

asian missions advance

93

Fall 2026 | Volume 32 | Issue 4

ISSN 2765-0936

Quarterly Bulletin of the Asia Missions Association *published by*
the East-West Center for Missions Research & Development

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

C. S. Caleb Kim

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.

CONTENTS

- 1** **God's Mission as a Call to Humanity: An Incarnational and Anthropological Perspective for Engaging People in a Pluralistic Asia**
C. S. Caleb Kim
- 9** **God's New Thing: Restoration of Humanity and Christian Mission in Isaiah 43:19**
Minhye Kang
- 19** **Listening Well Through Interviews: An Outreach Approach to University Students in Europe**
Takaaki Hara
- 23** **John Wesley: Evangelism with Children in Mind**
Mark Gil A. Petallar
- 31** **Inter-Generational Mission**
Lizzy Iweala

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.

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. Apologetics might win debates, but hearts can be won solely through love.

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 outpower 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.

REFERENCES CITED

- Bosch, David J. *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991.
- Kearney, Michael. *World View*. Novato, CA: Chandler & Sharp Publishers, 1984.
- Kim, C. S. Caleb. *Cultural Anthropology from a Christian Perspective*. Eldoret, Kenya: Utafiti Foundation, 2019.
- Kim, C. S. Caleb. "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.
- Kim, C. S. Caleb, ed. *Lived Experiences of Muslims in Africa: From an Inter-religious Perspective*. Nairobi, Kenya: Africa International University Press, 2024.
- Kraft, Charles H. *Worldview for Christian Witness*. Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2008.
- Newbigin, Lesslie. *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989.



C. S. Caleb Kim
negstkim@gmail.com

*Prof. Rev. C. S. Caleb Kim has served African churches as a missionary and professor since arriving in Kenya with his family in 1989. He holds a Ph.D. in Intercultural Studies from Fuller Theological Seminary and is Emeritus Associate Professor at Africa International University in Nairobi, where he has taught African Islam and cultural anthropology since 2002. He has also taught cultural anthropology at Fuller since 2001. His books include *Islam among the Swahili in East Africa* (2004, 2016) and *Cultural Anthropology from a Christian Perspective* (2019).*