

Biblico-Theological Foundations of Mission through Asian Eyes

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Introduction

Let me begin by defining the Asia that I speak to. Asia is the largest continent and the most densely populated portion of the globe. Some of the largest cities in the world are found in this region. Asia contains a wide variety of cultures, religions and traditions. Asia is representative of the world. Asian people have different experiences of colonialism and post-colonialism. The Christian people in Asia live in the midst of other faiths or religions. As Monica J. Melanchthon rightly points out:

Asia is also the home of world religions and the challenge of religious plurality and religious fundamentalism is most felt by the churches in this region. Patriarchy still manages to suppress the voices of women and hinder their struggle for liberation. Our environment is endangered leading to more than just an ecological crisis. Marginalized communities who depend on the land for survival and are integrally related to the environment, particularly the indigenous peoples, women and Dalits are further victimized. Asia has also become a continent with a very high incidence of violence, where life has become dispensable. [Except the Philippines and East Timor], as Christian communities we are a minority and we live in the midst of people of diverse faiths and of no faith. Churches have been accused of catering to the needs of the rich and powerful within the church rather than approximate the values of the Kingdom. Thus, we are called to participate in God's mission in a context where the majority are socially oppressed, economically marginalized, politically rendered powerless and spiritually pauperized."²

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² Dr. Monica J. Melanchthon, a Lutheran Old Testament scholar from Gurukul Lutheran Theological College and Research Institute, Chennai, India in her paper, "Mission in the Asian Context in the Third Millennium: Issues, Questions and Needs," presented at the Seminar on Mission, October 25-30, 2000, Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, Malaysia (unpublished), 3. She refers to George Matthew Nalunnakal, "Mission and Unity in the Context of Contemporary Challenges," in *Quest for Justice: Perspectives on Mission & Unity*, 60. Melanchthon further writes, "In the postmodern world of today, plurality has come to stay and plurality when studied from a social-political perspective will reveal that plurality is a characteristic feature of Asia. Without it, Asia has no future. The church needs to be in favor of plurality and should not fall victim to any monolithic conception and practice of unity in its practice of Christian mission. Promotion of plurality should become an integral part of mission and by doing so, the Christian church will become a sign of hope for the minority peoples of Asia. Embracing plurality thereby becomes an issue of justice" (4-5). See also James H. Kroeger, *Asia-Church in Mission, Exploring Ad Gentes Mission Initiatives of the Local Churches in Asia in the Vatican II Era* (Quezon City, Philippines: Claretian Publications, 1999), 21, 113-114.

Based on this reality, our understanding of mission (*Missio Dei*) is necessarily diverse.³ In light of this context let us now look at the classical texts that are widely used for “world” mission. Since it is impossible to reflect on all or different texts in one session, I will only concentrate on Matthew 28:18-20 and Luke 4:16-21.

Matthew 28:18-20

In the early part of Matthew (Mt. 10:5-6), when Jesus sends out the twelve disciples, he says to them: “Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” To the Canaanite woman, Jesus says, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (15: 24). And when the woman insists for Jesus to help her, Jesus adds, “It is not fair to take the children’s bread and throw it to the dogs” (vs. 26). Jesus of Matthew limits the missionary commission only to Israel. This seems to contradict the great commission in Matthew 28:19—“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” Only after resurrection is the invitation to discipleship open to all people, men and women, of all nations. The Christian duty is to tell the story of the good news of Jesus to those who have never heard it. Donald Senior writes, “From the death of Jesus comes the birth of a resurrection community; from the failure of the mission to Israel comes the opening to the Gentiles.”⁴

In the early period Jewish Christians had not understood themselves as members of a separate religion over against Judaism but primarily as a renewal movement within it. However, in the late seventies or early eighties, the situation was changed and tension between them was escalated, which finally divided them. The writer of the gospel of Matthew helps the Christians to develop themselves as the Church of Christ, the “true Israel.” Many quotations from the Old Testament were used to prove that Jesus is the Messiah and the fulfillment of Old Testament promises. David J. Bosch writes, “Matthew therefore uses the Old Testament as witness *against* the Jewish theologians of his day and their use of Scripture.”⁵ He adds, “Throughout, then, Matthew’s use of the Old Testament is not just polemical—to counter rabbinic claims to the Old Testament—but deeply pastoral

³ David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission, Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission, American Society of Missiology Series, No 16* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 10, distinguishes between mission (singular) and missions (plural): Mission is *Missio Dei* and missions (*missiones ecclesiae*, the missionary ventures of the church), refers to particular forms related to specific times, places, or need, of participation in the *missio Dei*. *Missio Dei* is God’s “yes” to the world: God’s love and attention to the whole world. But *missio Dei* is also God’s “no” to the world. What Bosch writes makes clear what Philip L. Wickeri, in “Dialogue and Resistance: Mission in the Context of Globalization,” in *Celebrating Life in Asia* (selected papers from the Second Congress of Asian Theologians), in *CTC Bulletin*, Vol. XVI, No. 1 (November 1999), 46, states: that *missio Dei* is concerned with “the dynamic relationship between God and the world, a relationship which anticipates the kingdom of God, and therefore a relationship within a human community in a world which is created, redeemed and sanctified by God.”

⁴ Donald Senior, “The Foundations for Mission in the New Testament,” in Donald Senior and Carroll Stuhlmueller, *The Biblical Foundations for Mission* (Maryknoll, NY.: Orbis Books, 1983), 244.

⁵ Bosch, *Transforming Mission...*, 59.

and missionary—*pastoral*, in that he wishes to convey self-confidence to a community facing a crisis of identity; *missionary*, in that he wishes to embolden the community members toward seeing opportunities for witness and service around them.⁶

Many attempts have been made to solve the contradiction in Matthew. David Bosch argues that it is indeed possible that the different sayings also reflect opposing views and traditions in Matthew's community and were, we may deduce, responsible for some sharp differences. "Matthew, however, chooses to include both. This certainly speaks for his pastoral concern; he does not simply play off one group against another. But it also reflects his theological position: a mission to Israel and one to Gentiles need not exclude but ought rather to embrace each other."⁷

Some scholars understand the words *ta ethne*⁸ as referring to all nations excluding the Jews. But together with other scholars I am convinced that *panta ta ethne* make it clear that the Jews are included but not anymore understood as a specially privileged people.⁹ "'Israel' as a theological entity belongs to the past¹⁰ 'Israel' is no longer the 'church'. In what happened to Jesus, the ancient notion of 'Israel' has been ruptured and God's eschatological community ushered on to the stage of history. All restrictions have been lifted."¹¹ It is clear therefore that for Matthew Jesus is no longer sent only to Israel but, in fact, he has become the Savior of all humankind (including the Jews).

For a long time the New Testament interpreters have very little interest in this passage. Some think that this text is a later addition to the gospel. Adolf von Harnack, in his monumental work, *The Mission and Expansion of Christianity in the First Three Centuries*, toyed with the idea that these words might be a later addition to the gospel, since he could not understand why Matthew would have added them. But then in the later edition of his book, he called it a "manifesto" or a "masterpiece." He said, "It is impossible to say anything

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*, 60. The Gentiles play a role from the beginning to the end of the gospel of Matthew: the four non-Israelite women in Jesus' genealogy (Mt. 1); the visit of the magi (Mt. 2:1-12); the centurion of Capernaum (Mt. 8:5-13); Jesus said, "Many will come from east and west and sit at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven (8:11); the Canaanite woman (Mt. 15:21-28); in the eschatological discourse it is stated that the gospel will be preached to all the nations (Mt. 24:14; 26:13); and the reaction of the centurion and those with him at the crucifixion of Jesus, who claims, "truly he was the son of God" (27:54).

⁸ Matthew uses *panta ta ethne* four times, and all of these are in the final part of his gospel (24:9, 14; 25:32; 28:19).

⁹ Douglas R. A. Hare, *Matthew, Interpretation, A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1993), 333, also writes, "While Jewish converts are by no means excluded, the focus of the church's mission, Matthew seems to suggest, must henceforth be the Gentile world."

¹⁰ H. Frankemolle, "Jahwebund und Kirche Christi: Neutestamentliche Abhandlungen," Munster: Verlag Aschendorff, 1974.

¹¹ Bosch, *Transforming*, 64-65, "The risen Jesus, however boldly and unreservedly, sends his followers to disciple 'all nations' (*panta ta ethne*; Mt 28:19). The reign of God has been entrusted to God's new people (cf 21:43).

greater and more than this in only forty words."¹² Then since the 1940s biblical scholarship began to pay serious attention to Mt. 28:19-20, the so-called "Great Commission." Friedrich (1983) says, "Matthew has, as if in a burning-glass, focused everything that was dear to him in these words and put them as the crowning culmination at the end of his gospel."¹³ Friedrich lists some phrases scholars have used to emphasize the importance of this passage for understanding the gospel of Matthew: "the theological program of Matthew" (J. Blank); "a summary of the entire gospel of Matthew" (G. Bornkamm); "the most important concern of the Gospel" (H. Kosmala); "the 'climax' of the gospel" (U. Luck); "a short of culmination of everything said up to this point" (P. Nepper-Christensen); "a 'manifesto'" (G. Otto); and "a 'table of contents' of the gospel" (G. Schille). Many scholars today agree "the entire gospel points to these final verses; all the threads woven into the fabric of Matthew, from chapter 1 onwards, draw together here."¹⁴ Bosch states, "The 'Great Commission' at the end of the gospel is to be understood as the key to Matthew's understanding of the mission and ministry of Jesus."¹⁵

The intention of the commission for mission in Matthew is as follows: (1) make disciples; (2) baptize; and (3) teach.

(1) Make disciples. Matthew's gospel has a very strong understanding of discipleship. Matthew uses the verb "make disciples" (Greek: *matheteuein*) which only occurs four times in the New Testament, three in Matthew [13:52; 27:57; 28:19] and one in Acts [14:21]). It is only in Mt 28:19 that the verb is used in the imperative sense: make disciples (Greek: *matheteusate*). To make disciple is to make a person to be a student; Jesus of Matthew sends them (his followers) to help others to be good students to follow what Jesus has done during his life and ministry. We may say that the followers of the earthly Jesus have to make others into what they themselves are: disciples.

The verb *matheteusate* is "the principal verb in the 'Great Commission' and the heart of the commissioning. The two participles, 'baptizing' and 'teaching,' are clearly subordinate to 'make disciples' and describe the form the disciple-making is to take."¹⁶ It is only in the gospel of Matthew that the word *ekklesia*, "church," is used (16:16; 18:17). But Matthew does not mean to make disciple is to add new members of existing congregation. "To be a disciple is not just the same as being a member of a local 'church' and 'making disciples' does not simply mean the numerical expansion of the church."¹⁷ Matthew makes a clear link between Jesus and Matthew's community with the command "make disciples." In the final analysis, therefore, there is, for Matthew, no break, no discontinuity between

¹² Quoted from David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 56; see also Adolf von Harnack, *Die Mission und Ausbreitung des Christentums in der ersten drei Jahrhunderten*. Vierte, verbesserte und vermehrte Auflage, Band 1 (Leipzig: Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, 1924).

¹³ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*..., 57.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* But it is important to make a note that in order not to neglect what Jesus has done during his life and ministry, if Mt 28:18-20 is called the Great Commission, then we may say Mt 25: 31-46 can be called a Greater Commission of Jesus.

¹⁵ Bosch, *Transforming*..., 60.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 73

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 82.

the history of Jesus and the era of the church. As Bosch clearly states, "The 'disciples' of Matthew's time are thus not just linked to the first disciples but also to one another. Every disciple follows the Master, but never alone; every disciple is a member of the fellowship of disciples, the body, or no disciple at all."¹⁸

(2) Baptize. Jesus tells his disciples to baptize "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Mt 28:19).¹⁹ Most scholars think that this triadic formula is not part of the original text of Matthew; it is "a later interpolation but is now generally accepted as authentic."²⁰ "In Matthew's time, the church had not yet worked out the sophisticated and logical doctrines of the Trinity; these were to come later in church history," says Thomas Long.²¹ "Baptism follows (or might follow) out of the 'making disciples', the teaching."²²

(3) Teach. In the commissioning of the disciples in Mt 10, Jesus sends out the twelve to preach (RSV) or, in NRSV, to proclaim (Greek: *kerysso*): "As you go, proclaim the good news, 'The kingdom of heaven has come near.'" But in Mt 28:19 they are sent to teach (Greek: *didaskhein*). In this commission the call to preach is absent for they are sent to teach the good news. They are now taking over Jesus' role of teaching. They are not to teach abstract ideas but "teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you" (Mt 28:20). There is a very strong ethical emphasis in this commissioning as there has been in Jesus' teaching throughout this Gospel. As France states, "To 'make disciples' is not complete unless it leads them to a life of observing Jesus' commandments."²³ Hare understands, "Matthew apparently can take for granted that the missionaries will proclaim the good news and call for faith (see 24:14; 18:6); what he cannot take for granted is that the converts will treat seriously Jesus' moral demands."²⁴ That is why teaching is very important in the commissioning. Bosch says that it is important to recognize that, for Matthew, teaching is by no means a merely intellectual enterprise (as it often is for us and was for the ancient Greeks). Jesus' teaching is an appeal to his listeners' will, not primarily to their intellect; it is a call for a concrete decision to follow him and to submit to God's will. Moreover, teaching does not merely involve inculcating the precepts of the Law and obeying them, as contemporary Judaism interpreted it (cf. also Jesus' very "Jewish" advice to the rich

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 74.

¹⁹ The Synoptic tradition never suggests that Jesus baptized or that his disciples adopted the custom before the Resurrection (but contrast John 3:5, 26; 4:1-2).

²⁰ Hare, *Matthew*, 334; see also R. T. France, *Matthew, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries* (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1985), 415 writes, "It has been argued that these words were not part of the original text of Matthew, since Eusebius regularly in his pre-Nicene works quotes Matthew 28:19 in the shorter form, 'Go and make disciples in my name', but the fact that no extant manuscript of Matthew has this reading suggests that this was rather Eusebius' own abbreviation than a text he found in existing manuscripts."

²¹ Thomas G. Long, *Matthew, Westminster Bible Companion* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 327.

²² Britta Mohring, "Introduction to the New Testament," Ecumenical Theological Seminary, Baguio City (Unpublished), 69.

²³ France, *Matthew*, 415.

²⁴ Hare, *Matthew*, 334.

young man in Matthew 19:17). No, what the apostles should “teach” the new disciples, according to Matthew 28:20, is to submit to the will of God as revealed in Jesus’ ministry and teaching.²⁵

Matthew summarizes Jesus’ commandments in Mt 22:37-39 as the Greatest Commandment. The disciples are as humble tutor helping others to know, to obey and to live according to God’s will. Lohmeyer writes, “Jesus is now the content of his own earlier teaching, the embodiment of God’s reign, the gospel.”²⁶ All these can only be done because Jesus’ promise, “And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” Only because Jesus continues to be present with his disciples to guide, to help, to strengthen and to enable them, they can go out in mission, to carry on their commission. Bosch rightly summarizes the meaning of Jesus’ commission as follows, “For Matthew, then, being a disciple means living out the teachings of Jesus, which the evangelist has recorded in great detail in his gospel. It is unthinkable to divorce the Christian life of love and justice from being a disciple. Discipleship involves a commitment to God’s reign, to justice and love, and to obedience to the entire will of God. . . Mission involves, from the beginning and as matter of course, making new believers sensitive to the needs of others, opening their eyes and hearts to recognize injustice, suffering, oppression, and the plight of those who have fallen by the wayside. It is unjustifiable to regard the ‘Great Commission’ as being concerned primarily with ‘evangelism’ and the ‘Great commandment’ (Mt 22:37-40) as referring to ‘social involvement.’”²⁷ As Jacques Matthey puts it, “According to Matthew’s ‘Great Commission’, it is not possible to make disciples without telling them to practice God’s call of justice for the poor. The love commandment, which is *the* basis for the church’s involvement in politics, is an integral part of the mission commandment.”²⁸

Luke 4:16-21

This pericope is known as “an inaugural episode of Jesus’ ministry.”²⁹ Luke 4:16 portrays Jesus as one who is loyal to ancestral tradition: “he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, as was his custom.” He spends the Sabbath day studying Jewish law and custom.³⁰

²⁵ Bosch, *Transforming...*, 66.

²⁶ Cited from Bosch, *Ibid.*, 67.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 81.

²⁸ Cited from Bosch, *Ibid.*

²⁹ Sharon H. Ringe, *Luke, Westminster Bible Companion* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), 67.

³⁰ This tradition is also practiced in the early church: Acts 2:46; 5:42; cf. Josephus, *Antiquities* 61.2.2.43; see also E. Earle Ellis, *The Gospel of Luke, The Century Bible, New Edition* (London: Thomas Nelson, Ltd., 1966), 96, refers to documents describing an ancient synagogue service date from some time after the first century. But probably they reflect in large measure the practices of the New Testament period. “The service included the recitation of the ‘shema’ (Dt.6.4-9; 11.13-21; Num. 15. 37-41), a prayer, a reading from the law, a reading from the prophets, and a benediction. The law was read in stated sections and completed over a three-year cycle. The reading from the prophets, with certain exceptions, also seems to have followed an assigned cycle of lessons. . . Afterwards the reader could give an exposition of the passage. While any member of the congregation might serve this function, precedence was given to priests and Levites. Probably the same courtesy would be accorded a visiting ‘rabbi’ such as Jesus (cf. Ac. 13.15).”

Jesus not only attends synagogue services regularly but as all male adults he also reads scripture and comments on what he reads. According to Acts 13:15 it is a tradition in the synagogue to read the Law and the Prophets. Whether Jesus reads the appointed text for the day cannot be determined, and the text we have in Luke is a composite of Isaiah 61:1; 58:6; 61:2, and the quotation stops with "to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" without the phrase "the day of vengeance of our God." Because of the word "anointed" in Isa. 61:1, Jesus claims himself as the anointed Servant of the Lord, "The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me . . ." and his mission is "a preaching mission" (Lk 4:18). He is the one expected "to bring to reality the longing and the hope of the poor, the oppressed, and the imprisoned."³¹ The Holy Spirit has come upon Jesus at his baptism: "and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove" (Lk 3:22; cf. Acts 10:38).

After reading from the book of Isaiah, Jesus says, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" (Lk 4:21). The word "today" (Greek: *semeron*) is an important word for Luke. In Lk 2:11, the angel says to the shepherds, "to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord." In Lk 5:26, when Jesus heals a paralytic, the people were amazed and they glorified God and were filled with awe, saying, "We have seen strange things today." To those who want to follow Jesus, Luke adds to his source the word "daily": "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me" (Lk 9:23). To Zacchaeus Jesus says, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today" (Lk 19:5). Later when Zacchaeus says to Jesus that half of his possessions he would give to the poor; and if he had defrauded anyone of anything, he would pay back four times as much, then Jesus says to Zacchaeus, "Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost" (Lk 19:9-10). Finally to one of the criminals who were hanged with Jesus and who said, "Jesus remember me when you come into your kingdom," Jesus replies, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise" (Lk 23:43). Luke strongly stresses "the immediate action of the Kingdom in contrast to future apocalyptic fire-works."³²

The declaration of Jesus evokes the amazement of the people in the synagogue. Luke presents Jesus in a very different way, he appears in public and acts as the anointed of God who performs liberating deeds in the framework of a lasting, indeed an everlasting covenant (Isa 61:8). What Isaiah announced to the people of his day is now being announced to the poor, the prisoners, the blind and the downtrodden of Jesus' day. What was announced to the exiles returning to Jerusalem has now been turned by Luke into fulfillment in the person, words, and deeds of Jesus of Nazareth. God's salvific act was fulfilled or realized.³³ Fred Craddock writes, "It is interesting that in Luke's Gospel, the first public word of Jesus as an adult, apart from reading Scripture, is "today." The age of God's reign is here; the eschatological time when God's promises are fulfilled and

³¹ Fred B. Craddock, *Luke, Interpretation, A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1990), 62.

³² Frederick W. Danker, *Jesus and the New Age. A Commentary on St. Luke's Gospel, Completely Revised and Expanded* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 107.

³³ Joseph A. Fitzmyer, S.J., *The Gospel According to Luke (I-IX), Introduction, Translation, and Notes* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1986), 529.

God's purpose comes to fruition has arrived; there will be changes in the conditions of those who have waited and hoped. Those changes for the poor and the wronged and the oppressed will occur today. This is the beginning of jubilee. The time of God is today, and the ministries of Jesus and of the church according to Luke-Acts demonstrate that "today" continued. Throughout these two volumes, "today" never is allowed to become "yesterday" or to slip again into a vague "someday."³⁴

Lk 4:18f. emphasizes the proclamation of the gospel as "the good news", and proclamation of the gospel is a definition of mission that occurs very often in the New Testament (Mk 16:15; 13:10; 14:9; Rom 1:1; 1:16; 1 Cor 1:17, etc). In Luke the proclamation of the gospel gives a strong emphasis upon the poor. In the Magnificat, Mary praises the Lord for he has lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty (Lk 1:52-53). In Lk 6:20 Jesus says, "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God." In Lk 7:22, to John's disciples Jesus says, "Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have good news brought to them" (see also Lk 14:13, 21; 16:20, 22; 18:22; 21:3). There is no reason to doubt the word poor (Greek: *ptochos*) means "the financially poor; but it will certainly include poverty of other kinds."³⁵ The two meanings are found throughout the Gospel (Lk 4:26, a poor widow; Lk 4:27, an exceedingly rich nobleman but in his resourcelessness against leprosy) and so "poor covers poverty of every kind, but denotes above all else the spiritual poverty from which all alike suffer."³⁶ Fredrick W. Danker writes, "The poor are, according to traditional expression, the politically powerless, those who therefore must look to God for help. Unlike the rich, those who are at ease in Zion, the poor observe God's precepts. But they are despised by the bluebloods of Israel."³⁷ That is why Luke does not only refer to Isa 61:1-2 but also Isa 58: 6, "to loose the bonds of injustice", "to let the oppressed go free", which is prompted by Luke's connection of the episode with the preceding account of Jesus' fasting and temptation. "Jesus aims to carry out with precision the Isaianic program of righteousness. He does what Israel was criticized for not doing."³⁸

There are plenty of examples in the gospel of Christ's giving freedom to people who are captives to guilt (Lk 7:41-50), to the love of money (Lk 19:1-10). Obviously Jesus did not talk of literal captives of war.³⁹ The same thing with the understanding of recovery

³⁴ Craddock, *Luke*, 62.

³⁵ David Gooding, *According to Luke, A New Exposition of the Third Gospel* (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1987), 81.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 82.

³⁷ Danker, *Jesus and the New Age*, 106-107.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 106.

³⁹ The Greek *aichmalotoi* ("captives") does not appear elsewhere in the NT, and elsewhere Luke uses the Greek word *aphesis* ("release") only for forgiveness of sins; see also Gooding, *According to Luke*, 82, writes, ". . . the word for 'captive' in Greek (*aichmalotos*) means, at the literal level, a war-captive. It is not the word one would use for someone imprisoned for a crime or for a political offence (which in New Testament language would be *desmios*). It follows therefore that our Lord could not have been using the word in its literal sense in the synagogue at Nazareth. He claimed that the promise of Isaiah was being fulfilled that very day in the ears of the congregation: captives were having release offered to them."

of sight to the blind: the offer of literal sight to the physically blind (Lk 7:21; 18:35-43), but once again it is impossible to think that the offer is only restricted to the blind in this literal sense. Jesus fulfills God's work of salvation foreseen by the prophet Isaiah: "a light for the nations" (see Lk 2:32; Acts 13:47) and like Jesus, his followers are to be light for others (Lk 8:16; 11:33).⁴⁰ Luke also relates the function of Jesus as the liberator ("year of the Lord's favor") to the tradition of the year of Jubilee in Leviticus 25. Every fifty years Israel was to declare a "year of liberty" and the reason for such a requirement on the part of the people was God's prior action who brought them out from the land of Egypt (Lev 25:55). It is the obligation of the prophet to proclaim "the acceptable year of the Lord" (Isa 61:2), when debts are canceled. Culpepper writes, "For Luke it proclaimed the fulfillment of Scripture and the hopes of Israel through Jesus' ministry as the Son of God. It stated the social concern that guided Jesus' work and allowed the reader to understand all that Jesus did as the fulfillment of his anointing by the Spirit."⁴¹ That is why Jesus' ministry is different from John's (Lk 16:16) and Luke omits the apocalyptic phrase, "the day of vengeance of our God" (Isa 61:2).

Luke strongly stresses the universality of salvation. The gospel ("the good news") is for all people: the poor, the outcast, the least, the sick, the blind, the captive, etc. No one is excluded. The theme of forgiveness is constant throughout the gospel of Luke and its climax is Lk 24:47, "and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem."⁴² Culpepper clearly states, "God's grace is never subject to the limitations and boundaries of any nation, church, group, or race. Those who would exclude others thereby exclude themselves. Human beings may be instruments of God's grace for others, but we are never free to set limits on who may receive that grace. Throughout history, the gospel has always been more radically inclusive than any group, denomination, or church, so we continually struggle for a breadth of love and acceptance that more nearly approximates the breadth of God's love. The paradox of the gospel, therefore, is that the unlimited grace that it offers so scandalizes us that we are unable to receive it."⁴³

The Latin American Bishops Conference at Puebla (1979) and the World Missionary Conference at Melbourne (1980) "regarded the missionary preferential option for the poor as central."⁴⁴ Jesus in his life and ministry is to seek a just, sustainable and participatory

⁴⁰ R. Alan Culpepper, "Luke" in *The New Interpreter's Bible*, Vol. IX (Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 1995), 106.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*; see also David Gooding, *According to Luke*, 83, writes, "he [Jesus] had no intention of executing the wrath of God upon evil men [women] or evil societies and institutions at this stage in history."

⁴² *Ibid.*, 82. He refers to the meaning of the Greek word for "release," which is *aphesis*. "Its associated verb carries a wide range of meaning: 'to send away, discharge, let go, release, allow' and then the specialized sense 'to forgive', since to forgive is to release someone from his debts, guilt, obligations and deserved penalties. The noun *aphesis* can mean 'release', 'discharge', 'setting free' in a general sense or else 'forgiveness'. Its meaning in this passage will depend on the sense in which the terms 'captives' and 'crushed' are intended."

⁴³ Culpepper, "Luke", 108.

⁴⁴ M. R. Spindler, "The Biblical Grounding and Orientation of Mission," in F. J. Verstraelen, Ed., *Missiology: An Ecumenical Introduction* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Company,

society—a social order that attempts to be inclusive—and pays particular attention to those whom the world regards as the “lest of these” (Mt 25: 40; cf. Lk 7:22-23; Mt 11:5-6). Michael Amaladoss writes, “He [Jesus] sought to free people from oppressive social and personal situations. In a world in conflict, he chose the side of the poor, the powerless, the sinners, and the marginalized of his day, promising them liberation through deed and word (Luke 4:18-21); following Jesus, our mission is to opt for the poor, and seek to transform the world, thereby ushering in God’s reign.”⁴⁵ M. R. Spindler also writes, “Proclamation in word is closely linked with concrete deeds of liberation breaking through the structures of oppression and injustice that force the poor into their situation of poverty and hold them there by violence. Mission thus aims to restructure society as a whole on a global scale. In other words, it aims at the kingdom (reign) of God. It is an ambitious program, and it breaks out of the traditional separation of church and the world, church and state, and spiritual and political power.”⁴⁶

How do we understand holistic mission through Asian eyes?

Many Christians still understand that the mission of the church is limited “to inviting persons to become Christians and preparing them for baptism.” This understanding is no longer adequate to take mission in the restricted sense of a mandate that Christians assume with regard to other people.⁴⁷ But as what the Vatican Council documents and more recent statements like *Evangelii Nuntiandi* express, the concept of evangelization should be taken in broader terms: “Christians should work to bring about a change in ‘personal and collective consciences of people, their activities and ways of life, and the milieux in which they live.’”⁴⁸ The biblical warrant for mission is no longer the so-called Great Commission (Mt. 28: 18-20). The church is called to be co-worker with God in the *Missio Dei*, proclaiming and living out God’s love (Lk. 4:16-21; cf., Mt. 25: 31-46).

We need to develop new ways of speaking about mission that name and reject the wrongs of the past, embrace what is good, and respond in new ways to the challenges facing the Asian churches and the modern world . . . Mission is no longer understood in the traditional sense of converting an individual or community from one religion into another. It is felt that any understanding or definition of mission that divides the community into saved/unsaved, reached/unreached and seeks to convert people into a particular understanding of the Christian faith or separated Christian and no-Christian into disparate human communities is inconsistent with the gospel message.⁴⁹

Thus says Monica J. Melanchthon. The church is engaged in the *Missio Dei*, “not because it claims to know and have all the truth, but because we as the Church are part of the body of Christ, and mission is part of who we are,” Melanchthon continues.⁵⁰

⁴⁵ Michael Amaladoss, SJ, “Mission,” in *Dictionary of Third World Theologies*, edited by Virginia Fabella & R. S. Sugirtharajah (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2000), 145.

⁴⁶ Spindler, “The Biblical Grounding,” 130.

⁴⁷ F. J. Verstraelen, General Editor, *Missiology: An Ecumenical Introduction* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), 4.

⁴⁸ Tom Michel, “The Challenge of Interfaith Dialogue,” a paper presented at the Second Congress of Asian Theologians (Bangalore, India, 8-15 August 1999; unpublished).

⁴⁹ Melanchthon, “Mission in the Asian Context”, 2.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 1; She refers to LWF Document entitled, *Together in God’s Mission*.

Bishop Erme R. Camba writes, "It is about time for us to understand that mission is not ours. For the church actually does not have it[s] own mission apart from the mission of God. Mission, rightly understood, is *missio Dei*, the mission of God."⁵¹ Further he adds, "I am bringing up the idea of *missio Dei*, to put us in wider perspective of our mission as a church. For the *missio Dei* is larger than the Church. God's mission embraces both the Church and the world and in which the Church is privileged to participate."⁵² The church stands in the service of God's turning to the world, representing God in and over against the world, pointing to God, holding up the God-child before the eyes of the world in a ceaseless celebration of the Feast of the Epiphany. In its mission, the church witnesses to the fullness of the promise of God's reign and participates in the ongoing struggle between that reign and the powers of darkness and evil.⁵³

The churches in Asia today are called and challenged to make the Gospel, the Good News relevant for the people in every context and situation. We live in a changing world but the Word is always the same. Mission can no longer be defined in one universal formula, but must be addressed in context. The churches in Asia are challenged to develop new goals and see new visions of opportunities for mission in Asia. Therefore, the churches should

- (1) Initiate ways of entering into intra- and inter-faith dialogues within the region;
- (2) Initiate the cultural renewal that provides the space, opportunity, and respect for the entry of women into increasingly significant roles in the life of the church and God's mission; and
- (3) Initiate a study on the impact of modern technology and the problems of poverty and aging and their impact on mission and evangelism.

It is the urgent need for and responsibility of Christians to make their response to the Gospel or the Word of God as concrete and lively as possible. Our context influences our understanding of God and the expression of our faith. We can only speak about a theology that makes sense at a certain place and in a certain time. Therefore, the churches in Asia need to undertake serious analysis of their mission contexts, practices, and theology. The churches in Asia are called to stand with the victims of injustice and violence and thus

⁵¹ Erme R. Camba, "Athens 2005: Mission as Healing and Reconciliation" (Unpublished), 3.

⁵² *Ibid*; see also Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 10.

⁵³ J. A. Scherer, *Gospel, Church, and Kingdom: Comparative Studies in World Mission Theology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1987), 84; cf. Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 389-393.