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The Task of Empowering the Vulnerable Communities

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VULNERABILITY AND VULNERABLE COMMUNITIES: DEFINING AND IDENTIFYING

Vulnerability, as a concept, is difficult to define as it can arise from a wide range of factors, including historical, cultural, social, environmental, political, and economic conditions. Moreover, vulnerability can be dynamic, changing with time, and can be heterogeneous even within the same vulnerable group. There is no universally accepted approach for measuring vulnerability.

However, for the purposes of missions work, we can adopt a definition of vulnerability that is relevant and useful. The United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction defines vulnerability as the conditions created by a mix of physical, social, economic, and environmental factors that make a person, community, property, or system more likely to be affected by hazards.

Factors that contribute to vulnerability include poverty, lack of access to resources, natural disasters, environmental degradation, health crises, political instability and conflict, discrimination, and inequality. The consequences of vulnerability can include emotional and psychological harm, physical harm, financial harm, social exclusion, exploitation, and a reduced quality of life.

COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT VULNERABILITY

Unfortunately, there are several misconceptions about vulnerability that can hinder our understanding and response to the needs of vulnerable communities. One common misconception is that vulnerability is a personal weakness or a sign of personal failure or lack of resilience. However, vulnerability is a natural part of the human experience and can arise due to external

factors beyond an individual's control.

Another misconception is that vulnerable people are solely responsible for their circumstances. This view ignores the systemic issues and structural inequalities that contribute to their hardships. Finally, some people believe that assisting vulnerable communities creates dependency. In reality, well-designed assistance programs can empower individuals and communities to become more self-sufficient and resilient.

In summary, missions targeting vulnerable communities require a nuanced understanding of vulnerability and the factors that contribute to it. It is important to dispel common misconceptions about

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vulnerability to develop effective and sustainable solutions that empower individuals and communities.

EFFECTIVE APPROACHES FOR ENGAGING VULNERABLE COMMUNITIES

To work effectively with vulnerable communities, it is essential to take a considerate and respectful approach that places the community's needs, viewpoints, and autonomy as the top priority.

To ensure that our interventions for vulnerable communities are inclusive, effective, and sustainable, it is important to avoid certain approaches that can perpetuate harm and reinforce existing power dynamics. These include stereotyping, top-down approaches, tokenism, over-reliance on charity, ignoring power dynamics, and failing to address inequality.

1. Stereotyping can reinforce harmful mistaken idea or belief many people have about a thing or group that is based upon how they look on the outside, which may be untrue or only partly true. This can perpetuate discrimination.
2. Top-down approaches can undermine the agency and voice of vulnerable communities, leading to ineffective or unsustainable programs.
3. Tokenism is the practice of making only a perfunctory or symbolic effort to do a particular thing, especially by recruiting a small number of people from underrepresented groups. It involves community members only symbolically or superficially.
4. Over-reliance on charity can prevent the development of sustainable solutions.
5. Ignoring power dynamics can perpetuate harm and reinforce existing power imbalances.
6. Failing to address inequality can neglect the underlying inequalities and injustices that contribute to vulnerability.

By avoiding these approaches, we can design programs and interventions that prioritize the perspectives and needs of vulnerable communities, foster interdependence, and address the systemic and structural factors that contribute to vulnerability.

THE MISCONCEPTIONS SURROUNDING DIRECT AND INDIRECT MISSIONS

In contemporary religious and missionary circles, there is an ongoing debate surrounding the understanding of missions. A central point of contention is whether a mission must necessarily include the direct proclamation of the gospel. As a result, activities that involve directly sharing the gospel are referred to as direct missions, while those that do not are labeled as indirect or auxiliary missions.

However, this dichotomy can lead to several

misconceptions regarding missions. One common misconception is that direct missions are superior to indirect missions. Direct missions often involve evangelism, preaching the gospel, and converting individuals to Christianity, while indirect missions are those that are aimed at providing physical, social, or economic support to vulnerable communities. Due to this, indirect missions are often viewed as a means to pave the way for direct missions, leading to a situation where direct evangelism is prioritized over other forms of mission work. However, we must ask ourselves: Did God and Jesus truly differentiate between direct and indirect missions? In Jesus' earthly ministry, as declared in Isaiah 61, His mission was to preach the gospel to the poor. We often get caught up in the abstract notion that the gospel, the good news, must always be synonymous with the Word of God. Yet, for those living in poverty, the most immediate good news may be the provision of food, and for the sick, it is the prospect of healing. Jesus provided for the physical needs of people and healed their illnesses. Was this done solely to prepare them for the Word of God? No, it is not a matter of sequential order. Jesus' miraculous works were, in and of themselves, a manifestation of His kingdom ministry. When we genuinely engage in God's mission, both the spiritual and the practical aspects are simultaneously fulfilled, and the two become inseparable. As we embark on missions for vulnerable communities, let us remember the importance of addressing both their physical and spiritual needs. By doing so, we follow the example set by Jesus, embodying a holistic approach to ministry that embraces both direct and indirect means of sharing the gospel.

The dichotomy between direct and indirect missions can lead to a narrow understanding of the nature of mission work. Some engaged in indirect missions may feel that they are not contributing to the spread of the gospel, leading to a sense of frustration or inadequacy. Conversely, those engaged in direct missions may feel that they are solely responsible for spreading the gospel, leading to an overemphasis on evangelism at the expense of other forms of missionary works.

Another common misconception is that the missionary is the central figure in missions. This view can lead to a situation where the focus is on the missionary's actions, overshadowing God's presence. To prevent this, it is essential to recognize that the ultimate agent in missions is God, and not the missionary. By remaining humble and faithful and allowing God to work through us, we can effectively participate in His mission and spread the gospel, whether through direct or indirect means.

It is essential to recognize that both direct and indirect missions play a vital role in reaching out to vulnerable communities. In regions where openly sharing the gospel is not possible, indirect missions

become an indispensable tool for expressing God's love through actions and support. For instance, providing food and medical care to vulnerable communities can create opportunities for sharing the gospel indirectly. This can lead to individuals becoming receptive to the gospel message and embracing Christianity.

IMPACT OF VULNERABILITY ON MISSIONS

The impact of vulnerability on missions is significant as it often affects the communities that missions aim to serve. Vulnerable communities often face challenges such as poverty, lack of access to basic needs like food, shelter, and healthcare, and limited opportunities for social and economic empowerment. These challenges can lead to further marginalization, discrimination, and injustice.

In mission strategies, addressing vulnerability is a critical component for achieving positive, long-term impact. This requires a deep understanding of the specific needs and challenges faced by vulnerable communities and working in partnership with them. By focusing on sustainability, building local capacities, and addressing root causes of vulnerability, missions can help to create a more equitable and just world for all people.

MISSION STRATEGIES

To explore mission strategies for vulnerable communities, the key considerations for a successful mission strategy are as follows:

Mission strategies towards vulnerable communities should focus on addressing the root causes of vulnerability and promoting sustainable development. The following points are key considerations for a successful mission strategy:

- 1. Understanding the Community:** It's essential to tailor interventions to community's specific needs. This can include assessing needs, consulting with the community and reviewing related data and research. This knowledge helps make interventions culturally suitable and fitting. For example, in rural Bangladesh, the non-profit "BRAC" performed an in-depth needs assessment to comprehend the local community's context and needs. They analyzed relevant data, collaborated with community leaders and residents, and evaluated current programs and services. This information guided the creation of a community-led development program aimed at tackling the root causes of poverty and vulnerability in the area.
- 2. Building Partnerships:** Collaborating with local organizations, government agencies, and stakeholders offers benefits like increased resources, more expertise, and better access to

decision-makers. These partnerships also ensure community involvement in the development process and that interventions meet their needs. For example, in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, a community organization *Desenvolvimento Urbano Sustentável no Brasil*, "Sustainable urban development Brazil" partnered with local government, businesses, and stakeholders to address vulnerable communities' needs in the city's favelas. The goal of these initiatives is to promote more just, safe, healthy, and sustainable cities for all residents, regardless of their socioeconomic status.

- 3. Addressing Root Causes of Vulnerability:** Tackling underlying issues like poverty and inequality promotes long-term resilience and reduces future vulnerability. Interventions may involve providing education and healthcare access, supporting income-generating activities, and encouraging sustainable livelihoods. For instance, in Nairobi, Kenya, "Slum Dwellers International" implemented a program to address urban slum dwellers' vulnerability. The program included initiatives to improve healthcare, education, and income-generating activity access. This effort significantly reduced poverty and improved residents' quality of life in the slums, showcasing the importance of addressing vulnerability's root causes in promoting sustainable development.
- 4. Promoting Inclusive and Equitable Development:** Design interventions to be inclusive and equitable, ensuring all community members have access to opportunities and resources, regardless of their background. Implement targeted programs, like gender-sensitive livelihood initiatives, and use participatory methods to involve the entire community. For example, in the Mekong Delta region of Vietnam, the non-profit "Oxfam International" implemented a program to foster inclusive and equitable development in vulnerable communities. Oxfam is a global movement of people, working together to end the injustice of poverty. That means it tackle the inequality that keeps people poor.
- 5. Investing in Human Capital:** Investing in education, health, and skills development builds individual and community capacities, supporting their ability to benefit from economic and social opportunities. This can include supporting education and training access, providing health services, and promoting healthy lifestyles. For example, in rural Guatemala, the non-profit, *Cada Niño*, provides services to orphans, vulnerable children, and those with special

needs.

6. Promoting Environmental Sustainability:

Consider the importance of environmental sustainability in interventions and minimize adverse environmental effects. This may involve preserving natural resources, decreasing waste and emissions, and advocating for renewable energy sources.

For instance, in the Amazon region of Peru, the non-profit “Amazon Conservation Association” implemented a program to foster environmental sustainability in vulnerable communities. The program included initiatives to reduce deforestation, enhance water management, and promote renewable energy sources. This effort positively impacted the preservation of natural resources in the region, highlighting the importance of promoting environmental sustainability in vulnerable communities.

7. Measuring and Evaluating Impact: Effective measurement and evaluation of impact requires a robust monitoring system that facilitates the assessment of impact and identification of areas for improvement. A range of data collection methods, including surveys, focus groups, and stakeholder consultations, can be employed to measure progress and evaluate the effectiveness of interventions. Consistent reporting and transparent communication of results are crucial to ensuring efficient resource allocation and achieving the desired impact.

For example, in Mumbai, India’s slums, The non-profit organization, “Majlis Manch,” has implemented a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation system to assess the impact of its programs and initiatives. They are also involved in training, research, campaigns, and publications on issues concerning violence against women and children. They work to demystify laws and make them accessible to judges, lawyers, prosecutors, police, NGOs and other government and non-government representatives and most importantly, to women themselves.

Many missionaries have already been engaged in various forms of missionary works for vulnerable communities, regardless of the scale or approach taken by their organizations. This is because such work is at the core of missions and an inevitable task that needs to be addressed.

OVERCOMING DEPENDENCY

As a missionary engages in missions for vulnerable communities, we are often faced with practical difficulties, particularly in overcoming the mindset of dependency on external support. It is crucial for us to find ways to break this cycle of beneficiary-dependency relationships and foster mutual

interdependence instead. By doing so, we can promote sustainable development and empower these communities to create new possibilities for themselves.

Missions for vulnerability aim to address the physical, social, and spiritual needs of vulnerable communities through a holistic approach that includes practical assistance and the gospel. These missions emphasize empowerment, collaboration, and advocacy to promote self-sufficiency, sustainable solutions, and social justice. To build empathy and understanding, missionaries engage in active listening, immerse themselves in the local culture, and encourage open dialogue.

The question then arises: how can we help these communities break free from this dependency? The answer lies in building a relationship of mutual interdependence. To address this issue and foster interdependency, it is important to recognize the interconnected nature of individuals, communities, and systems. Vulnerability and interdependence are closely related concepts, and addressing vulnerability requires a holistic and integrated approach that acknowledges the mutual interdependency of social, economic, and environmental systems. By promoting interdependence, interventions can encourage individuals and communities to work together to build sustainable solutions that enhance resilience and reduce vulnerability for all. This way, vulnerable communities can move beyond a cycle of dependence and towards a mutually beneficial and supportive relationship with those who seek to assist them.

MISSIONS FOR VULNERABILITY AS A WAY TO TRANSFORM WEAKNESS TO STRENGTH

Missions for vulnerability aim to address the physical, social, and spiritual needs of vulnerable communities through a holistic approach that includes practical assistance and the gospel. These missions emphasize empowerment, collaboration, and advocacy to promote self-sufficiency, sustainable solutions, and social justice. To build empathy and understanding, missionaries engage in active listening, immerse themselves in the local culture, and encourage open dialogue. By promoting shared experiences, missionaries can foster mutual trust,

respect, and understanding between themselves and vulnerable communities.

To inspire positive change, missions for vulnerability mobilize volunteers and resources to support community-driven initiatives and advocate for policy changes that address systemic issues. These missions also facilitate partnerships between vulnerable communities, organizations, and stakeholders to promote collaboration and shared learning.

In conclusion, missions for vulnerability have the potential to transform weakness into strength by empowering individuals, building empathy and understanding, and inspiring collective action. By focusing on the key elements of these missions, we can create lasting change in the lives of vulnerable communities and work towards a more just and compassionate world.

WEAKNESS AS PARADOX

- 2 Cor 12:9-10

But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

PARADOX OF THE POWER OF THE CROSS: WOUNDED HEALER

The cross is a mystery that reveals the divine nature of God hidden within the suffering of Jesus Christ. It represents a paradox, where extreme shame can lead to the pinnacle of glory. Similarly, disabilities may be viewed as shameful, but within the context of the cross, they can become a source of great strength and triumph. However, the cross itself has no inherent power or ability; it is simply a symbol of despair and shame. Nevertheless, Jesus Christ's cross became the symbol of power as it transformed weakness into strength.

When Jesus Christ came into this world, he embodied humility and willingly suffered. His ultimate sacrifice on the cross was an expression of love for humanity and a meeting place between the spiritual love of Jesus Christ and human suffering. He did not come to eliminate pain and suffering, but rather to offer a way to transform it into something greater. Thus, the cross represents the ultimate expression of God's love for humanity, where suffering and weakness can be transformed into strength and glory.

Jesus did not rely on miraculous power to heal people, but rather used his own wounds and suffering to bring about healing. The cross represents God's power to transform tragedy into glory and is not simply a symbol of conquering disability. Instead, it

is a place where God's grace meets our weakness and suffering, and transforms them into something new.

True healing in Christ occurs through the process of restoration, which happens when God's love enters into a person's pain and suffering. Even for those with disabilities, physical limitations do not equate to helplessness. By applying the grace of Christ's sacrifice, their limitations can be transformed into God's power. The cross is a symbol of transformation, where tragedy is turned into glory through the endurance of extreme pain and suffering, leading to ultimate resurrection.

Paul is a person who knows the secret of this paradox better than anyone else. His confession is always centered on Jesus Christ, and he speaks of a theology of weakness. This is the theology of the cross. This theology of the cross is a revolutionary way of thinking that overturns the conventional system of thinking that considers a healthy body without wounds or disabilities as normal. This paradox is where weakness and wounds become strength.

Isaiah 53:4-10 is considered the pinnacle of disability theology, and the passage portrays Jesus Christ as a wounded healer. The passage speaks of how Jesus carried our grief and sorrows, and how He was pierced and wounded for our transgressions and sins. This is the plan that God had for the redemption of sinners, and the cross represents the highest form of love that God could show for us.

In 1 Corinthians 1:18, the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

The cross swallows human helplessness and weakness with God's power and replaces them with God's power. The cross is where Jesus Christ, who came as a life-giving spirit (1 Corinthians 15:45), exchanged death for the glory of life. Therefore, the cross is a place of essential transformation.

PARADOXICAL BENEFITS OF BEING VULNERABLE

While vulnerability is often seen as a weakness or something to be avoided, it can actually have paradoxical benefits. Here are a few examples:

1. Building stronger relationships: Being vulnerable can create a deeper connection with others, as it allows for authenticity and honesty. When we are vulnerable, by showing our true selves to others, we can build mutual trust and understanding, and create a sense of purpose and meaning in our lives.
2. Developing resilience: Vulnerability can teach us to be more resilient, as it requires us to face our fears and overcome them. When we are vulnerable, we learn to accept and work through our emotions, rather than repressing or avoiding them.
3. Creativity and innovation: Vulnerability can also

stimulate creativity and innovation, as it requires us to think outside of our usual patterns and comfort zones. By embracing uncertainty and taking risks, we can explore new possibilities and ideas.

4. Compassion and empathy: Vulnerability can also cultivate compassion and empathy, as it allows us to see and feel the struggles of others. By recognizing our own vulnerabilities, we can develop greater empathy for others and become more compassionate and understanding.

In summary, vulnerability can have paradoxical benefits that can lead to personal growth, deeper connections, creativity, authenticity, and compassion. By embracing vulnerability, we can tap into our true potential and become more resilient, adaptable, and compassionate individuals.

THE POOR AND THE KINGDOM OF GOD

In the beginning of his ministry, Jesus read from the scroll of Isaiah 61 at the synagogue in Nazareth, declaring himself as the fulfillment of the prophesied Messiah and the protagonist of the end-time Jubilee. This declaration confused the Jews who believed that the promise of the prophecy was exclusive to them. Isaiah's prophecy not only identifies Jesus as the fulfillment of the prophecy, but also describes his role as the Messiah on earth.

One significant difference between Isaiah's prophecy and Jesus' perspective is the replacement of the term "day of God's vengeance" with "year of the Lord's favor" in Luke 4:19. This change represents a shift from judgment in the Old Testament to grace in the New Testament. Jesus' Jubilee proclamation emphasizes his social responsibility as the Messiah, including freeing the oppressed and bringing value to the marginalized groups of society.

Overall, Jesus' declaration of Jubilee reaffirms the presence of the marginalized in the Kingdom of God and challenges the religiously incorrect habits of his time. His proclamation brings a dramatic reversal in perspective, declaring that those considered outsiders by society are insiders in God's eyes. Jesus' proclamation of Jubilee has implications in spiritual, physical, and social aspects of life, making a significant impact on all areas.

STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS OF LUKE 4:6-20

And he went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up; and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. And stood up to read.

The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to Him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:

"The Spirit of the Lord is on me, Because he has

anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim for the prisoners released and recovery of sight for the blind, to send away the oppressed into release to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

Then he rolled up the scroll, and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him, and he began by saying to them .

There are intentional changes in the sentence structure of the biblical passage from Isaiah 61:1-2 that Jesus quoted in Luke 4:18-19. Specifically, the Hebrew word for "prisoner" was changed to "oppressed," and "the day of God's vengeance" was replaced with "the year of the Lord's favor." These changes create a chiasmic structure in the passage, which emphasizes the central message of the passage - that the proclamation of the gospel and God's grace is the essence of the Messiah's mission. The term "the poor" is used to represent all marginalized groups, including prisoners, the blind, and the oppressed, and emphasizes that the gospel is for all people, including Gentiles. The passage also suggests that those who were previously excluded from society may play a leading role in the new kingdom of God. Finally, the term "the poor" is expanded to encompass not only material poverty but also spiritual poverty.

The meaning that can be obtained from this intentional sentence structure is as follows:

1. The parallel structure between "good news to the poor" and "the year of the Lord's favor" in part B emphasizes that these two phrases convey the same meaning.
2. The salvation work of God's kingdom, which is achieved through grace, is emphasized by the central vertex of the cross-symmetric structure (bold text), which becomes the main theme of the entire passage. In other words, the central part directly speaks of the essence of the gospel and grace, namely to free the captives, give sight to the blind, and release the oppressed.
3. "The poor" is ultimately presented as a representative of the categories listed in the middle part, namely the captives, blind, and oppressed. Therefore, "good news to the poor" ultimately means "good news to the Gentiles," and that is the essence of the Messianic ministry.
4. The phrase "the blind" in the sentence can also be considered to represent the disabled. This highlights the fact that the disabled play a pioneering role in opening the door to missions among other marginalized groups and Gentiles.
5. "The day of God's vengeance" was deleted and "the day of God's grace" was emphasized.
6. The most essential content is that these marginalized groups were not just objects of sympathy or welfare work, but Jesus took them as partners in Gentile missions. This emphasizes

the shift from being objects of God's kingdom to being stewards and subjects of missions.

7. The message of sight restoration, where the blind see, is a message of eschatological restoration that is in line with the prophecy of Isaiah 29:18-19 and Isaiah 35:5-6. Through such restoration, the passage emphasizes the unification of the entire kingdom of God.

THE POOR AND THE KINGDOM OF GOD

As we have seen, the poor ultimately serve as representatives of the Gentiles. Therefore, when Isaiah prophesied to preach the good news to the poor, it means that Jesus was sent to preach the gospel to the Gentiles. Preaching the gospel to the poor means freeing the marginalized under the power of darkness, which means the Gentiles are freed by the gospel. Furthermore, we need to examine the meaning of "the poor" in connection with the Kingdom of God. There are two possible interpretations of the term: the poor as the object of salvation and the poor as the subject of salvation. If we see the poor as the object of salvation, they are just like anyone else who needs salvation. If we see them as the subject of salvation, they become a paradigm of God's salvation plan. Jesus began His ministry with the poor and was identified with them. Therefore, we should view the poor not only as a social problem but also from the perspective of the Kingdom of God. The New Testament teaches us that poverty is not only an economic problem but also a spiritual one. Preaching the gospel to the poor means that they can find hope and salvation through Jesus Christ, who welcomed, embraced, and transformed them.

To fulfill this Kingdom motivation, we must empower the vulnerable. We must follow the method used by Jesus.

For instance, in the story of the ten lepers in Luke 17:11-19, ironically, the leper community had already achieved social integration by living together as Samaritans and Jews. This was a dream-like state that was unimaginable in the existing social order. However, in the stage of their healing, a reversal of the reversal occurs. After being cured, they return to the stage of social separation, dividing Samaritans and Jews again.

The reason for praising the returning Samaritan was that he knew how to give thanks, while the Jews who went to the priest were considered ignorant of gratitude. This is a misunderstanding of the text. Although the Jewish lepers were cured, they were still considered impure until they received a declaration of cleanliness from the priest. Therefore, it was most important and urgent for them to go quickly and receive the declaration of cleanliness from the priest. That is why Jesus also told them to go and show themselves to the priest. However, for the Samaritan, the act of going to the priest to receive a declaration of cleanliness was meaningless in itself. Even if he

received a declaration of cleanliness from the priest, he was fundamentally impure from a religious purity code because he was a Samaritan.

So, the fact that the Samaritan came to Jesus while the Jews went to the priest reveals the truth that the Messiah, Jesus Christ, came from heaven to establish the kingdom of God, where even Gentiles can take a seat as guests of honor.

Therefore, our missions for the vulnerable are not just social welfare work or indirect evangelism. It is the very heart of ushering in the kingdom of God.

As such, the characteristic of Kingdom missions is that it brings about holistic restoration. Firstly, physical restoration such as healing and financial recovery, secondly, spiritual restoration, and thirdly, social restoration where individuals return to mainstream society and their families.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the chaos that vulnerable communities face does not always lead to tragedy or failure. We as missionaries can learn from God's use of chaos as a material for creation and strive to create new possibilities for these communities. This involves embracing the challenges and complexities of interdependence, promoting sustainable development, addressing root causes of vulnerability, and fostering inclusive and equitable development.

As we carry out this mission, it is important to recognize the vulnerability that we as missionaries and pastors also face. The pressure to appear strong and powerful can lead us to a messiah complex and a reluctance to acknowledge our own limitations and weaknesses.

Let us not forget that in Jesus' parable of the shepherd and the sheep, we often think of ourselves as the shepherds. However, we must remember that we are first and foremost the sheep of Jesus, and among his flock, we hold leadership roles.

Therefore, let us embrace vulnerability and seek help when needed, as we work towards the realization of God's kingdom on earth, where justice, peace, and love prevail. Amen.



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The Future of Disciple-Making

Susanta Patra

‘What will be the future of disciple-making?’ ‘Are we going to continue our ministry of making disciples or disciple-making will be a forgotten chapter in the context of our time?’, and ‘How are we going to fulfill the Great Commission of making disciples?’

THE CO-VID ERA

Never in our lives have we seen anything like the CO-Vid pandemic and its consequences. This pandemic has been like an alien invasion. The invaders killed, they multiply, and they spread across the world, hidden in the bodies of their hosts.

We have lived through a period of deep disruption, chaos, isolation, and anxiety. The things and people we hold most dear have been separated from us and the normal order of life has been utterly upended. As we navigated this pandemic, it was obligatory to remember the absolute tenderness and perpetual closeness of God. Amidst the chaos and fear, God was always closer to us and we could hear the divine whisper in our hearts. THE CO-VID ERA taught us; A new way to Hear His Voice, A new care for Others, and A new desire to do what is Right.

THE WORLD AFTER CO-VID

We are living in the bubbling convergence of massive social, philosophical, ecological, economic, and technological disruptions. These disruptions are reshaping our lives. The pandemic has been highlighting some of these interferences, especially in terms of how people communicate, socialize, and enact their lives and religious commitments. The era has brought numerous changes both inside and outside our personal lives, family, society, and our Church as a whole.

Evidently, the impact of the past pandemic is real and ongoing. It has caused significant disturbances. Hence, I have identified five sets of way-forward for us to reflect on as we move into the future of disciple-making ministry.

1. Adaptability is the key – The pandemic has shattered human living through a period of extraordinary change, with jobs lost, businesses closed, graduations canceled, and weddings, travels, and vacations postponed. In such a situation, we the disciple-makers are expected to be adaptable. “I define adaptability as the ability to be creative and flexible in the face of new situations,” says Laurie Leinwand. Hence, cultivating a passionate heart for the new

seekers & believers and Cultivating adaptability in ourselves is the key response to the Gospel, Seekers’ & new believers’ mindsets/contexts, and disciples’ living styles from earlier times.

2. Opportunity is important – The post-pandemic era has opened numerous closed doors to pioneer evangelism. More people today are living their lives without hope, satisfaction, answer, release, and future. More and more educated urbanites go through agony, uncertainty, pain, guilt, insecurity, and depression, which turn into suicidal or demonic oppression. This era has created more hunger for the truth and longing to fill the inner vacuums than we ever knew. Therefore, availing all opportunities in this context of our time is most important.

3. Communication is vital – We in Asia are more used to teaching, praying, and encouraging our new seekers or believers physically. But we are now expected to be more creative and innovative since working from home, watching YouTube live streams, or attending Zoom meetings have become the mode of communication. Moreover, the pandemic has changed all technologies into digital modes of communication. The digital modes offer convenience, reduced travel time, and cost to meet a seeker or new believer for follow-up & discipleship. Moreover, the teaching of doctrinal truths is lesser important in communication than shaping the new believers to follow God who is still “doing a new thing” (Isaiah 43:19). Hence, our communication as disciple-makers is vital in the present context.

4. Leadership is the incentive – Leadership is all about bringing transformation in the life of people. “Disciple-making is an intentional systematic process of teaching & training believers to practice a dynamic relationship with God, be matured in Christ, and multiply the



entire process.” In other words, leadership is discipleship. There can be no Christian leadership without discipleship and no discipleship without leadership. The two are inextricably linked. To try to lead without making disciples takes us off our mission and limits our ability to impact Asia for the gospel. To try to make disciples without leading creates church attenders/members, but not people who imitate the character and life of our Lord (Ephesians 5:1-2). Our goal, whether you are in vocational ministry or not, is to move others onto God’s agenda by leading them to fulfill the one thing Jesus asked us to do, ‘make disciples’. What God yearns for the Church to be, is not a multitude of devotees but disciples.

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As a disciple-maker myself, when I think of my own Christian life journey, I measure my growth in many areas. I have metrics to measure my financial growth, my fitness goals, my success in my profession, and lots of other things. But how do I measure my spiritual growth? How can I be assured that the person I am today is not the same person I was yesterday? Certainly, I could look at whether I know God’s Word more or pray more today than I did a year ago. But if Bible study and prayer do not result in a radical change in my life then I have to ask the question, “What effect is reading the Bible and praying really having on my life?” I would like you to go through Philippians 2:3-8 and ask questions to yourself and measure your own spiritual growth. Our disciple-making depends on whom we are building, how are we preparing, and at the end of our labor, what would be the outcome.

5. *Group Identity is dynamic* –In most Asian Countries, there is a new sense of belonging to a group, a new socio-cultural identity, and a deeper feeling of security in fitting into the cluster of choice. Your disciples connecting themselves to a group involves the influence of personality, power, and behavior on the group process.

While the Bible never prescribes a particular model for discipling others, Jesus invested in groups of varying sizes. Larger groups learned

from his teachings and miracles, while his closest followers benefited from personal discipleship and specific instruction. While one-on-one discipling is valid and has its purposes, I want you to think about meeting in a group of three to five instead of privately with one in this post-pandemic era. Let me share with you what I experience practically - whys and wherefores;

+ All of us including our new disciples struggle with suppressed transparency. Just like Adam before us, our native tendency is to grab the fig leaves and cover up the shame in our lives (Genesis 3:7).

+ Although all our disciples are born again, each of them continues to struggle with a tendency. They drag their “former manner of life which is corrupt through deceitful desires” around with us (Ephesians 4:22). Eternally saved, but not sanctified, is the problem.

+ If you try to mature your disciples outside of a community, you will not be successful. Isolation from a small group of disciples is self-defeating as it will hinder them from following Jesus, who came to penetrate and transform the human community. Making disciples is a process. Moreover, isolating from other disciples is counter to the aim of the Gospel. (Matthew 28:19-20, Ephesians 5:1)

+ Two of the more common responses that I hear about this subject are: (1) You do not know him or her in my group and (2) I find no one in my life whom I can trust. Either one of these may be true, and if so, this is where the gospel must transform your thinking.

Hence, each of us disciple-makers ought to acknowledge the importance of keeping our new disciples in a group while leading them to maturity. Truly, what God yearns for the Church to be, is not a multitude of devotees but disciples...”

All of us know that these days are different from before. Those of us engaged in disciple-making on a day-to-day basis know the demands of this ministry. Mission leaders across all spectrums ask me; ‘How long does it take these days for a new believer to become a disciple?’ I have often responded to them that it can take 3 months to 3 years. All of us here indeed know that disciple-making is a difficult process. In this process, we primarily require regular & efficient Biblical tutoring, nurturing through Spiritual Fellowship, and fostering Emotional Care.

6 Indicators of Spiritual Growth

- 1) Making Better Choices
- 2) Being Determined
- 3) Feeling for Others
- 4) Desiring to Learn
- 5) Influencing People
- 6) Improving Relationships

Although in the process of disciple-making, we are expected to lead a person from the stage of a seeker to the experience of conversion and thereafter, prepare the new believer to become a follower of Christ. Of late, we have witnessed that several new believers carry with them more baggage from their past (guilt, doubt, interpersonal issues, the obsession with caste, creed, and/or class, etc.). Hence, regular inward regeneration leading them to real solid transformation is the task. Furthermore, in this process, we ought to focus on their relationship issues and prepare them to accept the Absolute Authority of Jesus, Implicit Obedience to God and His Word along with Undivided Loyalty in their lives for other believers.

DISCIPLES' TESTIMONIES

"My name is Asish. I am from Uttar Pradesh. I got saved by a team of young people who came to our village to conduct a Gospel campaign during the pandemic. I was fascinated by their lives, their singing, and the message they proclaimed. Moreover, their friendliness got me attracted to them. I finally gave my life to Jesus Christ as they guided me. But during the pandemic, a lot of questions, confusion, and doubts crushed me. I had nowhere to go. The lockdowns shattered me. I tried to speak to those young people who had led me to Christ over the phone. But they were not satisfactory to me. But after the lockdowns were over, I met them personally to pour out my anguishes. I am happy now to testify that each of my questions was answered, every confusion was resolved, and the team helped me to turn my doubts into deeper faith in Christ. Now I praise God for the labor of love in me."

Many such stories have helped us to establish a system to identify each new believer's growth although some take more time while others take just a few months to grow and be faithful disciples of Christ, willing to pay the cost of their discipleship. Our general evaluation is done through the following 5 questions.

- #1 – How SELFLESS is he/she?
- #2 – How much is he/she willing to SACRIFICE?
- #3 – How much is he/she willing to SERVE?
- #4 – How much is he/she willing to SUBMIT?
- #5 – How much is he/she willing to SUFFER?

Moreover, we have recognized that the public confession of a new disciple's faith determines his/her status in our Disciple-Making. Furthermore, our target is to prepare each new disciple to be a strong witness and lead at least 5 people to Christ in 6 months. Such initiative assures us of his/her growth in discipleship and leads us to our Post-Disciple-Making process.

"My name is Sushil. I am from a Rajput background. I gave my life to Christ in a Gospel meeting conducted

by the Christians. Although I accepted Christ, I had lots of wounds, pains, and fears, particularly when I returned home to be with my parents during the pandemic. There were fears, pains, and deaths everywhere. I was consistent in my faith although my parents, neighbors, and relatives planted more confusion, which made me crazy with more questions and grief. My Christian friend, who was discipling me kept good contact with me and called me at night to discuss all my problems. Sincerely, my faith in Jesus was shattered due to the pandemic. Although my friends caringly answered all my questions yet I took 3 years to make a decision to get baptized. Even after baptism, my people confused me. However, one good thing I did, was when I had questions or confusion, I ran to my Christian leader and got them answered. Furthermore, it took another 2+ years to get established in my faith. Now I am free from all my negative questions and following Christ as His disciple. Gradually, I learned; and I do not forget to do good and to share my faith with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased" (Hebrews 13:16). I am deeply engaged in discipling another 13 of my friends who recently came to Christ through my Gospel presentation."

Finally, the pandemic has taught us many new things. However, in this new era, our Great Commission in making disciples of Christ is to be enhanced. The process given is crystal clear - 'Evangelize', 'Baptize', and 'Catechize (Teach)'. The Vision of disciples-making ought to be renewed daily in this new post-pandemic new era.

However, this new era has taught me to prioritize the following few non-negotiables.

Finally, the pandemic has taught us many new things. However, in this new era, our Great Commission in making disciples of Christ is to be enhanced. The process given is crystal clear - 'Evangelize', 'Baptize', and 'Catechize (Teach)'. The Vision of disciples-making ought to be renewed daily in this new post-pandemic new era.

Spiritual Formation undergirds all the others and is the way we summarize what it means to love God with all our heart, soul, strength, and mind (Matthew 22:37-40).



Personal Wholeness focuses on emotional health and proper self-respect, and biblical, emotional, and spiritual maturity are inseparable (Ephesians 4:17-5:33; Colossians 3:1-16).

Healthy Relationship is the dimension that reflects the biblical command to, "Love your neighbor as yourself." From our families to our friendships, all relationships can be marked by love and wisdom (I Corinthians 13)

Vocational Clarity means we have a sense of calling and purpose to disciple-making that is more than our current job or vocation. It daily informs us of our life and work. (Ephesians 2:8-10).

Economics and Work is the dimension that speaks to our daily lives as the place where our discipleship and

mission are carried out. (Jeremiah 29; 2 Thessalonians 3:6-13; I Timothy 2:1-6)

While facing the Challenges of the Post-Pandemic Transition in Disciple-making, we need to introspect and make Disciple-making in Asia even more Effective. May the Lord grant us His grace to disciple Asia for His glory and in the fulfillment of the Great Commission.

"These men who have upset the world have come here also..."

- Acts 17:6-7



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Theatrical Paradigm of Theodrama and Its Implications for Christian Life and Mission

Daniel J. Kim

ABSTRACT

This thesis incorporates the theatrical concepts, such as speech-act, agency, drama, performance, simulation, and improvisation, to help enhance both theological education and missiological practice. These concepts may be integrated with the theme of “theodrama,” providing a critical analogy for understanding God-human interaction, creation-redemption history, incarnational-missional movement, and the “kingdom of God” eschatology.

The purpose of this thesis, then, is to examine how the theatrical paradigm of “theodrama” may have implications for Christian life in general and mission in specific. The outline of the thesis is as follows: (1) Theoretical Basis for Theodrama (speech-act theory, action/agency theory, performance theory, dramatic narrative view); (2) Practical Methodology of Theodrama (simulation on stage, improvisation in life); and (3) Missiological Implications of Theodrama (hermeneutical process, missional application).

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this thesis is to examine how the theatrical paradigm of “theodrama” may have implications for Christian life in general and mission in specific. The outline of the thesis is as follows: (1) Theoretical Basis for Theodrama (speech-act theory, action/agency theory, performance theory, dramatic narrative view); (2) Practical Methodology of Theodrama (simulation on stage, improvisation in life); and (3) Missiological Implications of Theodrama (hermeneutical process, missional application).

But before presenting the main contents of the thesis, I would like to address two pertinent issues. First, it has to do with the negative connotations associated with those critical terms/concepts (“theater,” “drama,” “performance,” “improvisation”) to be explored in this thesis. There is a tendency in Christianity to use the term, “theatric” or “dramatic,” in reference to what is “pretentious, showy, or over-the-top,” and to associate the term, “performance” or “improvisation,” with “hypocrisy, insincerity, or the prideful attempt to achieve salvation by works.”¹ However, for the purpose of this thesis, such terminology is used in a technical sense as in the theatrical world (not the popular stereotypical notion), which can serve as analogy/metaphor to depict both the biblical and contemporary realities. Second, there is a need to distinguish and clarify the key terms/concepts:

drama, performance, and theater. I find it adequate to differentiate these terms, as suggested by Kevin J. Vanhoozer:

*[D]rama is a shaped sequence of action, especially dialogical action, with a beginning, middle, and end. Performance is the realization or actualization of drama. Theater is the space-time performance by which persons present themselves – their being – to others.*²

Simply put, drama has to do with the content (idea, plot, characters, scenarios) related to the text/script, performance has to do with the actual enactment of the dramatic content, and theater has to do with the setting/context of performance.

This thesis, then, incorporates the theatrical concepts, such as speech-act, agency, drama, performance, simulation, and improvisation, to help enhance both theological education and missiological practice. These concepts may be integrated with the theme of “theodrama,” providing a critical analogy for understanding God-human interaction, creation-redemption history, incarnational-missional movement, and the “kingdom of God” eschatology.

THEORETICAL BASIS FOR THEODRAMA

Since the publishing of the seminal work, *Theodrama* (in 5 volumes, 1988-1998), by Hans Urs von Balthasar, there has been a growing number of scholars and ministers espousing the theatrical paradigm in their theological reflection and pastoral application. The movement is recognized as a clear sign of the “theatrical turn”³ in theology. “Theology is inherently theatrical,”⁴ because it has to do with “the historical performance of God” and “the ongoing performance of the church” in the theater of everyday life.⁵ This so-called “theatrical theology” is established on the theoretical foundations, such as speech-act theory, action/agency theory, performance theory, and dramatic narrative view.

1. Speech-Act Theory

In the field of philosophy of language, the so-called “speech-act” theory was first developed by J. L. Austin

1. Wesley Vander Lugt, *Living Theodrama: Reimagining Theological Ethics* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2014), 16.

2. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Faith Speaking Understanding: Performing the Drama of Doctrine* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014), 23.

3. Vander Lugt, *Living Theodrama*, 2.

4. Wesley Vander Lugt and Trevor Hart, eds., *Theatrical Theology: Explorations in Performing the Faith* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2014), xiii.

5. Vander Lugt and Hart, eds., *Theatrical Theology*, xiv.

(1962) and further advanced by John Searle (1969).⁶ The premise of speech-act is based on the notion of illocution: “to say something is to do something . . . by saying and in saying something we are doing something.”⁷ In other words, our speech or utterance can be performative in nature. For example, in our utterance, associated with promise, contract, bet, curse, or judgment, to speak is not to merely describe/represent the action through words; it is an actual commitment to action. As Vanhoozer comments:

A promise, for example, has propositional content, but this is not what makes it a promise. An utterance becomes a promise only when an agent uses words to commit himself or herself to a course of future action. Promising is an act in its own right; to promise is to commit oneself to a future course of action that some hearer finds desirable. Promising is a form of doing something in saying something. To promise is to use words in such a way as to bring about a particular kind of interpersonal relationship.⁸

From the perspective of speech-act theory, then, the Scripture itself is not simply a deposit of the content of divine revelation; it signifies the dynamic revelatory and communicative acts of God. Vanhoozer comments:

That speaking is a form of action is a familiar theme in the Bible. . . . [God] is the paradigm communicative agent. The word of God is something that God says, something God does, and (with reference to the incarnation) something God is. As to Scripture, it is not merely the disclosure of information about God (revelation) but a collection of diverse kinds of divine communicative acts (divine discourse). When God does make himself known, he is both agent (Father) and content (Son) of his discourse, as well as its power of reception (Spirit). Scripture is taken up in complex ways into God’s triune self-communicative action. God speaks in and through human words, not only to reveal but to promise, exhort, command, warn, comfort, predict, lament, even plead. Scripture is thus a vital ingredient in the economy of divine communicative action.⁹

Moreover, the Scripture is the product of God’s people engaged in communicative response to God, as well as communicative activities in the world as God’s representatives. As such, the Scripture depicts the dynamic communicative activities between God and his people (Israel and the church) for the sake of communicative (and redemptive) mission to the world.

6. J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1962); John Searle, *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1969).

7. J. L. Austin, “How to Do Things with Words: Lecture II,” in *The Performance Studies Reader*, 2nd edition, edited by Henry Bial (London: Routledge, 2007, original 2004), 177.

8. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 64.

9. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 47.

2. Action/Agency Theory

In philosophy, particularly in the areas of ethics, jurisprudence, metaphysics, mind-body philosophy, and epistemology, there is a category known as “action” or “agency” theory, which deals with the themes of purpose, motive, desire, belief, intention, deliberation, decision, action, responsibility, and free will. Following the lead of Aristotle in *Nicomachean Ethics* (3rd Book), many modern philosophers¹⁰ have engaged in the discussion especially on the theme of “intentionality,” as related to human agency.

According to John MacMurray, the human personhood should be understood in terms of relationality and agency, rather than individuality and rationality.¹¹ Specifically, he envisions the human person (in meaningful existence) as an embodied agent engaged in active participation in the society and the world. “As agent . . . the Self is the body. Conversely the Self, as subject, is the mind. For as subject, the Self is non-agent, withdrawn from action, and, therefore, non-body.”¹² Thus, the individual who exists merely as a “subject” (viewing the world as “object”) is someone who is isolated within the realm of the mind and disengaged from the bodily and actual reality of the world. The ability to engage in dynamic action in this world (of people, entities, environments), then, is the primary characteristic of being a truly existential person. And what distinguishes such an actional or agentic person is the element of “intentionality.” MacMurray comments:

An action, in the sense in which we are using the term, is necessarily intentional. It is indeed the presence of intention which distinguishes it from activities which are non-rational, uninformed by knowledge. . . . What determines an action is its intention.¹³

From a theological perspective, then, we humans have been created and called by God to intentionally and proactively engage in obedient action as his representative agents in this world. The implication of such agency model for mission is that our action/activity is not something we merely initiate as free-will agents, but something that we must abide by as God’s commission. This sense of human agency/instrumentality, then, is the means by which God

10. See the following: G. E. M. Anscombe, *Intention* (Oxford, UK: Basil Blackwell, 1957); Donald Davidson, *Essays on Actions and Events* (Oxford, UK: The Clarendon Press, 1980); Harry Frankfurt, “Freedom of Will and the Concept of a Person,” *Journal of Philosophy* 68/1 (1971): 5-20, and “The Problem of Action,” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 15/2 (1978): 157-162; Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 3rd edition (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007, original 1981); Michael Bratman, *Intention, Plans, and Practical Reason* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), and *Structure of Agency: Essays* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2007).

11. The following two books are based on John MacMurray’s Gifford Lectures (at University of Glasgow) under the main heading of “The Form of the Personal”: “The Self as Agent” (1953) and “Persons in Relation” (1954). See John MacMurray, *The Self as Agent* (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 1999, original 1957) and *Persons in Relation* (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 1998, original 1957).

12. MacMurray, *The Self as Agent*, 91.

13. MacMurray, *The Self as Agent*, 195.

accomplishes his missional agendas in this world.

3. Performance Theory

The so-called “performance theory”¹⁴ was first introduced by Erving Goffman (sociologist) in his book, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959).¹⁵ He proposed the idea that all of social reality is, in essence, “performed” reality. People on a daily basis engage in various types of role-play, staging their multi-identities before the presence of others. They do so most naturally, without being aware of the fact that they are actually performing in the society. Goffman comments:

*The legitimate performances of everyday life is not “acted” or “put on” in the sense that the performer knows in advance just what he is going to do, and does this solely because of the effect it is likely to have. . . . But as in the case of less legitimate performers, the incapacity of the ordinary individual to formulate in advance the movements of his eyes and body does not mean that he will not express himself through these devices in a way that is dramatized and pre-formed in his repertoire of actions. In short, we all act better than we know how.*¹⁶

Thus, Goffman understands the “society as populated by living actors”¹⁷ who are engaged in playing roles and freely changing roles as a way of socializing.¹⁸ The reality, then, is that “we have been socialized into our roles, having had choices of behaviors and roles modeled for us and choosing our roles and how we perform them,” like actors in a theatrical production.¹⁹

Goffman’s view of everyday life as stage performance was further developed by Victor Turner (cultural anthropologist) in his book, *Dreams, Fields, and Metaphors* (1974),²⁰ as he applied the performance approach to culture, particularly in terms of ritual and social drama. Using the theatrical terminology, Turner described how social dramas arise especially during

the “conflict situations,” involving arguments, battles, or rites of passage in which the participants not only engage in the conflict, but they actually perform their acts before the presence of the audience.²¹ The critical factor in any performance, then, is the performer-audience relationship. So, the focus cannot be exclusively on acting/doing; there must also be a reciprocal watching/listening/responding.²² As a result, the participants cultivate a genuine sense of empathy/care for others, and become more fully human and communal.²³ Thus, the theatrical model is both performative, reflective, and formative in the context of community.

The implication of the performance theory for mission, then, is that we as God’s people are called to “perform” as good witnesses of Christ to others in this global theater. Thus, it is principally a matter of how well we perform in this world — that is, missionally speaking — according to the pattern of Christ and the biblical prophets and apostles.

4. Dramatic Narrative View

Since the main stream of the biblical revelation is the story of interaction between God and his people (Israel and the church), the Scripture can certainly be viewed as a grand narrative.²⁴ But a more accurate understanding is that the Scripture is basically a dramatic writing. Although both narrative and drama represent the biblical stories of creation, providence, and redemption, they depict them in different ways.²⁵ Vanhoozer well distinguishes the specific concept of drama from the general notion of narrative.

Narratives require narrators and recount their tales in the first or third person. Dramas, by contrast, show rather than tell. Moreover, in drama, the words are part of the action. . . . The theater is, after all, the “language of action,” and the dramatist’s task that of “teaching through action.” Not only do dramatic acts often have symbolic force, but the dialogue is “spoken action.” Finally, unlike narrative, the biblical text, along with its present-day reader, gets caught up in

14. Shannon Craigo-Snell, “In Praise of Empty Churches,” in *Theatrical Theology: Explorations in Performing the Faith*, edited by Wesley Vander Lugt and Trevor Hart (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2014), 89-90, identifies 3 basic contours of performance: “First, a performance is an event that takes place in a specific time, location, and community. . . . Second, a performance is an interaction. It is deeply relational. . . . A third element of performance is doubleness. . . . a performance has doubleness in that it is made up of elements we have already performed or learned from someone else.” See also Shannon Craigo-Snell, “Theology as Performance,” *The Ecumenist* 16/4 (2008): 6-10.

15. Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (New York: Doubleday, 1959).

16. Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, 73-74.

17. Peter Berger’s comment on Goffman, in Peter L. Berger, *Invitation to Sociology* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1963), 138.

18. Richard Schechner, *Performance Theory, revised and expanded version* (New York: Routledge Classic, 2003, original 1988), 196, well sums up Goffman’s theory: “all social interactions are staged — people prepare the roles (various personae or masks), different techniques of role playing ‘back stage’ and then enter the ‘main stage’ areas in order to play out key interactions and routines.”

19. Todd E. Johnson, “Doing God’s Story: Theatre, Christian Initiation, and Being Human Together,” in *Theatrical Theology: Explorations in Performing the Faith*, edited by Wesley Vander Lugt and Trevor Hart (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2014), 165.

20. Victor Turner, *Dreams, Fields, and Metaphors* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1974).

21. Turner, *Dreams, Fields, and Metaphors*, 37-41, explains the performative nature of social drama in terms of four-phase process: (1) breach, (2) crisis, (3) redressive action, and (4) reintegration or social recognition (legitimation).

22. Paul Woodruff, *The Necessity of Theater* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 10.

23. Johnson, “Doing God’s Story,” 168.

24. Of course, the Bible is comprised of other forms/genres (law, wisdom, poetry, prophecy, apocalypse, prose discourse) as well. But the main flow is that of historical narrative(s) of God and his people.

25. N. T. Wright, “How Can the Bible Be Authoritative?” *Vox Evangelica* 21 (1991), 18-19, presents the outline of the Bible in terms of divine drama in 5 acts: (1) Creation; (2) Fall; (3) Israel; (4) Jesus; and (5) Church. Samuel Wells, *Improvisation: The Drama of Christian Ethics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004, 2018), 33-37, suggests a more streamlined outline: (1) Creation; (2) Israel; (3) Jesus; (4) Church; and (5) Eschaton. See also the following: Gabriel Fackre, *The Christian Story: A Narrative Interpretation of Basic Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1984); Bernhard W. Anderson, *The Unfolding Drama of the Bible*, 3rd edition (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988); Craig G. Bartholomew and Michael W. Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture: Finding our Place in the Biblical Story*, 2nd edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014).

the action too.²⁶

What then consists of drama? A drama essentially has to do with “doing, an enactment.”²⁷ The term derives from the Greek verb *draō* (to do, to act, to take action). But the genre of drama is specifically associated with “a type of literature designed for stage representation and performance with the ‘live’ enactment of the written drama.”²⁸ In this sense, drama is a unified sequence of action that “a script preserves or prescribes in writing” which humans bodily represent and enact through the means of “performance” in the context of “theater” (theatron = a place for seeing) in which the audience observes what happens.²⁹

Thus, in the biblical sense of drama (performed in the context of the theater of redemption), “God and humanity are alternately actor and audience.”³⁰ Moreover, in our contemporary setting, “life itself is divine-human interactive theater.”³¹ Theology, then, has to do with “what God has said and done for the world and what we must say and do in grateful response.”³²

Such theatrical paradigm known as “theodrama” (primarily attributed to Balthasar and Vanhoozer) emphasizes the dramatic nature of the Bible in connection to, but in distinction from, the narrative nature. Balthasar’s premise of theodrama was that the Scripture can be best interpreted in terms of dramatic rather than metaphysical categories. The inter-relationship between God, the church, and the world is best understood as a dramatic play with the primary theme of God’s love in Christ. Vanhoozer further developed the dynamic of theodrama by including the church’s performance as a response to Christ’s performance in history.³³ Moreover, as Christopher Wright (in *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible’s Grand Narrative*, 2006) has expounded, the biblical reality is that the entire theodrama unfolds in accordance with God’s purpose for and mission to the world, with the participation of God’s people (Israel and the church) in his mission.

26. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 48–49. Here, Vanhoozer borrows the expressions, “language of action” and “teaching through action,” from Keir Elam, “Much Ado about Doing Things with Words (and Other Means): Some Problems in the Pragmatics of Theatre and Drama,” in *Performing Texts*, edited by Michael Issacharoff and Robin F. Jones (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988), 41.

27. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 37.

28. Vanhoozer, *Faith Speaking Understanding*, 22.

29. Vanhoozer, *Faith Speaking Understanding*, 22. Schechner, *Performance Theory*, explains theatric taxonomy in terms of 4 categories (drama, script, theater, performance), and places them consecutively in the concentric circles — expanding from strict definition to broader definition — with drama at the core. Schechner, 70, comments: “The drama is the domain of the author, the composer, scenarist, shaman; the script is the domain of the teacher, guru, master; the theater is the domain of the performers; the performance is the domain of the audience.”

30. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 37.

31. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 37.

32. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 38.

33. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 44.

PRACTICAL METHODOLOGY OF THEODRAMA

Practically speaking, the theodrama model can be applied through simulation and improvisation. The idea of theodrama (derived from theatrical analogy) has generally been understood (hermeneutically) in dual terms of biblical interpretation and contemporary application. But I would like to suggest an intermediary mode of theatrical stage production (involving both rehearsal and performance) as a bridge between the biblical and contemporary theodramas. In this sense, the actual theodrama stage production may serve as a sort of simulation of both the biblical and contemporary realities, establishing the basis for life improvisation (consistent with the Word and the Spirit).

1. Simulation on Stage

Since 2014, I have been engaged in an experimental project at ACTS University in Korea. Here, while serving as professor of spiritual theology and mission theology, I have been training the students to articulate theology (and missiology) through innovative theatrical means. In the process, I have developed a performing arts genre, which I labelled as “theodrama,” and choreographed/directed six major productions at ACTS University.³⁴ Our theodrama productions have since gained recognition, so that we were granted the privilege of staging such a production at the upcoming 6th Lausanne Congress (2024) in Korea.

Regarding the general concept of theodrama, I am certainly indebted to those theodrama advocate theologians, such as Balthasar and Vanhoozer. But in my case, I have adopted the term “theodrama” for the actual theatrical production of theological/missiological themes to be performed live on stage.³⁵ This theodrama performance genre may be understood as a theatrical way of expression (through music, dance, mime, acting, design, and media), depicting the biblical-theological concepts in a visual-aural, kinesthetic, and experiential way. The theodrama production, then, is a way of theologizing

34. The ACTS University theodrama productions are as follows: “Imago” (2014) - biblical overview of salvation history from Genesis to Revelation; “Prophetic” (2015) - preaching drama portraying the biblical prophetic type lineage; “Communion” (2016) - theological meaning of communion based on John Calvin’s view; “Resurrectio” (2017) - essence of the cross/resurrection as depicted by the body of Christ; “Missio” (2020) - theological, historical, and strategic perspectives of mission; and “Vita” (2022) - portrayal of the entire human life journey, along with spiritual journey. It is acknowledged that all ACTS theodramas were produced in collaboration with Imago Christi Studio, an institute established for the multi-purpose vision of spiritual theological research, incarnational spirituality training, creative arts production, and strategic mission. In order to view the ACTS University theodrama productions, visit the following website (www.imagochrististudio.org) >> Creative Arts >> ACTS University Theodrama Productions).

35. For deeper insight into the paradigm of theatrical performance and its contribution to Christian life and mission, see the following: Samuel Wells, *Improvisation: The Drama of Christian Ethics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004, 2018); Todd E. Johnson and Dale Savidge, *Performing the Sacred: Theology and Theatre in Dialogue* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009); Wesley Vander Lugt and Trevor Hart, eds., *Theatrical Theology: Explorations in Performing the Faith* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2014); and Wesley Vander Lugt, *Living Theodrama: Reimagining Theological Ethics* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2014).

(and missiologizing) on stage, depicting the biblical dramas of creation, redemption, incarnation, mission, kingdom, eschatology, and other significant themes through various theatrical means. As Trevor Hart comments:

If ... the divine Word presents itself most fully not as text or utterance but in the flesh and blood realities of an embodied existence, surely we ought to consider whether a natural and proper mode of the rehearsal and interpretation of this same Word in its form as Scripture might lie in actual embodied performances of those portions of the biblical text that lend themselves naturally to it.³⁶

Moreover, while the Bible depicts the drama of divine-human interaction (in dynamic words and acts), our contemporary life serves as the extension of such divine-human drama. The theodrama experiment at ACTS University, then, can be understood as a sort of simulation training of the student participants, so that they may learn to bridge the biblical and contemporary theodramas through the means of stage rehearsal and performance.

Significantly, in the process of training and preparation for theodrama performances, the students learned to expand beyond the typical academic discipline of assimilating knowledge to a more dynamic understanding of education. They had to transition from the cerebral to the experiential way of learning through bodily movements and dramatic enactments. In the process, the students began to explore and discover a vital incarnational-kinesthetic way of theologizing (and missiologizing). Moreover, the students as amateur performers had to learn to compensate for their lack of experience in theater and movement arts with their heart of passion and prayer. In the process, they learned to humble themselves before God and to rely on one another as they endeavored to move and perform in unity and harmony. In essence, they learned how to operate as the corporate body of Christ.

As a result, we as a theological community (at ACTS University) have come to appreciate how theatrical performing arts can offer a much-needed inspiration and challenge to theological education. Such theodramatic way of expression supplements the traditional concepts of the "written word" and the "audible word," with the "visible word," and even the "tangible word." It is a way of educating the students, not only to "read the word" and "hear the word," but also to imagine and "see the word," as well as to be "in touch with the word," so as to theatrically experience what it means to embody and enact God's Word.

2. Improvisation in Life

The methodology of "improvisation" is implemented in practically all disciplines of art, including music, dance, theater, film, design, and

36. Trevor Hart, "Beyond Theatre and Incarnation," in *Theatrical Theology: Explorations in Performing the Faith*, edited by Wesley Vander Lugt and Trevor Hart (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2014), 41.

craftwork. Of these, perhaps the most natural and holistic form is that of dance improvisation. To improvise in dance is to "dance the dance as it comes into being at this particular moment at this particular place."³⁷ Thus, improvisation is a way of experimenting in spontaneous (unrehearsed, non-premeditated) movements, without any set choreography. However, such improvisational flow should not be understood exclusively in terms of spontaneous integration of thought and movement. It also involves the environmental factor being explored in particular time and space. Dance improvisation, then, provides an innovative way of integrating kinesthetic, social, and environmental factors.

Basically, through dance (as well as other theatrical means), we learn the art of "spontaneity of kinesthetic flow" which may serve as an analogy for the way of life. This is so pertinent especially in light of the enormous flux and numerous variables of life we face in the 21st century. Life, then, ought to be lived as though (in an experimental studio) we are improvising with endless possibilities and variations. The best way to prepare for such reality of life, then, is by learning how to be open, flexible, and innovative. Perhaps the only guideline is that our improvisation should be as natural and instinctual, flowing from our true nature.

Improvisation, however, does not necessarily imply an anti-traditional attitude. Although traditionalism with its strict regulations and rigid formalities tend to quench the creative and innovative dynamics of improvisation, a truly "living tradition" actually provides an assuring foundation for the ongoing improvisation that is both liberating and constructive. Vander Lugt comments:

Improvisation always involves an element of risk, but developing disposability to tradition and studying paradigmatic performances can diminish foolish risks. Improvisation is pivotal for theodramatic performance, because it keeps tradition alive, and conversely living tradition is a liberating constraint for creative improvisation.³⁸

In Christianity, the living tradition, comprised of the biblical and historical legacies, provides both the foundation and inspiration for a continual improvement in performance through improvisation, rather than strict repetition of the scripted performance. Thus, from the perspective of theodrama, "tradition is the improvisation of beliefs and behaviors in creative continuity with past performance" of the biblical and historical characters.³⁹

37. Maxine Sheets-Johnstone, *The Primacy of Movement*, expanded 2nd edition (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Co., 2011), 420.

38. Vander Lugt, *Living Theodrama*, 149.

39. Vander Lugt, *Living Theodrama*, 148. N. T. Wright, "How Can the Bible Be Authoritative?" *Vox Evangelica* 21 (1991), 19, suggests the following scenario for improvisation, based on the Scriptural givens: "Suppose there exists a Shakespeare play whose fifth act had been lost. The four acts provide, let us suppose, such a wealth of characterization, such a crescendo of excitement within the plot, that it is generally agreed that the play ought to be staged. Nevertheless, it is felt inappropriate actually to write a fifth act once and for all: it would freeze the play into one form, and commit

Improvisation, then, requires that we attune ourselves, not only to our inner self and the surrounding world, but also the past tradition (both biblical and ecclesial), which in essence is a transcript and pre-script for us. Moreover, we need to attune to the very presence of Christ in the midst of our improvisation (and performance). We need to be led and influenced by the prompting of the Holy Spirit. As Jesus said, “The wind [Spirit] blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going” (Jn. 3:8). As Paul said, “Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom” (2 Cor. 3:17).

MISSIONAL IMPLICATIONS OF THEODRAMA

The missiological implications of the theatrical paradigm of theodrama can be explained in terms of two dynamics: hermeneutical and applicational.

1. Hermeneutical Process of Theodrama

Based on the classic theodrama theories — especially those of Balthasar and Vanhoozer, as well as our experimental stage productions at ACTS University — a holistic paradigm of theodrama can be formulated. In this (essentially) hermeneutical process, there are a number of key factors which need to be considered: (1) Scripture, (2) theology, (3) spirituality, (4) art, (5) life, and (6) mission. There are basically two directional flows in this process. First, the above factors contribute to the actual “formation” of the theodrama paradigm. Second, these factors themselves undergo significant “transformation” under the influence of the theodrama paradigm.

- The theodrama paradigm is multi-faceted and holistic in its formation as a result of the diverse contributing factors:
- The Scripture as the script (and our transcript/prescript) of the God-human drama is the initial starting point of the theodrama paradigm.
- The orthodox theology provides the inspiration and motivation in articulating the essential biblical themes underlying the grand theodrama.
- From a spirituality point of view, the Trinitarian spirituality and incarnational spirituality are foundational for conceptualizing and practicing theodrama.
- The realm of art, with its emphasis on aesthetics, imagination, creativity, and expression, naturally informs and enriches the ideology of theodrama.
- Life in general becomes the second axis of drama. Hermeneutically, theodrama takes place in mutual relationship between the biblical revelation and real life.
- The missional vision challenges the theodrama

paradigm to be actualized more dynamically and efficiently in the context of contemporary situations.

- Conversely, the theodrama paradigm is instrumental in help transforming the six areas of concern:
- The theodrama paradigm introduces the somatic, kinesthetic, and theatrical paradigm for a dynamic interpretation of the Bible.
- The theodrama paradigm helps enhance theological education by introducing the performative theory, which integrates mind, body, speech, and action.
- A sound biblical-theological theodrama, with its emphasis on the life of Christlikeness, establishes the basis for Christian spirituality.
- The theodrama vision helps to transform the realm of art/culture in accordance with Richard Niebuhr’s view of “Christ transforming culture.”⁴⁰
- Realizing that life itself is theodrama helps us to live a fuller life of intimacy with and trust in God.
- The theodrama paradigm contributes to evangelism/mission in terms of missional hermeneutics, performative methodology, and life drama encounter.

As a result, the theodrama paradigm signifies a dynamic transformative process, which Max Harris articulates as “theatrical hermeneutics”:

*If . . . there is a transformation effected when word becomes performance and, in reverse when performance is encoded in text, and if . . . the Christian concept of God’s mode of self-revelation is theatrical, then the sensitive reader of script and Scripture alike will need to engage in a form of theatrical hermeneutics that both animates and interprets text*⁴¹

2. Missional Application of Theodrama

At the turn of the 21st century, there emerged the so-called “missional church” movement,⁴² advocating the most natural and strategic way of witnessing to the

40. H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper & Row, 1951).

41. Max Harris, *Theater and Incarnation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), 12.

42. The missional church movement is indebted particularly to those seminal missiological writings of Francis Dubose, *God Who Sends* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1983); Charles Van Engen, *God’s Missionary People: Rethinking the Purpose of the Local Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1991); and Lesslie Newbigin, *The Open Secret: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission*, revised edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995, original 1978) and *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989). The movement gained impetus mainly through the publishing of the book, *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998) (Darrell L. Guder, ed.), in association with the “Gospel and Our Culture Network” (COCN) in Britain, North America, and New Zealand. The missional church model is also acknowledged by a number of Korean scholars as follows: Sunil Kim, “Educational Ministry Revisited in the Light of the Missional Church’s Paradigm,” *Gospel and Mission*, vol. 17 (2012): 9-37; Soo-hwan Lee, “A Study on Missionary Spirituality for Missionaries,” *Gospel and Mission*, vol. 33 (2016): 89-121; Kyung-gu Shin, “The Classification of Missionary Spirituality,” *Gospel and Mission*, vol. 5 (2005): 144-169.

Shakespeare as it were to being prospectively responsible for work not in fact his own. Better, it might be felt, to give the key parts to highly-trained, sensitive, and experienced Shakespearian actors, who would immerse themselves in the first four acts, and in the language and culture of Shakespeare and his time, and who would then be told to work out a fifth act for themselves.”

world. Basically, the movement emphasized the divine source of mission (*missio Dei*) and the missionary nature and purpose of the church. As Wright states, “Mission is not ours; mission is God’s. . . . Mission was not made for the church; the church was made for mission — God’s mission.”⁴³ Essentially, the *missio Dei* is equivalent to the *missio Trinitatis* (Trinitarian mission), which has its origin in the Father’s heart of loving grace toward humanity. And with the Father’s sending of his Son, Jesus Christ in his incarnation, servanthood, obedience, and suffering becomes the model for mission. Moreover, Jesus’ mission is continued through the mission of the Spirit who empowers the believers for mission in this world.⁴⁴ Thus, the *missio Dei* (*missio Trinitatis*) implies a divine invitation of human participation: *missio hominum* (human mission) in general and *missiones ecclesiarum* (church’s missions) in specific.⁴⁵

With such missional foundations (Trinitarian theology, incarnational Christology, pneumatology, theological anthropology, ecclesiology, eschatology), we must also be grounded in the reality of this world, which is the very cultural/societal context in which the church is to witness the gospel. This means that we must be well-versed in the contemporary cultural trends, such as globalization, urbanization, migration, digitalization, cybernization, virtualization, and cyborgization.⁴⁶ Moreover, we must come to terms with the reality that we are living in a post-Christian society plagued with humanism, secularism, materialism, relativism, and pluralism.⁴⁷ It is in this culture-specific context of the early 21st century that we must be instrumental in witnessing the gospel of Christ and expanding the kingdom of God.

The missional church, then, envisions all Christians as functioning missionaries in their

43. Christopher Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible’s Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 62.

44. David J. Bosch, *Witness to the World: The Christian Mission in Theological Perspective* (London: Marshall, Morgan, & Scott, 1980), 4.

45. Charles E. Van Engen, *Mission on the Way: Issues in Mission Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1996), 27-28.

46. There are a number of Korean missiologists who have delved into these technological issues associated with the 4th Industrial Revolution and their implications for mission in the 21st century. See the following: Seong Mo Ku, “Mission Methods for the Net Generation in Cyberspace,” *Theology of Mission*, vol. 37 (2014): 11-41; Ki Mook Jung “Mission in the Fourth Industrial Revolution,” *Theology of Mission*, vol. 48 (2017): 265-294; Won Young Bong, “The Role and Outlook of a Missional Church in the Age of the Fourth Industrial Revolution” *Theology of Mission*, vol. 50 (2018): 190-224; Hae Lyong Cho, “What Should We Prepare for Korean Mission in the 4th Industrial Revolution?: Future Mission Strategy and Direction,” *Theology of Mission*, vol. 51 (2018): 178-211; and Hyun Joo Lee, “Necessity of New Mission Strategy in the 4th Industrial Revolution,” *Gospel and Mission*, vol. 41 (2018): 113-152.

47. According to Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 221, Christianity has been eroding and secularism has been gaining grounds since the modern era began under the influence of providential deism of the late 16th-17th century and the exclusive humanism of the 18th-19th centuries. As Gene Edward Veith Jr., *Post-Christian: A Guide to Contemporary Thought and Culture* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020), states: “Modernism with its scientific materialism and trust in evolutionary progress is post-Christian. So is postmodernism with its relativistic mindset.” The result, then, is, as Lesslie Newbigin, *The Open Secret: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission*, revised edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 2, pointed out, “churches are in a missionary situation in what once was Christendom.”

particular societal/cultural contexts and beyond. So, the missional church must interact purposefully and meaningfully with people and culture, exercising Christlike discernment of the world. Ultimately, the missional church must function as the transforming agent — as the “salt of the earth” and “light of the world” (Mt. 5:13-16) — embodying and enacting Christlikeness so that Christ (by his Spirit) may continue his ministry on earth through his church. The missional church, then, is committed to the incarnational approach to mission as embodied, proclaimed, and demonstrated by Christ. As Christ himself modelled and commissioned his disciples: “As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you” (Jn. 20:21). Thus, the missional church movement should essentially be understood as the “incarnational-missional” movement.⁴⁸

And from the theatrical theological perspective of “missional theodrama,” God the Father may be seen as the producer, the Son as the theatrical director, and the Spirit as the performance coach. Moreover, the incarnate Son may be regarded as the premier actor in this drama, while the Spirit may be understood as the hidden supporting actor behind all scenes. Ultimately, the Triune God would be the main spectator — as both the host-sponsor of the drama’s other players (the believers) and the final judge of the drama’s outcome (both the participant believers and the unbelieving world).

Thus, in this grand theodrama, we as God’s people are invited to play many and diverse roles as fellow-actors with Christ and his Spirit. As Christ’s agents, we are called and commissioned to fulfill our specific roles and functions on the world stage. Here, our vision and motivation derive from Christ, the principal actor who modelled the perfect image of God for us. He demonstrated what it means to be a truly incarnate human being. And he demonstrated what it means to be an intentional, agentic being, perfectly submissive to the Father’s will. Likewise, we are called — with our Spirit-awakened sensibility to God and fellow humans — to serve as Christ’s agents to accomplish his kingdom agendas on this global stage.

CONCLUSION

From a theatrical perspective, the Shakespearean statement — “All the world’s a stage. / And all the men and women are merely players. / They have their exits and their entrances. / And one man in his time plays many parts.”⁴⁹ — has a profound, and yet practical, ring to it. From a Christian perspective, John Calvin’s reference to the created universe as God’s “theater of glory” (*theatrum gloriae*)⁵⁰ —

48. Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *The Shape of the Things to Come* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003), 56-59

49. William Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, Act II, scene vii, 146-149.

50. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion, Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1559 edition), 2 volumes. Edited by John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1960), 1.6.2 (cf. 1.5.8; 1.14.20; 2.6.1).

complemented by the notion of human history as God's "theater of redemption" — affirms such theatrical paradigm for life and mission. The Bible, then, serves as the authoritative script depicting God's creative-redemptive work in the midst of humanity and the earthly habitat. And based on this biblical transcript/prescript, we are called to carry out God's redemptive purposes in our particular theatrical stages of life. All of God's workings in our life, ministry, and mission, then, can be regarded as "theatrical" and "dramatic" in terms of characterization, plot, tension/suspense, setting/atmosphere, and symbol/meaning. Thus, the biblical history and the continual unfolding of kingdom history may be understood as an epic theodrama. Moreover, our own contemporary settings may be understood as the ongoing scenarios in the continuing saga of theodrama, both personal and corporate.

Here, the theodrama production/performance as experimented at ACTS University can serve as a working model of bridging the biblical and contemporary theodramas. It can be understood as a way of simulation training for the biblically-based real life theodramas on the world stage. Thus, the theodrama paradigm can help supplement and enhance the holistic vision of the missional church, in the following ways:

- Community Revitalization: The Christian communities (churches, schools, agencies) can be more creatively/aesthetically revitalized through theatrical productions and art-culture movements. The participants can learn how to rely on God and each other as they work together and coordinate with each other through theatrical art rehearsals and performances.
- Theological Education: The participants can receive inspiration and challenge in their biblical/theological education through bodily movements and theatrical expressions. Through such "physical" education, the participating students can discover the Word as "seen" and "felt," in addition to the Word as "read" and "heard."
- Life Simulation: The theodrama production/performance can serve as a simulation training for the real life play. For the participants, the means/method of training/rehearsal and stage performance can serve as a bridge between the biblical theodrama and the modern-day theodrama.
- Holistic Ministry: The theodrama expressions can serve as the means of manifold ministry: to God (worshiping and glorifying God), to self (activating one's true self and creativity in Christ), to the church (teaching and discipling the believers), and to the world (witnessing the gospel to the unbelievers).
- Missional Strategy: The theatrical arts (along with other art forms) can serve as the missional bridge between the "word"-oriented modern generation and the "after-word" post-modern generation.

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Inspired, Instructed, and Enlivened for The Future: Encouragement and Lessons from Asian Christian Witnesses

J. Nelson Jennings

“Since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted” (Hebrews 12:1-3).

Looking to Jesus is fundamentally important for Christians in facing new challenges and opportunities. Jesus is “the founder and perfecter of our faith,” the exalted Suffering Servant who faithfully endured unfathomable pain “for the joy that was set before him.” It is Jesus’s exemplary endurance that his followers are to “consider” closely “so that [we] not grow weary or fainthearted.”

Goh Ewe Kheng (吴有庆, 1924-2014) is one witness who looked to Jesus from a young age. He began to follow Jesus in 1935 after hearing evangelistic messages by Dr. John Sung on the island of Penang (present-day Malaysia), where Goh was still growing up as an 11-year-old boy. In 1949, Goh and his new wife, Teh Phaik Hong, moved to Singapore to establish the branch operations of Tithes Dental & Photo Supply Ltd, Teh’s father’s business. Goh and Teh were blessed with five children and eventually several grandchildren. Moreover, over the course of 65 years in and near Singapore Goh was involved in numerous Christian ministries—including the Gideons, Scripture Union, prison ministry—as well as in the founding of numerous churches, including the now 4,000-plus-member Church of Singapore. It is no wonder that Goh has been described as a “quintessential minister in the marketplace” (Yap, 2023).

Wáng Zhì (王峙, 1903-1998), widely known as Wilson Wang, was another Asian witness who looked to Jesus throughout a long and fruitful life in this world—in Wang’s case for over 94 years. Born in Fuzhou, China, Wáng came to Christ in 1922 while on a Chinese navy career path. Wáng and several other young men—including his older brother Leland and Watchman Nee—would regularly visit two British missionaries stationed outside Fuzhou, and all of them eventually spread the gospel in China and much of Southeast Asia. For his part, Wáng affiliated with The Christian and Missionary Alliance (C&MA), edited the C&MA Chinese-language Bible Magazine, served briefly as principal of Singapore Bible College, and utilized his fluency in English and several Chinese dialects to speak and preach in (among other settings)

Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia, Australia, and the US—all the while partnering with his wife Beatrice in raising their five children (Wang, 2023).

While hearing stories of earlier stalwarts in the Faith may inspire us today, in reality we Evangelicals—including those of us involved in the modern missions movement—struggle to connect the past with the present or future. To be sure, Evangelicals have studied historical examples that are to be either emulated or avoided.

Goh Ewe Kheng and Wáng Zhì are just two of an innumerable host of Christian witnesses throughout Asian history who faced “Challenges and Opportunities in [their] New Normal World(s)” in the aftermath of displacement, war, political change, and other dramatic changes—changes that we today similarly face in approaching “Missions in the Post-Pandemic Era.” Receiving “Encouragement and Lessons from Asian Christian Witnesses” who have gone before us can help us today be “Inspired, Instructed, and Enlivened for the Future” that is filled with unknown challenges and opportunities.

LIVING WITH HISTORY

While hearing stories of earlier stalwarts in the Faith may inspire us today, in reality we Evangelicals—including those of us involved in the modern missions movement—struggle to connect the past with the present or future. To be sure, Evangelicals have studied historical examples that are to be either emulated or avoided. However, Evangelicalism has been birthed within, and shaped by, modernity’s objectification of history such that the past “appears as static, a picture or tableau vivant of a bygone culture”; and, what is “modern” has become “detached from [the past] in a new, autonomous cultural space.... The modern mind grew indifferent to history, for history... became useless to its projects” (Schorske, 1998, pp. 3, 4). We Christians who live in the continuing wake of modernity—perhaps preeminently we who have been particularly shaped by the contemporary world’s single most influential superpower, the United States of America—have been hard-wired to approach

challenges and opportunities with historical amnesia and self-generated ingenuity.

With regard to Asians, it is important first to note that the concept “Asian” is unquestionably “extremely complex and overwhelmingly vast” (Koyama, 1984, p. 435). For example, the mapping attempt by the ancient Greek cartographer Strabo in c. 30 AD shows the challenge of grasping merely the outline of Asia’s massive size: <https://www.alamy.com/stock-photo/strabo.html?sortBy=relevant>. The c. 1544 “First [European] Printed Map of Asia” by Sebastian Munster in Basle below demonstrates the challenge of depicting Asia’s topographical complexity: <https://www.raremaps.com/gallery/detail/78353/first-printed-map-of-asia-neuw-india-mit-vilen-anstossen-munster>. Ephraim Pagitt was not able to show much more detail of Asia’s interior almost 100 years later, seen in this 1636 map he produced in London: <https://www.raremaps.com/gallery/detail/36861/christianographie-asia-pagitt>. Jesuit-Chinese collaboration produced similar detail, as in this Wanguo Quantu (萬國全圖) from the 1620’s: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kunyu_Wanguo_Quantu#/media/File:JesuitChineseWorldMapEarly17thCentury.jpg. Today’s satellite imaging and other technologies enable more detailed and accurate mapping of Asian geography. However, manifold other “Asian” facets—perhaps most especially traits of various Asian people—present complexities and nuances that defy simple characterizations.

Even so, it is safe to say that in general Asians, including Asian Evangelicals, have had to come to terms with the coming—over the past half-millennium, and most certainly over the past two centuries—of Westerners as “historical agents of modernization [and] secularization.” These two revolutionary processes have clashed with the massive variety of ancient and resilient Asian historical and religious backgrounds (Koyama, 1972, 229). Therefore, in thinking of “Missions in the Post-Pandemic Era,” Asian Evangelicals face the additional complex challenge of having embraced a faith that has modern, “ahistorical” modern traits, all the while carrying deep Asian historical and religious sensibilities. (Other non-Western Evangelicals—African and Latin American, in particular—similarly face such a complex challenge.)

Despite such challenges, intentionally seeking to live and think with history—not against or without history, as modern thinking conveys—is important for Asian Evangelicals constructively to face post-Covid challenges and opportunities. To elaborate, Asian Evangelicals are to utilize “elements of the past... in the cultural construction of the present and future”; and, they are to understand themselves to live in “the flow of social time” (Schorske, 1998, pp. 3-5). Asian churches, mission agencies, and Christians are neither approaching a totally “New Normal World” of post-Covid realities, nor are they constrained to turn their backs on their Asian heritages in determining how to approach post-pandemic challenges. There

are historical, cultural, and experiential continuities between pre- and post-Covid challenges and opportunities; between Asian Christians’ heritages and the current generation’s traits; and, between how earlier generations of Asians dealt with adversity and how today’s Christians will take part in God’s mission.

At the same time, living with history does not entail turning a blind eye to genuinely new contemporary realities. Prior to 2020, no Asians—indeed no human beings—had ever experienced (earlier widespread pandemics notwithstanding) the kind of global lockdown everyone has had to endure due to the Covid outbreak. Similarly, no Asians living two generations ago had ever dreamed of WeChat, TikTok, KakaoTalk, WhatsApp, Weibo, QQ, SNOW, LINE, Youku, Naver, Bilibili, or any such electronic communications platform. A generation or two before that there was neither the United Nations structure nor all of the national boundaries that are enforced (and sometimes disputed) throughout Asia today. While international trade is not new in Asia, today’s ever globalizing cities and megacities in Western Asia, Central Asia, South Asia, Northeast Asia, and Southeast Asia are genuinely new.

ENGAGING PAINFUL HISTORIES

An additional obstacle to living intentionally with Asian history consists of having to revisit painful wounds from numerous conflicts and injustices—many of which are ongoing. Most parts of Asia have been dealing with international tensions, and often open conflicts, resulting from newly created boundaries or territorial claims related to imperial incursions, withdrawals, and decisions. Indeed, all regions of Asia have numerous such struggles, be they in West Asia (e.g., Israel-Palestine, Northern Iraq), Central Asia (e.g., Kyrgyzstan-Tajikistan), South Asia (e.g., India-Pakistan, Bangladesh-Myanmar), Northeast Asia (e.g., South Korea-North Korea, South Korea-Japan, China-Taiwan), or Southeast Asia (e.g., islands and waters in the “South China Sea” involving China-Philippines/Vietnam/Malaysia/Brunei/Taiwan). Many conflicts that go back much further in history also undergird ongoing tensions—including Israel-Palestine and Korea-Japan. Acknowledging the living connection between the present and the past necessarily entails working through the pain of enduring wounds and lasting effects of permanent scars.

Christians are not immune to painful histories, nor are they exempt from responsibly working toward healing, justice, and reconciliation. Merely hoping that time will heal past wounds, or that focusing on Christian ministry will somehow dry up the deep undercurrents of unresolved trauma, are both wishful thinking. Bringing out into the light what might seem more manageable were it to remain hidden away in some dark, locked closet of the past is essential for

truth and reconciliation to hold sway—even in those Asian cultural settings that traditionally deal with conflict more indirectly, with nuanced subtlety, or by avoidance altogether.

Evangelicals involved in missions face an added hindrance to dealing with wider, difficult, and complicated historical matters. The evangelical movement's pervasive focus on Unreached People Groups (UPGs), sparked by Ralph Winter's plenary address to the first Lausanne Congress in 1974 (Lausanne Movement, n.d.a), had the accompanying effect of dissipating Evangelicals' concern about socio-political matters—even though the Lausanne Covenant spoke to the importance of "Christian Social Responsibility (Lausanne Movement, n.d.b). In actuality, part of what led to the formation of the Lausanne Movement was a reaction against the World Council of Churches' perceived "universalism, syncretism, and the premise that social action and political liberation [emphasis added] can be construed as evangelism" (Plowman, 1974). Viewed negatively, the evangelical commitment that "cross-cultural evangelization needs to be the primary task of the Church" (Lausanne Movement, n.d.b) can serve as a hindrance to, and convenient avoidance of, facing painful and difficult histories.

Most constructive for working through painful histories is for Christians (and others) on different sides of an inherited conflict to seek truth and reconciliation together. For Asian Christians, that means participating in such efforts as that of "Creating New Narratives" conducted by the Holy Land Trust, wherein participants from differing groups—including Jews, Christians, and Muslims—come together to create a "deeper understanding of identity, conflict narrative, tolerance, active listening, and how trauma shapes conversations in one's community" (Holy Land Trust, 2023). The "Northeast Asia Reconciliation Initiative" (NARI) is another exemplary attempt with several goals, one of which is to "engage key areas of contextual challenge in the region" (NARI, n.d.) rather than avoiding them. As noted earlier from Hebrews, looking to Jesus is connected to, and enhanced by, noting the "cloud" of those who have gone before us. Living with history, working through inherited trauma, and studying the lives of predecessors are all part of learning to face present and future challenges and opportunities.

DICTIONARY OF CHRISTIAN BIOGRAPHY IN ASIA (DCBASIA)

Concretely going about studying history is of course a wide open, multifaceted, and potentially unwieldy endeavor. For the sake of discussing that endeavor in a manageable and concrete manner, the focus here will be on learning biographies of Asian Christians. In particular, a new and growing resource for Asian Christian biographies will be introduced and examined here, namely the Dictionary of Christian

Biography in Asia (DCBASIA) (Dictionary of Christian Biography in Asia, 2023a).

This essay has already utilized the DCBASIA in introducing the sketches of Goh Ewe Kheng and Wáng Zhì (王峙). At the time of writing (late March 2023), these biographies are two of 161 on the DCBASIA site. That total is significant in light of the site having been launched only about one year ago, on 17 April 2022. The hope and plan is for the number of biographies to increase significantly.

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It is important to note that biographies of women, as well as of non-Asians who have influenced Asian Christianity, are most welcome. For example, Sophia Blackmore (1857-1945) was an Australian who served as a missionary in Singapore for 40 years. Obstacles and changes characterized her early years of service: the Australian Methodist Church to which Blackmore belonged did not send single female missionaries overseas; and, when she set out as a missionary anyway, she was headed for China via India. Through various encounters Blackmore affiliated with the Woman's Foreign Missionary Society of the American Methodist Episcopal Church, then opened the Tamil Girls' School in Singapore. Later, having made good progress in learning the Baba Malay language, Blackmore responded to yet another request and began teaching Chinese girls, leading to the Anglo-Chinese Girls' School and eventual boarding school. Blackmore also started a Baba church for the Straits Chinese (in Singapore), translated many hymns into Malay, and published a Baba Malay Christian periodical called Sahabat ("Friend") tailored to women (Teng, 2023).

OTHER DATABASES

While the DCBASIA is being highlighted here, some other important databases should also be noted. Two are China focused: the Biographical Dictionary of Chinese Christianity (BDCC) (Biographical

Dictionary of Chinese Christianity, 2023a) and the China Historical Christian Database (CHCD) (China Historical Christian Database, 2020a). The BDCC was launched in 2006 with a goal “to narrow the gap between current reference materials and contemporary Chinese Christian demography.” With entries in English and in Chinese, this valuable resource provides access to “essential biographical facts of Chinese and foreign Christian missionaries, church leaders, evangelists, and laity chiefly responsible for laying the foundations and advancing the growth of Chinese Christian communities and their influence in societies around the world” (Biographical Dictionary of Chinese Christianity, 2023b). The CHCD went public more recently, in 2020. This ambitious database is not restricted to biographies but seeks to “provides users the tools to discover where every Christian church, school, hospital, orphanage, publishing house, and the like were located in China, and it documents who worked inside those buildings, both foreign and Chinese” (China Historical Christian Database, 2020b). The CHCD is a collaborative project involving multiple educational institutions and aims to provide as thorough and detailed information imaginable about Christian individuals, organizations, churches, and movements.

An important precursor and model for both the BDCC and the DCBAsia is the Dictionary of African Christian Biography (DACB). The DACB was launched online in 1998 with the mission “to collect, preserve, and make freely accessible biographical accounts and church histories – from oral and written sources – integral to a scholarly understanding of African Christianity.” Over the course of its now over 25 years of existence, the DACB has grown to have over 3,000 biographies in four languages, a Journal of African Christian Biography, thematic research projects, and educational resources (Dictionary of African Christian Biography, 2023). As noted earlier, the DACB has willingly served the creators of both the BDCC and the DCBAsia in providing counsel and, just as importantly, incentive through its own pioneering example of a freely accessible online biographical dictionary.

DCBASIA PARTICULARS

As noted elsewhere in this essay, the DCBAsia website URL is <https://dcbasia.org/>. The site is free to use by anyone who has internet access. Bishop Dr. Hwa Yung, Bishop Emeritus of the Methodist Church of Malaysia, has been particularly instrumental in envisioning the DCBAsia. Dr. Tai Kim Teng has assumed the responsibility of DCBAsia Executive Director (Dictionary of Christian Biography in Asia, 2023b). DCBAsia’s two main sponsors are Seminari Theoloji Malaysia (STM) and Overseas Missionary Fellowship (OMF); DCBAsia.org operates under the auspices of STM and is based at the STM campus in Seremban, Malaysia (Dictionary of Christian

Biography in Asia, 2023c).

Navigation on the site is easy and intuitive. Clicking the pull-down menu for “Guidelines & Submissions” on the homepage shows “Biographies” and “Christian Histories” links to the appropriate instructions for making those types of submissions.

DCBAsia aims to have as many biographical sketches from throughout Asia as possible. Brief “Christian Histories” of movements, periods, churches, institutions, or other similar topics related to Asian Christianity are also welcome. While English is assumed to be the most widely used language for DCBAsia entries—since English is the most widely shared language throughout Asia—other languages are also welcome and indeed encouraged, either as originally used for composing an entry or as a translation (of English or of another language).

Those who submit entries for consideration do not have to be specially trained historians or scholars. Anyone who believes that a particular Asian Christian (or non-Asian Christian who had Asia-related influence) or other Asian “Christian History” should be more widely known should feel free to contact DCBAsia about making a submission. As stated on the DCBAsia homepage, “an invitation is extended to all Christians irrespective of creed to contribute towards its success and future growth by praying for us, supporting us, contributing stories, or sharing this resource with your friends” (Dictionary of Asian Christian Biography, 2023a). Collaboration and mutual encouragement are vital for the DCBAsia’s ministry to flourish.

Concrete instructions are on the “Guidelines & Submissions” section of the DCBAsia website. One important set of parameters is that entries are to be approximately 500 to 1500 words (or non-English script equivalent). The ultimate length will depend on the subject’s degree of influence, as suggested by the submitter and decided by the appropriate DCBAsia editorial committee.

The DCBAsia seeks to speak for all of Asia. At the time of writing, because of having been developed and launched in Malaysia the large majority of DCBAsia entries are understandably Malaysia-related—as clicking on the “Stories” homepage heading shows. To help move DCBAsia toward becoming more genuinely pan-Asian, five regions (West, Central, South, Northeast, and Southeast) will have their own executive and editorial committees. As of late March, scholars related to South Asia and to Northeast Asia are already working to form these committees and expand the entries on the DCBAsia site. Those of you receiving information here about the DCBAsia are encouraged to help by making submissions, encouraging others to make submissions, and otherwise collaborating with those involved with expanding DCBAsia’s usefulness. The search function for the Stories is designed to accommodate multiple languages and categories.

One more current example of the multifaceted

and instructive character of DCBAsia stories is that of George Vergis (1921-2017). Born in India, Vergis eventually served as an educator and priest of the Mar Thomas Church in Malaya/Malaysia. Like many he endured the war years of the early 1940s, in Vergis's case in southern Malaya under Japanese occupation. Vergis learned Japanese, eventually married and had two children, and led a varied and fruitful life of service (Vergis, 2023).

To God be the glory through such testimonies of the growing cloud of witnesses presented on the DCBAsia website. May God provide much encouragement and countless lessons from these Asian Christian accounts to inspire, instruct, and enliven Christians today who must creatively face a challenging post-pandemic future.

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TESTIMONY:

A Business Surrendered to God

Jaque Dy with Damples Dulcero-Baclagon

I became a Christian when I was 9 years old when I accepted Jesus as my personal Lord and Savior. I was born in a Christian family. Both my parents are actively serving in the church. I grew up knowing Christ as my Savior and Lord and to obey Him is the best way to show my love for Him. I was raised to be a church-going and Christ serving believer.

Growing up, I lived with my grandmother till I was 12. She was the one who taught me how to pray and sing hymns. She also hosted many missionaries traveling in our area in her home, and taught me to love God's people. I saw her how she took care of them as an opportunity to serve the Lord. She also encouraged me to attend church conferences to know more about God.

After college, I pursued Masters of Arts in Biblical Studies in Singapore. While studying I worked part time in a church training volunteers on how to be Sunday School teachers. When I completed my studies, I went back home to help my father in his business. Dad taught me how to work with confidence and excellence. I also helped our church to start a pre-school. After teaching pre-school for 3 years, I got married.

After 3 years of being married, my husband and I started our business. As a start-up business we did well, we became busy, and thought our business will flourish.

A BIG BURDEN

Five years later, in 2007, the business that we thought would take off went bankrupt. We lost everything we had and we were even left with loans to pay the banks and our parents. It was a heavy burden placed on our shoulders. This life's episode taught me how to surrender to God literally. Ironically, when I look back I realized that I surrendered everything when I had nothing- and yet God accepted that, and it started the transformation in my life. I realized that it's not our own personal talent, skills and knowledge that we can rely on to succeed, but only with God. His way, His will, His truth. I believe this experience was the turning point in my faith. As the Lord led us step by step out of our darkness and bankruptcy, I got to see how true His Words are, how alive they are that we can touch, hear, see and experience them.

When I chose to obey God and follow His lead, things slowly came into place.

I remembered one morning when my husband told me the good news that we finally started earning. My reply? I told him how can we be earning when I was

not getting any salary all these years. My negativity and hopelessness was so evident despite surrendering to God, my heart was not always right.

TURNING POINT

Then one day, he told me that we were overstocked with an item. I told him sarcastically I will pray about it. After a few days, a retailer called me to ask if I had that item, so we delivered the same. After a few months, the sales were so phenomenal that I had to tell Aldy, my husband we need 1,000 cases. He looked at me with disbelief because we were just moving it out a few months ago. The rest they say is history.

I remember asking God all the time in my prayers, what to do, and how to do things according to His will. I will go on my knees early in the morning even before the crack of dawn to seek him, and cry out to Him. Many times, I would be praying and I will see images in my mind which I believe the Lord sent. And when I go to my office, I would start to compute and come up with a promotion or a strategy to promote our products. I have learned to hear His voice. It is true that when you seek God, you will find Him.

There were times when we were so desperate, nothing seems to be going right. I would go back to God and kept asking, kept seeking Him in prayers and through Bible reading. I learned to ask God for everything . Big or small. Even asking Him for simple personal things like when should I have a haircut, or how can I solve a problem in the office or at home and I will not move until I hear Him clearly.

And as I became closer in my walk with God, one of the learnings I had was I would easily well up with compassion for the lost, the needy, to speak with love, kindness and gentleness. This led me to another step to fulfill God's call. During this time, we would be very vocal on what God is doing in my husband's and my life in our office. In our company meetings, we started to pray and sing worship songs with our employees. We also became very vocal about our faith and would be testifying how the Lord is opening doors, and providing for our every need. Sharing, talking and putting God in our midst became a habit. Over the years, we have continuously declared that we are nothing without God, to our employees, our clients, our vendors, and everyone we get to talk to about Heavenly Products Inc.. During the pandemic, there were devotions on the Word of God every day in our offices and branches, Our employees had break

out groups, to learn God's word and to pray. These are our employees' discipleship groups. This didn't only help them go through the pandemic, but also develop their relationship with God and with one another.

The pandemic led us to find our calling to minister to our employees, vendors, clients and whoever God sends to us. My husband, Aldy and I decided as a couple with faith in Christ to make this our mission, to not just share the gospel and mentor, but to lead people to know about discipleship and to become disciple makers of their own groups. We started discipling members of the management committee in our company, and today they already have their own discipleship groups. This is multiplication!

HEAVENLY MISSION



Our company mission is to elevate the lives of our fellow Filipinos with world class quality products that have fair value and affordable prices and continuously innovating and developing products to fulfill the same. I manage the company with my husband, Aldy and our consultants Emilio Macasaet III and Cathee Acero. We also have declared that we are a Christian company with the H Logo of Heavenly that depicts a high priest worshipping God. It also symbolizes a full surrender to God.

Our employees have grown from 20 to 250 and we now have 3 offices and 2 more warehouses. Our products are distributed nationwide in several supermarket chains, local key accounts and distributors.

We praise God for saving us and bringing us this far. Heavenly, our company's boss is the Lord. We all follow Him and His ways. Its success and revival is all because of Him.

MINISTRY IN BUSINESS

Having considered that our business is a mission. We have organized our process of Evangelism, Discipleship and Multiplication basing on the Operation Christmas Child ministry where I am also serving as National Prayer Coordinator for the past 14 years.

In our company we have the following ministries:

1. **Discipleship** - particularly the management committee and the managers and supervisors under me. It is part of our daily work at the office and also we encourage our employees to have a separate time to do discipleship with others.

2. **Prayer** - I mobilize prayer groups to pray for the company, our country and missions. We gather prayer requests from our employees and pray for them during our discipleship group meetings. Then we share God's answers to our prayers to encourage each other of God's amazing grace. Our other activities like team building and company annual strategic planning, we also include devotions, prayers and worship to teach our employees that everything we do is to glorify the Lord.

3. **Church Worship** - We invite our teams to worship God in the church. Our team goes to Victory Christian Fellowship and other Christian churches in their areas. We also have discipleship and worship in the warehouse where a pastor monitors and mentors them.

4. **Bible-based Recruitment** - since our consultants for warehouse and sales are also Christians, the company follows the Biblical leadership principles and are applied during recruitment and selection. This biblical principles are adapted from the high impact training of Al Newell.

5. **Women's Ministry** - our ministry with women has been a very fulfilling and rewarding experience. I have seen women grow in their faith, I have seen God move, change and transform women into having more time in prayer and devotion. We also meet other women quarterly to mutually encourage them and be accountable in discipleship ministry.

BUSINESS AS MISSION

Throughout the years of operating our business we learned the following:

1. Business is a ministry itself

The Bible says, "And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him." (Colossians 3;17) Since our lives had been fully surrendered to God, we included our business too and everything we do for it.

We realized that we have created a ministry of our own in our business. We started to organize our concept on how to make our employees undergo discipleship activities by incorporating prayers, and singing gospel songs in our meetings. Then we started to invite our management people to

discipleship groups during their break times. We also started evangelism for the rank and file and if they find themselves interested to hear more about the gospel, they are invited to the discipleship group with some of their colleagues.

We also extended our business as mission to our distributors and other business partners. We invite them for business meetings that includes sharing of God's work through blessings and problem solving and attest to them that all things were orchestrated by God who knows everything. Our testimony of God's grace and salvation are always heard during our meetings.

Our suppliers are also included in our mission. Since our products are imported from other countries, we take trips to our suppliers/vendors and we bring with us our stories of God's way and will in doing our business. In one of our trips, while we were checking the factory, our supplier told me that our marriage saved theirs. The wife confided to me that she was in a "cold relationship" with her husband for many years. In fact they were about to divorce. But she told me that we as a Christian couple is like her model when it comes to husband-wife relationship. She observed how I talk to my husband, give food to him, inquire of him first before making decisions and others. Then she tried to copy doing these things to her own husband. So her relationship with her husband began to change and improve. She and her husband now are doing well. This Chinese couple is grateful for how we were able to help his wife and turn their marriage around. We were also blessed by God for having a continued relationship with them as our supplier/vendor and that they treat as well and give us good business deals.

In another business meeting with our Chinese vendors, God allowed us to minister to her and her 17 year old daughter who is preparing for her studies overseas. The Lord led me to listen to the daughter and her pressures and struggles just to be able to go through the difficult process – especially as 2 of the students in their school committed suicide from all the pressures of making it. Our conversation led me to share Jesus Christ and how God can help her with the pressures and difficulties in life. I also told her about the love of Jesus to her and how God can give her forgiveness of sins and salvation. We would like to think talking and sharing Jesus to this young lady was such a great way to end this work trip. It maybe labeled as a work trip, but it is always a heavenly God-led trip whether it be work, rest or family trip. God is always in the equation.

2. Business as mission is a big opportunity to serve God and others

Just like Lydia in the book of Acts, we see our business as a big opportunity to serve God and others. Lydia was quick to perceive that what had been hers before her conversion home, business and possessions – now belonged to the Lord.

- She had a new partner – the Lord Jesus
- A new purpose – to serve him
- And a new satisfaction – seeking to be effective and successful in order to glorify the Lord. (<https://www.thenivbible.com/blog/lydia-from-the-bible/>)

In our company, we treat our employees as family and disciples. We teach them about God and how to be good workers and stewards of His resources. Even if we are their employers, they can approach us for their prayer requests and for help whether personal or work-related. Our business is a good stepping stone to share our lives and love for the Lord to our other business partners as well. They know that we are honest and God-fearing in our dealings. We do not only share our faith to others, we also share our Godly values and God-sent resources to others. We know we have to do everything according to God's Words.

3. Doing Business and making it your mission is a reflection of your commitment to the Great Commission (Matt 28:19-20)

As believers of Jesus Christ, we know we have a calling. We are God's missionaries. And we know that we can obey this calling through our business. This is the reason why we are passionate with our discipleship program in our company. Many people may see us as a regular business operation. But to us our business is a means to obey God and His commandments.

We envision Heavenly to be a company that is used by God to bless others spiritually and through it many will come to know the Lord Jesus Christ and His grace. We have branded one of our products as BLEST, the old English word for blessed, because we wanted others to see God's blessings in every opportunity and in everything. We make sure that this is the reason why we keep on doing our business and this is the purpose why Heavenly Products Inc. exists.



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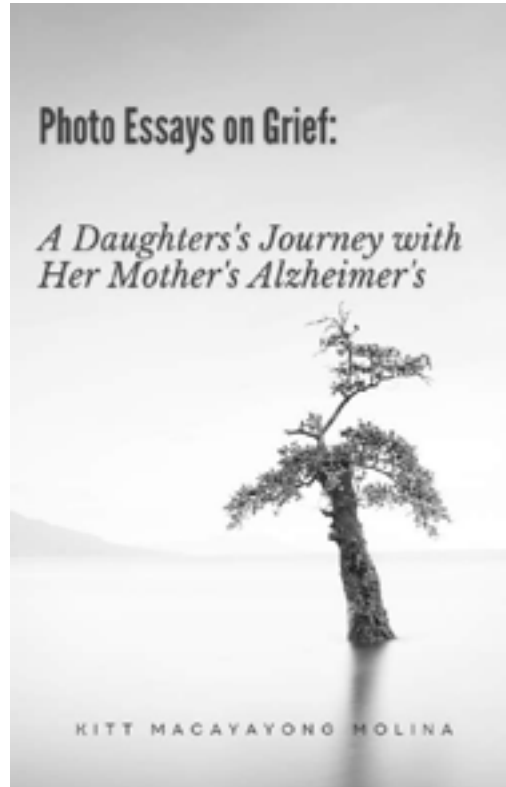
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BOOK REVIEW:

Photo Essays on Grief: A Daughter's Journey to her Mother's Alzheimer's

Benji Cruz

National Director, Living Waters Philippines



This eBook, "Photo Essays on Grief: A Daughter's Journey to her Mother's Alzheimer's," is not just a valuable resource on providing care for elderly fighting a debilitating disease. Kitt Macayayong-Molina invites us to glimpse in the inner chamber of her heart as she takes a journey of giving back to her mother the mothering she received. As I read this haunting photo essays, I got a sense of a coming into a full circle of being dependent on your child who was once dependent on you. And in that process, one increases in love. Kitt's words couldn't be said better, "Alzheimer's brought me closer to Mama and allowed me to show love and care for her. Mama had become my 'Little Girl. I mothered my own mother.'"

That love didn't come easy. Kitt didn't go into platitudes praising her mother. She was real in sharing her tiredness, and at times irritation, at her mother's erratic behavior, even at the receiving end of her accusing words as the disease worsened. But even in the midst of exhaustion of being her mom's primary care for seven years, she found herself having a "deep affection and compassion" for her.

And when she's gone, the book shifted to Kitt's wrestling with profound grief of losing as she witnessed her mother even to her last breath. A

touching moment of a mother to her daughter even when she had already forgotten her name. Mama's heart proudly owned her even if her brains were giving away. "Oh, anak kita (You are my daughter)" she told Kitt, at a loss on recalling her name. That kind of bond can't be conquered by any ailment nor any memory loss.

Kitt courageously refused to cave in to cultural pressure to get over her grieving fast. In indictment of today's move-on-quick culture, she wrote, "The picture is like a looming anger I felt in my heart towards those who wanted me to hurry my process of grieving."

This photo-essay book is not about disease but about being healed to love. It's not about death but being made truly alive by compassion. And it's not about grieving in despair but about grieving unto hope.

I read the book in one sitting as I couldn't put it down. Because it gives me life. Towards the end of her book, Kitt pointed us to where that newfound life, hope and compassion emanated from..."My intimacy with Christ helped me make enough room for love in my life."