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God's Mission as a Call to Humanity: An Incarnational and Anthropological Perspective for Engaging People in a Pluralistic Asia

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INTRODUCTION: THE ERA OF DIVERSE ASIA AND RENEWED FOCUS ON PEOPLE

Asia is entering a unique era, unlike any before. The continent, birthplace of three major religions, rich in folk cosmologies, home to ancient philosophical civilizations, and rich with memories of priesthoods and shamans, now experiences a new phase of religious coexistence. Buddhism continues reform efforts in Korea, Japan, Thailand, and other countries; Islam grows stronger with young populations in Indonesia, Malaysia, Pakistan, and neighboring countries; Hinduism revives its cultural pride in India; and even as technology spreads language and habits worldwide, ancestral and shamanic traditions silently persist within Asian families.

In this context, Christian mission needs to go beyond the approaches of the 19th and 20th centuries, as well as the strategies commonly used in the early 21st century. The issue isn't just how the church evangelizes but also how the gospel gains trust through those who live it. We're no longer operating in a religious vacuum or in a simple cultural context. Instead, the Christian encounter in Asia has become more of a human encounter: neighbor with neighbor, worker with worker, mother with mother, scholar with scholar — that is, people connecting with people.

Therefore, I suggest a missiological approach that emphasizes the importance of the "people factors," as they are the ones experiencing and embodying their religions. Certainly, Christian missions are frequently portrayed as missionaries going to evangelize and serve within various cultural and religious communities. Therefore, any form of Christian mission involves engaging with people. However, studying missionary efforts in history prompts numerous questions about their goals, methods, and motivations,

as discussed in many missiological works such as David Bosch (1991), Lesslie Newbigin (1989), and others. Having observed missionary work and having carried out a missional task myself in East Africa over three decades, I also raised many questions about how to define a Christian mission that is biblically truthful and culturally appropriate in the current context. Building on these questions, this paper seeks to emphasize a crucial element of Christian missions that should be taken into account in all forms of missional efforts.

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As mentioned above, Asia is a vast continent with deeply rooted religions, making it essential for missionary work to engage with these religious traditions. Therefore, gaining a thorough understanding of diverse religions is crucial and valuable for both comparative theology and apologetics. However, it remains crucial to consider the human element when engaging with religions. Our missionary efforts should always prioritize people, keeping that at the heart of our mission. This perspective should once again be central to the church's mission. The future of Asian Christianity depends not only on sound theological reasoning but also on how well it understands and develops human relationships. If we see our mission as a holistic effort to reflect Christ in everyday life and ministry, we need to reconsider our methods—focusing on building genuine relationships, listening carefully, practicing hospitality through friendship, showing compassion, and maintaining integrity. As we analyze and improve our missional strategies in the context of today's Asia, it's crucial to consider the human (anthropological) reality. I want to highlight this anthropological aspect of the missional task in Asia in this article.

People understand truth both cognitively and emotionally. My anthropological framework demonstrates that meaning isn't fixed in propositions but is actively constructed within individuals through personal and social influences such as self-identity, social belonging, emotional memories, cultural norms, and lived experiences. A message's truthfulness depends on how it resonates within a person's awareness. Consequently, the messenger and the message are inseparable, especially in societies like those in Asia and Africa, where the messenger embodies the message.

This paper supports a Christian mission model focused on the human individual. The goal is not to weaken theology or change orthodoxy but to emphasize its core message: God's mission is inherently personal. God does not save religions, but people. Christ did not come into abstraction; He entered flesh, households, villages, and shared meals. The incarnation illustrates God's approach to mission towards humanity.

Asia's future does not merely need new strategies; it requires a new imagination. Institutions and mission agencies have often approached religious communities as strategic fields to be reached, but what stands before the church today is not a field; it is a neighbor, a friend, a colleague, a child. Behind every religious identity is a story, a fear, a wound, a longing. In missiology, we cannot speak only of doctrines and systems; we must learn again to speak to souls.

Christian mission loses its effectiveness when it focuses solely on belief without fostering a sense of belonging. It becomes truly transformative when individuals encounter Christ through the embodied presence of others. While a Buddhist seeker might dismiss theological concepts, it is rare

to find a Christian who offers forgiveness even when wounded. A Muslim may reject Christian doctrines, but not the Christian who visits them in the hospital. Apologetics might win debates, but hearts can be won solely through love. Therefore, the future of Asian missions—guided by Scripture and rooted in human cultural reality—must prioritize presence over proclamation, hospitality over explanation, and friendship over persuasion. My starting point is this: Mission to people is not just a method; it is a way of being in Christ.

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Below are the key points of this paper:

My theological perspective on the church's mission is grounded in the Incarnation of Jesus. It teaches that God's mission in Christ is primarily aimed at people as bearers of God's image, rather than at religions as products of people.

From an anthropological perspective, it is essential to thoughtfully consider a cultural worldview in mission efforts, as it influences people's belief systems, including their perceptions of truth and faith.

Drawing on my research into African Muslims' lived experiences, I propose that Asian churches adopt a neighborly presence in their mission rather than focusing solely on institutional persuasion.

I also propose that the Asian mission in the 21st century must move beyond culturally neutral doctrinal strategies toward an incarnational mission to people shaped by presence, hospitality, listening, relational trust, and allegiance-forming discipleship.

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATION: INCARNATION & IMAGO DEI

If Christian mission is fundamentally a mission to people, then theology must first show us that God Himself engages people, not systems. The doctrine of mission is not rooted in strategy, but in the person of Jesus Christ. Before discussing evangelism or cross-cultural communication, we need to focus on incarnation: God's entry into history not as an abstract truth but as an embodied presence. The Word became

flesh, not theory; the Gospel came as a person, not a proposition.

INCARNATION AS GOD'S MISSIONAL METHOD

Christ did not rescue humanity from afar; He entered into our world with all its realities—breath, hunger, fatigue, laughter, and tears. He learned a language, lived within a family, and submitted to village customs and cultural rhythms. Known by name, lineage, and local place—Jesus of Nazareth—He showed that salvation is not just about instruction. Instead, God revealed Himself as a person, emphasizing that love must be experienced, truth is relational, and redemption is interpersonal rather than transactional.

This theological truth challenges the notion that mission is mainly religious and strategic. If God had believed salvation could be achieved through a well-organized system or plan, Christ might have come as a book, similar to Islam, or as a religious authority, as misunderstood by many Christians throughout history, exemplified by the Crusaders. Instead, truth arrived in a personal form—walking, eating, touching, and embracing; essentially, truth lived among people. Jesus communicated with words, but people followed Him because of His presence. While theology can be summarized logically, salvation became something tangible and real. Essentially, God didn't send us a systematic approach to salvation but sent us a Person—His own Son. In this Person, we find our existence and purpose.

IMAGO DEI: THE MISSIONAL WORTH OF EVERY PERSON

Every person, no matter their religion, bears the image of God. Therefore, evangelism should not start with judgment, suspicion, or religious profiling. When we encounter a Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, shamanic practitioner, or secular neighbor, we initially see someone created in God's likeness. The focus of evangelism shifts from asking, "What do they believe?" to understanding, "Who are they before God?"

Imago Dei emphasizes respect and forbids belittling others. It reminds missionaries that people should not be seen as problems to solve or targets to reach. Instead, each individual is a complex mystery shaped by memory, culture, trauma, hope, childhood, shame, language, and desire. The image of God links us more profoundly to our neighbors than any philosophy, ritual, or religious doctrine. Our core identity is human and shared before assigning religious labels like Christian, Muslim, or Buddhist. Seeing people as ideological foes rather than valued creations of God undermines our mission.

JESUS' MISSIONAL INTERACTIONS: A PATTERN

FOR ASIA

When Jesus conversed with the Samaritan woman, He treated her as an individual, not just a religious label, recognizing her thirst, history, and pain. He started with a simple request for water, demonstrating vulnerability. Only afterward did He disclose the deeper truth. His approach moved from addressing human needs to revealing divine insight, rather than starting with divine knowledge.

When Jesus met Zacchaeus, He didn't begin with moral admonitions. Instead, He asked to dine at his house. This gesture of fellowship prompted Zacchaeus's repentance, illustrating that a sense of belonging precedes genuine change. Similarly, when healing the leper, Jesus touched him first, before addressing him. Physical contact preceded His words. True restoration came through compassion.

The Christian mission in Asia generally follows a pattern: starting with presence rather than explanations, emphasizing humility over dominance, and prioritizing relationships over debates. Apologetics may come afterward, but the core approach is to build connections, with presence serving as the main way to share the Gospel.

THE MESSENGER AS THE EMBODIMENT OF THE MESSAGE

In *Cultural Anthropology*, I argued that meaning exists not in words themselves but in the people who use them. This idea also holds true theologically: a sermon devoid of genuine life is mere noise, and a doctrine lacking embodied kindness becomes simple rhetoric. In Asia's relational cultures, a Christian's character takes precedence over the perceived credibility of the Gospel.

Orthodoxy only persuades when it is visible. Christian mission falters when we preach love but fail to show it, promise forgiveness but harbor resentment, speak of grace but live defensively. In societies based on relationships, inconsistency undermines doctrine more than eloquent arguments can salvage it. The world does not first scrutinize our theology; it observes our character.

In this respect, the church's most powerful tool for evangelism is not just its persuasive reasoning but also its display of Christlike character when conveying the gospel. Christ brings transformation not just through teachings but through individuals shaped in His image. Therefore, the mission should do more than just teach theology; it must embody it.

The incarnation is more than just a revelation; it serves as an invitation. We are encouraged to follow the example of the One who entered human experiences, shared meals with sinners, restored dignity to the ashamed, touched the untouchable, and remembered the overlooked. Mission continues Jesus' way within His world. Therefore, the theological foundation for the Mission to People is clear: God's

mission starts with Christ, moves through His followers, and reaches out to the world. Mission isn't a mere program but is expressed through God's presence in His people.

ANTHROPOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK: UNDERSTANDING WORLDVIEWS WITH SYMPATHY AND EMPATHY

A mission to people demands more than goodwill; it requires understanding. Loving without understanding can lead to paternalism, and zeal without listening might be perceived as intrusion. If we ignore how people think, feel, interpret, and experience reality, we may communicate eloquently yet remain misunderstood. Theology offers the truth of the Gospel, but anthropology shows how that truth becomes meaningful to the human mind. Without anthropology, mission can become projection—speaking from our own understanding rather than how others perceive it. Therefore, understanding one's worldview is crucial for fulfilling God's mission.

MEANINGS RESIDE NOT IN WORDS BUT IN PEOPLE'S MINDS!

Every message, including the Gospel, is filtered through a person's worldview: the fundamental cognitive framework through which reality is perceived. Two people may hear the same words but walk away with opposite meanings, not because the words have changed, but because they perceived them through different worldviews. As I emphasized in *Cultural Anthropology*, meaning does not lie in cultural forms themselves; it lies in the people who interpret them.

A Bible verse is not meaningful simply because it is true. It becomes meaningful when it connects to the interpretive structures within a listener, such as their memory, identity, fear, desire, and cultural logic. A mission that ignores cultural cognition speaks truth loudly but is heard faintly.

UNDERSTANDING CULTURAL WORLDVIEW AS GRASPING ONE'S "ENCULTURATION"

From birth, children acquire values, taboos, emotional cues, sacred concepts, purity, shame, and a sense of belonging through family interactions, language, rituals, and discipline. This process, known as "enculturation," shapes one's view of the world around them, and the content of their worldview is what an intercultural missionary needs to grasp to understand the cultural insider for the sake of gospel communication. It is because the gospel message must be communicated to the place of the deep level of one's worldview. A Korean child's view of bowing as respectful, a Muslim child's perception of prayer as rhythmic, a Hindu child's belief in the sacredness of cows, and a secular child's understanding that

tolerance is a virtue. Therefore, the mission should view people not as blank slates but as individuals shaped by their culture. When the Gospel enters a person, it does not enter an empty room; it enters a house already furnished. Evangelism is not merely about adding truth, but about rearranging meaning structures. This is why conversion is rarely instantaneous; it is architectural.

"WORLDVIEW UNIVERSALS" AS LENSES FOR EXPLORING DIFFERENT WORLDVIEWS

Cognitive anthropologists have identified seven worldview universals that exist in every culture, though expressed differently. They include the categories, such as Self, Other, Classification (or categorization), Relationship, Causality, Time (or events), and Space (or places).¹ The worldview universals carry significant implications for Christian mission and gospel communication.

Understanding the Self is deeply linked to one's identity, honor, and shame, which directly affect how a person responds to Christ. The perception of the Other creates boundaries between insiders and outsiders, shaping attitudes such as hospitality, caution, suspicion, or exclusion, and thereby influencing how the gospel messenger is received. Classification provides cultural standards for distinguishing between the sacred and the profane, the pure and the impure, and the moral and immoral, all of which shape how the gospel message is interpreted and understood.

In terms of Relationship, tension can occur between family loyalty and personal faith choices, greatly affecting conversion and discipleship. The concept of Causality determines whether reality is explained through spiritual beings, fate, God, or karma, thereby influencing how suffering and salvation are interpreted. Furthermore, perspectives on Time, whether cyclical or linear, affect one's understanding of history, eschatological expectations, and the sense of urgency and hope related to salvation. Finally, the idea of Space includes sacred sites, clean areas, and spiritual landscapes, influencing religious rituals and people's connection to God.

In this manner, worldview universals serve as a crucial framework that shapes how the gospel is understood and received in different cultural settings. Moreover, the core of people's worldview universals can be accurately identified only through ongoing life dialogues and shared experiences, rather than solely through research methods.

UNDERSTANDING "EMOTIONS" AS AN INTEGRAL WAY TO GRASP MEANINGS

Meaning includes both cognitive and emotional

1. See *World View* by Michael Kearney (Novato, CA: Chandler & Sharp Publishers, Inc., 1984) and *Worldview for Christian Witness* by Charles Kraft (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2008).

elements, as every interpretation involves an emotional component. For instance, two children watching the same dog might perceive it differently: a German child might feel strong affection, almost as if the dog were part of the family, while a Swahili child might see it simply as an animal, without any emotional connection. The object stays the same; only the emotional response varies. Cross-cultural missionaries should remember that effective gospel communication touches both the mind and the heart. Conversions often happen when people's emotions are positively engaged. Hence, doctrinal explanations seek to connect with both the intellect and emotions of the listener. Relying solely on intellectual agreement may not be enough when individuals face important decisions, such as choosing to follow Christ.

THE MOST EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION OCCURS WHEN THE MESSENGER BECOMES A MESSAGE!

In anthropology, cultural forms are crucial because they carry meaning. Examples include sermons, prayers, testimonies, crosses, bread, and hymns, which serve as tools for expressing the communicator's intentions. However, form alone doesn't ensure understanding. For instance, a missionary might preach about grace, but if the listener is only familiar with Christians who judge, this message can be emotionally undermined. Similarly, a church may teach forgiveness, but if it doesn't practice it internally, people tend to trust actions more than teachings. The Gospel isn't just about hearing; it's about observing. In Asia and Africa alike, relational trust acts as the interpretive framework that makes doctrine believable.

THE NEED FOR ANTHROPOLOGICAL TOOLS TO FOSTER BETTER UNDERSTANDING THROUGH SYMPATHY AND EMPATHY

Asia's religious landscape is complex and layered. Buddhist modernism promotes compassionate ethics without metaphysical claims. The revival of Islamic identity signifies a sense of belonging that exceeds strict doctrine. Hindu cultural nationalism combines faith with ethnic memory. Post-Christian Korea adopts pragmatic secularism, accompanied by feelings of loneliness. Shamanic traditions continue, though subtly, and exert a strong psychological influence. This creates a continent where individuals often hold multiple worldviews simultaneously: a Buddhist might meditate with a smartphone, a Hindu entrepreneur could base investments on astrology, and a Korean youth might be an atheist yet still experience spiritual anxiety and turn psychologically to a tarot reading shop. Therefore, mission work must go beyond mere propositions and engage with identity, belonging, emotion, social imagination, ancestral memory, and cultural logic.

In such a complex Asian cultural setting with diverse religious backgrounds, gospel communicators need to understand how to use anthropological tools to explore and understand the minds and hearts of people within Asia's multi-religious environment. Anthropology does not conflict with theology; rather, it enhances our understanding by emphasizing its human aspects. It urges us to see individuals not merely as targets for evangelism but as carriers of cultural narratives. It encourages asking: What fears hinder this Muslim from embracing faith? What cultural wounds underpin this Buddhist's silence? How does this Hindu interpret causality and destiny? What shame is this Korean secretly hiding? A mission that values culture begins healing before teaching. By respecting different worldviews, such a mission listens carefully and responds thoughtfully. This approach cultivates sympathy and empathy, mirroring what our Father demonstrated when He sent His Son, who shared His compassion for the wounded and lost souls on earth. Recognizing the suffering caused by sin aligns with Christ-like compassion and understanding.

CONTEXTUAL REFLECTIONS ON MISSION TO PEOPLE: LESSONS FROM AFRICA FOR ASIAN CHURCHES

Research on Muslims' lived experiences in Africa, carried out by my doctoral students using my STA (synthetic triangular approach)—a methodology developed from my own fieldwork with Swahili Muslims decades ago—underscores an important yet often overlooked concern for missiologists. Muslims should be regarded primarily as neighbors, not as targets for conversion. Conversion rarely results from debate; it tends to develop through relationship-building, trust, and respecting their dignity. These personal relationships are often strengthened through interactions—occasionally challenging but emotionally impactful—that emphasize life issues over doctrinal differences. People are usually motivated to convert to Christianity when gospel workers demonstrate care and empathy, along with confidence in their beliefs.

In the African cases gathered in *Lived Experiences of Muslims in Africa*—a monograph I edited²—ordinary Muslims are shown to encounter religious realities not merely through doctrinal argument but through concrete experiences of fear, suffering, mercy, and social belonging. Among Digo Muslims on the Kenyan coast, Mwambiroro's frightening encounter with Jinn Makata led his family first to seek help at a mosque; when Qur'anic recitation did not improve his condition, they took him to a nearby church, where prayer by a pastor became the context in which he placed his faith in "the God of Christians," and his recovery eventually led to his conversion testimony.

2. This monograph, authored by my PhD students, a faculty colleague, and myself, was published by Africa International University (AIU) Press in 2024.

In another Digo Muslim account, Ali, a bereaved husband in Shimoni, Msambweni County, testified that he experienced the mercy and peace of God when Christians and Muslims together assisted in the burial rites of his wife, Fatuma, leaving a lasting impression of compassion beyond religious boundaries. Similarly, Sheikh Barakat's participation in an interfaith meeting in Kwale County challenged his previous stereotypes of Christians when he encountered clergy who displayed hospitality, peace, and honesty, showing that Muslims may experience God's nearness through relationships marked by righteousness, cooperation, and trust rather than through polemical exchange alone. These cases suggest that Muslim-Christian engagement in Africa often becomes most meaningful when Christians meet Muslims as neighbors in moments of fear, bereavement, and relational vulnerability rather than approaching them merely as representatives of an opposing religious system.

These examples illustrate the idea of the "mission to people" I want to discuss. While Christian missions are undeniably directed towards people, they also remind us that the concept of "felt-needs" greatly impacts our audience's faith-based decisions. Drawing from my extensive experience in Africa, I want to share three important insights for my fellow Asian Christians. I believe these are vital and should be carefully adapted to the varied settings of Asian churches.

First, the recognition that belonging precedes belief challenges Asian churches to reimagine themselves not primarily as doctrinal institutions but as relational households in which identity and acceptance are established prior to cognitive assent. Second, the African emphasis on hospitality as a transformative force suggests that conversion is often mediated less by argumentation than by embodied practices of welcome; accordingly, mission in Asia must begin at the table rather than on the platform. Third, the credibility of Christian witness, as shaped by the African context, is deeply intertwined with suffering, indicating that authenticity in mission emerges through costly identification rather than comfort. In contrast, an overreliance on stability and affluence in Asian contexts may risk weakening the very conditions for genuine spiritual renewal and revival.

Why are these insights important for the mission to people? The answer might be derived from another discussion in anthropology about the "low aspect of religion," or what I refer to as the "religious unconsciousness." Religion consists of both high and low aspects that together form a unified system. The high aspects refer to formal, institutionalized elements such as official doctrines, sacred texts, and prescribed rituals, while the low aspects refer to the lived, everyday expressions of religion, including folk practices, local beliefs, and pragmatic concerns. Both are dynamically interrelated: the high aspect provides structure and authority, while the low aspect reveals how religion is actually practiced and experienced

within a cultural context.³ When people find almost no answers in their official religions in critically painful circumstances, they might go beyond the boundaries set by their religion, seeking immediate answers to their crises. Then people's potent religious unconscious seems to be awakened, and they become "religious," seeking answers even beyond their casual "common sense." This kind of conscious shift often occurs when people face life challenges that overpower their human abilities. Such a critical moment in life falls under the low aspect of religion, and the "mission to people" must address that aspect.

People often visit shamans for answers to various "low aspect" religious questions. Followers of religions like Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism also often seek answers to these questions from outside their official religious boundaries. As seekers, they primarily desire to experience the divine presence amid their suffering, rather than engage in theological arguments. However, they also fear losing their cultural or religious identity and are afraid of the shame that might come from betraying family ties or dishonoring their religious community. These can count as part of the "low aspect" religious issues, which put people in a daily dilemma. Hence, what I mean by "people" in the phrase of the "mission to people" refers to the aspect of people's "ordinariness,"⁴ which comprises the existential reality of humanity. Therefore, the nature of human existence and experience overshadows the theological debates that may not address humanity's existential problems. When considering the mission to people, these sensitive human issues should be taken into account. I believe this approach to mission is both globally relevant and biblical. It can be summarized in a question: Will we Asians evangelize as an institution or as a presence among neighbors? The choice determines our future!

MISSIONAL IMPLICATIONS FOR ASIA IN THE 21ST CENTURY

The Asian church is now at a stage comparable to where Africa once was—and to some extent still is—about to redefine its role in global missions. Christianity has shifted from being seen as a foreign influence to an indigenous movement, articulated in Asian languages, influenced by Asian history, and driven by Asian suffering. However, Asia's spiritual landscape is uneven. Urban secularism is growing, yet folk religion persists quietly. Islamic identity gains strength, while Buddhist ethics evolve into modern philosophical ideas. Ancestral spirits remain deeply embedded in the collective memory of nations.

3. For more discussions on this, see pp. 160-161 of my book, *Cultural Anthropology from a Christian Perspective* (Eldoret, Kenya: Utafiti Foundation, 2019).

4. For the missiological and anthropological concept of "ordinariness," see my article, "The STA (Synthetic Triangular Approach) in Islamic Studies and Ministries: A Missiological Attempt to Understand Muslims through the Concept of 'Ordinariness.'" *Asian Missions Advance* 28, no. 2 (Spring 2022): 1-7.

Overall, Asia is a region rich in religious expression, not devoid of it.

Therefore, the future of Asian missions should move beyond strategies that rely on a doctrinal approach rooted in the assumption of cultural neutrality. Missions should not stay silent about human factors that shape people's self-identity and the choice of their fate. So, we need to ask if there is abundant truth but a limited sense of belonging and a lack of answers to other needs in people's existence. Our role should go beyond mere teaching; it requires authentic communion in which people can recognize their worth before God and the need for their "salvation" from life challenges, including spiritual salvation and myriad bondages that keep them from freely fellowshiping with the living God in Jesus Christ.

Building on my earlier discussions, I propose a missional approach as a framework for the "mission to people," grounded in my theory of the anthropological worldview and drawing on my experiences in Africa, as well as the theological conviction that mission is incarnational. I hope that this framework proves practical for churches, seminaries, missionaries, lay believers, and diaspora communities.

PRESENCE BEFORE PROCLAMATION

A mission that relies solely on words often encounters resistant barriers. In contrast, a mission rooted in shared life experiences tends to soften the ground, creating openness. Presence is more than mere visitation; it involves remaining long enough to be genuinely known. Asian cultures, in particular, value consistency and authentic relationships more than eloquence. Practical actions include planting a community first, engaging with others not to talk but to sit, eat, listen, and linger. It means becoming visible in everyday places—markets, schools, workplaces, or homes of mourning—so people can observe your life before you invite them to consider Christ. The gospel is not always heard first; it is felt deeply before words are spoken. Effective proclamation begins through relationships, avoiding the temptation to skip genuine connection with the excuse of being "too busy in ministries."

HOSPITALITY AS MISSIONAL ARCHITECTURE

In Asia, food often unites people more quickly than religious debates. Sharing a meal lessens differences, flattens hierarchies, and fosters trust. Most major Asian religions consider hospitality sacred. It presents a missional chance, not just a cultural custom. To put this into practice, hospitality creates welcoming spaces where outsiders feel at ease and unjudged. Regular gatherings should be established that focus on community rather than one-off events, allowing strangers to become friends. Families are encouraged to intentionally host non-Christian neighbors in a warm manner. While apologetics appeals to the

intellect, genuine hospitality has a deeper impact by touching the heart and soul.

LISTENING AS SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE

Missionaries have historically been trained to speak, but few are trained to listen. In societies that focus on relationships, listening acts as a form of testimony. When Christians listen attentively, they embody Christ's gentleness, humility, and closeness. Therefore, gospel workers need to learn how to inquire about people's stories rather than their religions. This form of listening should be part of missionary training programs, where they practice ethnographic listening with questions like: "What hurts you most? What gives you hope? What keeps you awake at night?" They should also acquire emotional vocabulary to understand what to include or avoid in conversations, such as shame, honor, fear, or belonging, especially in local dialects.

FROM ARGUMENT TO ALLEGIANCE

Conversion involves more than just intellectual agreement; it requires transferring loyalty. While Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, and shamanic or secular Asians might understand Christian beliefs, what truly counts is genuine trust. The real question is: Who will I follow? Who do I belong to? Who is worth risking shame for? An effective approach emphasizes guiding people toward allegiance instead of simply transmitting information. Faith ought to be presented as a covenant rather than a mere curriculum. Baptism signifies the start of belonging rather than the conclusion of the mission. A person may accept doctrine without truly belonging to Christ, but genuine faith ultimately entails belonging, which means authentic allegiance to the Savior.

A SUMMARY OF THE FRAMEWORK FOR THE ASIA MISSION

This approach to engaging with Asia is rooted in humility, approaching communities as a learner instead of a teacher. It focuses on seeing people as reflections of God's image, not just as representatives of specific religions or cultures. Developing real relationships takes time through consistent rhythm and repetition, involving deep listening to people's stories and struggles before sharing teachings or doctrines. Creating a sense of belonging within community naturally fosters faith, and introducing Christ happens casually and relationally, framing Him as a friend rather than through argument.

Discipleship is viewed as an apprenticeship, involving slow, intentional companionship, acknowledging that transformation in Asia depends on presence and compassion rather than quick results or conquest. The approach emphasizes that the mission to people is not merely a technique but

a way of life—characterized by sincere, unhurried truthfulness, gentleness, courage, and presence. Ultimately, effective outreach in Asia requires embodying a hospitable, relational witness, making mission a reflection of Christlike living rather than just a strategy.

CONCLUSIONS

This paper has argued that Christian mission in pluralistic Asia must be reimagined as a mission to people before it is framed as a mission to religions, institutions, or ideological systems. Theologically, this argument is grounded in the incarnation of Christ and the dignity of all persons as bearers of the image of God. Anthropologically, it recognizes that people receive and interpret truth through worldview, emotion, memory, identity, belonging, shame, fear, and lived experience. Missiologically, therefore, Asian churches must move beyond approaches that rely too heavily on doctrinal explanation, institutional programming, or strategic efficiency, and recover the slower but more biblical pattern of embodied presence, hospitality, listening, relational trust, and allegiance-forming discipleship.

The African cases discussed in this paper have shown that religious transformation often emerges not first through formal argument but through concrete human encounters in contexts of fear, suffering, need, hospitality, and social vulnerability. These insights offer Asian churches an important mirror for self-examination. In many Asian societies, religion is not merely a matter of formal belief but is deeply embedded in family loyalty, communal identity, ancestral memory, social honor, and existential crisis. For this reason, the church's witness must be neither abstract nor merely apologetic. It must become visible in homes, neighborhoods, workplaces, schools, hospitals, and places of mourning, where people encounter Christians not simply as defenders of doctrine but as trustworthy neighbors who embody the compassion, truthfulness, and costly love of Christ.

Further research is needed in several directions. First, more ethnographic studies should be conducted on how Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, secular Asians, and adherents of folk religious traditions actually experience their religions in daily life, especially in relation to suffering, healing, shame, family obligation, and spiritual fear. Second, the concept of "mission to people" should be examined more deeply in relation to discipleship, conversion, and allegiance, asking how belonging, trust, and community shape faith decisions in Asian contexts. Third, comparative studies between African and Asian Christian experiences could help clarify how churches in the Majority World may learn from one another without merely copying Western missionary models or uncritically transferring one regional pattern to another. Such research would strengthen the theological, anthropological, and

practical foundations for an Asian missiology that is biblically faithful, culturally discerning, and deeply human.

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God's New Thing: Restoration of Humanity and Christian Mission in Isaiah 43:19

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the future of Christian mission through the lens of theological anthropology. Interpreting Isaiah 43:19, it argues that God's "new thing" signifies not only historical renewal but the restoration of human existence within which faith emerges. Contemporary mission increasingly encounters persons shaped by relational fracture rather than doctrinal resistance, requiring proclamation to be understood alongside accompaniment.

Drawing on pastoral encounters and diaspora congregational experience, this study argues that mission credibility emerges where restored relational life becomes visible. The integration of proclamation and presence does not replace evangelism but enables its reception, reframing mission as participation in God's work of making human life inhabitable again. The future missionary work therefore requires not only theological clarity but relational durability, for where renewed humanity is embodied, the gospel becomes believable.

INTRODUCTION

Discussions about the future of humanity have become increasingly urgent in the twenty-first century. Rapid technological development, global migration, political conflicts, and social instability have reshaped human life in unprecedented ways. Yet alongside material progress, many societies experience deepening fragmentation of identity and breakdown of relationships. In numerous contexts, particularly within parts of Asia, individuals live with unspoken suffering shaped by displacement, inequality, and various forms of personal and collective trauma. The question is thus not only what the future will look like, but what kind of humanity will inhabit that future.

Christian mission has often responded to global change through strategies, structures, and institutional expansion. While such approaches remain important, they do not fully address the lived reality of human sufferings. The gospel speaks not merely to religious belief but to the restoration of persons in their relationships with God, with others, and within themselves. For this reason, mission cannot be understood only as geographical expansion or numerical growth; it must also be understood as the visible sign of renewed existence in broken contexts. This understanding resonates with missional theology, which understands the gospel as public truth shaping human society (Newbigin, 1989).

This paper approaches the theme "The Gospel and the Future of Humanity" through a theological and missional reading of Isaiah 43:19: "See, I am doing a new thing." Rather than interpreting this passage solely as national restoration, the study reads the "new thing" as God's work of renewing wounded humanity. Special attention is given to the experiences of women in Asian settings, where suffering is often endured in silence and where mission frequently takes the form of presence, listening, and accompaniment. Within this framework, trauma is not treated primarily as a clinical category but as a human condition that mission encounters and through which the gospel is embodied. Mission thus concerns participation in the mission of God, not merely the activity of the church as an institution (Wright, 2006).

Accordingly, this study argues that the future of mission lies not primarily in expanding religious systems but in forming communities that embody reconciliation and healing. By integrating biblical theology, missional reflection, and attention to lived human experience, the paper proposes that the church participates in God's "new thing" when it becomes a community in which renewed existence is visible. Such communities serve as a foretaste of the future humanity promised in the gospel.

The present study enters into conversation with contemporary missiology by asking how the gospel addresses humanity in conditions of fragmentation rather than merely how the church expands institutionally. Mission has often been described in terms of geographic movement or religious transmission, yet the biblical narrative presents God's action as directed toward the restoration of human life within history. The church thus participates in mission not simply by extending its presence but by visibly living the renewal of humanity through the life it embodies.

Within this perspective, the gospel is understood as public truth that reshapes human existence in society. The missionary task becomes the discernment of how God's renewing work becomes visible within ordinary relationships, cultural life, and shared communal life. Mission thus, concerns not only the conversion of belief but the transformation of lived reality.

Contemporary missiology has increasingly recognized that the crisis facing humanity is not primarily ignorance of religious information but fragmentation of relational existence. While traditional mission paradigms emphasized transmission of belief, emerging discussions emphasize recognition, shared life, and restored relational identity. This shift does not replace proclamation but reframes its context. The

gospel must be heard within lived experience for its truth to be recognized. Thus, the question of mission becomes not only what is spoken but what kind of human life becomes visible through the community that speaks.

Hence, this study approaches mission not primarily as expansion but as the manifestation of renewed existence within history. This study thus operates at the intersection of missiology and theological anthropology. Rather than proposing a pastoral method, it seeks to articulate a theological account of mission in which the restoration of humanity constitutes the primary horizon of evangelization.

This study therefore approaches mission through theological anthropology rather than strategy. Its central claim is that the gospel becomes intelligible where restored humanity becomes visible. Mission is thus examined not primarily as the expansion of belief but as participation in God's work of making human life inhabitable again within history.

II. HUMANITY IN CRISIS: WOUNDEDNESS IN THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD

A contemporary discussion about the future often focuses on technological innovation, economic development, and political stability. However, beneath these visible changes lies a quieter crisis: the condition of humanity itself. Many individuals experience life not as coherent meaning but as fragmentation. Relationships are weakened, trust is diminished, and personal identity is destabilized. The issue is thus not merely social change but the erosion of relational existence.

In many parts of Asia, these realities appear in distinct forms. Rapid urbanization, migration for labor, and economic pressure reshape family structures and shared social life. Individuals frequently carry experiences of loss, displacement, or prolonged insecurity, yet such experiences remain largely unspoken. Cultural expectations often encourage endurance rather than expression, resulting in lives marked by silent suffering. Within Christian communities, faith may provide structure and moral guidance, yet deep personal pain may remain hidden beneath outward stability. Cultural transitions often intensify experiences of dislocation and identity instability, particularly in rapidly changing societies (Walls, 2002).

Women often experience this condition in intensified ways. Responsibilities within family and society may limit opportunities to articulate distress, and suffering is frequently interpreted as something to be borne rather than shared. In these contexts, brokenness rarely appears as an open crisis but as a quiet persistence: a functioning daily life accompanied by inner exhaustion, fear, or resignation. Such realities reveal that the crisis of humanity is not always visible through dramatic events but through sustained patterns of relational and emotional disconnection.

This condition may also be understood as the loss of interpretive coherence. Individuals continue to act within social systems while lacking a stable narrative that explains their own existence. The problem is thus not merely suffering but the inability to interpret suffering within a meaningful horizon. Mission encounters people not only in need of relief but in need of a world that can be understood again.

For mission, this situation presents a significant theological question. If humanity lives under conditions of unspoken suffering, proclamation alone cannot be the sole expression of mission. The gospel must be encountered as a reality that addresses lived human experience. Mission thus requires attentiveness, presence, and the capacity to recognize wounded humanity even where it is not verbally expressed. In this sense, the task of mission is not merely to introduce belief but to be visible sign of the possibility of a restored life within contexts marked by fragmentation and silence.

Understanding humanity in crisis reframes the purpose of mission. The church is not sent merely into religious ignorance but into wounded human existence. When mission recognizes this condition, its message is no longer abstract doctrine but becomes good news within real human experience. The restoration promised in Scripture speaks precisely to such situations, where humanity longs not only for truth but for renewed lived relationship.

Humanity's crisis today may be described less as explicit rebellion and more as fragmentation of lived relationships. Individuals remain connected through systems and technology, yet often experience disconnection at the level of shared life and recognition. Identity becomes unstable when value is measured primarily through productivity, achievement, or social expectation. Such conditions produce forms of silent suffering in which people continue functioning while inwardly estranged from themselves and others.

Modern societies often reduce people to functional roles. Individuals are evaluated according to performance, productivity, and social usefulness. Such evaluation creates stability for systems but uncertainty for people. People continue to function outwardly while inwardly losing a sense of being recognized as persons rather than functional roles.

This condition produces a particular form of suffering: not a visible crisis but a persistent interior exhaustion. The person does not collapse but lives without a stable sense of shared life. The absence of shared life becomes one of the defining features of contemporary humanity. Human beings do not experience suffering only as events but as alterations of perception. Repeated exposure to instability gradually reshapes expectations about relationships and safety. The person begins to live oriented toward survival rather than trust. In such a condition, belief alone does not restore life; the individual must first rediscover the possibility of reliable relationships. From a theological

perspective, this condition resembles exile not as a punishment but as a dislocated existence. Humanity loses not only a place but an interpretive stability — the ability to understand life as meaningful before God.

The loss of relational identity reflects not only a social change but a deeper theological crisis of human existence (Newbigin, 1989). From a theological perspective, this condition reflects not merely a moral failure but a disordered relational existence. Humanity struggles to perceive itself as existing before God and consequently struggles to perceive others as persons rather than roles. The problem addressed by the gospel thus concerns the restoration of relational identity rather than solely the correction of behavior.

In many Asian contexts, this condition appears in relational rather than individualistic forms. Expectations of responsibility and harmony often prevent open expressions of distress. Consequently, suffering is carried through endurance rather than articulation. The result is not the absence of pain but the absence of a language for pain.

Henri Nouwen describes the modern person not primarily as immoral but as wounded and searching for a place of belonging. Human suffering often appears less as rebellion than as the experience of being unrecognized. This perspective suggests that the human crisis encountered by mission is relational before it is doctrinal.

Recent missiological discussions have increasingly noted that modern mission encounters not primarily religious difference but existential fragmentation. The question is no longer only whether people believe, but whether they can imagine shared life. In such contexts, the credibility of the gospel is closely tied to whether the Christian community presents an alternative form of human existence.

This indicates that the issue concerns not only theological meaning, but the form of human life made visible through it.

III. ISAIAH 43:19 AND THE RENEWAL OF HUMANITY

God's New Work Among a Wounded People

Isaiah 40–55 addresses a people living in exile, a community whose social structure, religious identity, and collective hope have been profoundly disrupted. The experience of exile was not only political displacement but also a crisis of identity. Israel had lost the land, the temple, and the visible signs of God's covenantal presence. The people thus lived not merely in geographical separation but in a condition of disorientation, uncertainty, and communal despair. Within this context, the prophetic proclamation announces a divine initiative: "See, I am doing a new thing; now it springs up; do you not perceive it?" (Isa 43:19). The Old Testament frequently presents restoration as the reconstitution of a people's identity

before God within history (Wright, 2006).

The "new thing" in this passage cannot be reduced to a simple return to former conditions. The prophet does not merely promise the restoration of past structures but points toward a transformation of existence. The language of making a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert signals not only physical provision but the re-creation of a people whose identity had been fractured. God's work is thus not limited to political liberation but involves the renewal of a people who no longer know how to understand themselves as God's own.

The prophetic language recalls the earlier narrative of the Exodus. Just as God once created a path through the sea, the new act of God creates a possibility where none appears. The comparison suggests continuity: restoration is not an isolated miracle but the characteristic manner of God's action in history.

Yet the prophet intentionally shifts the emphasis. The new work is not merely a repetition of the past but transformation of perception. The people must learn to recognize God's action in unfamiliar form. The renewal therefore, involves both divine action and human recognition. Restoration thus begins before circumstances visibly change. A people learn to understand their existence again in relation to God. The new thing is first theological before it becomes historical.

This restoration motif anticipates God's broader purpose of renewing creation and forming a visibly living community in the world (Wright, 2006).

The prophetic promise also anticipates the broader biblical pattern in which divine restoration culminates not merely in national return but in renewed creation. The new exodus theme moves toward a renewed humanity gathered not around territory but around restored relationship with God. The New Testament identifies this restoration in Christ, where shared life is no longer defined by land, lineage, or ritual boundaries but by participation in reconciled life. The continuity between exile, restoration, and new creation suggests that Isaiah's vision ultimately concerns the formation of a people whose existence itself becomes testimony.

This dimension becomes clearer in the surrounding text, where memory and forgetfulness are held together: "Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past." The command is not an erasure of history but a reorientation of identity. The past defined by loss and humiliation no longer determines the people's future because God's action establishes a new basis for their existence. Divine restoration thus addresses the deepest level of human life—the meaning of shared life, dignity, and relational identity before God.

Within a missional reading, exile may be understood as a paradigm of wounded humanity. The people's crisis was not only moral failure but the collapse of their interpretive world. They struggled to perceive God's presence within their suffering. The prophetic announcement of a "new thing" thus functions as

revelation: God acts in ways that re-create perception before circumstances visibly change. Restoration begins when a people learn again who they are in relation to God. This interpretation shapes with biblical theology that understands salvation as God's initiative before human response. Restoration is not produced by human recognition but revealed through it. The people perceive what God has already begun.

This interpretation shapes the understanding of mission. The passage does not present restoration as human achievement but as divine initiative to which the community responds. God's people become witnesses to what God has done rather than architects of their own renewal. Consequently, mission flows from participation in God's action, not from the attempt to repair humanity through religious effort. The community exists as a testimony that identity can be re-established where it has been lost.

Reading Isaiah 43:19 in this way frames the gospel not simply as forgiveness but as re-creation. The promise anticipates a future in which God restores lived relationships and communal identity. The "new thing" is thus visible wherever people rediscover dignity and shared life through God's initiative. Mission participates in this divine work by pointing to, embodying, and narrating the reality of renewed humanity.

Within the wider biblical narrative, the promise of a "new thing" belongs to God's continuing work of restoring creation. The prophetic announcement does not stand in isolation but participates in a pattern in which God forms a people capable of reflecting divine character within history. Restoration thus involves the reconstitution of a community whose identity is grounded in God's initiative rather than its own stability.

The prophetic announcement thus restores not only hope but also perception. People learn to see reality differently before circumstances visibly change. Here salvation includes the renewal of interpretation. God's act precedes understanding, yet it creates the possibility of understanding.

The language of wilderness and water signals not only provision but re-creation. God's action generates the conditions in which life can exist again where none seemed possible. Mission, in this light, originates in God's determination to renew human life and communal identity, and the people of God become a visible sign to this renewing work rather than its producers.

Here the issue concerns not only theological meaning, but the form of human life made visible through it.

IV. A PRACTICAL-THEOLOGICAL READING OF RESTORATION

The promise of God's "new thing" found in Isaiah 43:19 invites not only theological interpretation but also practical discernment. The prophetic text speaks

to a historical community in exile, yet its meaning unfolds fully only when it encounters lived human experience. A practical-theological approach thus asks how the divine promise is recognized, interpreted, and embodied within contemporary life. Rather than moving directly from biblical statement to doctrinal formulation, it attends to the interaction between God's word and human reality.

In this sense, theology does not remain complete at the level of explanation. The proclamation of restoration must be read alongside the concrete conditions in which people struggle to perceive hope. Where communities experience silence, dislocation, and relational fracture, the question becomes not only what the text once meant but how its promise becomes perceivable in the present. The "new thing" of God is thus discerned within the ongoing relationship between divine initiative and human experience.

Such an approach reshapes the understanding of mission. Mission is not limited to communicating correct beliefs but involves participation in God's restorative work as it becomes tangible in everyday life. The church learns to read its context as a place where God is already acting, even where evidence appears minimal. Attentiveness, presence, and faithful accompaniment become theological practices through which the community recognizes and bears a visible sign of God's initiative.

Practical theology seeks to interpret lived experience in light of the gospel and to interpret the gospel within lived experience (Osmer, 2008). Within this framework, experiences often considered secondary — listening, shared suffering, and patient presence — gain theological significance. They are not merely pastoral responses but modes of perceiving God's activity. Particularly in contexts where suffering is endured quietly, the recognition of God's work emerges gradually through relationships rather than immediate transformation. The community does not create restoration but learns to notice and participate in it.

The interpretive task of theology thus involves discerning God's activity within concrete situations (Osmer, 2008). Practical theology proceeds through a movement of attending, interpreting, discerning, and responding. The community first learns to listen to lived experience without premature evaluation. It then interprets these experiences in the light of the biblical narrative, seeking theological meaning rather than immediate solutions. Discernment follows as the recognition of God's action already present within the situation. Finally, a response emerges not as technique but as faithful participation in what God is doing.

A practical-theological reading thus bridges the biblical promise and the missional task. Isaiah's proclamation is no longer confined to an ancient event but becomes a lens through which the church interprets contemporary human life. The church bears a visible sign of God's "new thing" when it lives as a community capable of recognizing and embodying

restored relationships. Mission, in this perspective, is the ongoing practice of discerning and participating in God's renewing action among wounded humanity.

Practical theology approaches Scripture as a living word encountered within concrete life. The meaning of the biblical text becomes fully visible when it is read in dialogue with lived experience. Rather than applying doctrine to situations from outside, the community learns to interpret its life in light of God's action and to recognize where divine restoration is already emerging.

This interpretive movement does not reduce theology to experience, nor does it isolate theology from reality. Instead, it integrates revelation and life so that the promise of God is discerned within ordinary existence. Mission thus involves attentiveness—learning to perceive where God's renewing work becomes tangible in human relationships.

Such a perspective suggests that mission involves theological perception as much as activity. The church learns to notice God's action before attempting to organize it. Discernment therefore, precedes strategy.

V. THE GOSPEL AS THE RESTORATION OF HUMANITY

The promise of God's "new thing" finds its fullest expression in the gospel. The prophetic vision of renewed identity anticipates a reality in which restoration is not achieved through human effort but given through God's initiative. The gospel thus speaks not only to moral failure but to the condition of human existence itself. Humanity is restored when the relationship with our God, disrupted by sin and brokenness, is re-established through divine grace.

Eric L. Johnson argues that the Christian understanding of the person cannot be reduced to psychological description but must be grounded in theological anthropology. Restoration therefore concerns the reordering of the self in relation to God rather than merely emotional stabilization.

In the life and ministry of Jesus, restoration consistently appears as relational rather than merely legal. Encounters with the marginalized, the sick, and the socially excluded reveal that salvation involves the re-creation of shared life. People who were isolated are brought into relationships; those who lived in shame regain dignity; those defined by exclusion receive a new identity within the community. Such acts do not simply demonstrate compassion but reveal the nature of God's saving work. Salvation becomes visible as renewed existence.

The ministry of Jesus repeatedly restores persons through relational encounter. Individuals are addressed by name, received at the table, and included within the community. These actions do not function as illustrations of salvation but as its form. Salvation becomes visible as restored participation in life with others.

The significance lies not only in the removal of

exclusion but in the reestablishment of identity. People encounter themselves differently when addressed within grace rather than judgment. The gospel thus restores humanity by altering relational reality.

The cross deepens this understanding. Rather than removing suffering from human life, God enters it. The crucifixion discloses divine solidarity with human pain, showing that redemption does not bypass wounded existence but passes through it. Resurrection, in turn, does not erase the marks of suffering but transforms their meaning. The risen Christ is recognized not as one who avoided death but as one whose wounds no longer define defeat. Restoration is thus, not the denial of brokenness but transformation within a relationship to God. The gospel thus addresses the whole of human life rather than merely private religious belief (Newbigin, 1989).

The significance of the cross lies not only in atonement but in the revelation of divine presence within abandonment. Humanity discovers that suffering does not remove the possibility of communion with God. The resurrection then confirms that relationship, not circumstance, defines reality.

Furthermore, the resurrection confirms that restored life is not fragile. The marks of suffering remain, yet no longer determine identity. The future of humanity revealed in Christ is not the absence of wounds but the transformation of their meaning.

Bessel van der Kolk notes that traumatic experience is carried not only in memory but in embodied patterns of fear and withdrawal. Restoration therefore concerns lived existence rather than abstract belief alone. The gospel addresses human beings not only as thinkers but as persons whose relational life must become inhabitable again.

Trauma is often carried not only in memory but in the body, shaping patterns of fear, withdrawal, and hypervigilance. A theological account of restoration must therefore attend to embodied life, not as a clinical add-on but as a part of human existence that the gospel renews.

This theological vision reshapes the understanding of mission. If the gospel restores humanity, mission cannot be reduced to the transfer of religious information. This indicates that salvation concerns the reconstitution of human life rather than solely the resolution of guilt. The gospel addresses existence before it addresses behavior. It becomes participation in God's reconciling work wherever dignity is renewed and relationships are healed. The church bears a visible sign not only through proclamation but through forms of life in which reconciliation becomes perceptible. Communities of forgiveness, hospitality, and faithful presence embody the message they announce.

The church becomes a visible sign of God's kingdom through its shared life (Newbigin, 1989). Such an approach is particularly significant in contexts marked by silent suffering. Where pain remains unspoken and individuals continue to live under the weight of

past experiences, the credibility of the gospel emerges through lived relational reality. The church does not merely declare restoration but becomes a place where restored life can be experienced.

In this way, salvation in the gospel extends beyond individual forgiveness toward the renewal of relational existence. Through Christ, reconciliation becomes the restoration of communion with God and the formation of a community shaped by that reconciliation. The church embodies salvation when relationships no longer depend on status, strength, or history, but on grace.

The cross reveals God's participation in human suffering, and the resurrection reveals the transformation of suffering's meaning. Restoration thus, does not eliminate wounded history but establishes a future no longer determined by it. The gospel addresses humanity by creating a new relational horizon in which persons can live without being defined by what has been broken.

VI. WOMEN, WOUNDS, AND MISSION IN ASIA

Listening to Silenced Humanity

In many Asian contexts, suffering is not always expressed through open conflict or explicit protest. It is frequently carried quietly within daily life. Social expectations often value endurance, harmony, and responsibility over personal expression, shaping ways in which pain is perceived and communicated. As a result, hardship may remain unspoken even within close relationships and faith communities. The absence of visible crises does not necessarily indicate the absence of distress; rather, suffering becomes woven into ordinary existence.

Silence in such contexts does not necessarily indicate agreement or peace. It often functions as a relational strategy for preserving family and social stability. Speech may threaten relationships, while silence allows the continuation of daily life. Over time, however, unspoken experience shapes self-understanding.

When a story is received without correction or urgency, the individual gradually discovers agency. The person moves from being an object of circumstance to a participant in a relationship. This transition marks the beginning of renewed existence.

The person learns to interpret faith primarily as endurance. While perseverance carries strength, it may also conceal loneliness before God. Mission thus involves creating a space in which faith may include honesty as well as faithfulness.

Women often inhabit this reality with intensity. Family roles, social responsibilities, and cultural norms can limit opportunities to articulate personal struggle. Experiences of loss, displacement, domestic burden, or relational strain are frequently absorbed into routines of care and duty. Faith may sustain perseverance, yet it can also reinforce silence when

suffering is interpreted solely as something to be borne faithfully. In such situations, the challenge is not disbelief but the lack of a space where life can be spoken honestly before God and others.

Mark McMinn notes that pastoral care becomes meaningful when the person experiences presence before explanation. Change often begins not with interpretation but with the discovery of trustworthy relationships. Such encounters illuminate how the gospel may be perceived before it is fully understood.

In such moments, mission does not primarily introduce new information but enables new interpretation. The person's life remains externally similar, yet its meaning changes. Hope emerges not from altered circumstances but from altered relational perception.

Mission encounters humanity in precisely these hidden places. The task is not first to correct belief but to make it possible to recognize one's life within God's presence. Listening becomes a theological practice rather than a preliminary pastoral act. When a person's story is received without judgment or haste, the individual begins to perceive that existence itself matters before God. Through attentive presence, the gospel is experienced not as abstract doctrine but as relational reality.

This dynamic is particularly significant for women whose experiences have long remained unnamed. Mission in such contexts often takes the form of accompaniment, by sharing ordinary time, hearing fragmented narratives, and patiently remaining in unresolved situations. These practices do not replace proclamation but prepare the ground in which proclamation can be understood. The message of reconciliation becomes credible when relationships themselves embody patience and dignity.

Within this perspective, the church functions as a community where speech gradually emerges. Silence is not forced to break, but gently transformed through trust. As individuals recognize that their lives can be held within a faithful community, they begin to rediscover an identity not defined by burden or isolation but by a shared life. Restoration appears not as dramatic change but as renewed participation in lived relationships.

Mission among wounded humanity thus proceeds through attentiveness rather than urgency. The visible sign of the gospel emerges as people experience being received, named, and remembered within the community of faith. Such experiences reflect the promise of God's "new thing" in which dignity is restored and relationships are renewed. In this way, the church participates in God's work not by controlling outcomes but by faithfully inhabiting spaces where humanity, long silenced, can be seen and heard.

In one pastoral encounter, a woman who had participated faithfully in church life for many years described her faith primarily as endurance. Only after extended conversation did she begin to speak about

a long-standing loneliness that she believed should not be expressed. The turning point did not occur when advice was given but when her experience was received without correction. Her understanding of God gradually shifted from obligation to presence.

Recovery begins where experience can be spoken about within a safe relational context of trust (Herman, 1992). Trauma is not only an event but a disruption of trust that reshapes a person's capacity for relationships. In this sense, recovery begins when safety and voice can gradually return within a reliable community. For mission, this means that accompaniment is not merely supportive but theologically significant, because it restores the conditions under which hope and confession can emerge.

In mission contexts, attentive presence allows people to recognize that their lives may be expressed without rejection. Such recognition does not immediately change circumstances but reopens the possibility of hope. The gospel is encountered as restoration when a person discovers that their story can exist before God and the community without fear.

Human experience is not held only in conscious thought but also in bodily memory. Some suffering remains beyond verbal articulation and is carried through patterns of reaction, avoidance, or emotional withdrawal. In such cases, understanding does not emerge through explanation alone but through trustworthy relational presence.

Mission among wounded people thus requires patience rather than urgency. As relationships become reliable, perception gradually changes. Individuals begin to experience themselves not only through past events but through a present shared life. Restoration appears first as the ability to remain within relationships. In such environments, the possibility of speech gradually emerges within trusted relationships.

In a Korean immigrant congregation in North America, a middle-aged woman had participated faithfully in church life for many years. She rarely spoke about her personal struggles and was widely regarded as spiritually mature because of her endurance. During a pastoral conversation, she eventually expressed that prayer had long been experienced not as comfort but as obligation. She believed faithfulness meant remaining silent about pain in order not to burden others.

Over time, the pastoral encounter shifted from advice to attentive listening. The most significant change did not occur when her circumstances improved but when she discovered that her story could be spoken without causing disruption to the community. Only then did she begin to interpret the gospel not as a demand for strength but as permission to be known. The meaning of salvation became intelligible not through new teaching but through the experience of being received.

Such experiences are not unusual in diaspora

congregations where endurance is often valued more than expression. In these contexts, mission frequently unfolds not through persuasion but through the restoration of voice within relationships.

This vignette reflects patterns frequently observed in Korean diaspora congregational life over extended pastoral engagement.

Judith Herman observes that trauma fundamentally disrupts trust and the capacity to speak within relationships. Recovery therefore begins not with explanation but with the gradual restoration of safety and voice. From a missional perspective, accompaniment becomes the condition in which hope and confession again become possible.

In pastoral encounters, it is not uncommon to meet individuals who faithfully participate in church life while carrying long-standing personal burdens that have never been spoken aloud. In some cases, change does not begin with advice or instruction but with the discovery that their experience can be heard without evaluation. Over time, the person's understanding of faith shifts from duty to relationship. Such moments do not resolve every difficulty but mark the beginning of restored dignity. These situations illustrate how mission often occurs not through dramatic intervention but through sustained relational presence. Such encounters demonstrate that mission frequently occurs in an interpretive rather than an event-based form. The decisive change lies in how life is understood before circumstances immediately change.

These observations are not presented as psychological analysis but as theological anthropology emerging from pastoral encounters. Through ordinary companionship rather than formal counseling, some gradually begin to share fragments of their experience. The turning point often occurs not at the moment of advice but at the recognition that their life is being heard without evaluation. Such moments illustrate how restoration begins as relational recognition before behavioral change.

VII. MISSION AS THE VISIBLE SIGN OF RENEWED EXISTENCE

The Church and the Future of Humanity

If the gospel restores humanity, the primary question for mission becomes not how the church expands but how it exists. The credibility of Christian message as a visible sign depends on whether the community embodies the reality it proclaims. Mission thus cannot be separated from the form of communal life. The church becomes a sign of the gospel when its relationships reflect reconciliation, patience, and mutual dignity.

The church thus functions not only as a teaching community but as an interpretive community. People learn what the gospel means by learning how life is lived within it.

Mission thus cannot be reduced to the expansion of

religious influence. It concerns the manifestation of a different mode of being human.

If the gospel restores humanity, the primary question for mission becomes not how the church expands but how it exists. The credibility of Christian message as a visible sign depends on whether the community embodies the reality it proclaims.

The church's visible sign emerges through its ordinary life rather than exceptional activity. Shared meals, remembered names, and consistent presence form the environment in which shared life becomes credible. Such practices appear simple yet carry theological meaning because they contradict conditions of isolation.

Mission thus proceeds through durability rather than intensity. A community that remains becomes a sign of hope in a transient world.

In many contexts, humanity is shaped by competition, isolation, and instrumental relationships. People are valued according to productivity, social position, or conformity to expectations. Within such environments, the existence of a community where persons are received apart from achievement carries theological meaning. The church bears witness to visible sign of God's renewing work when individuals experience shared life that is not conditional upon success or strength. Renewed existence becomes visible in shared life before it is explained in doctrine.

This understanding reframes the future of mission. Rather than focusing solely on geographic expansion or institutional growth, mission attends to the quality of lived relationships formed within the community of faith. The church participates in God's "new thing" as it cultivates spaces of hospitality, truthful speech, and enduring presence. Through such practices, the gospel becomes perceptible as lived reality rather than an abstract message.

The future of humanity is often discussed in relation to technological progress, economic development, or global systems. Christian mission points toward the renewal of human life within God's redemptive purpose for the world (Wright, 2006).

Yet Scripture points toward a different horizon: a humanity renewed through a relationship with God and with one another. The church anticipates this future not by predicting it but by embodying it. Wherever communities live in reconciled relationships, the promised renewal already begins to appear.

Thus, mission proceeds not from strength but

from faithfulness. The church does not create the new humanity but bears witness to a visible sign of God's action by living according to its promise. In communities where wounds are acknowledged, dignity restored, and persons remembered, the gospel becomes visible. Such a life together offers a sign of hope for a world searching for a future it cannot secure on its own.

Ultimately, the missionary congregation lives as a foretaste of renewed existence in history (Newbigin, 1989). The church exists as a sign of renewed existence when its life reflects reconciliation rather than performance. Community practices such as hospitality, shared prayer, and faithful presence create an environment in which shared life precedes achievement. In such a community, people encounter the meaning of grace not only as belief but as lived reality.

Mission thus proceeds through the formation of communities where restored relationships are practiced. The church does not persuade humanity of a future hope merely through proclamation but demonstrates that future within present life.

Here the issue concerns not only theological meaning, but the form of human life made visible through it.

VIII. IMPLICATIONS FOR MISSION FORMATION

The preceding discussion suggests that the future of mission cannot be framed merely as the expansion of religious knowledge or institutional growth. Rather, mission must be understood as participation in God's restorative work within damaged humanity. If the gospel addresses persons whose trust, memory, and relational capacity have been fractured, then missionary formation must prepare ministers not only to proclaim truth but to accompany persons whose ability to receive truth has been impaired.

Mission training has traditionally emphasized doctrine, cultural adaptation, and evangelistic methods. While these remain essential, contemporary contexts, particularly urbanized and diasporic societies—require an additional competency: the capacity to remain present within human vulnerability. In many communities, disbelief does not arise from intellectual resistance but from relational injury. The question is not whether the gospel is true, but whether reality is safe enough to hear it. Therefore, formation must cultivate stability of presence before persuasive speech.

1. Formation of the Missionary Self

Mission begins not with technique but with the character of the messenger. A missionary who is unable to endure ambiguity, silence, or emotional distress will instinctively retreat into an explanation or correction. However, people shaped by suffering often interpret rapid explanation as dismissal.

Consequently, formation must include disciplines that develop patience, listening, and non-defensive presence.

This requires a shift from a performance identity to a relational identity. The missionary is not primarily a problem-solver but a witness whose life becomes inhabitable for others. Practices such as guided self-reflection, supervised ministry conversations, and communal discernment help missionaries recognize their impulse to control outcomes. The goal is not psychological expertise but the cultivation of attentiveness. The gospel is then communicated through reliability before articulation.

2. Pastoral-Missional Listening

Future mission fields increasingly resemble spaces of emotional fragmentation rather than ideological opposition. Migrants, urban youth, and socially isolated populations often carry unspoken suffering. Listening here is not passive but theological. It assumes that human stories, even when disordered, are spoken within God's ongoing history. The missionary learns to hear lament, anger, and silence without immediately converting them into moral categories. This allows the speaker to rediscover speech. Only after voice returns can confession and faith become meaningful acts rather than required responses.

Thus, proclamation becomes dialogical rather than declarative. The gospel is not reduced, but its reception emerges because it enters a relationally restored space.

3. Community as the Primary Mission Method

If the gospel restores humanity, then the primary apologetic of mission becomes a community where restored relationships are observable. Programs cannot substitute for an environment in which people experience predictable acceptance. Many individuals who resist doctrinal instruction nevertheless remain within communities that embody patience and mutual care.

Mission training therefore must prepare leaders to cultivate communal rhythms: shared meals, repetitive gatherings, and non-utilitarian presence. These practices appear ordinary, but they counteract social instability. Within such environments, belief emerges gradually rather than through decision pressure.

The Church becomes not merely a teaching institution but a livable world. The plausibility of the gospel is perceived before it is analyzed.

4. Integrating Proclamation and Care

This approach does not replace evangelism with therapy. Rather, it restores evangelism to its anthropological depth. Proclamation announces reconciliation; accompaniment enables humans to perceive reconciliation as real. Without proclamation, care lacks direction. Without accompaniment, proclamation lacks reception.

Missionary formation should therefore integrate biblical theology with guided pastoral encounters. Trainees learn to articulate the gospel while remaining attentive to the hearer's capacity to receive. The task is neither to delay faith nor to force a decision but to recognize the moment when understanding emerges.

5. Hope as Eschatological Practice

Finally, mission must be understood as participation in God's future rather than the management of religious outcomes. Isaiah's declaration of a "new thing" portrays restoration emerging within barren conditions. Missionaries therefore act not as producers of results but as witnesses to God's ongoing renewal.

Hope is practiced through consistency. Returning conversations, repeated visits, and stable presence enact the belief that God has not abandoned human history. Over time, persons discover that faith is not an imposed idea but an inhabitable reality.

CONCLUDING IMPLICATION

The future missionary will require theological clarity, but also relational durability. Training must therefore form people capable of proclamation, listening, and communal patience simultaneously. In a fragmented world, credibility will arise less from argument and more from embodied faithfulness.

Mission, then, becomes the lived announcement that humanity is not finished. The church participates in God's new work by becoming a place where people can again exist without fear and therefore hear without defense. Within such spaces, the gospel is not merely explained—it becomes believable.

CONCLUSION

This study has argued that the future credibility of Christian mission depends not merely on the transmission of doctrinal truth, but on the restoration of humanity within which that truth becomes intelligible. Contemporary mission increasingly encounters persons whose primary obstacle to faith is not intellectual disagreement but relational fracture. In such contexts, proclamation alone does not lose its authority; rather, its reception depends upon the reconstitution of the human capacity to trust, speak, and belong.

Reading Isaiah 43:19 through theological anthropology reveals that God's "new thing" concerns more than historical renewal. It signifies the emergence of a form of life within which persons can again inhabit reality without fear. The gospel therefore addresses human beings not only as moral agents but as wounded persons whose perception of the world has been shaped by loss, displacement, and silence. Mission participates in this divine action when the church becomes a space where speech is possible and presence is reliable.

The integration of pastoral encounter and

proclamation does not redefine mission into therapeutic practice. Rather, it restores evangelism to its anthropological depth. The announcement of reconciliation requires a community in which reconciliation can be recognized. Thus, accompaniment is not a secondary ministry but a condition of intelligibility for the gospel itself. The church does not replace proclamation with care; it embodies the world within which proclamation becomes believable.

This framework contributes to contemporary missiology in three ways.

First, it reframes mission from expansion to manifestation: the gospel is not only communicated, but made visible in restored relational existence. Second, it situates wounded experience at the interpretive center of mission rather than its margins. Third, it proposes missionary formation that integrates theological clarity with relational durability.

The future of mission, therefore, will not be determined primarily by new strategies but by the church's capacity to inhabit a recognizable form of renewed humanity. Where such life becomes visible, faith becomes plausible. Mission endures not because it overcomes the world, but because it reveals within the world a life the world cannot generate.

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Listening Well Through Interviews: An Outreach Approach to University Students in Europe

Takaaki Hara

As evangelical Christians, we take Jesus' Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15; Luke 24:46-47; John 20:19-22; Acts 1:4-8) seriously. We desire to share the gospel and give the reason for the hope we have to those who do not know Christ yet (1 Pet. 3:15). How can we share the gospel with postmodern young people living in Europe in a way that they can meaningfully receive and appreciate it? I serve among university students studying in the Netherlands and have been exploring this question for the past five years. In what follows, I describe my approach to outreach among university students.

LISTENING WELL IS AN ACT OF LOVE

Once or twice a week, I go to university campuses in the Netherlands, to conduct a survey on students' values and views on religion. All too often, when we talk to people for the sake of evangelism, the initial small talk is treated merely as a prelude to sharing the gospel. But they can quickly tell if we are only interested in preaching to them, and they dislike it when they are treated as objects of evangelism. Therefore, when I interview students (mostly one student at a time), I listen attentively to what they have to say and ask follow-up questions. I ask questions because I truly wish to understand their thoughts and experiences regarding religion.

In fact, during the interviews, I spend about 80 percent of the time listening to students. This is because demonstrating sincere interest in people affirms their dignity. As Janet Dunn says, "listening affirms people. Indeed, it is one of the highest forms of affirmation. When we listen, we invite another person to exist."¹

Listening affirms people. Indeed, it is one of the highest forms of affirmation.

When we listen, we invite another person to exist. The first principle of outreach through interviews, then, is this: take a sincere interest in what people share with you, ask thoughtful questions, and learn from them.

When we also look at the life of Jesus, we notice that he gave his full attention to people whenever he interacted with them (Matt. 8:5-13; Mark 5:25-34; 10:46-52; Luke 24:13-35; John 3:1-15; 4:1-26). Thus, another reason we are called to listen attentively and with care is that, by doing so, we reflect Christlikeness. In this regard, it is well to heed Dietrich Bonhoeffer's words:

*We do God's work for our brothers and sisters when we learn to listen to them. So often Christians, especially preachers, think that their only service is always to have to "offer" something when they are together with other people. They forget that listening can be a greater service than speaking. Many people seek a sympathetic ear and do not find it among Christians, because these Christians are talking even when they should be listening.*²

The first principle of outreach through interviews, then, is this: take a sincere interest in what people share with you, ask thoughtful questions, and learn from them. Luke Cawley concurs: "Don't judge people or place them in mental boxes. Instead, cultivate a genuine curiosity about them. God is already at work in their lives. Ask good questions and listen well to figure out what he's been doing with them."³

When someone identifies as an atheist, it does not necessarily mean that they are anti-religion. They may simply mean that they were not raised in a religious household. I have asked students claiming to be atheists if had they been raised in a religious household, they might have been religious, and some said yes. Thus, as Cawley notes, "It's only by listening to the individual we can move past simple categorizations and begin to grasp the nuances of what they really believe."⁴

BE A POSITIVE, HEALING AMBASSADOR OF CHRIST

Some people have a negative image of Christianity because they have been hurt by legalistic and judgmental "Christians," or they have seen hateful "Christians" on social media. Thus, one of my objectives when interviewing students on campus is to present a different image of Christians by being humble and respectful, and by demonstrating that not all Christians are like those they have encountered. In other words, "at least we can show we care and

1. Janet Dunn, "How to Become a Good Listener," Desiring God, last modified April 1, 1983, <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/how-to-become-a-good-listener>.

2. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, trans. Daniel W. Bloesch (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2015), 75.

3. Luke Cawley, *The Myth of the Non-Christian: Engaging Atheists, Nominal Christians and the Spiritual but Not Religious* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2016), 96.

4. Cawley, *The Myth of the Non-Christian*, 113.

open people's minds to the possibility that their past experience of church (and of Christians) may not be representative of the whole."⁵

Recently, I interviewed an Egyptian-Dutch gay student. He had rejected Islam because of his sexuality and also harbored deep anger and frustration toward Christians. During our 45-minute conversation, I mostly listened to his anger and frustration and sincerely apologized for the pain he had experienced. What was the result? Although I did not share the gospel with him during our conversation, when he saw me later that day, he smiled and waved at me. To quote Cawley again, "You would be surprised how helpful it can be to say to someone with unpleasant church experiences, 'I am so sorry that the church, of which I am a part, has done this.' Our personal ownership of what happened to them often opens the door to their healing."⁶

So often, we feel compelled to proclaim the whole gospel to someone in a single setting, but it is important to remember that each of us is only one link in the chain of a person's salvific journey (1 Cor. 3:5-7). We do not need to share everything in a single encounter, because we can trust that the Lord will send others to continue drawing that person to himself.

SHARE A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

I am always amazed that, when I show sincere interest in what students say and ask good questions, they begin to trust me as a person within as little as 10 minutes. Once trust is established, it becomes much easier and more natural to share my own Christian perspective. As David Mathis says, "Sometimes good listening only listens, and ministers best by keeping quiet, but typically good listening readies us to minister words of grace to precisely the place where the other is in need."⁷

It's only by listening to the individual we can move past simple categorizations and begin to grasp the nuances of what they really believe. Consider what might be his tone of voice and manner.

One of the questions I ask when I interview students is: "Do you have any questions to ask religious people out of curiosity? I am a Christian myself. Do you have

any questions to ask a Christian?" (see APPENDIX 1 for the list of questions I use for a survey). When students raise questions about religious issues, I always ask permission first before sharing my Christian perspective. Because the outreach takes the form of an interview and students generously give their time to answer my questions, I always keep in mind to be respectful and to avoid getting into an argument. Another thing to honestly ask ourselves is: What is my motivation behind sharing a Christian perspective? Do I seek to help the person I am talking with come one step closer to Christ? Or do I want to prove that their understanding of Christianity is wrong? In this regard, it is well to ponder Madeleine L'Engle's words: "*We do not draw people to Christ by loudly discrediting what they believe, by telling them how wrong they are and how right we are, but by showing them a light that is so lovely that they want with all their hearts to know the source of it.*"⁸

Furthermore, it is best not to overwhelm people with more knowledge than they can handle at a time, but rather to share "only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen" (Eph. 4:29). Whatever we share, we are to speak "the truth in love" (Eph. 4:15) and let our conversation be "always full of grace, seasoned with salt" (Col. 4:6). Finally, as Cawley says, "Think about what Jesus would say to each person. Consider what might be his tone of voice and manner. Ensure that your interactions with others don't just mention Jesus but instead reflect his character and attitude."⁹ Evangelism is not just about sharing who Jesus is and what he has done for us. We are called to grow in Christlikeness if we are to "reflect his character and attitude" when we talk about him.

DRAW PEOPLE TO CHRIST

When I interview students, I usually ask them this question: "Have you seen a picture or a statue of Jesus hanging on a cross? What do you think it symbolizes?" I slightly alter the question when I talk to Muslim students: "One of the differences between Christianity and Islam is that we believe that Jesus died on the cross. Do you know why his crucifixion is central to our faith?" These are non-coercive ways to share the gospel with students (again, I always ask permission before explaining the significance of the cross of Christ to them). To Muslim students, we can share that Jesus' dying on the cross was not an ad hoc event but the ultimate fulfillment and culmination of the Mosaic sacrificial system (Heb. 10:1-18). My desire when sharing the gospel with Muslim students is a rather modest one: it is not to convince them of the truth of the gospel in a single conversation; rather, I want them to see that what Christians believe is actually consistent with the grand biblical narrative.

5. Cawley, *The Myth of the Non-Christian*, 78.

6. Cawley, *The Myth of the Non-Christian*, 182.

7. David Mathis, "Six Lessons in Good Listening," *Desiring God*, last modified April 3, 2014, <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/six-lessons-in-good-listening>.

8. Madeleine L'Engle, *Walking on Water: Reflections on Faith and Art* (Wheaton, IL: Harold Shaw Publishers, 1980), 122.

9. Cawley, *The Myth of the Non-Christian*, 96.

Another question I ask is: “Suppose God exists. If God were a personal being who loves you unconditionally, never gives up on you, and will always be there for you to overcome difficulties, how would you feel?” I get a range of responses, from “I would feel safe and happy” to “It wouldn’t make much difference.” I always affirm those who give a positive response by saying, “I believe that God loves you unconditionally.”

The final question I ask is: “Have you ever read the Bible? Would you be interested in reading it?” Over the last five years, I have interviewed 1,086 people, and 310 of them received a Bible. This means that approximately one Bible was distributed for every 3.5 conversations! During their years in the university, I maybe the only Christian some of the students might have encountered. Thus, I find it vital to pray for the students I have interviewed, especially those who received a Bible. There are days (though not often) when I do not meet any student who shows interest in reading the Bible. At such times, I take comfort in reminding myself of Cawley’s words:

“It’s not your responsibility to convert people any more than it is your job to stand all day with your hand in a flowerpot trying to make tulip bulbs blossom. Yet, even if you don’t physically make plants grow, you can still encourage or inhibit their development. Watering and planting matter. You have some influence. The greater part of the work is with God. But not one ounce of energy you put into making Jesus known is ever wasted.”¹⁰

APPENDIX 1 QUESTIONS USED IN THE SURVEY

1. What are you studying, and what would you like to do in the future?
2. Aristotle said, “Educating the mind without educating the heart is no education at all.” Would you agree? How would you educate your heart?
3. Are there any big issues in society that you are concerned about?
4. What are the values that you consider important? What kind of person would you like to become?
5. “We have a lot of understandings in our culture of what makes a life successful or prosperous. But we’ve lost some of the understanding of what makes a life good” (Susan Phillips). What, in your opinion, makes a life good?
6. Do you think a lot about spiritual things or religion? If you are religious, how important is it to you?
7. Why do you think some people are drawn to religion? What attracts them to religion?
8. Do you have any question to ask religious people out of curiosity?
9. Do you ever pray? What do you pray about? To whom or what are you praying?

10. What do you think was the point of Jesus’ life and teachings? What did he want to accomplish?
11. Have you seen a picture or a statue of Jesus hanging on a cross? What do you think it symbolizes?
12. If you could sit with Jesus over a cup of coffee and ask him anything, what would you ask him?
13. Suppose God exists. If God were a personal being who loves you unconditionally, how would you feel?
14. Have you ever read the Bible? Would you be interested in reading it?

APPENDIX 2 A SUMMARY OF A RECENT OUTREACH

One of the students I spoke with was Hannah (not her real name) from the Netherlands. She was very friendly and open to conversation, and we ended up talking for over an hour. She shared a lot about herself, and at first, I was struck by how much she had already accomplished. She has a heart for children struggling with learning, and volunteers every Sunday to help them. She has lived in Bali and Morocco, where she visited Hindu temples and mosques. After returning from Morocco, she opened a Moroccan restaurant with Muslim partners. She is also a classical ballet dancer who performs once a year. Her dream is to become a mayor, and she is currently part of the youth group of a political party.

When I asked Hannah if there was anything she wanted to ask a Christian, she was curious about heartwarming experiences I had as a believer. I shared that when we lost our first child, or when my wife was diagnosed with breast cancer, people supported us through prayer. I told her that I was especially grateful to a Christian couple and our church leaders who came to our house to pray for my wife’s healing during her battle with cancer. This reminded Hannah of a friend who had recently become Catholic. When Hannah’s grandmother became seriously ill, she moved in to take care of her until she passed away. During that time, her Catholic friend and her church were praying for her grandmother, and Hannah was clearly touched by their gesture of love.

As our conversation continued, Hannah shared that her mother had struggled with alcohol addiction but had been set free after attending church and becoming a Christian. Although her mother is no longer an active believer, Hannah attended church with her for four years during her early teens. Yet she had never understood why Jesus died on the cross. When I explained it to her, I could see that it resonated deeply in her heart. Earlier that day, I had shared the same message with another Dutch student, but her response had been very different from Hannah’s.

When I asked Hannah if there was anything she would like to ask Jesus if he were sitting with us, she paused to think. With tears in her eyes, she said, “I want to know if my sister could find happiness.”

¹⁰ Cawley, *The Myth of the Non-Christian*, 207-208.

At first, I had thought everything was going well in Hannah's life, but now I could see that it was also marked by brokenness. After asking if she would like a Bible and giving it to her, I told her I wanted to pray for her sister. I asked if there was anything else I could pray for, and she shared that she wanted to study in Asia. "I want to take my sister there. That'll be her only chance," she said, implying something serious about her sister's situation. I prayed for both Hannah's study plans and her sister.

As our conversation came to an end, Hannah asked why I was doing this. I explained, "I work for a Christian student organization, and I'm curious to hear students' views on religion and the beliefs they hold." She smiled and said, "You do amazing work!"

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John Wesley: Evangelism with Children in Mind

Mark Gil A. Petallar

When Christians talk about evangelism, people often assume we mean evangelism of, with, and to adults—with adults as both the object and subject of our evangelistic endeavors. Consequently, we preach the gospel of salvation to the lost with adults in mind, and we mobilize Christian adults as participants in our evangelistic endeavor to reach out to the spiritually lost. But are children not both an object and subject of evangelistic endeavors as well? In other words, does our Wesleyan heritage allow us to embrace children as both in need of our evangelism endeavor and participants in that same evangelistic enterprise?¹

Several scholars have sounded the alarm regarding children and their significant role in the kingdom of God. Wess Stafford, former president of Compassion International, said, “The Christian evangelical movement is one of the few that has allowed children to remain a second-rate mandate—the Great Omission in the Great Commission.”² The omission of children in the great commission was recognized by Dr. Gustavo Crocker, one of the General Superintendents of the Nazarene Church and my former professor at Asia-Pacific Nazarene Theological Seminary. Crocker recognized the absence of children in the modern missionary movement’s obedience to the great commission despite the active role of children in biblical times.³ Therefore, he calls for the recovery of the active participation of children in the mission work of God. Bambang Budjihanto recognized that an adult schema plays a role in this omission.⁴ He said, “In the schema regarding missions, children are not only left out of the picture, but they often pay

the price when adults take part in mission.”⁵ These voices call for reflection regarding the perspective of the Wesleyan tradition concerning the evangelism of, with, and to children. Thus, my goal today is to extend our horizon of evangelism to include in our evangelism schema the children in our midst. I hope to persuade you using evidence from Scripture and the writings of John Wesley. By doing so, it is my desire to see revival spring up not only with the adults but also with children in our various churches.

THE SCRIPTURE

I want to use today the text in Luke 18:15–17 as our source for biblical reflection. This passage says, “*People were also bringing babies to Jesus for him to place his hands on them. When the disciples saw this, they rebuked them. But Jesus called the children to him and said, Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it*” (NIV).⁶

This text is **critical** for us because Jesus **taught his disciples about the kingdom of God directly through this encounter**. He used the disciples’ preventive actions as a point of reference to teach them about the kingdom.

In this text, we can observe various characters: the people, the babies, Jesus, and the disciples.⁷ The people had the noble intention of bringing children to Jesus so he could place his hands on them. But the disciples rebuked the people and stopped the children from coming. However, Jesus overrode the authority of the disciples and welcomed the children. In verse 17, Jesus used this opportunity to teach the adults about the kingdom of God—an insight Jesus hoped the disciples would learn from their actions.

These observations were clarified by Peter Spitaler

1. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the Order of the Flame Conference on October 12, 2023, in Pampanga, Philippines upon the invitation of Dr. Luther Oconer to speak during the devotional time.

2. Wess Stafford, foreword to *The 4/14 Window: Raising up a New Generation to Transform the World*, by Luis Bush, (Colorado Springs, CO: Compassion International, 2009), 12.

3. Gustavo Crocker, “Towards a New Missiology: Renewing Our Engagement in God’s Mission,” in *Children and Youth as Partners in Mission: A Compendium of Papers Presented at the 4/14 Window Missiology Conference Seoul, Korea, February 2013*, ed. Dan Brewster and John Baxter Brown (Malaysia: Compassion International, 2013), 79.

4. According to Budjihanto, Schema is a mental framework that allows one to take shortcuts in processing new information and retrieving our memories. However, these mental frameworks can also cause us to exclude pertinent information and focus only on those things that confirm our pre-existing beliefs and group boundaries (prejudice). Moreover, schemas can produce selective perception (bias) and an underestimation of differences within groups/ideas. Bambang Budjihanto, “Children and Youth as Partners in Missions,” in *Children and Youth as Partners in Mission: A Compendium of Papers Presented at the 4/14 Window Missiology Conference Seoul, Korea, February 2013*, ed. Dan Brewster and John Baxter Brown (Malaysia: Compassion International, 2013), 32.

5. Budjihanto, “Children and Youth as Partners in Missions,” 33. He said, “Our schema has significantly influenced how discipleship, mission and the Great Commission are defined and have unintentionally left children out of the picture. The terms mission, missions and missionary are defined for us (adults) as full members of the society and are often associated with: the crossing of cultural and linguistic barriers, a relocation away from a person’s familiar surroundings, and proclaiming the Gospel and making disciples.” Budjihanto, “Children and Youth as Partners in Missions,” 33.

6. Regarding Luke 18:15–17 and parallels, Clark understood that “the texts do not suggest that we act like children but like Jesus . . . [and] that the apostles are not acting as their master would.” Ronald R. Clark Jr., “Kingdoms, Kids, and Kindness: A New Context for Luke 18:15–17,” *Stone-Campbell Journal* 5, no. 2 (2002): 240. He further said, “The act of receiving the children was a metaphor of receiving Jesus and the Kingdom of God, which the disciples failed to learn and imitate.” Clark, “Kingdoms, Kids, and Kindness,” 239.

7. Other translations use the word infants, little children, small children, tiny babies, young children, or babes.

who captured the spatial tension brewing in this story. Although his study focuses on the book of Mark, the concept is also found in Luke's account.⁸ Recognizing a tension between indoor and outdoor spaces, Spitaler said,

*"The people challenged spatial boundaries (they request access to the in-door space), the disciples act as gate keepers (they deny access to the in-door space), the children transcend space (they move from out-of-door space to in-door space) and Jesus controls both spaces."*⁹

This tension serves as imagery for Spitaler to emphasize that the disciples' action of not welcoming children was illustrative of not welcoming God's kingdom.¹⁰ Ronald Clark supports this view regarding the disciples' actions. He said, "The disciples failed to follow the earlier teachings [of Luke 9:46–48 about who is the greatest in the kingdom] and were again shown that Jesus receives children."¹¹ Luke emphasizes the importance of welcoming children—a missing piece in the disciples' schema regarding the concept of the Kingdom of God.

To better understand the dynamics of this passage, let us first consider the people bringing their babies for Jesus for blessing. According to Frederick Louis Godet, "Luke would indicate that the consideration enjoyed by Jesus had reached its height. Mothers brought him even their nurslings."¹² Odd Magne Bakke raised several issues regarding the state of children in the ancient world. He notes the high rate of child mortality caused by poor hygiene and sanitary conditions; concerns regarding inheritance, parental support, and care in old age; and anxieties about the future in this life and after death.¹³ From this perspective, children and their situation were a primary concern for people in Jesus's time. However, it is worth observing that the discussion of children in our text focuses primarily on the concerns of adults. Rosalind Tan, on the other hand, emphasizes that bringing children to elders and scribes for prayers and blessings was a customary practice in Jewish culture, especially before the Day of Atonement.¹⁴ Yet, the disciples did not adhere to this practice on this occasion.

The disciples' actions are important subject for us today as we wrestle with the significance of children in our evangelistic endeavors. To further illuminate

8. Cf. Mark Gil A. Petallar, "An Understanding of Children as Mission from Mark 10:13–16," *Journal of Asian Mission* 18, no. 2 (2017): 71–83.

9. Peter Spitaler, "Welcoming a Child as a Metaphor for Welcoming God's Kingdom: A Close Reading of Mark 10:13–16," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 31, no. 4 (2009): 430.

10. Spitaler, "Welcoming God's Kingdom," 432.

11. Clark, "Kingdoms, Kids, and Kindness," 239.

12. Frederick Louis Godet, *Godet Commentary on Luke, John, Romans, and 1 Corinthians*, trans. E. W. Shalders, n.d. Available at Accordance Bible Software.

13. Odd Magne Bakke, *When Children Become People: The Birth of Childhood in Early Christianity*, trans. Brian McNeil (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2005), 23–25.

14. Rosalind Tan, "Welcoming Children," *Journal of Adult Theological Education* 11, no. 1 (2023): 22.

their actions, we must delve deeper into the view of children in the ancient world. The perspectives of several scholars can assist us here. David Csinos said children were seen as a "sub-form of humanity lacking in reason, status, and formation."¹⁵ Ronald Clark argued that the attitudes towards children in the Ancient Near East were reflected in the apostles' attitudes that children were: (a) not worth an adult's time, (b) not considered full members of the community until they were twenty years old, (c) not viewed as mature citizens of the community and classed with slaves, women, and imbeciles despite having been taught the Scriptures, and (d) without rights.¹⁶ Judith Gundry-Volf noted that children were considered to be "mentally deficient and ignorant; they spoke nonsense and failed to think and plan rationally; they were capricious, foolish, and quarrelsome. In a word, they lacked the prime Roman virtue of reason and could not participate in the rational world of the Roman citizens."¹⁷ Thomas Wiedemann also shared some of the negative views, noting that children were viewed as "physically and mentally weak" because of their susceptibility to illness which resulted in the high mortality rate. Furthermore, they were depreciated as non-combatant citizens in an era of war where men were needed to fight.¹⁸ Samjung Kang-Hamilton added that children were the "least powerful people socially, politically, and economically."¹⁹ All these descriptions underscore how children were viewed as unimportant, unwelcomed, and insignificant in adult affairs, explaining the action of the disciples in stopping the children from coming to Jesus.

Essentially, in a male-dominated society where children were viewed as a lower class, the disciples used their authority to limit their access of children to Jesus. Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown explained that the disciples saw the intrusion as useless because infants were incapable of receiving anything from him since his ministrations were for grown-ups.²⁰ Jesus was an important figure (Great Rabbi) whose precious time

15. David Csinos, "The Biblical Theme of Welcoming Children," *McMaster Journal of Theology and Ministry* 8 (2007): 105.

16. Clark, "Kingdoms, Kids, and Kindness," 240–244.

17. Judith M. Gundry-Volf, "The Least and the Greatest: Children in the New Testament," in *The Child in Christian Thought*, ed. Marcia J. Bunge (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001), 32. This idea was shared by Thomas Wiedemann who described children as "a symbol of non-participation in the rational world of the adult due to its inability to communicate." Thomas Wiedemann, *Adults and Children in the Roman Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 17–18. This would mean that children could not participate in rational discourses and disputes. Wiedemann, *Adults and Children in the Roman Empire*, 27.

18. Wiedemann, *Adults and Children in the Roman Empire*, 17. Wiedemann also described in his work that children were associated with women in war because they were overcome with fear or were simply fearful people.

19. Samjung Kang-Hamilton, "Welcoming Children and Receiving Jesus: Reflections on the Synoptic Gospels," *Restoration Quarterly* 60, no. 1 (2018): 29.

20. Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown, *Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown's Commentary Critical and Explanatory of the Whole Bible*, n.d. Available at Accordance Bible Software.

was limited. They desired to make use of that time for the intellectual, physical, and spiritual needs of the adults. The apostles, thinking from an adult point of view, did not see any need for children to interrupt Jesus or consume the adults' time.²¹ However, this provided a great opportunity for Jesus to inform, correct, and teach those whose understanding would otherwise "exclude children and their concerns" about the kingdom of God.²² By doing so, Jesus hoped to change the worldview of the disciples regarding children in the kingdom.

The action of Jesus in this story is an essential key when we as adults engage in evangelistic endeavors with children in mind. Jesus' action was geared toward teaching lessons to adults. Csinos identified three great reversals in Jesus's teaching that ran counter to the norms and expectations of His day:

- (a) Jesus engaged children as teaching assistants to educate the disciples,
- (b) Jesus affirmed the inherent worth of children as his disciples and representatives,
- (c) Jesus insisted the disciples must welcome those who represent him—not only high-status individuals, but also those who held the lowest status, children.²³

Kang-Hamilton explained that Jesus's action of receiving and acknowledging children would have seemed indefensible to the disciples who played games of power and status for selfish purposes and were even inclined to neglect the vulnerable.²⁴

Luke 18:15–17 allows us to see how children were an integral part of the business of the kingdom of God. As a result of the adults' actions of hindering children from coming to Jesus, he overruled the authority of the disciples. The children were viewed as important, as valued, and as worthy of Jesus's time. The text clarifies the disciples' misunderstanding regarding the Kingdom of God of the disciples regarding the kingdom of God and teachings of Jesus, as well as the prevailing cultural male and adult bias, that led to hinder the children in coming to Jesus. This teaching of Jesus sheds light on our contemporary approach in reaching out to children and ensuring we do not prevent them from becoming active participants in God's Kingdom.

JOHN WESLEY'S CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCE OF EVANGELISM

Let us now turn our attention to John Wesley and the concept of evangelism with children in mind. It is fitting for us to consider Wesley's perspective on evangelism to, of, and with children as members of the Wesleyan tradition, for whom Wesley continues to serve as a revered figure. The following section explore Wesley's perspective by examining his

childhood experience, his works regarding children, and his interactions with children during his ministry. This survey will serve as a foundational reference for evangelism of, to, and with children.

John Wesley was raised by his parents with the evangelism of children in mind. The rectory fire was a key event that significantly shaped Susanna Wesley's concern for the souls of her children. She recorded in her journal the miraculous escape of John from the rectory fire. During the fire, John was trapped in the burning house, and his father Samuel had already given up hope of saving him. In her letter to Sammy dated February 14, 1708/9, Susanna wrote that Samuel Sr. thought of John as "lost, and commended his soul to God."²⁵ However, Wesley was saved through a window with the help of the neighbors who formed a human ladder to reach him.²⁶ This event was significant for the family and most especially for his mother, and eventually for Wesley himself. His mother made it her deliberate effort to care for the souls of her children, particularly of Wesley's. In her meditation dated May 17, 1711, Susanna wrote, "I do intend to be more particularly careful of the soul of this child . . . that I may do my endeavor to instill into his mind the principles of thy true religion and virtue."²⁷ She intentionally spent time raising her children, nurturing their faith through prayer, one-on-one time alone with each child, and structured lessons.²⁸ She became even more committed to nurturing the children's faith when she saw the counterproductive result of her prior efforts as they acquired worldly habits following their dispersal after the fire.²⁹ She even established a house church and defended it against any objection from her often absent husband. She took the care of the children's souls seriously and viewing their spiritual well-being as talents committed to her care for which she would

25. Susanna Wesley, *Susanna Wesley: The Complete Writings*, ed. Charles Jr. Wallace (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 65.

26. Terrell E. Johnson, "A History of Methodist Education and Its Influence on American Public Education" (PhD diss., Southern Illinois University at Carbondale, 1989), 22. Terrell detailed how a neighbor brilliantly thought of forming a human ladder in the absence of a physical one.

27. Wesley, *Susanna Wesley: The Complete Writings*, 235. George Stevenson also claimed that John Wesley's escape from the rectory fire "induced his mother to pay special attention to this mental and religious training." George J. Stevenson, *Memorials of the Wesley Family: Including Biographical and Historical Sketches of All the Members of the Family for Two Hundred and Fifty Years; Together with a Genealogical Table of the Wesley, with Historical Notes, for More than Nine Hundred Years* (London: Paternoster Row, n.d.), 330.

28. John Wesley's schedule for time alone with his mother was every Thursday night. Wesley, *Susanna Wesley: The Complete Writings*, 80.

29. Wesley, *Susanna Wesley: The Complete Writings*, 372. It is in this work of Susanna that she gave an account of the dispersion of her children and how her trainings at home prior to the rectory fire was lost, how her children acquired bad habits, and how she endeavored to intentionally reverse the bad influences.

21. Cf. Petallar, "An Understanding of Children," 71–82.

22. Kang-Hamilton, "Receiving Jesus," 34.

23. Csinos, "Biblical Theme," 106.

24. Kang-Hamilton, "Receiving Jesus," 36.

be accountable to God.³⁰ In one letter to Samuel Jr., she expressed her deep concern for her children's eternal happiness.³¹

John Wesley, for his part, recognized his miraculous escape during his ordeal in the rectory fire. In his journal dated February 9, 1750, he wrote, "About eleven o'clock it came into my mind that this was the very day and hour, in which forty years ago, I was taken out of the flames. I stopped and gave a short account of that wonderful providence."³² Not only did Wesley remember the event, but he also wished to be commemorated by it. He suggested that on his grave it should be written, "Here lieth the Body of John Wesley, a brand plucked out of the burning."³³ Thus for Wesley, that miraculous escape was a life-transforming event. Wesley's awareness of God's hand at work in his life through the rectory fire event, the intentional faith nurture of his mother because of the fire, and the counterproductive influence of others during their dispersion shaped Wesley's perspective on the evangelism with children.

WESLEY'S WORKS ON THE EVANGELISM OF CHILDREN

As evident in his many writings, John Wesley endeavored to evangelize children. These works include sermons, journal entries, letters, conference minutes, and materials specifically for children: such as instructions for children, prayers for children, and even hymns for children. In these diverse works, Wesley gave several reasons for reaching out to children and addressed adults' responsibilities towards children's spirituality. These writings will serve as evidence of Wesley's great concern towards the souls of children.

In his sermons, Wesley emphasized the profound responsibilities of parents to care for the souls of their children. He recognized that children are "immortal spirits" entrusted to parents.³⁴ Based on this understanding, Wesley underscored the future accountability of parents towards God.³⁵ Moreover, in

a letter to Ms. Hetty, he expressed a view of children as "glorious monuments of divine grace."³⁶ From such evidence, we can see that Wesley emphasized the great value of children whom adults should not dismiss because they will be held accountable to God.

In addition to holding a high regard for their value, in his sermon *On the Education of Children*, Wesley recognized the need to evangelize children due to the various spiritual diseases that affect them. Wesley noted that children were born with "atheism, pride, loved of the world, anger, deviation from truth, [proneness] to speak or act contrary to justice."³⁷ For example, on the issue of atheism alone, Wesley recognized the need to evangelize children because he believed children possess "no knowledge of God at all, no fear of God at all, neither is God in all [their] thoughts. Whatever change may afterwards be wrought, (whether by the grace of God or by [the child's] own reflection, or by education), [the child] is, by nature, a mere atheist."³⁸ Theologically, Wesley recognized the effect of original sin even in children. Thus, this condition warrants great concern from adults to evangelize children.

Wesley's sermon *On Family Religion* provides further evidence of his concern for the souls of children. In this sermon, Wesley again reminded his hearers of the spiritual diseases of children. But at the same time, he reminded and cautioned them about the various possible counterproductive influences in schools and harmful adult practice towards their children.³⁹ These critiques of the influences that might feed children's spiritual diseases show how Wesley continually kept in mind the souls of children. His concerns extending even to their work and marital life, demonstrates his holistic engagement with children. This evidence reveals how Wesley maintained his care for the souls of children and their future.

However, it is important to recognize that Wesley did not focus solely on the spiritual diseases of children as his driving motivation toward evangelizing them. His primary motivation was God's ability to heal those spiritual diseases. He said that God is the great "physician of the soul."⁴⁰ By this, Wesley meant that only God has the ability to heal these spiritual diseases. When teaching children, he also recognized the active work of the Holy Spirit in enlightening them to understand spiritual things. Wesley said, "Whenever the Holy Spirit teaches, there

30. Wesley, *Susanna Wesley: The Complete Writings*, 79. Susanna provided two reasons why she organized these Sunday evening prayer meetings: (a) it was the church's strict observance of the Lord's day which was not limited by going to church and (b) she viewed the service at night as an acceptable act to God in spending the sabbath. Wesley, *Susanna Wesley: The Complete Writings*, 79–80. Attendance at Susanna's Sunday evening worship service had really grown starting from her family, then with neighbors grew to twenty or twenty-five people, and then had become between two and three hundred. Wesley, *Susanna Wesley: The Complete Writings*, 82.

31. Wesley, *Susanna Wesley: The Complete Writings*, 72.

32. John Wesley, *The Journal of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M. Sometime Fellow of Lincoln College, Oxford*, ed. Nehemiah Curnock, Standard., vol. 3 (London: The Epworth Press, 1938), 453–454.

33. John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, 3rd ed., vol. 2 (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1979), 309. This journal entry was dated November 26, 1753.

34. John Wesley, "On Family Religion," in *The Works of John Wesley*, vol. 3, *Sermons III 71–114*, ed. Albert C. Outler. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1986), 337. As discussed above, this view was evident in his mother's influence from his childhood.

35. Wesley, *The Works of Wesley*, vol 3, ed. Outler, 337.

36. John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, 3rd ed., vol. 13 (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1979), 83.

37. John Wesley, "On the Education of Children," in *The Works of John Wesley*, vol. 3, *Sermons III 71–114*, ed. Albert C. Outler. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1986), 350–352.

38. Wesley, *The Works of Wesley*, vol 3, ed. Outler, 350.

39. Wesley, *The Works of Wesley*, vol 3, ed. Outler, 342–345. In this sermon Wesley continued to remind the parents of their responsibilities for the souls of their children not only in the home but especially the influences outside the homes. He regarded their responsibilities which included even in the area of choosing dress, schools, masters, professions, and marriage.

40. Wesley, *The Works of Wesley*, vol 3, ed. Outler, 349.

is no delay in learning.”⁴¹ Thus, evangelizing children is made possible by the active involvement of God. However, the initiative of God does not disregard the role of adults. Wesley said, “[God] honors men to be, in this sense, workers together with him. By this means the reward is ours, while the glory redounds to him.”⁴²

John Wesley’s *Treatise on Baptism* offers another perspective related to the topic of the evangelism of children. In response to objections people had raised against including children in evangelistic endeavors, Wesley gave several grounds for infant baptism. These were:

- (1) infants need to be washed from original sin;
- (2) infants were capable of entering a covenant and both were and still are under the evangelical covenant;
- (3) infants are capable of coming to Christ, of admission into the Church, and of solemn dedication to God;
- (4) the apostles baptized infants; and
- (5) baptizing infants has been the general practice of the Church, in all places and in all ages.⁴³

These beliefs of Wesley prove that children were not to be hindered from coming to faith, to Christ, and even to admission into the Church. Wesley was not deterred by the inability of children to repent as basis for baptism. Thus, it can be safely argued that Wesley thought deeply about children and the salvation of their souls, and their entrance to the church to become covenant participants and members of the body of Christ was constantly on Wesley’s mind. Wesley even emphasized that godparents were to make sure children were taught in sermons and through the Creed, the Lord’s Prayer, and the Ten Commandments. Godparents were responsible to bring children to church and encourage them to take sacraments—all with the goal that they would live a godly Christian life.⁴⁴ These again are evidence of Wesley’s great concern for the salvation and nurture of the faith of children.

Moreover, Wesley extended the responsibility to care for the salvation and faith nurture of children to the Methodist ministers and other children’s workers. He recognized the strategic importance of the family and children in the growth and sustainability of the Methodist movement.⁴⁵ He even confronted Methodist preachers who shied away from the responsibility of

caring for children by claiming their lack of spiritual gifts. Wesley responded, “Gift or no gift, you are to do it, else you are not called a Methodist preacher.”⁴⁶ Wesley’s argument revealed his great emphasis on caring for the souls of children. It can be safely argued that Wesley regarded the evangelism of children was a non-negotiable task for ministers. The same is also true for those who worked with children in a lay capacity. In his writing to Ms. Bishop dated to May 17, 1781, Wesley said, “Make Christians, my dear, make Christians.”⁴⁷ All these works of Wesley consistently reveal his great concerns for the souls of children and serve as proof that children were included in Wesley’s approach to ministry. The frequent mention of children in his works reveals the weight of his concern for them.

Wesley confronted Methodist preachers who shied away from caring for children, responding, “Gift or no gift, you are to do it, else you are not called a Methodist preacher.” Wesley’s argument revealed his great emphasis on caring for the souls of children. This was a non-negotiable task for ministers.

JOHN WESLEY’S PERSONAL ENCOUNTER AND EVANGELISM OF CHILDREN

John Wesley saw the work of God in the lives of children. He observed children listening and responding to the gospel just like adults did. On the ship during his travel to Georgia, he witnessed Mr. Ingram instructing children.⁴⁸ In his journal entry dated February 3, 1738, Wesley recorded his early experience with children in Georgia. He reported, “Many children have learned how they ought to serve God, and to be useful to their neighbor, and those whom it most concerns have an opportunity of knowing the true state of their infant colony and laying a firmer foundation of peace and happiness for many generations.”⁴⁹ In Savannah, Wesley recorded an account of the methods ministers used when they ministered to children. Here he recorded that the

41. Wesley, *The Works of Wesley*, vol 3, ed. Outler, 341. In Wesley’s sermon *The Unity of the Divine Being*, Wesley was asked that these religious instructions were impossible to children because their understanding was limited. However, Wesley answered that it was God who really opens up the understanding of humanity whether they were adults or children. John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, ed. Albert Outler, vol. 4, *Sermons IV 115-151* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1987), 64.

42. Wesley, *The Works of Wesley*, vol 3, ed. Outler, 349.

43. John Wesley, “Treatise on Baptism,” in *The Works of John Wesley*, 3rd ed., vol. 10 (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1979), 193–197.

44. John Wesley, “Serious Thoughts Concerning God Fathers and Godmothers,” in *The Works of John Wesley*, 3rd ed., vol. 10 (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1979), 508.

45. Wesley, *The Works of Wesley*, vol 3, ed. Outler, 335.

46. *Minutes of the Methodist Conferences, from the First, Held in London by the Late Rev. John Wesley, A.M. in the Year 1744*, vol. 1 (London: John Mason, 1862), 69.

47. Wesley, *Wesley’s Letters*, 13:37.

48. John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, 3rd ed., vol. 1 (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1979), 18. Wesley also heard testimony of Mr. Oglethorpe of him teaching children (Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, 1:24).

49. John Wesley, *The Journal of the Rev. John Wesley*, ed. Nehemiah Curnock, Standard., vol. 1 (London: Robert Culley, nd), 435.

catechism was taught to the youngest children before morning class and the older children in the evening.⁵⁰

From his time in Kingswood and other ministries, Wesley recorded observations of the spiritual experiences of children. He said, "And almost as soon as we began, God gave us a token for good; four children receiving a clear sense of pardon."⁵¹ He also recorded in his journal dated October 2, 1784, that many children had been moved by the moving of the Holy Spirit.⁵² He witnessed and heard about the transformation of children's lives because of the gospel. He stated in his journal dated July 16, 1783, "Men, women, and children flocked out of their houses and kneeled down together in the streets."⁵³ This occurred during a storm. For Wesley, these episodes proved the receptivity of children to spiritual things. It also signaled that evangelism should not be limited to adults but should rather include children.

For Wesley, these episodes proved the receptivity of children to spiritual things. It also signaled that evangelism should not be limited to adults but should rather include children. He witnessed and heard about the transformation of children's lives because of the gospel. John Wesley himself personally evangelized children and ministered to children.

John Wesley himself personally evangelized children and ministered to children. In his preaching, children were also present. In his journal dated April 5, 1782, Wesley said, "I preached at Oldham and was surprised to see the street lined with little children . . . before preaching they only ran round me and before me; but after it, a whole troop, boys and girls, closed me in and would not be content till I shook

50. Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, 1:45. Wesley used the term, lowest class, which I understand to mean small children. Wesley later recognized how his time in Savannah influenced him, as referenced in his work entitled *The People Called Methodists*. He said, "These were the first rudiments of the Methodist societies" (Wesley, *Wesley's Letters*, 13:306).

51. Wesley, *Wesley's Letters*, 13:301. He also witnessed children's spirituality after the preaching of Mr. Berridge. He testified, "Afterwards at church many cried out, especially children, whose agonies were amazing. One of the oldest, a girl ten or twelve years old, was in violent contortions of body, and wept aloud, I think incessantly, during the whole service; and several much younger children were agonizing as this did. . . but some women, and several children, felt the power of the same almighty Spirit." Wesley, *Wesley's Letters*, 13:345.

52. Wesley, *The Works of Wesley*, vol 23, ed. Ward and Heitzenrater, 23:333.

53. Wesley, *The Works of Wesley*, vol 23, ed. Ward and Heitzenrater, 23:285.

each of them by the hand."⁵⁴ On July 1, 1782, Wesley recorded that he spent time with forty poor children whom Lay Maxwell kept at school where they also learned principles of religion.⁵⁵ He also followed up on children after ministry. In his journal, he recorded, "The number of children that are clearly converted to God is particularly remarkable. Thirteen or fourteen little maidens in one class are rejoicing in God their savior, and are as serious and stayed in their whole behavior as if they were thirty or forty years old."⁵⁶

In addition to evangelizing them personally, Wesley developed materials called *Instructions for Children* and *Prayers for Children*.⁵⁷ Even without a child himself, Wesley extended his pastoral ministry to them. He provided lessons to equip his ministers for teaching and nurturing the faith of children.⁵⁸ His work on *Prayers for Children* supported and supplemented his endeavors in the care of the souls of children.⁵⁹ These added to the evidence of Wesley's great concern for the souls of children.

EVANGELISM WITH CHILDREN IN WESLEY'S PERSPECTIVE

John Wesley's works so far have not revealed any actual commissioning of children for evangelism purposes. However, several scholars talked about the possibility of children as subjects for evangelistic endeavors. Dean Blevins and Peter Benzie have shed insights on this topic from a theological perspective. Blevins on his part focused on the idea of children as means of grace. He said,

*Wesley intended the inclusion of these children's lives as part of the narrative of the people called Methodist, not only as a form of historical reporting, but also as a means of grace for those who would read their accounts. Wesley believed that children's spiritual lives provided a valuable witness for the Kingdom of God.*⁶⁰

This meant that Wesley's personal experience of the spirituality of children in his ministries as discussed above served as a means of grace for the transformation of the schema of Wesley regarding the kingdom of God. The same transformation of schema was implied by Blevins to other Methodist workers who read the spiritual experiences of children as

54. Wesley, *The Works of Wesley*, vol 23, ed. Ward and Heitzenrater, 23:235.

55. Wesley, *The Works of Wesley*, vol 23, ed. Ward and Heitzenrater, 23:241.

56. Wesley, *The Works of Wesley*, vol 23, ed. Ward and Heitzenrater, 23:349.

57. The writer recognized the existence of *Hymns for Children* but has not yet read the material.

58. See John Wesley, *Instructions for Children*, 2nd ed., 1745, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=emu.000015257578&view=1up&seq=2>.

59. John Wesley, "Prayers for Children," in *The Works of John Wesley*, 3rd ed., vol. 11 (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1979), 259–272.

60. Dean Gray Blevins, "To Be a Means of Grace: A Wesleyan Perspective on Christian Practices and the Lives of Children," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 43, no. 1 (2018): 67.

reported by Wesley. Wesley's personal witness to the spiritual journey of children opened his mind to the work of God in the lives of children and to how receptive children are to the working of the Holy Spirit. Thus, the testimonies of children were a means of grace for Wesley. Peter Benzie concurs. Benzie emphasizes the idea of the sovereignty of God and says that adults should not "place limits on God" because "God can and does move in the hearts and minds of whomever he chooses at whatever age he chooses."⁶¹

Blevins and Benzie are correct. As recorded in biblical literature, children can serve as agents of God to open the minds of adults. The account of the disciples' hindering the children and Jesus welcoming them is one example of how God uses children to teach adults. Wesley's doctrine of prevenient grace accommodates the reality of God working in the lives of children and at the same time God using children to minister to adults. For Catherine Stonehouse, this doctrine makes ministry to children child-friendly.⁶² For Charles Rishell, the doctrine makes children's ministry optimistic.⁶³ Just like the idea of Benzie, we cannot stop God from accomplishing his purposes his way. The reality of the testimonies of children in Wesley's accounts proved that children were ministered to by God and served as God's agents to open Wesley's mind regarding the Kingdom of God.

CONCLUSION

From a Wesleyan point of view, evangelism should include children. Any evangelistic endeavors among Wesleyan denominations should keep children in mind. When it comes to spirituality, children are receptive. As evidenced by their spiritual diseases, children are affected by original sin. They indeed need to hear and be transformed by the gospel. They need to be aware of sinful tendencies that result from spiritual diseases. The work of God towards the salvation of humankind also includes work in the lives of the children. John Wesley's childhood evangelistic experience at home, his several works on children, his personal experiences with children on evangelism, and his testimonies and observations on evangelism with children provide evidence for how children were indeed part of Wesley's ministry. He did not exclude them. Just like adults, he saw them both as subjects

and recipients in the evangelistic endeavors.

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61. Peter Benzie, "As a Little Child: Children in the Theology of John Wesley" (master's thesis, Laidlaw-Carey Graduate School, 2020), 144.

62. Catherine Stonehouse, "Children in Wesleyan Thought," in *Children's Spirituality*, ed. Kevin E. Lawson and Scottie May, 2nd ed. (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2019), 128. She also explained how this grace made it possible for children to respond to God's seeking love. Catherine Stonehouse, "Children in Wesleyan Thought," in *Children's Spirituality: Christian Perspectives, Research, and Applications* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2004), 130.

63. Rishell said, "By nature children of wrath, by grace children of God, and the latter was stronger than the former." Charles W. Rishell, "Wesley and Other Methodist Fathers on Childhood Religion," *Methodist Review* 18, no. 5 (October 1902): 781. Both the scholarship of Stonehouse and Rishell helped untrained eyes see the hidden gem in Wesley's ministry of and with children.

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Inter-Generational Mission

Lizzy Iweala

Christian mission is a call for all believers to participate in God's mandate of restorative work in the world as we share the love of Christ in practical ways. We, as believers in Christ, should exemplify Christ by becoming living epistles that people within our communities and circles of influence can read and be inspired by to learn more about Him and His message of salvation.

There are different types of missions geared toward fulfilling biblical mandates. Some of these mandates include:

- a. The Great Commandment:** Matthew 22:37–39 contains Jesus' summary of the greatest commandments. He states: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Additionally, in John 15:12, believers are instructed to love God supremely and love one another just as Christ loves the Church.
- b. The Great Commission:** An explicit mandate given by Christ to His disciples to "go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit," according to Matthew 28:19–20.
- c. The Ministry of Reconciliation:** A responsibility entrusted to all believers as ambassadors of Christ to bring peace to a troubled world, and justice and reconciliation to a broken world, based on 2 Corinthians 5:18–19.

Nevertheless, in advancing the Gospel, the Great Commission, and the Ministry of Reconciliation alongside, evangelism, discipleship, compassion, and justice can be considered effective means of achieving the Gospel mandate. Incorporating intergenerational mission can also be viewed as an inclusive approach to propagating of the Gospel.

For the purpose of this paper, however, I will discuss intergenerational missions and their relevance in advancing the work of God's Kingdom.

WHAT IS INTERGENERATIONAL MISSION?

According to Randy Shepley (Baptist News, 2012), intergenerational mission consists of people from different age groups connected through various forms of relationships. Within a denomination or church community, individuals from different generations

share faith, dialogue, mutual respect, friendship, and a common commitment to the propagation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

A mosaic of mission is created when all generations participate in mission together, making it an integral part of the identity of every age group and stage within a congregation. It communicates that mission has no age boundaries but is instead an essential part of lifelong faith formation. Although there may be obstacles in the process, the fact remains that mission is an open invitation for everyone to serve Christ. In doing so, it demonstrates that all believers can serve and love those within their spheres of influence, including neighbors and colleagues in the marketplace.

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An intergenerational short-term mission trip is a typical example of how intergenerational mission can be enhanced. Such trips often consist of multiple age groups that are not necessarily related to one another and may come from different ethnic backgrounds, yet they participate together in the same mission. This blend of ages and ethnic diversity adds significant value to the team.

Intergenerational teams can include children, youth, young adults, adults, and seniors. When all these groups come together for a short-term mission trip, it sends a powerful message. As Ida Hermanson, a church planter in Sweden, stated:

"Having teams with all ages gives the trip more credibility. It opens doors. The dynamics of a team change when there are children all the way to senior adults. People notice and are more attracted to what the team is doing."

When a host city or country sees a diverse group

of people from different age groups and cultures gathered in one place for the same purpose—fulfilling God’s mandate through the propagation of the Gospel, the questions, “Where are the youth?” or “Where are their parents?” become irrelevant because intergenerational mission bridges those gaps.

Another advantage of intergenerational mission trips is the promotion of discipleship and long-term healthy relationships. Younger participants can be paired with older individuals, creating opportunities for mentorship, spiritual growth, and mutual encouragement.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I strongly believe that if intergenerational mission is encouraged and promoted, the Church will experience both spiritual and numerical growth.

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