

Foreword by David B. Barrett

# WORLD MISSION IN THE WESLEYAN SPIRIT

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Edited by

Darrell L. Whiteman & Gerald H. Anderson

A clear survey and analysis of Wesleyan missions and mission studies, written by thirty-one authors in five continents. I wholeheartedly welcome this scholarly work as an excellent tool to reflect on world mission in today's context.

—**Jan A. B. Jongeneel**  
Utrecht University

Even a single good essay on “World Mission in the Wesleyan Spirit” would be welcome. That the editors have here assembled thirty-one outstanding essays on the subject is a great tribute to them, an enormous gift to readers, and an enduring legacy for the world Church. John and Charles Wesley would be pleased. I predict that this book will serve a vital role in every corner of the world parish for years to come.

—**Jonathan J. Bonk**  
*Executive Director*  
Overseas Ministries Study Center

This volume is a veritable ‘Who’s Who’ of Wesleyan missiologists which promises to be one of the most important books in Protestant missiology to be published during this decade. It will be a classic text read by pastors, missionaries, mission executives, and students of mission the world over. It will be required reading in my missions courses.

—**Charles Van Engen**  
*School of Intercultural Studies*  
Fuller Theological Seminary

This volume represents a significant milestone in mission studies and fills a void in the scholarly literature in missiology. The editors have assembled an impressive list of international contributors. This tour de force makes *World Mission in the Wesleyan Spirit* a veritable goldmine. It is a magnificent service to world Christianity!

—**Tite Tiénou**  
*Dean and Professor of Theology of Mission*  
Trinity Evangelical Divinity School

The American Society of Missiology Series seeks to publish scholarly work of high merit and wide interest on numerous aspects of missiology—the study of Christian mission in its historical, social, and theological dimensions. Able proposals on new and creative approaches to the practice and understanding of mission will receive close attention from the ASM Series Committee.

*American Society of Missiology Series, No. 44*

# **WORLD MISSION IN THE WESLEYAN SPIRIT**

Edited by

DARRELL L. WHITEMAN and GERALD H. ANDERSON

Foreword by DAVID B. BARRETT

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# PREFACE TO THE SERIES

**T**he purpose of the American Society of Missiology Series is to publish—without regard for disciplinary, national, or denominational boundaries—scholarly works on missiological themes from the entire spectrum of scholarly pursuits relevant to Christian mission, which is always the focus of books in the Series.

By “mission” is meant the effort to effect passage over the boundary between faith in Jesus Christ and its absence. In this understanding of mission, the basic functions of Christian proclamation, dialogue, witness, service, worship, liberation, and nurture are of special concern. And in that context questions arise, including: How does the transition from one cultural context to another influence the shape and interaction between these dynamic functions, especially in regard to the cultural and religious plurality that comprises the global context of Christian life and mission?

The promotion of scholarly dialogue among missiologists, and among missiologists and scholars in other fields of inquiry, may involve the publication of views that some missiologists cannot accept, and with which members of the Editorial Committee themselves do not agree. Manuscripts published in the Series, accordingly, reflect the opinions of their authors and are not understood to represent the position of the American Society of Missiology or of the Editorial Committee. Selection is guided by such criteria as intrinsic worth, readability, coherence, and accessibility to a range of interested persons and not merely to experts or specialists.

The ASM Series seeks to publish scholarly works of high merit and wide interest on numerous aspects of missiology—the scholarly study of mission. Able presentations on new and creative approaches to the practice and understanding of mission will receive close attention.

THE ASM SERIES COMMITTEE  
Jonathan J. Bonk  
Angelyn Dries, O.S.F.  
Scott W. Sunquist

# FOREWORD

One gloomy morning in the year 1904, my Taid (Welsh for grandfather) Richard Davies crossed the road and entered his tiny Calvinistic Methodist chapel in Barmouth, Wales. Things looked dreary as he began his sermon. Suddenly, three people in the small congregation stood up and then fell flat on the floor. Three more followed suit. Most of the congregation followed likewise, shouting and singing in what would later be called “being slain in the Spirit.” Rushing to a phone, Davies called his Wesleyan ministerial colleagues across Wales. Astounded and amazed, he heard that all were at that moment experiencing the same phenomena. Thus began the noted Welsh Revival. During the next six months, there were 100,000 new converts to Christ, sometimes amounting to thousands every day. Several hundred became foreign missionaries to Asia, Africa, Europe, and South America. Then one gloomy day in 1905, the Revival suddenly stopped and the phenomena never returned.

## **RECORDING THE EVIDENCE**

Some eighty years later, the Mission Society for United Methodists was launched in Dallas, Texas, in 1985, and I was privileged to preach the inaugural sermon. The search for data and explanations goes on. The Welsh Revival is recorded today by Wesleyan Methodists in nine publications in Welsh and many others in English. The whole course of Methodism and the Wesleyan movement worldwide can thus be followed from the shelves of the world’s fifty thousand biggest libraries. There we find a total of 6,330 distinct Wesleyan publications in English, 440 of which are books or tracts written by Wesley himself and other ministers. Every publication has now been catalogued and documented—books, booklets, letters, gospels, Scriptures, journals, dissertations, maps, videos, CDs, DVDs, musical scores, sound recordings, archives, reports, and

surveys. We now add the 31 ground-breaking essays in this volume, *World Mission in the Wesleyan Spirit*, bringing the total to 6,361.

## **REACHING TWO HUNDRED FIFTY LANGUAGES**

The contributing authors are familiar in great detail with some aspect and culture of the Wesleyan world. They are multilingualists, which is essential to such study. In fact, study of the progress on this worldwide movement is greatly assisted by the publishing of Wesleyan materials, listing their publications from the year 1738 to the present. In addition to the works written in English, Wesleyan materials have been published in the following languages.

In the German language we find 143 Wesleyan books and other publications; Korean 78 publications; French 53; Spanish 49; Japanese 28; Swedish 26; Dutch 20; Portuguese 16; Chinese 14; Welsh 9; Norwegian 7; Italian 6; Russian 4; Bulgarian 4; Latin 4 (one written by Wesley himself); Hindi 3 (one being *Life of Wesley* in 2003); and Greek 3. There are 40 languages with only two publications, and another 100 languages with only one publication—a total of more than 150 languages, not including those languages which have not yet been recorded.

## **LANGUAGES WITH NO REVIVAL PHENOMENA**

One puzzling observation is that of the world's 407 lingua francas (each with over a million speakers), the majority have no Wesleyan materials: there are at least 50 more very large languages with no Wesleyan materials—Arabic, Swahili, Hausa, Bengali, Marathi, Punjabi, Urdu, Somali, Javanese, Dari, Persian, Amharic, Sinhalese, and more than 30 others.

The underlying reason for this situation is primarily the absence of strong Protestant missions, Methodists in particular, in these areas. In many such cases, we find strong Roman Catholic missions, most of which center on and parallel Wesley's counterparts—Francis of Assisi, Dominic, Loyola, Xavier, Thomas à Kempis, Las Casas, Teresa, and innumerable other Wesley-types. It should also be noted that Wesley materials are well known in several Roman Catholic circles. Catholic libraries invariably have surprising numbers on these subjects.

## **STRATEGIZING FOR WESLEYAN WORLD MISSION**

This analysis poses a major problem for the Wesleyan approach to world mission. The total Wesleyan influence of all kinds—laity, clergy, missions, publications, Scriptures, finance, *et alia*—touches around 30 percent of the task of world mission. Catholics, Orthodox, and their own influence is around 30 percent as well, and has extensive influence in another 30 percent, often sympathetic to the Wesleyan 30 percent. This means in fact that both 30 percent (60 percent together) should be cooperating rather than ignoring the 40 percent remaining unreached or unevangelized areas and peoples who currently have no access to Christianity, Christ, or the Gospel.

## **PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE IN GLOBAL MISSION**

A very abbreviated statement on the subject of our 31 new essays will now be made. This takes the form of a tiny modification of a diagram of the whole extent of Christian history which has been published in my book, *World Christian Trends* (2001), on page 88. That diagram portrays the relative size of the Christian mission throughout the two thousand years of Christian history. We modify the changes bringing the expansion of Christianity up to date during the last one hundred fifty years. The purpose of the diagram is to utilize the detailed statistics produced by all churches. The whole purpose of such statistics is not to indulge in triumphalism, but to illustrate the progress of the three-fold graphic depiction: 1) to describe the historical past of the Christian movement; 2) to describe the numerical requirements of the present, such as publicity and arrangement for the many major current conferences; and 3) to present the churches and agencies as they plan for the future.

The modification of the contemporary Christian scene shows the central parts of Protestantism and Catholicism separated by a band illustrating Christian outreach with a broken line—Catholicism above the line, Protestants below. This illustrates the endeavour of one side to convert or at least to recognize the existence of the other. The situation depicts the Wesleyan world's relation with the Catholics—as outlined above the roughly 30 percent of the resources for Wesleyan world mission, 30 percent for Catholic resources, leaving 40 percent unreached

by either bloc. It is a shockingly similar situation to the global situation of that of 105 years ago in the year 1904.

### **A DETAILED LOOK AT WESLEYAN RESOURCES**

The table on page xv sets out a major component of one aspect of this global mission—the deployment of church members. There is a startling number of new developments, especially the huge numbers since 1965 of Catholic and Protestant Charismatics. One line therefore has been described at this point—the Catholic Charismatics, now numbering 120 million. They penetrate communions and are active with their Protestant counterparts, so that in any statement of global influence they are close to sharing in the Wesleyan model.

### **UNDERSTANDING TOTALS**

The table ends with five different statements on the number of Wesleyans in the world. These are not contradictory, but arise from differing meanings. Thus “doubly-counted” is not a statement of incompetence: it can also mean “doubly-committed.” The reader is thus invited to examine the exact meaning of the words as derived.

### **SUMMARY**

These 31 essays are not only absorbing reading, they illuminate the current worldwide situation and its call to new kinds of collaboration.

David B. Barrett  
Richmond, Virginia  
April 2009

## WESLEYAN INFLUENCE AND AFFILIATION TODAY

(with tentative or estimated figures)

Rank a	Organization b	Initials c	Members d	% Wesleyan e	Wesleyans f
1.	World Methodist Council	<i>WMC</i>	70,226,000	<b>100.0</b>	70,226,000
2.	Independent Methodist Churches	<i>IMC</i>	3,000,000	<b>100.0</b>	3,000,000
3.	Christian Holiness Association	<i>CHA</i>	5,000,000	<b>92.0</b>	4,600,000
4.	International Moravian Unity of Brethren	<i>IMUB</i>	1,042,000	<b>90.0</b>	900,000
5.	Global Network of Mission Structures	<i>GNMS</i>	7,700,000	<b>70.0</b>	5,390,000
6.	Protestant Charismatics	<i>ICO</i>	100,000,000	<b>60.0</b>	60,000,000
7.	World Evangelical Alliance	<i>WEA</i>	420,000,000	<b>30.0</b>	126,000,000
8.	Pentecostal World Fellowship	<i>PWF</i>	52,821,000	<b>14.0</b>	7,390,000
9.	World Council of Churches	<i>WCC</i>	560,000,000	<b>12.5</b>	70,000,000
10.	Catholic Charismatic Renewal	<i>ICCRS</i>	120,000,000	<b>10.0</b>	12,000,000
11.	Christian World Communions	<i>CCWC</i>	2,149,000,000	<b>3.5</b>	75,228,000
12.	Global Christian Forum	<i>GCF</i>	2,200,000,000	<b>3.4</b>	75,228,000
	Total Wesleyans including doubly-counted or doubly-committed				509,962,000
	Doubly-counted Wesleyans in Western countries (Europe, Northern America)				214,088,000
	Doubly-counted African, Amerindian, Asian Wesleyan-type				80,000,000
	Total of Wesleyans and Wesleyan-types in all lands				215,874,000
	<b>Total Wesleyans</b>			<b>1.9</b>	<b>130,000,000</b>
	<b>Global population</b>				<b>6,828,157,000</b>

Legend:

- a. rank (shown in column e in descending order of commitment to Wesleyanism)
- b. organization
- c. initials of b
- d. members of b whether Wesleyan or not
- e. percent Wesleyan in b
- f. Wesleyans in the world (including doubly-counted where stated)

# INTRODUCTION

In 1984, the Mission Society for United Methodists was founded by a group of United Methodist pastors and lay leaders in the United States. This mission-sending organization was created as an alternative to the official General Board of Global Ministries of The United Methodist Church, and therefore did not have the formal endorsement of The United Methodist Church. From those humble beginnings, God has blessed the growth of this organization so that twenty-five years later, there are 215 missionaries serving in thirty-five countries around the world, supported by 322 churches and 5,334 individuals. The Mission Society has become a global entity responding to spiritual and material needs throughout the world. While retaining its Wesleyan ethos and heritage, The Mission Society has expanded beyond its initial United Methodist orbit. Today, it is working with fourteen different denominations and independent churches, and its missionaries come from many denominational traditions. Therefore, in 2005 the “for United Methodists” part of the original name was dropped in favor of simply The Mission Society.

This collection of essays commemorates the twenty-fifth anniversary of The Mission Society. On this occasion, we want to take a look at world mission in the past and the present, with anticipation of future directions and opportunities. God’s mission in the world can be understood through several perspectives, each of which is needed to understand God’s mission in its fullness. Therefore, we have organized these essays into the following categories: biblical, theological, historical, cultural, and strategic perspectives.

What does it mean to do and to understand world mission in the Wesleyan spirit? These essays will fill out in both broad strokes and considerable detail how a Wesleyan theological orientation shapes our practice of mission. For example, woven through the fabric of these essays is John Wesley’s concept of prevenient grace, the notion that God is at work in every people group revealing something of God’s self and nature, preparing them for saving grace and eventually sanctifying grace. The

Wesleyan spirit in world mission is also seen in the integration of evangelism with social ministries in what is frequently called holistic mission. In practical everyday activity, this means that we hold together both the Great Commission and the Great Commandment. Jesus did not divorce calling people to repentance and eternal life from responding to their daily needs, to their broken bodies, and to their damaged spirits. Mission in the Wesleyan spirit has held these two dimensions of the Gospel together in creative tension, and continues to do so today. This is the legacy, empowered by the Holy Spirit, that motivates The Mission Society in all it does.

In his inaugural sermon at the dedication of the Mission Society for United Methodists on May 6, 1985, David B. Barrett said it was “like being present, in New Testament days, on that occasion in A.D. 45 when the church in Antioch met to commission and send out Barnabas and Saul on their first missionary journey . . . with its sense of excitement, its sense of expectancy, its sense of being in the direct line of God’s will.”

*Time* magazine described Dr. Barrett’s *World Christian Encyclopedia* as “a miracle.” Once again, Dr. Barrett is party to “a miracle”—this time to celebrate what God has done with The Mission Society. Joining with him in this celebration, thirty-one scholars and church leaders from Asia, Africa, Latin America, North America, and the United Kingdom have contributed to this anniversary volume which marks a milestone in the endeavor of an agency that seeks to advance the mission of Jesus Christ “so that the world may believe” (John 17:23) and “for the healing of the nations” (Rev. 22:2). There is still a sense of excitement, a sense of expectancy, and a sense of being in the direct line of God’s will.

Darrell L. Whiteman  
Gerald H. Anderson

# PART ONE

## Biblical Perspectives

**I**N THIS SECTION, WE RECEIVE INSIGHTS FROM SCRIPTURE that help us understand God’s mission in the world. Daniel Arichea reminds us that the way Jesus lived and interacted with people and his culture is the best model for Asians to understand how to become followers of Jesus. As a model, Jesus reminds us of the importance of identifying with the poor, how to both embrace and critique culture, and how to interact with people from other religious traditions. Arichea reminds us that theological Christology is of less importance to Asians than is practical Christology, for “explaining the human and divine nature of Christ is not as important as discovering how Jesus himself is pertinent to the actual situations of Asians.”

Dean Flemming helps us see that the Jerusalem Council debate in Acts 15, which laid down guidelines concluding that Gentiles don’t have to become Jews in order to follow Jesus, is an excellent paradigm for doing contextualization today in a Wesleyan spirit. Wesley’s emphasis on Scripture and experience, for example, as seen in the Jerusalem Council debate, reminds us that “our theology does little good unless it is demonstrated in the everyday lives of God’s people.” The many parallels between Wesleyan theology and the debate and conclusions of the Jerusalem Council give us good guidelines for contextualizing theology in diverse cultural and religious contexts.

We turn to the Old Testament story of Jonah for the final chapter in this section. Here we see Jonah portrayed as a reluctant missionary, but more important, as Sandra Richter notes, we see that God, “as the lord of the cosmos, cares about every man, woman, and child on this planet.”

World mission informed by Scripture is fundamental to a Wesleyan understanding of mission, and in this section we see this clearly expressed in the person of Jesus, the debate of the Jerusalem Council, and in the story of Jonah.



# JESUS AS PARADIGM

## AN ASIAN PERSPECTIVE

*Daniel C. Arichea, Jr.*

### INTRODUCTION

Theology in Asia has been primarily patterned after the theology of the West. This is so because, with very few exceptions, Christianity came to Asia from the West, and theological education in Asia has been modeled after that of the West. For one thing, Asian theologians were sent for training to the countries of the colonizers.<sup>1</sup> For another thing, theological schools in Asia were patterned after theological schools in the West, with most of the teachers coming from the West as well.

### THE “PERSON” OF JESUS

This background is necessary in order to understand the development of Christological concerns in the Asian church. Three things can be mentioned. First, there was great interest in the “person” of Christ, especially as the second person in the Trinity. Is Jesus human or divine, and how is he related to the whole issue of the Trinity? This focus on the person of Christ has influenced Christology so much that even in addressing the relationship between Christianity and other religions, a great deal of attention is given to the relationship of Christ with religious personalities who are prominent in the living faiths of Asia.<sup>2</sup>

## **JESUS AS SAVIOR**

Second, the role of Jesus Christ that was considered as primary and most important is that of Savior, that is, one who saves people from sin and guarantees them a place in the eternal heavens. The Gospel that came to Asia was primarily addressed to individuals, urging them to make decisions for Jesus, which means accepting him as personal Savior and Lord. This focus on individual salvation made the Gospel otherworldly; it became a message of hope and comfort to people whose earthly existence was characterized by suffering and hopelessness. The Gospel message enabled them to endure all of life's trials and tribulations, and assured them glory and honor beyond this life. This world is, after all, not their final home; there is a world "somewhere beyond the blue" that is waiting for them.

## **JESUS AS JUDGE OF CULTURE**

Finally, a third observation: the Christian faith was understood as a judgment against receptor cultures.<sup>3</sup> The primary stance of the Western missionary movement was that of Christ against culture. More often than not, the receptor culture was regarded as anti-Christ and anti-Christian, and therefore part of the darkness that needed to be overcome by the light of Christ. People and communities who came to Christ must necessarily reject their own culture.

Culture in the Asian context is quite broad in its scope. In many countries, culture includes religion; in fact, culture and religion are so closely intertwined that it is impossible to separate them.<sup>4</sup> If the receptor culture was not acceptable as a vehicle of the Gospel, then what happened? Since the Gospel never comes disembodied, the result in most cases was for the Gospel to be proclaimed with the use of Western cultural categories; in many instances, the Gospel message and its Western garb were so closely intertwined that it was not possible to distinguish one from the other. And what happened to Asians who accepted the Gospel message? They also accepted the vehicle through which the Gospel came to them, and that vehicle was Western culture in one form or another. So Asians who became Christians became something that they were not: they became believers of a Western message and began to live within a Western cultural framework. The end result of all this was that Christ

was regarded as a foreigner, and the Christian faith was regarded as alien to Asia as well. As Phillips says, “It is one of the ironies of history that Christianity, which was born in Asia, has become ‘alien’ in its own home.”<sup>5</sup>

## **JESUS AS PARADIGM**

In the light of all of this, how should we do Christology in Asia today? There is a need to capture and put emphasis on the Jesus of the Gospels as paradigm for Asian Christian communities both collectively and individually. We Christians in Asia should be able to go beyond theoretical discussions and theological affirmations about Jesus Christ, and move toward a posture of *imitatio Christi* in both our attitude and behavior. It is not Christology per se, but “Christopraxis.” In the words of an Indonesian scholar, “Christopraxis is a Christology of action where truth is done and applied by mirroring the ministry and humanity of Christ.”<sup>6</sup> More accurately, it is “Jesu-praxis,” imitating Jesus, or in the words of 1 Peter, to “follow in his steps” (1 Pet. 2:21 GNT).

To achieve this, there needs to be a serious attempt to focus on the life and ministry of Jesus, which receives very little attention in the New Testament other than in the Gospels. For example, the main focus of Paul in his letters is the death, resurrection, and return of Christ.<sup>7</sup> While these are important especially for their salvific value, yet in the context of Asia, the life of Jesus has more meaning and significance. Jesus is revealed much more in his words and deeds while on earth than by his death, resurrection, and return. It is not that the role of Jesus as Savior from sin and as the giver of eternal life is discarded altogether. It is simply that for Jesus to be Savior from sin and the giver of eternal life, he must first of all be Savior for the present life.

Therefore, when we talk of Jesus as paradigm, we mean that his words and actions provide us with guidelines on what we should do as his followers in the distinct contexts in which we find ourselves in various parts of Asia.

## **RELATION WITH THE MARGINALIZED**

There are at least three areas in which this concept of Jesus as paradigm can be applied: marginalized people, culture, and religious plurality. So first we ask,

can Jesus be a paradigm for us as we consider the Asian situation in which so many people live in the margins and are regarded by society as secondary and insignificant? What can we glean from the Gospels?

One reason why the Jesus of the Gospels is so attractive to Asians is because he paid attention to people with whom Asians can identify: the poor, the sick, the forgotten, the outcasts, women, and children. He fed the hungry; he healed the sick; he raised the dead; he comforted the sorrowing. When John the Baptist sent people to ask Jesus whether he was the Messiah or not, his answer was, “Go back and tell John what you are hearing and seeing: the blind can see, the lame can walk, those who suffer from dreaded skin diseases are made clean, the deaf hear, the dead are brought back to life, and the Good News is preached to the poor” (Matt. 11:4–5 GNT). In the Beatitudes (Matt. 5:3–12 and Luke 6:20–26), God promises blessings to those who would be considered by society as undeserving of praise. Included among them are the poor. In Luke, Jesus is quoted as saying “Blessed are you poor.” In Matthew, this is rendered as “Blessed are the poor in spirit.” This does not spiritualize the problem of poverty but relates material poverty to spiritual poverty. People are “poor in spirit” because first of all they are materially poor. Because of their poverty, they find it extremely difficult or even impossible to fulfill the requirements of the Jewish religion.<sup>8</sup> But no matter. Jesus includes them among the blessed ones.

When we read the Gospels, we get the distinct impression that Jesus was always on the side of those who were despised and rejected by society as well as by organized religion; he identifies with them and works for their liberation. This is clearly seen both in his actions and his teachings. The Gospels present a Jesus who was with the *ochloi*, the crowds, and who interacted with all kinds of people in society, including those who were hated and despised, such as Zealots, tax collectors, prostitutes, and people afflicted with leprosy and other sicknesses.

Jesus’ identification with the poor and the oppressed has resulted in the development of various kinds of theologies that address the concern of the marginalized in society. Examples of these are the Minjung theology in Korea, Dalit theology in India, and the theology of struggle in the Philippines.<sup>9</sup> It is here where we see the importance of theological developments in Asia, where Asian values are taken seriously and where the Gospel is interpreted through Asian eyes and Asian hearts. While there is

a great deal of diversity in Asia, there is at least one common element in all the endeavors of doing theology in Asia, namely, the emphasis on the importance of people who are generally not given much importance by society. Jesus thus becomes the model for Christian life, and his teachings become the law of the faith community. It is this aspect of Christology that many Asian theologians are rediscovering.<sup>10</sup>

The one major problem in Asia, and in a real sense the root of all other problems, is poverty. In a document<sup>11</sup> circulated at the 2008 General Conference of The United Methodist Church, it was noted that “half of the world’s population—nearly 3 billion people—live on less than \$2 a day.”<sup>12</sup> Half of the 3 billion are Asians! Asia is rich in natural resources, but its people are poor. And the church in Asia is poor. If Christianity has to have an impact, it must address more vigorously this problem of poverty. Since the church is poor, it cannot simply have a ministry to the poor, but more appropriately, it must discover how to work with and among the poor. It must follow Jesus, who became poor for the sake of the world.

We Asians, particularly those in the Wesleyan tradition, need to remind ourselves not only of our New Testament roots, but of our Wesleyan roots. Once again we must have a serious conversation with John Wesley, who was truly concerned for the poor and throughout his entire ministry paid attention to the “least of these” in society.<sup>13</sup>

## **RELATION WITH CULTURE**

Second, how should Jesus be a paradigm for Asians as they live in the midst of diversity of cultures? Asia is a cultural minefield. One cannot move from one country to another without realizing the rich diversity that is Asia itself. For example, of the six thousand or so living languages in the world, more than half are in Asia. And of course, most of the religions of the world originated in Asia and continue to thrive in Asia.

In our endeavor to take Asian culture seriously and use it as a worthy and effective vehicle of the Gospel as it is proclaimed and lived out in Asia today, the Jesus of the Gospels once again becomes a model for us. Jesus took seriously Jewish culture and its demands. He regularly attended synagogue meetings. As a faithful Jew, he went regularly to Jerusalem to attend the required religious festivals.<sup>14</sup> Jesus’ sensitivity to culture is also

shown in his message, which he conveyed often with the use of cultural categories with which his Jewish audiences could identify. He used parables, many of which were taken from agricultural settings and very appropriate for rural Palestine. He talked about shepherds and sheep, landlords and tenants, the birds of the air, the grass of the fields, the mustard seed. Certainly one cannot read the Gospels without getting the impression that Jesus was at home in his own culture.

But Jesus did not observe cultural requirements blindly. In fact he subordinated culture to human need. When culture (even religious culture) conflicts with the fulfillment of human need, culture should be sacrificed, for after all, culture is secondary to human concerns. This is shown clearly in Jesus' attitude toward the Sabbath. In many cases he broke the rules of the Sabbath in order to respond to human need.<sup>15</sup>

Jesus' attitude toward culture has something important to say to us Asians. We need to believe and affirm that there is no such thing as Christian or un-Christian cultures. All cultures, including our own, have the potential of being used as vehicles and instruments of the Gospel. Nevertheless, in any culture there are elements that don't measure up to the standards of the Gospel and may prevent people from being faithful to the Gospel message. It is because of this that there is a need for a critical attitude toward culture in relation to the Gospel, and when necessary certain elements in culture must be either rejected or transformed to make sure that they conform to the Gospel's demands.

Jesus' attitude toward culture is therefore a good model for us Asians as we are confronted with the diversity of cultures and as we endeavor to use Asian categories to express our faith, whether these be in theological affirmations, church structures, art, music, or other avenues.<sup>16</sup>

It is inevitable however that questions related to these endeavors would arise. How far can we go in the utilization of nonbiblical cultures and still be faithful to the Gospel message? How far can we talk of an Asian Christ without compromising the real Christ as revealed in the Scriptures? Is it legitimate at all to put an Asian face to the Gospel?

Here Asians need to be in conversation with the Gospel of John: "The Word became a human being, . . . and lived among us" (John 1:14 GNT). Jesus, the Incarnate Word, became a Jew, a product of his day and time. His involvement in a specific language, a specific culture, and a specific geographical setting has the effect of sanctifying language, culture, and geography, and giving these earthly factors the potential of becoming

worthy vehicles of the Gospel message. The Word becoming incarnate in Galilee does not make Galilee special, but makes every place in the world a potential Galilee, that is, a scene of the Incarnation of the Word. The Word becoming incarnate within the Aramaic language does not make Aramaic special, but makes every language in the world a potential Aramaic, that is, a language that is worthy as a means of proclaiming the Gospel. The Word becoming incarnate within Jewish culture does not make Jewish culture special, but makes every culture in the world potentially worthy as an instrument of the Gospel.

Here Asians also need to be in conversation with the apostle Paul. In his message to the Athenians on Mars Hill (as recorded in Acts 17:22–31), he includes this quotation: “In him we live and move and have our being.” (NIV) This has become part of many prayers in the church. In its original setting, however, this saying is part of a poem to Zeus attributed to Epimenides the Cretan (about 600 B.C.E.):

They fashioned a tomb for thee, O holy and high one—  
The Cretans, always liars, evil beasts, idle bellies!  
But thou art not dead, thou livest and abidest for ever,  
For in thee, we live and move and have our being.

Paul takes this hymn to Zeus and uses it to refer to the God revealed in Jesus Christ. Since he was speaking to Athenian scholars, he quoted from their own literature.

Can Paul be a model for us? Are we brave enough to take our religious folklore and other traditional literature and apply them to the Christian God in much the same way that Paul did with Greek literature? Are we willing to locate within our culture literary types that are equivalent to the literary types in the Bible, use them in Bible translation, and utilize them as vehicles in the effective proclamation of the Gospel?

## **RELATION WITH OTHER COMMUNITIES OF FAITH**

Finally, a third point. How can Jesus be a paradigm for us Asian Christians in our dealings with people who belong to other religious traditions? Our concern is not primarily how Jesus should be proclaimed relevantly in the midst of religious diversity, but what Jesus can teach us Asians as we

live out our faith as a minority group among peoples belonging to various religious traditions.

This is no easy matter, especially considering the fact that Jesus was never directly confronted with other religious movements. Jesus was a Jew, and the only religion he had dealings with was Judaism. So then how can he become a paradigm for Asian Christians?

In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus begins his ministry with a one-sentence sermon: “The right time has come . . . and the Kingdom of God is near! Turn away from your sins and believe the Good News!” (Mark 1:15 GNT). Except for chapter 4, there is no record in Mark’s gospel of any lengthy teaching of Jesus about the kingdom of God. Instead of teaching about it, Jesus demonstrates it by his actions and in his interaction with other people. The tone is set in the first chapter of Mark, verse 38: “We must go to the other villages around here. I have to preach in them also, because that is why I came” (GNT). And Mark makes clear that the “other villages” do include Gentile territories. It is an accepted fact that while the majority of the people in Palestine during Jesus’ time were Jews, there were non-Jews among them. In fact, there were even Gentile territories, that is, areas where the majority of the people were Gentiles.

In Mark’s gospel, Jesus seemed to habitually cross over into non-Jewish territory! As he did, he encountered Gentiles and responded to their pleas for healing and help. In Gadara, obviously a Gentile territory because of the pigs, Jesus healed a man by sending the demons to a herd of pigs (Mark 5:1–20). Chapter 7 records three of these visits to Gentile territories. In the city of Tyre, Jesus had a confrontation with a Canaanite woman, and at the end of the encounter, Jesus pronounced her as a woman of great faith (Mark 7:24–30). Then Jesus visits the Decapolis and heals a deaf-mute (Mark 7:31–37). And finally, Jesus takes his disciples to the Gentile city of Caesarea Philippi, and it was there where Jesus asked his disciples the question about who he was to them (Mark 8:27ff).

All these visits to Gentile territory seem to indicate Jesus’ attitude toward Gentiles. By going to Gentile territory and by including in his ministry the healing of Gentiles, Jesus goes against the exclusive tendencies of his time, and opens up the possibilities for the establishment of a more inclusive community that would include not only Jews but Gentiles as well. Here again, we see that Jesus does not say anything about accepting Gentiles into the fellowship of the church. What he does, so many times, is to enact living parables that truly demonstrate the nature of the community

that he wants to establish, namely, a community that knows no racial or national barriers.

Jesus also becomes a paradigm by what he taught. A relevant passage here is Matthew 5:43–48, where Jesus exhorts his followers to love their enemies. Doing good to enemies is not a new idea. In the book of Proverbs, there is such an exhortation, which Paul quotes in Romans 12:20, “If your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them a drink; for by doing this you will make them burn with shame” (GNT).

In the above passage, doing good to enemies is motivated by self-interest: you do good to them not because it is the right thing to do, but because it is a good strategy for putting them in their proper place.

Jesus, on the other hand, has no such motivation. In fact, his use of the word “love” in relation to enemies is something that is new. We are told to love our neighbors. But to love our enemies? That is humanly impossible; in fact, that is being completely irrational and irresponsible! But Jesus anchors loving the enemy on a very important tenet of faith, that is, the very doctrine of creation: all of us, that is, all humankind, are created by the one God. This would mean then we are all sisters and brothers, regardless of the faith community to which we belong.

How does all of this apply to us Asian Christians, especially in the context of religious plurality? Through the example of Jesus, we are being challenged to live out the ethical implications of our faith in our relationship with those who belong to other faith communities. One regrettable fact is that we Christians sometimes (and often!) exhibit the exact opposite attitude of what Jesus taught and exemplified in his actions. Our relationship with our non-Christian neighbors has been characterized more often than not by arrogance rather than by humility, by hatred rather than by love, by rejection rather than by acceptance. In short, we have not been very good neighbors to the non-Christians around us.

It is inevitable that questions would arise related to these endeavors.<sup>17</sup> One of the most serious issues is how to deal with the exclusive claims of the Christian faith, as represented for example by John 14:6 (“I am the way, the truth and the life”) and Acts 4:12 (“no other name”). This is connected to the whole issue of truth and revelation: is there truth in other faiths, or is the truth only revealed by God through the Christian faith?

In this regard, Asian Christians need to be in conversation with the apostle Paul. In the Acts 17 passages that we have already referred to,

Paul tells the Athenians, “I see that in every way you Athenians are very religious. For as I walked through your city and looked at the places where you worship, I found an altar on which is written, ‘To an Unknown God.’ *That which you worship, then, even though you do not know it, is what I now proclaim to you*” (Acts 17:22–23 GNT, emphasis added).

In a sense then, Paul acknowledged that the Athenians were worshipping the true God although they were not aware of it. Can we at least try to see the “Unknown God” in other religious movements?

Here Asian Christians, especially those in the Wesleyan tradition, need to be in conversation with John Wesley. He had, for instance, quite a positive attitude toward other religions, claiming that some people who belong to other religions may have been given the experience of “true religion” through “God’s inward voice.” Further, while he does recognize and affirm the distinctiveness of Christ and the experience of forgiveness through him, he does not condemn to hell all others who have no faith in Christ. Maddox writes: “He repeatedly prefaced claims about the qualifications for eternal salvation with an exemption from consideration of those who received only initial revelation. He argued that Scripture gave no authority for anyone to make definite claims about them. Their fate must be left to the mercy of God, who is the God of heathens as well as of Christians.”<sup>18</sup>

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, then, it is apparent that in the context of Asia today, theoretical or systematic Christology has much less relevance than practical Christology. Another way of putting it is that the matter of explaining the human and divine nature of Christ is not as important as discovering how Jesus himself is pertinent to the actual situations of Asians. We should continue to proclaim his death and resurrection. We should recover the meaning of his ascension as the means by which he now fills the whole universe (Eph. 4:10). But most important, in the context of Asia today, we must discover and rediscover again and again the relevance of his earthly life and his teachings. Christology must become Christopraxis.

## NOTES

1. Thus, Indonesian church leaders found their way to theological schools in the Netherlands, church leaders from the Philippines got their theological education in the United States, and most Indian theologians found their way to Great Britain. Asian theologians were also trained along denominational lines, with Lutherans going to Lutheran theological schools in Germany and other parts of the world. This was also true with Methodists and Presbyterians and other denominations.

2. This is illustrated in many publications. For instance, in *Asian Faces of Jesus* (ed. R. S. Sugirtharajah, Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1993), the articles include “Jesus and Krishna,” “Christ and Buddha,” and “Confessing Christ in the Islamic Context,” which includes discussion on the relationship of Jesus and the prophet Muhammad. I still remember the religious debates in the 1950s and 1960s centering on the issue of whether Jesus was divine; these debates were triggered by the resurgence of a religious group known as Iglesia ni Cristo (Church of Christ) that denied the divinity of Christ. The Iglesia ni Cristo has since grown into quite a large religious group with more than two million adherents.

3. Using the categories of H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2001).

4. Thus in Thailand, being Thai and being Buddhist are one and the same; in Malaysia, a Malay is by definition a Muslim.

5. T. V. Phillips, *East of the Euphrates: Early Christianity in Asia* (Delhi: CSS and ISPCK, 1998), p. ix.

6. Daniel Lucas Lukito, *Making Christology Relevant to the Third World* (Bern, Switz.: Peter Lang, 1998), p. 23. The subtitle of Lukito’s book is “Applying Christopraxis to Local Struggle.”

7. These aspects of Christ are also emphasized in the liturgy of Holy

Communion, where the mystery of faith is proclaimed as “Christ has died; Christ is risen; Christ will come again.”

8. During the time of Jesus, wealth was needed in order to fulfill the requirements of religion. Thus the wealthier one was, the closer that person was to God. Wealth and prosperity were considered signs of God’s blessings. No wonder the disciples reacted very strongly to Jesus’ statement that it is very difficult, in fact, impossible for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God: “Who then can be saved?” Such a reaction made sense. If the rich can’t be saved despite all their wealth, then how can poor people be saved when they have no wealth at all! But Jesus turns this around. It is in fact those people who are considered poor in spirit who are blessed by God.

9. Some recent publications include: *Dalit and Minjung Theologies: a Dialogue*, Dalit-Minjung Theological Conference (2005), Serampore, India (Bangalore: BTESSC, SATHRI, c2006). Manohar Chandra Prasad, *The Book of Exodus and Dalit Liberation, with Reference to Minjung Theology* (Bangalore: Asian Trading Corp., 2005). Eleazar Fernandez, *Toward a Theology of Struggle* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1994).

10. An example of this is represented by Carlos Abesamis, *A Third Look at Jesus* (Quezon City, Philippines: Claretian Publications, 2000). He says that his emphasis is more on telling the story of Jesus rather than “drafting formulas about Jesus and his nature” (p. 3). See also *Asian Faces of Jesus*, ed. R. S. Sugirtharajah, (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2001).

11. “The Poor in a Global Church: What Is at Stake for United Methodists?” report presented by the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry at the 2008 General Conference of The United Methodist Church.

12. The report cited in the previous note also includes the following facts:

- The gross domestic product of the poorest 48 nations (i.e., a quarter of the world's countries) is less than the wealth of the world's three richest people combined.
- The world's richest 500 individuals have a combined income greater than that of the poorest 416 million people.
- A staggering 1 billion children live in poverty (1 in 2 children in the world); 640 million live without adequate shelter; 400 million have no access to safe water; and 270 million lack access to health services.
- Each day 30,000 children die due to poverty and preventable diseases.
- The United States, the richest nation in the world, reported an official poverty rate of 12.6 percent in 2005, representing 37 million Americans.
- In 2001, the poverty rate for minors in the United States was the highest in the industrialized world; and in the same year, this country had the highest relative poverty and deep poverty among 11 industrialized countries.

13. The best book so far on this subject is *The Poor and the People Called Methodists*, edited by Richard P. Heitzenrater (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 2002). When one reads Wesley's *Journal* and *Sermons*, one gets the impression that many members of the Methodist societies during Wesley's time were poor. Accordingly Wesley conducted his ministry in such a way that he and the societies would maximize their help to and concern for the poor.

14. The reference for this is the Gospel of John, in which Jesus travels back and forth from Galilee to Jerusalem. In the Synoptic Gospels, Jesus stays most of the time in Galilee and only spends the last week of his earthly life in Jerusalem.

15. In Mark 2:23–28, we are informed that while walking through some wheat fields on a Sabbath morning, the disciples began to pick the heads of wheat, an act

that was legal on ordinary days but illegal on the Sabbath. Now obviously the disciples had a purpose in what they did; Matthew in fact specifies that the disciples were hungry (Matt. 12:1). Jesus knew that the disciples were doing something against the law, but he justified their action with these words: "The Sabbath was made for the good of human beings; they were not made for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27–28 GNT).

In Mark 3:1–6, Jesus comes in direct conflict with religious authorities. Confronted with a man whose hand was paralyzed, Jesus asked the people, "What does our Law allow us to do on the Sabbath? To help or to harm? To save someone's life or to destroy it?" (Mark 3:4 GNT). It is worthy of note that right after this incident, the religious authorities began to make plans to kill Jesus.

16. Already there are attempts to produce Asian liturgy and Asian music. This obviously was the motivation behind the establishment of The Asian Institute of Liturgy and Music (AILM) in Quezon City, Philippines.

17. It is well known that there are three positions in the relationship of the Christian faith with other faiths: the exclusive (one against all), the inclusive (one above all), and the pluralist (one with and among all). For a brief discussion of this, see Hope Antone, "Living with Pluralities," in *The Asian Church in the New Millennium: Reflections on Faith and Life* (ed. Raul Fernandez-Calienes, Delhi: ISPCK, 2000), pp. 20ff.

18. Randy Maddox, "Wesley as Theological Mentor: The Question of Truth or Salvation Through Other Religions," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 27 (1992): pp. 7–29. Maddox cites for support John Wesley's Sermon 91, "On Charity," Sermon 127, "On the Wedding Garment," and Sermon 130, "On Living Without God." The other pieces of information in the above paragraph are all taken from Maddox's article.

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