into Japan from China and Korea.[4] Prince Shotoku (聖徳太子, 574–622) officially adopted Buddhism as the religion for the elite of the court in the sixth century. By 686, Emperor Temmu (天武天皇, 631–686) ordered family altars (仏壇) to be erected in every home and Buddhism gradually developed into a cult of the dead. The early schools (Nara Nanto, six schools 奈良南都六宗) soon competed with the more magical and esoteric Tendai (天台宗) school of Saicho (最澄, 767–822) and Shingon school (真言宗) of Kukai (空海,774–835), founded in the eighth century with the founders going to China to learn from the Chinese masters. From the twelfth century onwards, Japanese Buddhism was further developed through indigenization, with the founding of Zen (禅宗), and the emergence of Amidism in the Jodo school (浄土宗) of Honen (法然, 1133–1212), the Jodo Shin school (浄土真宗) of Shinran (親鸞, 1173–1262) and Nichiren school (日蓮宗) of Nichiren (1222–1282).[5]

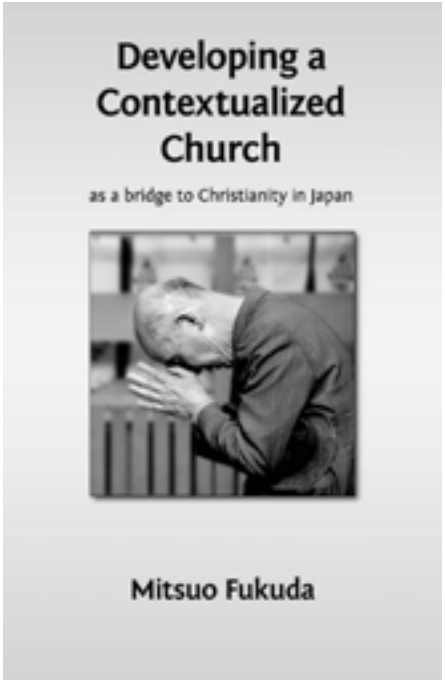
Since Hokkaido's history only goes back about 150 years, it doesn't have a long tradition of Buddhism in comparison with other parts of Japan. Having served in Hokkaido during our first term, we would like to share our understanding of Japanese Buddhism and interaction with Japanese non-believers to see whether approaches that work in Thailand can also be applied on Japanese soil. We would also like to respond to the high value placed upon harmony, which emphasizes hierarchy and groupism, and the extent to which this value affects Buddhist seekers and believers in Japan. The way forward will be to look more deeply into issues of Christian identity and national identity which have been touched upon in Lim's paper.

Japanese churches have rituals similar to those in the society at large but spend little time studying local religions

In Japan, there are festivals or ceremonies linked with Shinto or Buddhist traditions almost every month. In response to some "big" celebrations, like *Shogatsu* (New Year's Day), *Higan* (the day for visiting family graves and holding memorial services for deceased relatives and ancestors), local churches may hold a special service and memorial service respectively.[6] Shinto festivals related to blessing children so that they will have healthy growth are reflected in church ceremonies and services conferring a special blessing on children and child dedication ceremonies are held during worship services. But this does not mean that Japanese churches are keen on ritual materiality when interacting with the local culture.

In an interview, Prof. Yuki Hideo, at the time director of the NCC Center for the Study of Japanese Religions, explained that

> When Protestant Christianity came to Japan for the first time in the 19th century, the method of evangelizing or teaching the people about Christianity went like this: "The other religions are wrong; the other religions have distorted teachings. Christianity is the only good, true religion; so you must throw away your traditional beliefs and traditional way of life. Instead you must adopt Christian beliefs and the Western Christian way of life." Once the Japanese converted to Christianity they asked, "Why do we have to learn about the old religions? If we have some remnant of traditional religions, we must try to throw it away"… After World War II the attitude of Japanese Christians became narrower, because during the war compromise was very threatening. We thought, "From now on we must be much stronger in our Christian faith."[7]



In seeking to minister to Buddhists, we must find immediate and significant points of contact in the identification of a common problem—the problem of suffering. This point of contact allows Christians to approach Buddhists in humility as fellow sufferers.

Having said that, we also note that Japanese Christians need freedom to critically examine their Buddhist/Shintoist background and decide upon the inclusion, exclusion, or alteration of the old religious and social forms instead of simply throwing away their culture and old religions. (Some Buddhist notions are profoundly different from, and diametrically opposed to, the Christian faith while other Buddhist doctrines have at least a superficial similarity to Christian teaching. Some practices are so much like certain Christian teachings that they are often treated as though they were identical.)[8]

Influence of communities: Groupism in culture and MUGA in Buddhism

When reaching out to Asian people like those in Thailand and Japan, we should not neglect the strong influence of communities (in the case of Japan, it is groupism) and the concept of MUGA (non-self). In his paper, Lim states that "Understanding the Thai folk Buddhist cosmology is important for any gospel engagement with Thai folk Buddhists because their worldview is interpreted through their notion of cosmology" (38). In the case of Japan, missionaries have to be aware of and tackle the strong hidden influence of groupism that results from the cosmology of Shinto and Buddhism. In our ministry as missionaries in Japan, we have come to know a retired seventy-year-old man who was very keen about studying Christianity. He participates actively in church activities, and even invites his friends and neighbors to the church events. However, when asked whether he would like to become a Christian himself, he replied, "I am the eldest son in my family. My family members come to my house for ancestor memorial service every year. I may become a Christian in another ten years after all my relatives have passed away." This is not an uncommon reply when we ask a Japanese to become a Christian. Family and community influence is the major stumbling block for Japanese to become Christians. Instead of one's own interests, interests of family and others are put as a first priority.[9] The meaning of one's existence depends on family and group. In Buddhist teachings, denying the existence of the individual self is important in order to overcome personal suffering.[10]

Not only does groupism influence one's decision about conversion, it also impacts leadership selection decisions in both Thai and Japanese Buddhist contexts. An interesting comparison of the necessary attributes and selection approaches of a Christian leader in the Northeastern Thai and Japanese Buddhist contexts reflects how groupism affects leader selection decisions. Buddhists expect that anyone aspiring to a leadership position will receive local acceptance and recognition of their legitimacy and authority. To gain acceptance, the potential leader is expected not only to have qualified leadership characteristics, but also to demonstrate competency in his knowledge of the local religious and cultural matters as well as the ability to lead people to live harmoniously in the context.[11] Similarly, in Japan, the leaders function as spiritual parents. The fundamental qualification for leaders is the ability to listen to God on their own, in their daily lives, and help others listen to God. The former Prime Minister, Yoshihiko Noda, gave a speech on his choice for a new executive party lineup, which showed vividly how the Japanese choose their leaders. He expressed that

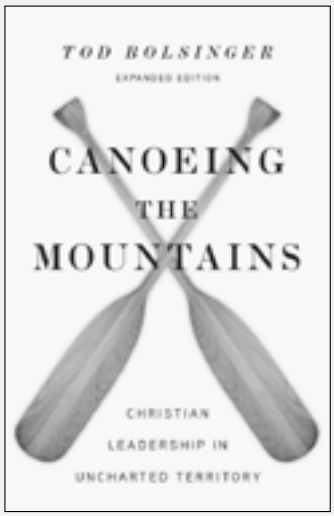
one of the ideal Japanese leadership styles was creating harmony in a group. One of the strong points of the Japanese workers in international projects of cooperation is being the facilitator who makes a mutual agreement for the team. This function is also a traditional Japanese leadership style for a family, in local community, and even in the national government.[12] Thus, groupism not only strongly influences conversion decisions, but, in the long run, also impacts discipleship training. This should always be taken into account when reaching out to Asian non-believers.

Dealing with the issue of "suffering"

When thinking about evangelism or theology in Asia, the historical and social background of the country should not be neglected. "What does your God think of these sufferings?" is a question that missionaries in Japan are asked from time to time. Soon after the Hokkaido Eastern Iburi Earthquake happened in September 2018, a Japanese friend asked, "How could a merciful God, who created the world, allow this earthquake to happen? Did he make it happen?" As Lim explains, how a religion is able to "fulfill different practical needs in daily living" (35) is a big concern for Asian seekers. A Buddhist scholar, Bhikkhu Buddhadasa, mentions that "God as creator is known in Buddhism under the term '*avijja*'. This means the lack of knowledge, or ignorance. Ignorance is the power of nature which is the cause of all existing things and as such the cause of suffering."[13] Buddhists have concluded that though he is not wicked, God did an evil thing by creating things. Though Shintoism and Buddhism are clearly different in their functions, the rituals and practices of both religions express the inner animistic assumption of the Japanese that one is able to control the spirit world in order to obtain well-being for the present and the future. Ritual and materiality may be, as Lim states, a "tangible and visible way" to serve as a reminder of "what is known about the way the world is, the quality of the emotional life it supports, and the way one ought to behave" (36). However, in seeking to minister to Buddhists, we must find immediate and significant points of contact in the identification of a common problem—the problem of suffering. This point of contact allows Christians to approach Buddhists in humility as fellow sufferers, in other words, inviting them to come with us along the true path to peace as we express the tangible love of Christ.[14]

The danger of syncretism and the dilemma of building identity

The last point that we would like to respond to from Lim's paper relates to "the balance of using Buddhist ritual and materiality." On one hand, as mentioned in the paper, "The veneer of Buddhism practiced through ritual materiality plays a significant role in that it provides avenues for the strengthening of Thai identity by surfacing religious allegiance through one's engagement in ritual materiality" (36). On the other hand, apart from regional differences, we should also be cautious about how much and what kind of ritual materiality can be borrowed. Henning Wrogemann notes that symbols are easily identifiable and therefore well-suited to function as a means of expression or evoking a sense of group identity. But, as he also points out, they can be used to exclude other people. This happens when individual symbols are used in such a way as to assert the foreignness of others. Therefore, we must first consider the historical context.[15] The website www.christianaggression.org reports how a Christian missionary has used all kinds of Hindu symbols, Sanskrit terminology, and Hindu practices in trying to make the Christian gospel understandable in India. Hindu-activists who oppose Christian mission work in general have sharply criticized this approach. Christian efforts at inculturation are thus interpreted as an activity by which spiritual violence is done to Hindus and that contributes to the destruction of Hindu traditions.[16]



Canoeing the Mountains: Christian Leadership in Uncharted Territory

By Tod Bolsinger. Downers Grove: IVP, 2015, expanded edition. ISBN 978-0830841264. 250pp.

Reviewed by Eunice Au

What do you do when you realize the objective you were aiming for is completely unattainable and actually totally inappropriate? This is the exact challenge the Lewis and Clark expedition team faced when they reached the Rocky Mountains and discovered that, not only was there no easily navigable waterway from the Mississippi River to the Pacific Ocean, there was no continuous water route at all! This book engagingly addresses the question of Christian leadership in uncharted territory, provides solid principles for devising answers to this question, and supplies a study guide to help readers respond when facing their own leadership challenges.

Tod Bolsinger combines lessons from Lewis and Clark's exploration, present day examples, and his scriptural passion for the mission of Christ to offer leadership principles for facing situations that are unlike anything that had been anticipated or previously experienced. He helps the reader understand and meet the challenges of uncharted territory and shows the value competence and credibility have in establishing a baseline of trust for those who are lead. As he demonstrates, leaders must acquire new skills when their road leads in wildly different directions than expected.

You will find this book helpful whether you lead change because of organizational responsibilities or are discovering a need to adapt practices because previous training doesn't work in your current context. I found this book an engaging read with a good balance of real-life examples and biblical concepts that helped me grow both in my capacity to face challenge and in my willingness to embrace an "adventure-or-die" mindset.



At the Uchimura Kanzo Memorial Stone Church

Of course, Lim correctly states that we should not ignore the fact that Asian believers "are actively engaged with the tangible and material because these are what shapes the character of their faith among other competing belief systems" (36). The concept of "To be Thai is to be Buddhist" is strong. This is very similar to the thinking of Japanese theologian Kanzo Uchimura when, in 1926, he wrote his famous essay, "Two J's," in which he proclaimed:[17]

> I love two J's and no third;
> one is Jesus, and the other is Japan.
> I don't know which I love more,
> Jesus or Japan.
> I am hated by my countrymen for
> Jesus' sake as *yaso* (Christian), and I am
> disliked by foreign missionaries for
> Japan's sake as national and narrow.
> Even if I lose all my friends,
> I cannot lose Jesus and Japan.

Both the Thai and the Japanese are closely attached to their community for their identity. We agree that ritual materiality is only a first step for young Christians, and that it is not sufficient and should not be relied on too much. The lesson of *fumie* (trampling on the crucified Jesus image during the Tokugawa period when Christianity was harshly suppressed) may serve as a good reminder about what we rely on to know our true identity in Christ. Galatians 2:20 is a good verse as an identity statement. "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (NIV). It is both Paul's "Declaration of Dependence" on Christ and contains a concise summation of the gospel. It also affirms the crucial fact that God loves the individual, who is here seen as so significant that God is willing to die even for *the one*. What is key here is the object of our dependency: Jesus Christ is the Lord.[18] **MRT**

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[1] Paul DeNeui, "Contextualizing with Thai folk Buddhists," in *Sharing Jesus in the Buddhist World*, ed. David Lin and Steve Spaulding (Pasadena: William Carey, 2003), 131–4.

[2] "日本の仏教," https://ja.wikipedia.org/wiki/日本の仏教 (accessed 11 September 2019). In 1939, the Japanese Government passed the Religious Bodies Law (宗教団体法) which placed religious organizations directly under the control of the government from the following year. The thirteen schools and fifty-six branches were grouped into twenty-eight schools. After World War II, the Religious Bodies Law was repealed and on 28 December 1945, the Religious Juridical Persons Law (宗教法人令) was issued and its implementation in 1951 gave a green light to total religious freedom. As of 31 December 2017, the Japanese Buddhist school with the largest number of adherents is Jodo (浄土宗) with 22,627,000 adherents. The second and third largest schools are namely Nichiren (日蓮宗, 11,598,000 adherents) and Shingon (真言宗, 5,360,000 adherents). 宗教年鑑 (平成30年版), Agency for Cultural Affairs, Government of Japan, http://www.bunka.go.jp/tokei_hakusho_shuppan/hakusho_nenjihokokusho/shukyo_nenkan/pdf/h30nenkan.pdf (accessed 20 September 2019).

[3] Kyle Faircloth, "Mission to Buddhists," in *Theology and Practice of Mission: God, the Church and the Nations*, ed. Bruce Riley Ashford (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2011), 252–3. Kyle named some basic philosophical teachings of Theravada Buddhism like *Anicca* (nothing is permanent), *Dukkha* (existence is suffering), *Anatta* (there is no personal soul), the Four Noble Truths, and the Noble Eight-fold Path.

[4] Mitsuo Fukuda, *Developing a Contextualized Church As a Bridge to Christianity in Japan* (Wide Margin: 2012). [Kindle edition]

[5] Mark Dominey, "Anätman as a Metaphor for Japan: The Challenge of a Buddhist Non-self Culture for Missions," in *Sharing Jesus in the Buddhist World*, ed. David Lin and Steve Spaulding (Pasadena: William Carey, 2003), 185–90. Dominey explains in his article how the law which banned Christianity in the Tokugawa regime (1600–1868) legally linked families to the neighborhood Buddhist temples and the modern funerary cult developed. As he says, "Japanese Buddhism, as it is popularly known, can surely be characterized as the most simplified and least troublesome path to buddhahood. This is not merely because of Mahäyäna's reliance on *tariki* (salvation through the merciful efforts of boddhisatvas), but the path of austerities has been whittled down by successive schools of thought to such an extent that most Japanese priests now marry, many eat meat, and (in the case of the Jödo Shin sect) it is popularly believed that one merely has to declare, '*Namu Amida Butsu*!' ('Praise be to Amithabha!') a *single time* (as opposed to the more constant chanting found in other sects such as Nichiren) in order to assure oneself of future buddhahood. For most, enlightenment is not attainable in this life, but is guaranteed after death on the basis of the rites performed by the descendants…. 'becoming a Buddha' in Japan is absolutely synonymous with death. But even then there is no real 'extinguishing' … of the individual, but a continued existence as a buddha with a unique funerary name (*kaimyö*) signifying enlightenment." Dominey, "Anätman as a Metaphor for Japan," 189.

[6] "Customs, Festivals, and Observances: The Japanese Year," Nippon Communications Foundation (14 July 2014), https://www.nippon.com/en/features/h10010/customs-festivals-and-observances-the-japanese-year.html (accessed 11 September 2019).

[7] "Christianity and Japanese Culture – Two Interviews with Yuki Hideo," *Japanese Religions* 38, nos. 1 and 2 (Spring and Fall 2013): 84, http://www.japanese-religions.jp/publications/assets/JR38%201&2_Yuki,%20Interview%20JCAN.pdf (accessed 11 September 2019).

[8] David H. Hesselgrave, "Reaching Japanese Buddhists: Where Do We Start If We Want to Do Better?," *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 10, no. 3 (July 1993): 140–1, https://www.ijfm.org/PDFs_IJFM/10_3_PDFs/Hesselgrave.pdf (accessed 14 October 2019).

[9] 勝本正實 (Katsumoto Masami), ≪知っておきたい：日本の宗教とキリスト教≫ (いのちのことば社：2018), 60.

[10] Mark Dominey, "Anätman as a Metaphor for Japan," 191.

[11] Chansamone Saiyasak, "Understanding and Strategizing Christian Leadership Development for the Thai Buddhist Context," in *Developing Indigenous Leaders: Lessons in Mission from Buddhist Asia*, ed. Paul H. DeNeui (Pasadena: William Carey, 2013), 141–2.

[12] Mitsuo Fukuda, "Empowering Fourth Generation Disciples: Grassroots Leadership Training in Japan and Beyond," in *Developing Indigenous Leaders*, 60.

[13] Faircloth, "Mission to Buddhists," 255.

[14] Faircloth, "Mission to Buddhists," 242.

[15] Henning Wrogemann, "Is Inculturation Permissible? Concerning Symbolic Forms and Their Use," in *Intercultural Theology Vol. One, Intercultural Hermenutics* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2016), 97.

[16] Wrogemann, "Is Inculturation Permissible?," 98.

[17] Shibuya Hiroshi and Chiba Shin, eds., *Living for Jesus and Japan: the Social and Theological Thought of Uchimura Kanzo* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013).

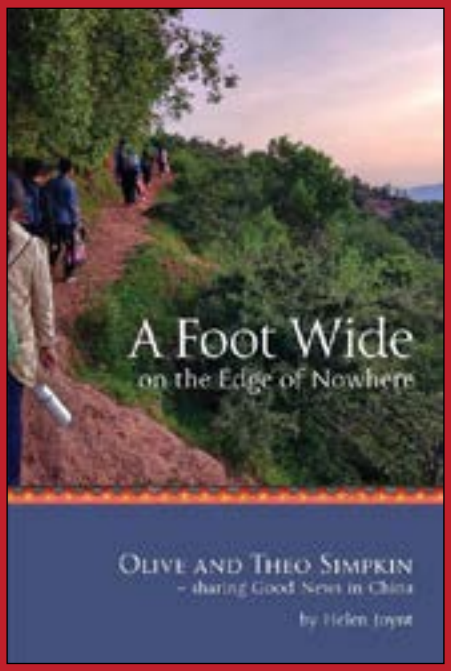
[18] Dominey, "Anätman as a Metaphor for Japan," 201.

Ritual materiality is only a first step for young Christians, and it is not sufficient and should not be relied on too much.

A Foot Wide on the Edge of Nowhere: Olive and Theo Simpkin—Sharing Good News in China

By Majorie Helen Joynt. Wattle Glen, Victoria: Helen Joynt, 2019. ISBN 9780648384908. 400pp.

Reviewed by Claire McConnell



This is a book I had been anticipating for quite some time. My own personal story with the people on its pages began in 1981 when I was a student in Belfast. The Ireland OMF Secretary at that time was David Strachan, who served with his wife Dorothy. Their exuberance, passion, energy, encouragement, and genuine interest in students left an impact on our lives for mission that has persisted until today. At some point, I had heard that Dorothy's parents had been CIM missionaries in China and that she had been born there. I had even heard the name "Simpkin". And I knew that a few years ago Dorothy had gone with her sister to visit the places of her childhood in China, including the areas where her parents had served. But my knowledge was sketchy as I had not taken the time to hear this story in full from my friend.

As archivist at OMF in Singapore, one of my tasks is to file away old papers and photos. One day in February 2018, I was dealing with papers from Saiburi hospital in Thailand when I came across photos taken by my friend David and a Dr. Simpkin. I knew David and Dorothy had both worked there; it was where they met and married. But could this Dr. Simpkin be related? Seeing many other documents signed by Dr. David Simpkin, my curiosity was piqued and I got out the old records of Dorothy's parents, Theo and Olive Simpkin. I thus learned that they had three children: David Martin, Dorothy Hollis, and Majorie Helen. Further research confirmed that David Simpkin was Dorothy's brother. Whilst this satisfied my curiosity, I was nonetheless feeling a bit guilty at "wasting" this time for personal interest—I had even roped in my husband, Walter. But God was at work. The next morning when Walter opened his email, there was one, redirected from the Melbourne office, from a Helen Joynt. The email trail revealed that she was the third of the Simpkin children—Marjorie Helen. Helen was in the process of writing a biography of her parents, the final result of which is *A Foot Wide on the Edge of Nowhere.*

Perhaps it is my personal connection with the book that made it such a delight to read, but I rather think it has more to do with the skill of the writer. Helen has vividly brought to life, not just her parents' experiences, but also the world in which they lived.

She helpfully begins the story with accounts of the journeys of her ancestors to Australia in the early to mid-1800s. Having carefully researched both sides of the family history of these early immigrants and the times in which they lived, Helen paints a realistic picture of the hardships and joys experienced by pioneers to the new world of Australia. Life was difficult, but the faith of these early settlers was real and strong. I found this backstory to the main missionary story particularly helpful as I had never considered immigration to be part of the context from which missionaries went out in the early days of the modern missionary movement. Placing it in this context helped me to realise that many early missionaries came from the stock of pioneers who had skills and endurance that would be tested to their fullest in the pioneering missionary environment into which many of them went. Long journeys away from family and homeland, with little expectation to return, were not unknown to these families.

As the book develops, we first meet Theo and then Olive. The story of these young people, their journey with God to China, and their journey together is told in a way that reveals their deep faith, dependence, and obedience to the Lord. Personal desires and hopes are set aside as they follow the path before them. After all, it is only in obedience that lasting, true joy can be found. This is a theme developed throughout the book which gives many examples of its truth.

Joynt draws from a rich collection of material as she follows the story of her parents. Both Theo and Olive wrote in-depth letters to family and friends containing vivid accounts of life and the people of Southwest China. The struggles of language learning, travel, provision of daily necessities, and the dangers of brigands and civil war are all brought to life in a captivating manner as Joynt weaves information gathered from many years of letters to produce a coherent and compelling story. If you want to understand what life was really like for pioneer missionaries in early twentieth-century China, this book is a great place to start.

The picture painted is not romanticised; the struggles and disappointments are real. The Simpkins endured long separations from each other and from their children. At times, trust in their loving God was stretched nearly to the breaking point. On multiple occasions they had to flee for their lives, leaving most of their possessions behind. When the final decision for the missionaries to withdraw from China came in 1951, they were some of the last to be able to leave.

China was not the end of their journey with their Lord or the CIM, and Joynt takes us through the readjustment years back in Australia. Their highest desire was to serve the Lord and tell others of him. This passion was passed on to all of their children, a passion I experienced first-hand in Dorothy.

The book is delightfully illustrated with wonderful photos taken by Theo, a keen photographer. I was delighted to see not only a young Dorothy but also more recent photos of her with Helen on the trip back to their childhood home. It was wonderful too to hear stories of the continued witness of the churches of the pioneer work.

That all might be "to the glory of God" is a common desire of past CIM and current OMF missionaries. By telling this story of her parents, Helen has given readers an opportunity to glorify God. So why don't you read it too and join them?