

Missiology:

Some Reflections from Asian Contexts

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Missiologies have come and gone. Apparently, certain periods of church history exhibit one or another dominant missiology. At least this is the impression that we get from some of the major works on missiology. Johannes Verkuyl, for instance, sketches the development of missiology through history, starting from the sixteenth century on to the nineteenth and up to his own time in the twentieth century.¹ Years later, David Bosch spoke of paradigm shifts in the theology of mission, presenting different paradigms in the New Testament and the following periods in history.² At the same time, we can also speak of missiologies across cultures and regions. Many Christian thinkers from non-Western continents have been prolific thinkers about mission—people such as Vinay Samuel of India, Kwame Bediako of Ghana, Rene Padilla of Argentina, Jonathan Parapak and Mangapul Sagala of Indonesia, and Isabelo Magalit of the Philippines are just a few examples of the growing number of mission thinkers who are reflecting on the struggles and aspirations of the church in their contexts. This general observation is significant. A static missiology true for all times and places is difficult to maintain. The Reformed principle of *ecclesia reformata semper reformanda est* applies to missiology as well because mission and missiological reflection are activities of the church. The church is continually reforming and so is its mission and missiology.

This article does not propose a certain missiology or, more precisely, missionary thrust and strategy. There have been many instances in history in which mission practitioners have debated about the correct missionary task—whether it is evangelism, church growth, humanization, or the fight for justice. This article does not deal with such questions. Rather, it does propose some reflections on how to do missiology in Asian contexts—Asian because the reflections are coming from, and informed by, the realities

¹Johannes Verkuyl, *Contemporary Missiology: An Introduction*, trans. and ed. Dale Cooper (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978). The Dutch original was published in 1973.

²David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1991).

in that region. While these may be regionally oriented, it is hoped that Christians from other continents—especially those in the West—may find something that will enrich their missiological tasks. The reason for this hope is that any missiology, from whatever regional context, would have to seriously take into account three things: biblical revelation; history of mission, including theology and practice; and the concrete sociopolitical and cultural contexts. It is an ecumenical endeavor encompassing history, cultures, and the whole biblical revelation. Here, I suggest two basic methodological principles: (1) that missiology is a critical reflection on mission strategy and (2) that missiology is a critical reflection on context for the sake of mission. Both of these reflections are based on and developed in the light of biblical revelation. The last major part of this article will draw out certain missiological implications of the first letter of Peter, looking seriously at the theme of suffering and witness in that epistle. It is an essential aspect of this article to give an example of theological perspective for Asian mission. In order to avoid confusion on issues, a distinction is made between mission and evangelism at the outset.

Mission and Evangelism Distinguished

In making the distinction between mission and evangelism, no implication is made that one is more important than the other. The reason we need to make the distinction is that evangelicals and ecumenicals still tend to confuse mission and evangelism. Evangelicals tend to think that mission is synonymous with evangelism and church planting. Thus, strategic considerations are always dominant in evangelical missiological thinking. This can be seen from the names of their conferences and institutions: They usually use the words *evangelism* or *evangelization*, e.g., Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization (LCWE), although in the case of Lausanne, it was careful to define what evangelism was and was not—proclamation of the cross and not sociopolitical involvement.

Ecumenicals, on the other hand, are careful to distinguish mission and evangelism, as can be seen, for instance, from the name, Commission on World Mission and Evangelism (CWME), of the World Council of Churches. They are right in making this distinction, but they are mistaken in their tendency to place evangelism outside the purview of mission, which is mainly understood as engagement with society and the world. At times evangelism is also confused with diaconal works and solidarity with the poor.

Mission and evangelism are two distinct though related concepts. Simply put, mission is the redeeming action of the triune God toward people and the creation, the goal of which is to restore human relations with God in Christ and to bring every aspect of life under the lordship of Christ. The mission of the church as a partner of God is based on this mission of God; the *missio ecclesiarum* reflects the *missio Dei*. The church has no mission

except that which God intends to do in the world. The chief end of mission is that God may be glorified, first among his people and then through them in every aspect and area of life.

The mission of God and the church has several aspects; one of them is evangelism—the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ and the establishment of his people into a worshiping and serving community. Thus, evangelism is not the same as mission, but it is an integral part of mission. Mission cannot be said to have taken place without evangelism. Yet, in and of itself, evangelism, even in its strict biblical sense as rightly understood by the evangelicals, does not exhaust all that God intends to do for humanity and the world. The Bible tells us that God is concerned about injustice, poverty, suffering, wickedness, and idolatry at every level of life. His restorative action includes, among other things, works of justice and righteousness and shalom, all of which make known the glory and will of the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ. Some Christians object to this definition of mission as being too broad, fearing that if everything is mission then nothing is mission. Admittedly, this can be a danger, but we need to clarify that mission is not anything that any person of goodwill can do. An action is mission or takes a missionary character when it is motivated by the kingdom of God; when it exhibits something of the gospel of Jesus Christ; and when it is done by the church, the people of God, who have received that gospel and come under the demands of the same kingdom. Therefore, I suggest that the other aspects of mission, aside from evangelism, are service to suffering humanity (*diakonia*) and work for justice and righteousness in society, which Verkuyl calls *missio politica oecumenica*. All these are essential aspects of the gospel and of the kingdom and, therefore, comprise the mission of God and of the church.

In this view of mission, we do not necessarily think in terms of mission boards and career missionaries. To be sure, mission boards and career missionaries are still needed, especially because evangelism is an integral part of mission—evangelism and church planting remains the basic duty of mission boards and career missionaries. If mission, however, is more than evangelism, we should think of the one church of Jesus Christ as the agent of mission with all its members doing their part in the kingdom of God. Christ has commissioned his church to do mission, and this is not limited to the ordained evangelists but extended to every member of the congregation.

This is especially relevant in Asia and, most likely, the rest of the non-Western countries. It has been noted that Christianity's center of gravity has been tilting toward these regions. It is not surprising that many Christians from these regions are taking up the challenge of the missionary cause, but they do not have organizations such as those found in the West to facilitate their overseas calling. Many of them have applied with Western mission boards and have been accepted but, in the end, could not go because they

did not meet the financial requirements. The national churches that were supposed to be the agents of mission, the God-ordained mission boards, so to speak, could not provide the resources and training these people need to do missionary work.

We should perhaps start thinking in terms of mission-boardless missionaries who have only their sending church and the overseas receiving church to which they are accountable. The engineers, doctors, business people, academics, politicians, social workers, and all Christian professionals engage in mission when they, with a profound sense of calling, practice their profession with full integrity and commitment and become salt and light in this decadent world. This is the vision the churches should have for mission in Asia. What we need are not just seminaries and missionary training centers but Christian schools and universities that integrate the Christian faith and ethics in the curriculum and in every academic discipline. In case we are wondering whether this is feasible, this is already taking place all over the non-Western world.³ Professionals called to missions are usually known as tent makers. They get their spiritual resources from their sending church and their orientation and direction from the national church leaders who share a similar vision. Mission is first and foremost a movement of God through the church.

The study of mission in all its aspects, including the evangelistic aspect, is missiology. Missiology as a theological discipline should not be an area reserved only for ordained missionaries and theologians. Professionals who see their work as part of the redeeming action of God should be invited to missiological discussions. Mission would be well served with their presence and insights from their work and ministry.

Missiology: A Critical Reflection on Mission Strategy

Missiology, as a theological discipline, is not simply a justification for the traditional and current practice in mission, but it is engaged in a continuing search for the will of God for the church and for the situation in which it finds itself. It involves a dialectical relationship between the Word of God and the church. To be sure, there are certain unchanging core beliefs, e.g., the Bible as the Word of God, the vicarious character of the death of Christ, and the basic task of proclaiming the gospel, all of which guide and protect the mission of the church. The strategic scope and shape of that mission have to be decided by a sustained critical reflection between the Word of God and the present practice of mission in certain contexts. Missiologists do not assume beforehand a certain missionary strategy and practice for which our missiological task is simply to provide justification.

³ See *Mission Frontiers*, Special Edition on Global Christian Education (March–April 2003).

At times, missiologies are simply providing a rationale for what they have decided the church should be doing in the world.

This does not mean, however, that missiology discards everything of the past and delights in novelties. Missiology never takes place in a vacuum. Among its materials for reflection are the history of missions, the history of the theologies of mission (historical missiology), and present mission practices. Missiology critically reflects all these, for it cannot simply assume that theologies and practices are infallible. This requires self-criticism and open interaction among Christians from different traditions that may enrich, expand, and deepen one's understanding of the mission of the church based on biblical revelation and is shown in the engagement between evangelicals and ecumenicals regarding mission.

The last three decades have witnessed significant progress in the theology of mission among both evangelicals and ecumenicals. The Lausanne Covenant of 1974 is considered to date to be the best mission document coming from the evangelical movement. No other evangelical document has combined evangelistic zeal and urgency with responsible sensitivity to sociopolitical and cultural issues in such a fine manner. Yet, it cannot be denied that the progress in missiological thinking is due to some extent to the challenges posed to the evangelical movement of the WCC. It should be recalled that years before Lausanne the WCC, through its assembly in Uppsala in 1968 and the CWME conference in Bangkok in 1973, issued provocative statements on the mission of the church. Largely through the influence of Dutch missiologist J. C. Hoekendijk, the conciliar movement took a stance that the world, not the church, was the place where God was at work. Hence, the church should participate in movements for humanization and emancipation perceived to be currently taking place in the world. This view created a storm in the missiological world, but, for some evangelicals, it was an occasion to reflect afresh on the mission of the church. The evangelicals did not throw off their pietistic heritage, nor did they ignore the concerns of the then-developing church growth movement. A result of the polemics was a recovery of the deeper and broader implications of the gospel and biblical revelation, without contradicting their most cherished evangelistic values. Thus, the Lausanne Covenant affirms, for instance, that evangelism and sociopolitical involvement are both part of Christian duty (art. 5). This statement, together with the entire covenant, is a significant milestone in evangelical missiological thinking, due to the controversy incited by the WCC.⁴

⁴On the debate, see Donald McGavran, ed., *Eye of the Storm* (Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1972) and R. Hedlund, *Roots of the Great Debate in Mission* (Madras: Evangelical Literature Service, 1981). For an assessment of the debate, see Arthur F. Glasser, "The Evolution of Evangelical Mission Theology since World War II," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* (January 1985): 91–113; John Stott, "Twenty Years after Lausanne: Some Personal Reflections," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* (April 1995): 50–55.

There has been a similar influence on the conciliar missiology from the evangelicals. A few years after Lausanne, the WCC, in 1982, adopted a document, “Mission and Evangelism: An Ecumenical Affirmation,” which is considered to be a benchmark statement and is warmly acclaimed by both conciliar and nonconciliar (evangelical) churches. Another noteworthy document is from the Stuttgart Consultation in 1987 sponsored by the WCC and participated in by both conciliar and evangelicals. It is based on the Ecumenical Affirmation and covers a broad range of issues. It served as a bridge between the conciliar Christians and evangelicals in the period before San Antonio (CWME, 1989) and Lausanne II (LCWE, Manila, 1989). In both the Ecumenical Affirmation and the Stuttgart statement, evangelism is affirmed well enough to the satisfaction of the evangelicals.

Missiology as a reflection on mission strategy has never been as critical as now with the emergence of the insiders’ movement. The movement is one phenomenon in Asia that certainly requires a theological response. Also called churchless Christianity, Ralph Winter calls this the largest new factor in mission strategy in the twenty-first century.⁵ Many of us are familiar with the C 1–5 contextualization spectrum and the relevant debate that ensued as a result of the emergence of the insiders’ movement. Although it is a movement of strategy, a cursory survey of the debate indicates that much of it touches on theological issues. Christology, soteriology, and ecclesiology are in the center of the storm, and we are witnessing a theological ferment similar to what took place in the early church. A critical reflection on the insiders’ movement brings to light theological ramifications, not only in mission but also in other doctrines. Such a reflection will surely deepen and broaden the understanding of the Christian faith without hopefully distorting the creeds of the church.

Missiology: A Critical Reflection on Context for the Sake of Mission

Another approach to missiology is to reflect on a situation or culture in the light of the Word of God for the interest of mission. The focus here is on the context of mission—not on the practice or strategy as we have discussed above. This is a valid approach, for, at times, theology is defined as a critical reflection on historical context in the light of the faith or biblical revelation. Missiology, by extension, can also be defined in a similar manner. The historical context means not only past events but also the

⁵Ralph Winter, “The Largest New Factor in Mission Strategy in the Twenty-first Century,” *New Global Partnership in Mission*, ed. Timothy Park (Oxford: International Association for Mission Studies, 2004), 65–71. *International Journal of Frontier Missiology (IJFM)* has run a series of articles of different views on the insiders’ movement: July–September 2006 and January–March 2007.

ongoing present in history, which includes the religious as well as the cultural, political, economic, and social aspects of life.

This approach raises, as far as this is concerned, a fundamental question: Which is the best context? For instance, Asia is perhaps the most varied and complicated continent on earth. There is an affluent and developed Asia, and there is poor and suffering Asia. There is Islamic Asia, Buddhist Asia, Hindu Asia, and Roman Catholic Asia. There is Dutch, British, or Spanish previously colonized Asia. There is modern Asia as well as primitive Asia. Mission practitioners usually pay serious attention to Asian contexts, particularly the religious contexts, for strategic purposes. Evangelical mission bodies, for instance, are beginning to structure mission fields in terms not of geo-political boundaries but of religious blocks. In contrast, the older strategy defines mission fields in terms of nation-states, within which the different ethnic groups are seen in their totality, including the religious, socioeconomic, cultural, and so on. Time will tell which is the more effective strategy, but it seems that the older strategy of discipling a whole nation in all its aspects is more in keeping with the Great Commission and our understanding of mission (cf. Matt. 28:19, “make disciples of all nations”). At any rate, all of this indicates the value of paying attention to historical context.

Critical reflection on context does more than serve the strategic interests of mission bodies. To be sure, this is good and necessary, but following our distinction of mission and evangelism, missiology as reflection on context should also guide churches and Christians in their practice of Christian obedience as they seek to realize God’s purposes for the world in their varied contexts. This is why we need to raise another question: Which is the best perception of the context? Obedience in one context may differ from another context and the difference may be due to one’s perception of the context in light of God’s Word.

Evangelicals and ecumenicals have different perceptions of the context, which influence their strategy and shape their obedience. Referring back to the 1960s, the evangelicals spoke of the unreached billions of Asia; the ecumenicals spoke of the impoverished societies. They also have different answers to the following questions: In what way(s) does God work or might he work in Asia? In what ways are sin and unbelief expressed? The views taken are not necessarily incompatible, and the strategic implications are merely a matter of emphasis. However, any view of the context is to be seen in the light of biblical revelation. Thus, missiology requires two kinds of exegesis (analysis): exegesis of the context and exegesis of the biblical texts based on the perceived context. Both kinds of exegesis will show the basic human predicament, what Bavinck calls the human rebellion that tries to suppress the knowledge of God by every form of wickedness (Rom. 1:18). The exegesis of the context needs the tools of the social sciences, while the exegesis of the texts needs the grammatico-historical method.

The principle of the hermeneutical circle of text and context applies here. At times, immersion or praxis in the communal life may be required to have a good feel for the situation. The general questions to ask and answer here are: How does the Bible shed light on a *critically analyzed* context? How would God like the church and Christians to respond to the analyzed context based on what we have learned from the Bible?

We recognize the danger of the context's becoming dominant in theological reflection. This is the danger we see in Latin American liberation theology and its Asian counterparts such as *Minjung* theology and other similar Asian theologies in which biblical revelation is marginalized by a view of historical context that is pregnant with ongoing liberating praxis by the poor. Liberation theology, as a methodology adapted in Asia, is a reflection of the context in the light of faith. The context, however, takes the upper hand in practice and is seen from a Marxist perspective. Be that as it may, it does not warrant us to ignore the historical context altogether. Otherwise, we might lose its peculiarity, which makes mission effective. It is not our intention to discuss the theoretical relationship between the text and the context. There have been many studies on contextualization, the result of which are good theologies coming out of the non-Western world, even from among its evangelicals. Suffice it to say that, from a missiological point of view, these contextual theologies are significant in that they are non-Western ways of expressing the gospel in all the aspects that bear on not only the religious but also the cultural and sociopolitical life of the people. They are essential to the mission of the church.⁶

One pressing problem in Asia that needs to be analyzed critically is religious extremism, sometimes called religion-inspired terrorism. Roger Greenway has commented that nowadays one cannot speak of global mission without taking into consideration political, economic, and military problems. This is especially true as one considers one of the serious challenges to global mission, namely, religious extremism. It is such a multidimensional and complex issue that casual and thoughtless comments may not help. Some call it satanic, referring not only to the terrorism itself but also to the religion that inspired this terrorism. Some say it has something to do with U.S. foreign policies, especially in the Middle East. Each one of us might have an opinion of the problem, and it would do us good to study and assess it as much as we can. However, we should also look at the problem missiologically from the standpoint of what God might be telling the church and how the church should respond to it. This holds true for two reasons: On the one hand, it is affecting the life of the church and Christians by making their mission more challenging. We are all aware of the persecution of Christians in some parts of Asia. The recent hostage

⁶ See for instance *The Bible and Theology in Asian Contexts*, ed. Bong Rin Ro and Ruth Eshenaur (Tiachung, Taiwan: Asia Theological Association, 1984).

taking of Korean Christians in Afghanistan is still fresh in our memory. The incident will surely trigger some hard missiological thinking.

On the other hand, it is a missiological issue in the sense—and this is hardly recognized so far—that Christians themselves may be contributing to the growth of religious extremism in Asia. They need to search their hearts as to whether they, with their scandalous lifestyles, are contributing indirectly and unconsciously to religious extremism and, thus, making the life and witness of the church more challenging. Religious extremism is a militant reaction to the perceived morally hopeless situation in established religions such as Christianity.⁷ For many Muslims, Christianity in the West is still perceived as a promiscuous religion, the exporter of lascivious goodies.

It is now common knowledge among missiologists that Christianity has experienced unprecedented growth in Asia—as much as anywhere else in the world. This is well documented, and we need not cite the statistics here. The Charismatic movement and the church growth movement have played a large part, yet, we have to go beyond mere statistics. Here, we see the value of a critical analysis of the situation. Due to our over-preoccupation with numbers, we fail to see the larger picture of the situation. The larger picture tells us that there is a steady moral decline even among Christians and even among evangelicals. Indonesia and the Philippines remain the most corrupt societies in Asia. South Korea, in spite of the growth of Christianity and in spite of being called the Antioch of Asia for sending out untold numbers of missionaries, has one of the highest divorce rates, is second in pornography revenue, and is a nation in which 80 percent of its young people are addicted to Internet games. We can easily add more to this sad list. The picture that Ronald Sider paints in his book, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Conscience*,⁸ is not only true of the many American evangelicals but also of Christians in Asia.

We are now reaping the results of what Dietrich Bonhoeffer termed “cheap grace.” The long years of missionary work in the region have not made any significant dent in society and culture and have not prepared Christians to overcome the forces that now destroy church and society. The current situation compels us to ponder whether the church in Asia is doing the will of God. Somewhere, there is a serious flaw in our mission theology and practice. How should we react to religious extremism? By declaring the religions that espouse it satanic? By declaring the phenomenon to be God’s chastisement on Christians’ scandalous lifestyle and disobedience? These are difficult questions, but we need to face them if we want to do God’s will for Asia. A theological perspective for Asian missions would have

⁷ Cf. Christiane Amanpour, “God’s Warriors,” *CNN Documentary*, August 2007.

⁸ Ronald J. Sider, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Conscience: Why Are Christians Living Just Like the Rest of the World?* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005). Translated in Indonesian by Inter-Varsity Fellowship-Indonesia (Perkantass, 2007), to which I gave endorsing remarks.

to deal with Christian nominalism and the religious extremism that has resulted.

Suffering and Witness in 1 Peter: A Theological Perspective for Asian Mission

I indicated above that theological reflection on the strategy and practice as well as the context of mission is done on the basis or in the light of biblical revelation. Biblical revelation in this regard does not simply refer to a few isolated verses or texts thought to be speaking of mission. The choice of certain texts already assumes a certain understanding of what mission is. It is this pre-understanding that influences the choice of texts and their interpretation. The mainline evangelicals usually refer to Matthew 28, the book of Acts, and relevant Pauline epistles, while the conciliar missiologists draw from the prophets and Jesus' life in the gospels.

If we think, as we must, of the entire Bible and every doctrine as the basis of mission, we will arrive at surprising discoveries—profound insights that may further enrich our view of mission. The writings of the apostles, the prophets, and Jesus Christ provide the foundations for mission in all aspects: rationale (why), message (what), practice (how), agents (who), and so on. The biblical drama consisting of creation, fall, redemption, and consummation can also be seen in its missiological aspect. It speaks of the works of God, the need for redemption, and how he intends humankind and his people to participate in his works. Any part of the drama may serve as a theological perspective for Asian missions if we see it in the light of a problem in the region; for instance, creation and the problem of pollution and global warming. The doctrine of creation, of course, should not receive attention apart from the doctrines of the Trinity, redemption in Christ, and even eschatology. A similar approach may be taken with other doctrines.

Missiological studies have also benefited from the biblical-theological approach, in which a theme is treated historically as it develops in the history of redemption from the time of the patriarchs down through the time of the apostles. Usually, the main theme, or some main themes of Scripture, is chosen because they are thought to parallel a current situation and to give guidance for such a situation in which the church finds itself. Here, I take the theme of suffering from 1 Peter as an example. I have chosen this Scripture because the situation of the church in Asia is similar to that of the first readers of the letter. In 1 Peter, we have the Word of God being addressed to the church, which is struggling to live out its faith and witness in a hostile environment. Its message regarding suffering is relevant for the mission in Asia. Although suffering is not something strange in the life of the church (1 Peter 4:12), it is never an ideal state to be pursued or accepted passively. The message of 1 Peter is simple: In the midst of a hostile environment, the church is called to faithful and active obedience to God even if it means suffering. Doing God's will in that context may

accomplish his purposes for both church and society. Suffering has missiological meaning when, by doing good, it witnesses to the suffering and love of Christ. The question this section intends to wrestle with is how the church lives out its faith and witness of the love of God in Christ in the midst of suffering.

A number of studies of 1 Peter have shown the letter's missiological thrust. It would be proper to cite a few here. John H. Elliott has done an extensive background study on "royal priesthood" (1 Peter 2:5) and concludes that *holy priesthood*, translated by Elliott as *body of priests*, was the appropriate term with which the task and function of the elect and holy community should be associated, and this task, "consists in the exercise of the holy life of obedience and well doing: *Coram Deo* and *pro-hominibus*. This activity is basically a witness oriented toward the world and complements a second aspect of the community's responsibility, the proclamation of the world of salvation and mercy."⁹

John Holdsworth, for his part, explores the possibility that suffering has an eschatological reference, usually associated with apocalyptic writings. He investigates a number of relevant terms in 1 Peter and concludes that the epistle contains "the basic elements of a missionary theology which sees a constant, ongoing, and necessary disjunction and struggle between powers antipathetic to the gospel and the gospel itself."¹⁰ The political-apocalyptic nature of its language is meant to produce a theodicy, or a "mission rationale in terms of the universality of God, and his, in fact, having a purpose for his people within history."¹¹

P. J. Robinson, on the other hand, takes 1 Peter as a missionary document, which deals with the most basic question about the church in the world—its existence in society as a new and distinct community with a totally new lifestyle. Robinson presents two significant facts about the church and its mission:

First, it [1 Peter] perceives the congregation's presence as mission. The missiological principles laid down by this letter are intimately intertwined with what the church is. The congregation itself [that is, its being] is part of the message it proclaims. Second, it is of utmost importance that the congregation should heed its identity as a witnessing community. Every aspect of its life and work should be in line with nature and so directed as to strengthen that particular identity.¹²

⁹J. H. Elliott, *The Elect and the Holy: An Exegetical Examination of 1 Peter 2:4–10 and the Phrase basileion ierateuma* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1966), 224.

¹⁰J. Holdsworth, "The Suffering in Peter and Missionary Apocalyptic," in *Studia Biblica*, ed. E. A. Livingstone (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1980), 230.

¹¹*Ibid.*, 230.

¹²P. J. Robinson, "Some Missiological Perspectives from 1 Peter 2:4–10," *Missionalia* 17, no. 3 (1989): 185.

There are other approaches to 1 Peter that are not formally missiological but rather focus on the liturgical and ethical nature of the document. Even from these studies, one can derive some missiological implications. It is not my intention to discuss these studies here. My focus is on the relationship of suffering and the witness of the church.

Very few doubt that suffering is a major theme in 1 Peter. One of the important issues raised in a study of 1 Peter is the relationship of suffering to baptism. This is quite strange because baptism is mentioned only once in the letter (1 Peter 3:21). There is no doubt that baptism is the Christian's participation in the suffering of Christ. This is clear from Paul (cf. Rom. 6), but this is probably not the idea of the author of 1 Peter who emphasizes the suffering of Christians, not baptism, as a participation of Christ (1 Peter 4:12, 13). If we relate baptism and suffering, there is a clear congruity between these two themes. As C. F. D. Moule says, "Suffering is connected with baptism (through Christ's baptism which meant the cross), and baptism is an epitome of the Christian doctrine of suffering."¹³ While 1 Peter is not a baptismal document, its message may have been intended for newly baptized Christians. A missiological implication may be drawn: In their life and in the context of their suffering, they have to bear witness to the love of Christ, who suffered for them. Baptism is the initial testimony or witness of commitment of a Christian and his or her willingness to share in the experience of those who were at the time suffering because of their faith. How would they show this witness?

First, we make a note here on the paraenetic approach, which refers to a literary genre, consisting of various practical moral instructions aimed at changing the readers' behavior. Our interest here is in the bases or motivations for the ethical exhortation and admonition in 1 Peter, as these have some bearing on suffering. There are at least three ways of looking at paraenesis in 1 Peter. Here, we will cite three studies. First, W. C. van Unnik believes that *doing good* is a key phrase in the letter. He examines various parallels in the Greek-Roman and Jewish understanding and then concludes that Peter's concept is closely related to the Greek-Roman meaning except for its foundation. For the Christian, the foundation, according to van Unnik, is God's calling and not human goodness; its aim is different, not to earn glory for oneself but to open the way for the gospel to reach the disobedient.¹⁴ Doing good has an evangelistic motivation.

Second, J. Ramsey Michaels views the motivation for doing good eschatologically, that is, as "salvation for the heathen and glory to God at the last day." In 1 Peter 2:12, Peter's emphasis is on the missionary calling of

¹³ C. F. D. Moule, "The Nature and Purpose of I Peter," *New Testament Studies* 3 (1956–1957): 11.

¹⁴ W. C. van Unnik, "The Teaching of Good Works in I Peter," *New Testament Studies* 1 (1954–1955): 108–9.

the church. Although the people of God are being slandered, Peter holds the hope that the slanderers may “have their eyes opened” and thus “glorify God on the day of visitation.” The theme of 1 Peter 3:17, which is the focus of Michaels’s exegesis, is the suffering of the church and the author’s confidence that God will finally vindicate the righteous and punish the wicked.¹⁵

Finally, Frederick W. Danker examined the Old Testament citations from the Septuagint and the Dead Sea scrolls, comparing these with the Petrine passage found in 1 Peter 1:24–2:17. From Danker’s analysis, it is apparent that the author of 1 Peter places great emphasis on the fact that the new community (church) is an authentic continuation of Old Testament Israel. The consolatory note in 1 Peter lies in the fact that all the Old Testament citations (Pss. 33, 117; Isa. 40, 43; Hos. 1, 2; and Prov. 24) affirm deliverance from suffering and tribulation. There is a difference, however, between Israel and the church of Christ with respect to suffering. “In the case of the OT Israel, sufferings were often viewed as the result of disobedience and Israel’s validity as God’s people was called into question. The sufferings of the new community, on the other hand, come not because of disobedience but in spite of obedience.”¹⁶

To sum up, here we have three ways of looking at the paraenesis in 1 Peter: Greek-Roman parallels (van Unnik), eschatology (Michaels), and Old Testament background (Danker). These three tracks are not to be taken as being mutually exclusive. Rather, they complement each other and together bring out the fuller significance of the message. With these, we have three kinds of motivation for Christian conduct, especially in a hostile environment: sharing Christ’s glory (van Unnik), vindication (Michaels), and distinctiveness as the new people of God (Danker). These are meant to encourage the readers not to give up and to be holy in all their conduct (in the midst of suffering) because the one who called them is holy (1 Peter 1:15). Holiness is missiological: that “they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us” (1 Peter 2:12 NIV).

It should be pointed out, however, that Michaels and Danker, and those who follow their lead, neglect some important features of biblical revelation. Michaels tends to view eschatology as merely future with his overemphasis on final vindication. Indeed, 1 Peter as well as the whole New Testament is eschatological in orientation, but the eschaton is not purely future; it is also present. The motivation for Christian living in the midst of suffering is not only God’s future vindication but also what he has done, and is doing, for his people in and through Christ.

¹⁵ J. Ramsey Michaels, “Eschatology in 1 Peter 3:17,” *New Testament Studies* 13 (1966): 397, 400.

¹⁶ F. W. Danker, “1 Peter 24–2:17—A Consolatory Pericope,” *Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 8 (1967): 100.

On the other hand, Danker correctly locates the background of 1 Peter where it should be, i.e., the Old Testament. His contrast of old Israel and new Israel, however, is quite simplistic: The suffering of Old Testament Israel is due to disobedience, while the suffering of New Testament Israel is in spite of obedience. There are instances in the Old Testament where the righteous suffer. Similarly, there are instances in the New Testament where the church also suffers because of disobedience (cf. Rev. 2, 3). The more significant factor that Danker overlooks is that suffering, by whatever cause, always takes place in relation to other nations. The reason for this is clear enough: The God of Israel is also the God of all nations—a God of justice and righteousness. In dealing with his people, either by way of blessing or punishment, he is at the same time showing his glory and will to the nations.

Conclusion

I have drawn a number of reflections for a missiology from an Asian perspective. We need to reflect critically in the light of biblical revelation on our current mission strategy and practice in the context of historical-cultural reality in Asia. I have tried to make a study of a theme from 1 Peter that I believe may give meaning to the present experience of the church in Asia. I submit that the theme of suffering from 1 Peter should become the theological perspective for mission in Asia. In and of itself, suffering is not a witness. Obedience to God in the midst of hostilities and persecution is a form of witness. It is a witness that may commend the truth of the gospel and make way for the hearing of the Word. Suffering is a form of witness when the church is faithful to its identity and to its calling in the midst of hostilities. There should be nothing that can intimidate the church from worshipping God, from doing good, and from following Christ. When the church is ready to accept suffering as a part of Christian experience and learns how to respond to hostilities for Christ's sake, then it can overcome the problems of nominalism, relativism, and other challenging problems to the church and mission. I believe the greater challenge to the church and mission than these external forces is the church's tendency to compromise with them. The problem is perhaps that the church feels too at home with the world. The problem may be that, at times, the church fails to respond properly to the challenges to its calling and identity. I suggest we learn from Peter.