

## Mission at the Roundtable of diversity in God's Mission

---

### *Mission in the Asian Context of plurality and diversity*

Rev. Dr. PARK Sung-Kook

Lecturer  
Ewha Woman's University  
Graduate School of Theology  
Hanshin Graduate Theological Seminary

"Asia" has been known as the icon and expression of "Variety", "Diversity" and "Cultural richness".

Asia – as a continent – forms the largest piece of soil on earth and is home to almost 4 billion people. Economically, Asia is a continent that reflects the most paradox phenomena: While certain countries are regarded as the most affluent ones in the world, the Asian continent also shows in some of its parts, the lowest income and hence, the poorest among the poor. Following their economical standards the gap between different technically equipped and non- or less equipped is evident: While some of the countries in Asia are praised to be equipped with one of the most sophisticated technical achievements in the human history, some regions in Asia show serious 'underdevelopment' in these respective terms. And historically, Asia is a wound-driven continent where most of the countries in Asia bear dark memories of being exploited in the past, and still many are still getting exploited.

The term "cultural richness", expresses itself in a huge variety of diverse forms of cultures; different languages (probably the most languages in numbers in the world) and different religions and religious practices. We may witness the oldest forms of human settlements (or civilization) up to the youngest developed industrial powers in Asia. In Asia we witness a wide spectrum from politically stable democratic countries to unstable, almost fragile countries; peaceful regions but also frequently or even constantly conflict driven places; regions that never have been affected by calamities or disasters, but also regions where calamities or disasters are almost like on the 'daily agenda'.

We could go on with listing up all the extreme contrasts we can bear witness to and even the longest one would not be exhausted. At the same time, there are numerous literatures that show lot of wisdom and critical assessments and analysis on the reality the Asian context is facing from various angles and perspectives. However, this task is not the main purpose of this paper and therefore will remain with this brief introduction to the contrast of the Asian context and tabling some thoughts.

## For a concept of mission in the Asian context: A necessary consideration

### The given missionary context

As stated earlier, Asia is home to a vast population counting approximately 4 billion people. While Asia bears the birthplace of three significant world religions, it shows the least evangelized peoples but on the contrary the largest local churches.

Christianity came to show its presence mainly through missionaries from overseas and hence, we cannot think of the Asian context without taking seriously into account the reality as the 'field' of mission and evangelism. That is to say, the Asian continent – with exception of a few – has received Christianity through external sources, in a way that has put the Asian context on the 'receiving end'. A discourse on mission in the Asian context must pay attention to the huge spectrum of diversity and variety. Without paying respect and accepting the 'difference', while repeating the 'old paradigm' of mission of the past<sup>1</sup>, the church and many other Christian faith-based organizations will not be able to play an active part in the diversity of the Asian context, but all sides will only get trapped in isolation. Hence, it is evident that in any context cultural aspects are embedded everywhere that need attention, recognition and respect. Preman D. Niles, in his volume *From East And West – Rethinking Christian Mission* (2004), puts this very well in an illustrative way, trying to find a new "metaphor"<sup>2</sup> for mission. Here, he is comparing sceneries from a dining table, where the host grants hospitality for his invited guests:

In a traditional dinner at a rectangular table, as I have often experienced [...], the host and hostess sit at the head of the table with their bountiful resources laid clearly before them, demonstrating clearly that the resources are theirs and that they are in control. Most importantly, when I as a guest would like to have some more, it is the accepted norm that I keep quiet until the host/hostess decides to offer a second helping. Everything that happens at the table is a clear demonstration that I am a passive recipient, entirely dependent upon the decision and good will of my hostess.<sup>3</sup>

This metaphor of mission, expressed through a rectangular table show evidently how mission in the past went on. Although they 'share' the goods at the same table, there is a host in full control over the granted goods, and a totally passive guest, namely the recipient. Putting this into a missionary language will be; sharing the Gospel through proclamation of the missionaries, but claiming the right

---

<sup>1</sup> The "past" refers here mainly to the period of the most active mission endeavors of the 15<sup>th</sup> – 19<sup>th</sup> century, before the concept of "Mission Dei" (God's Mission) came into the discourse of mission in Willingen / Germany, 1952.

<sup>2</sup> Comparing the "rectangular table" with the "round table": Preman D. Niles, *From East and West – Rethinking Christian Mission*, Chalice Press, St. Louis: 2004, 33-47.

<sup>3</sup> Preman D. Niles, *From East And West – Rethinking Christian Mission*, Chalice Press, St. Louis: 2004, 34.

of the absolute truth and the correct way of practicing Christian faith. The rectangular table, with clearly defined ends of it that mark the head of the table at each end, shows an authoritative system and isolates the group in 'givers' and 'takers' or in 'mother churches' and 'daughter churches' ('younger churches'). It may not do full justice to a custom of a certain culture, however, using the hospitality at the rectangular table as a metaphor for mission seems to reveal the struggle and tension in the mission field.

Another metaphor Niles is introducing as a contrast to the rectangular table is the round table, often used in Chinese restaurants for dining:

The metaphor of a round table itself was probably prompted by mealtimes in Singapore. The Chinese prefer round table and not the rectangular table used in British homes. Usually the food, either served in restaurants or brought in by several people when meals are held in church halls, is placed at the center of the table, and the diners help themselves to what they need.<sup>4</sup>

The round table, used as the counter metaphor to the rectangular table illustrates not only a seamless integration of all parties involved in the dinner, through the circle the parties are seated around, but also the absence in sharing the resources (food) in the dining event. Although the metaphor of the round table does not solve all the problems, as Niles describes further in his Book, it is an adequate way of illustrating the difference between unilateral distribution of goods and mutuality. The metaphor of the round table emphasizes mutuality in the field of missionary work, where the human communities constantly encounter new challenges and hence, find themselves in an urgent need to re-think and re-evaluate the concept and practice of mission from the poor and the marginalized.

Mutual respect to and acceptance of the existence of different religions and faiths shall be the way of understanding mission in different contexts in order to assure a peaceful co-existence. This should not be misunderstood as a way of implementing the concept of cultural and religious relativism but be understood as a necessary way of respecting one another's religion, based on the right of religious freedom<sup>5</sup>, mutual respect and acceptance, which may also result in mutual enrichment.

### Some points for critical theological reflections

Along with the given reality of diversity and variety of the religious and cultural spectrum, the historical perspective and the critical reflections on the history of missionary movements must also be seriously taken into consideration, when we enter the discourse on mission in Asia. Some critical

---

<sup>4</sup> Preman D. Niles, *From East and West – Rethinking Christian Mission*, Chalice Press, St. Louis: 2004, 35.

<sup>5</sup> From numerous studies on the history of Christianity, one can observe that the "Freedom of Religion" has been practiced long time before "Constantinianism" (313). This concept of having a state religion is still practiced in many countries but with certain extend of tolerance or acceptance of other faiths.

perspectives have been stated in a series of documentation. A special and unique culmination of those is the series of publication called "re-routing mission", inspired by the Urban Rural Movement (URM) in Asia by the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA). In one of the volumes M.P. Joseph's critical analysis results into a critical reading of the history of mission which shows three main epochs and media of mission encounter that inform our understanding of the churches in the East. M.P. Joseph distinguishes three main epochs as (1) colonial period, (2) the development decade and (3) recent epoch of globalization.<sup>6</sup> As simple it may appear, M.P. Joseph covers with these three epochs a critical analysis on the history of missionary movement with a deep insight, which leads up to the current concerns of globalization and its side effects. The first epoch documents a religious coverage over the colonial expansion which was in mutual benefit with the missionary activities of that age. While the racial and imperialist interests were clouded with religious terms like "heathen" or "conversion", the Gospel appeared to be the cultural expression of the colonial masters. The second epoch documents the ideological stage, when the mission encounter met with the ideology of development saving other regions from "primitiveness" into "civilization". Empowered by the industrial revolution from the West, Western tools and technology, the whole construct of productivity and effectiveness marked the era of modernity, which defined new ways of understating of "being".<sup>7</sup> Finally, the third epoch marks the age where we find ourselves, the epoch globalization. We are living in an age where only the consumption commodities or the attached capital are regarded the value point of "being" and where politically and socially extreme de-polarization along with de-centralization is taking place, placing the human being and traditional communities in the middle of the field of unlimited competition and materialization.

I am coming back to the metaphors of the missionary movement suggested by Preman D. Niles, as the "rectangular table" and the "round table". While there is a clear distinction at the rectangular table between host-guest, giving-receiving, everyone being sitting around the round table is able to rejoice from the same resources according to one's needs. There is no distinction, no discrimination between "we" and "them". This leads necessarily to the recognition and acceptance of the legitimate place of "the other" (or stranger). While the missionary movement, according to M.P. Joseph, made it as its ideological construct to distinguish between "us" and "them", even sanctioned through religious terms, a new way of doing mission needs to tear down those layers and walls, discriminating my neighbor and in the same time negating the very essence of all human nature, namely being created in the Image of God.

In June 2010 the centenary celebration of the Edinburgh Missionaries' Conference 1910 took place. This gathering showed a lot of improvements and developments during the past centenary period.

---

<sup>6</sup> M.P. Joseph, "Be Witness to Life: Towards a people's Concept of Mission", in: *Re-routing Mission: Towards a People's Concept of Mission and Diakonia*, Joseph P. Widyatmadja (ed.), CCA, Jakarta: 2004, 11.

<sup>7</sup> M.P. Joseph, 12.

The motivation and background of this celebration could be mentioned as one of the most significant difference between 1910 and 2010. While the 1910-gathering was called mainly by mission agencies / societies and Christian laity movements, the 2010-gathering was organized by a church based council's mission department (World Council of Churches, Commission for World Mission and Evangelism).<sup>8</sup>

One of the presenters began with an impressive oral statement: "We repented 100 years ago that only one-third of the world was evangelized. Today, after 100 years we rejoice that one-third of the world population has been evangelized."<sup>9</sup> This clearly shows that this celebration was not to end 'only' as a celebration. To me, it sounded like an open invitation to all kinds of critical reflection on the history of mission enterprises of the past 100 years, while signaling a dawn of a new paradigm shift in mission.

The Theme of the 1910-gathering is well known in the discourse on mission related issues, which was: "Evangelize the whole world within this generation." This very optimistic vision of Evangelism soon proved to be 'too optimistic' – not to say naïve.<sup>10</sup> Although the Edinburgh 1910 gathering has been celebrated as *the* 'watershed moment' and birth of the modern ecumenical movement, it has to be admitted that the theme and along with the mission concept of that time did not deeply consider the circumstances from various angles in the regions where missionaries were planned to be sent to. The optimistic idea of evangelization within a given time frame ("within this generation") soon got shattered by the two world wars (WWI: 1914~1918, WWII: 1939~1945) and challenged by the emerging institutionalized ecumenical movements, expressed through and manifested into several "Ecumenical Organizations" (e.g. World Council of Churches: WCC, Christian Conference of Asia: CCA, etc.). This shows that two major burning concerns could not be paid enough attention within the range of the idea of evangelization of the whole world<sup>11</sup>, namely, social and political engagement in

---

<sup>8</sup> Kenneth R. Ross, *Edinburgh 2010: New Directions for Church in Mission*, William Carey International University Press, California: 2010, 9-10. Here Ross states: "In the great missionary movement which transformed the world Christianity in the 19th and 20th centuries, mission was regarded as a matter for the professionals. Missionary societies, church mission boards and missionary orders were formed to take responsibility for this dimension of Christian witness. Local churches were encouraged to be supportive – by prayer, by financial giving and by providing recruits to the missionary movement. They were not expected to be missionary bodies themselves."

<sup>9</sup> Professor Dana L. Robert, "Witnessing to Christ Today": Mission and Unity in the "Long View" from 1910 to the 21st Century", This presentation was delivered at the opening session of the centennial gathering for Edinburgh 2010, which is retrievable on the Edinburgh 2010 web-page under: <http://edinburgh2010.org/en/resources/papersdocuments.html> (last access: Nov. 28, 2012). (The oral statement was directly noted down, possible through my own participation to Edinburgh 2010).

<sup>10</sup> With the closing of the borders of China, to which most of the missionaries' efforts were rendered to, caused a major withdrawal of mission societies and agencies from various parts of the world, especially from the 'Mekong Region', due to the revolution and the following global geo-political situation.

<sup>11</sup> The actual title of Commission One's report read: "Carrying the Gospel to all the non-Christian World". This was in the same time the overarching theme of the Conference's eight Commission – the term 'Non-Christian World' being intended to focus the Conference mainly on Africa, Asia and the Pacific Islands, to the exclusion of regions – notably Latin America – where Catholicism was established: David A. Kerr, Kenneth R. Ross (ed.), *Edinburgh 2010, Mission then and now*, Regnum Books International, Oxford: 2009, 23.

form of a prophetic ministry and the approach to other religions and faiths, based on mutual respect and acceptance.<sup>12</sup>

Another significant difference between '1910' and '2010' is that "mission" has been "recovered to the church"<sup>13</sup>. As mentioned before, the 1910-gathering was called and organized by independent bodies that understood themselves as 'professional missionaries'. "Mission" was regarded to that time as a profession, carrying out a 'specific task'. And in order to carry out this profession – besides the commitment to proclaim the Gospel to the 'heathen and pagan world' – specific skills were required. Organized and carried out mainly by the churches across almost all denominations and Pentecostals and even with the representation of the roman-catholic church, the 2010-gathering truly was a 'church-driven' centenary celebration. Having 'recovered' mission to the churches' concern, a lot of question can be raised. Only to name a few: New paradigm of ecclesiology in the light of the paradigm shift of mission; re-thinking the definition of mission in conjunction with "mission" as (now) the ontological / natural expression of the existence of ecclesia, etc.

The 'recovering' act of mission into the churches' concerns, shall not mean that the mission activities carried out by numerous agencies and organizations can be negated and put into another category, rather than "mission". Edinburgh 2010, has put the term "mission" into a much more comprehensive one, which seems to cover both outreaching and church-internal activities as affirmation and proclamation of faith at-large.

The inquiry regarding "ecumenism" or "ecumenical movement" as a possible solution for Mission in the Asian context leads us to critical reflections on the term "ecumenical" (Oikumene) itself. The concept and idea of the "ecumenical movement" as we know it in our current age, has been nurtured through countless and invaluable efforts and sacrifices during the past century. Even though many people understand "Ecumenism" as "Unity in Diversity", the term "ecumenical" or "Oikumene" itself gains totally different connotations, when understood from a non-church, non-Christian perspective. M.P. Joseph, in his theme presentation addressing the Sixth Congress of Asian Theologians says:

---

<sup>12</sup> I would like to call these two aspects as following terms: "Socio-political diakonia" and "interfaith-koinonia".

Also Metropolitan Geevarghese Mor Coorilos, in his presentation at the opening panel of Edinburgh 2010, emphasized on the social and political role of the church as the "liturgy before liturgy": Geevarghese Mor Coorilos, "Witnessing to Christ Today – A Perspective", This presentation was delivered at the opening session of the centennial gathering for Edinburgh 2010, which is retrievable on the Edinburgh 2010 web-page under: <http://edinburgh2010.org/en/resources/papersdocuments.html> (last access: Nov. 28, 2012).

<sup>13</sup> Kenneth R. Ross, *Edinburgh 2010: New Directions for Church in Mission*, William Carey International University Press, California: 2010, 9-10: "At the beginning of the 12th century, a new pattern began to emerge. As the church has put down roots in almost every part of the world the question is how well are churches equipped to fulfill the missionary mandate? No longer are church and mission viewed as two separate matters. Now the focus is on their integral relation to one another: "the church of the mission" and "the mission of the church". Viewed in this light, the local church now takes centre stage as the primary instrument of mission. Everywhere that God's people gather for worship, fellowship and witness, they are the footprint of the universal church. The local church is not merely a branch of an organization which has its HQ elsewhere. Rather, it is at the local level that the universal church finds its authentic life and expression. Local church therefore hold the initiative, not least when it comes to the mission dimension which is essential to the life of any true church."

This was also stated by the responsible staff of WCC during a radio interview by the Christian Broadcasting Service (CBS), Korea, during the 2010 gathering in Edinburgh 2010.

Ecumenism itself doesn't indicate a break from the monarchic ideologies and framework. Unity historically is a political demand of the empire. In a penetrating analysis of the epistemology of the term ecumenism, Barbara R. Rossing suggests that unlike the Septuagint parallelism of *Oikumene* to earth or whole world, the New Testament literature gave a restricted meaning of *oikumene* as the 'administrative world of the empire'.<sup>14</sup> *Oikumene* is essentially imperialist since the administrative world is constantly in search of a military strategy to conquer other land and people. This essentially means *oikumene* is in opposition to "earth" created and belonging to God. Jesus was persecuted and killed by the *oikumene* of Rome and it functions as a counter force to God's promise of the fullness of creation.<sup>15</sup>

In this light, interpreting and praising the Missionary Conference in Edinburgh 1910 as the 'watershed moment' and 'birth' of the modern ecumenical movement, falls in the need to be critically reflected, as well. Many documents and studies show that his conference was not an occasion for celebration. It was not an occasion of affirmation of the Christian faith, as the 'receiving' and 'sending' parts could obviously not share the same visions.<sup>16</sup> The themes of Edinburgh 1910, when mirrored in the reports, resulted in reactions of the invitees of the Western churches from the 'mission fields' that did not get only friendly echoes. Some comments (e.g. V.S. Azariah, C.H. Yun) were related to a transformation towards a totally new formation of partnership, which were not yet acceptable to that time and furthermore, to be dealt with great sensitivity since those were directly aiming at sharing of power.<sup>17</sup> Here some of the words spoken at the end of his speech:

Through all the ages to come the Indian Church will rise up in gratitude to attest the heroism and self-denying labours of the missionary body. You have given your goods to feed the poor. You have given your bodies to be burned. We also ask for love. Give us friends!<sup>18</sup>

In order to get a glimpse of the difference between 1910 and 2010, a comparison of the commissions for each conference could be helpful:

Edinburgh 1910	Edinburgh 2010
1. Carrying the Gospel to all the non-Christian World	1. Foundations for Mission
2. The Church in the Mission Field	2. Christian Mission among other Faiths
3. Education in Relation to the Christianization of National Life	3. Mission and Postmodernism
4. The Missionary Message in Relation to non-Christian Religions	4. Mission and Power
5. The Preparation of Missions	5. Forms of Missionary Engagement
6. The Home Base of Missions	6. Theological Education and Formation
7. Missions and Governments	7. Christian Communities in Contemporary Contexts
8. Cooperation and the Promotion of Unity	8. Mission and Unity – Ecclesiology and Mission
	9. Mission Spirituality and Authentic Discipleship
	10. Women and Mission, Bible and Mission

<sup>14</sup> M.P. Joseph, 4, quoted from: Barbara R. Rossing, "(Re)claiming Oikumene" in: Shelly Matthews, Melanie Johnson-Debaufre, and Cynthia Briggs Kittredge, eds. *Walk in the Ways of Wisdom: Essays in Honor of Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 2003), 74-87.

<sup>15</sup> M.P. Joseph, 4.

<sup>16</sup> Preman D. Niles, *From East and West – Rethinking Christian Mission*, Chalice Press, St. Louis:2004, 49-53.

<sup>17</sup> Hans-Ruedi Weber, *Asia and the Ecumenical Movement 1895-1961*, SCM Press, London: 1966, 113.

<sup>18</sup> *World Missionary Conference 1910 Edinburgh: The History and Records of the Conference*, vol.9, Oliphant, Anderson & Ferrier, Edinburgh & London: 1910, 110.

The table shows not only the significant difference between the two conferences, but also the concept of the earlier conference, which is more 'business oriented' or technical than the later one. The concept of Edinburgh 1910 reports were more of missionary strategy from the perspective of missionary challenge and opportunity, while those of Edinburgh 2010 were issue based and tried to cover a wide range of theological and ecclesiastical differences. Hence, history shows clearly that the original imperialistic concept of "oikos" (oikumene) was still in use.

### **Suggestion: Mission in Asia: Prophetic Ministry towards Reconciling and Healing**

The text of Mt. 28, 19-20 is the most often quoted text regarding the foundation of mission. The text of Mt. must not be seen as a separate (proof-) text in order to lay the foundation and cornerstones and find reasons for Mission in the 'narrow sense'. If we see the "Great Commission" as *the* culmination of the whole Gospel according Matthew, we must take into consideration *all* the previous biblical stories and narratives prior to the much celebrated 'key-text' of Mission. Considering the 'Golden Rules' (Mt 5-8) as one of the key parts of the Gospel, we need to look into the narratives of the Gospel and see how it reflects in the 'Last Words of the risen Lord'. It cannot be just a mere coincidence that both the "Sermon on the Mount" (Mt. 5-8) and (!!) the "Great Commission" are placed on a mountain!

The understanding of mission since "Edinburgh 2010" calls for a more comprehensive and inclusive understanding while it brought "mission" 'back' into the realms of 'being church' itself. Hence, "Mission" cannot remain in a 'narrow understanding' that is only subject to 'winning believers' and 'physical expansion of the church'.

Although it seems that the "Edinburgh 2010" gathering has attempted a significant contribution towards critical reflections to the imperialistic understanding of the earlier concept of "oikumene"<sup>19</sup>, the later concept of mission, namely *Missio-Dei* has not been discussed very much from critical perspectives during the past century. *Mission-Dei* ("Mission of God"), which puts God's will in the primary place of mission and the churches along with all faithful beings in the plan of God's mission, there have been little chances for the churches in Asia to really 'participate' in this endeavor. Since, the mission is a supreme and ultimate will of God and anything earthy takes a participatory part of it, knowledge 'about' God was the most required way of revealing or understanding the will of God. It seems more than obvious that a new structure of unequal relationship between the 'parent churches' and the 'younger churches' has been established.

---

<sup>19</sup> "Constantinianism (313)". Also see the table above, comparing the two conferences in terms of their working commissions.



The above mentioned critical reflection on the key terms of mission in the current age, shall not be understood as a total negation towards all the efforts, that resulted in and brought also positive impacts to the 'fields' of mission. However, it must be admitted that both terms show contradicting meanings against the values of the Gospel and the beginning of the Christian faith itself.

In the first part of this brief paper, some points of the Asian realities were mentioned, where gross contrasts can be observed. The Asian continent is a context where different and new approaches of mission and missionary movements have to be implemented. However, these shall not be 'implemented' in a 'programmatic' way, but grounded on a basic understanding of mutual respect and beneficial mutuality. It should guide the ways of missionary engagements as a concept.

In the following I would like to propose an alternative way of mission, beginning in the Asian context. Based on the studies for the theme of the General Assembly of the Christian Conference of Asia in 2010 in Kuala Lumpur, "Called to Prophesy, Reconcile and Heal", I would like to make a brief attempt proposing a way of understanding of "Mission" based on this theme.

Paul says in his second letter to the Corinthians that God has reconciled the world to Himself (2 Cor. 5:16-21). It is through God's own sovereign initiative and not earned through human efforts. Only through God's mercy and grace, we are saved in the reconciled relationship to God. Talking about "Reconciliation" from a theological perspective and understanding the term theologically, we cannot but receive it as the total and holistic recovery of our humanity according to the Image of God. It is an invitation.<sup>20</sup>

Reconciliation in the theological language goes beyond fixing and recovering of broken or distorted relationships. The biblical message of reconciliation goes beyond healing of wounds in our hearts and relations. "Be reconciled in God" is a declaration towards recovering the whole creation in God's Image and goes beyond any imagination and system of defining good and evil. The invitation "Be reconciled in God" is His divine invitation out of God's own sovereign initiative. It is the primary declaration of God's Righteousness. That God has reconciled us with Himself implies God's calling is Righteous. Therefore Paul's words: "From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! (2 Cor. 5:16-17)".

God's reconciling initiative goes hand-in-hand with justification. Because of his reconciling Will, we are justified (called righteous) by God and because God calls us His righteous people, we can receive the invaluable gift of reconciliation in God.

---

<sup>20</sup> Gerhard Sauter, „Was heißt, was ist „Versöhnung“?, in: Gerhard Suater (ed), *Versöhnung als Thema der Theologie*, Chr. Kaiser Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1997, 14.

God's reconciliation in His righteousness is a counter act to the human logical framework that breaks down every human criteria and (pre-) conditions. Justification by God does not apply to or abide by human criteria of good and evil. Because God does not keep account of our (miss-) deeds! The justification by God is not of a nature that can be earned by good deeds or other efforts of the human being. To be justified and called righteous by God is the sovereign initiative of God Himself.

How can we understand the phrase from the 2 Cor. 5, where Paul says, "He reconciled us with himself"? It is said that we were not even aware of the fact that we have been failing God (sin), living in Sin to God. Therefore God took the full initiative to reconcile us to himself; not that we reconciled us with God! God's reconciliation embraces us all with the whole Creation (Kol). What does this mean and how do we have to understand God's initiative in the contemporary conflict driven world?

It is clear that God's act of reconciliation cannot be transferred to the human relationship as such. If we would call God's Reconciliation the vertical dimension of Reconciliation, we need a link to the horizontal dimension, namely the dimension of human relationship that implies the ethical perspective.

The biblical usage of the term "Reconciliation" (καταλλαγή) occurs rarely in the Scripture. In the letters of Paul this term finds a unique usage. In 2 Cor. 5 Paul uses καταλλαγή as his reference term for reconciliation. The Greek term is derived from a political-diplomatic language. Hence, Paul used a widely known term in the secular world and re-shaped it to the divine act of reconciliation.

Reconciliation is a very widely and frequently occurring term – even in our every-day life. It is used in ordinary situations up to highly diplomatic and political areas as a gesture. In the theological language, it is correct to regard reconciliation as a God-given gift, a condition which is granted. But, it is wrong to equalize the secular understanding of reconciliation with God's Reconciliation.<sup>21</sup>

The theological concept of Reconciliation according to Paul does not imply any elements or ideas of atonement, neither does it in any ways relate to the Hebrew term כפר (pi), which is used in the Old Testament.<sup>22</sup>

The cross of Jesus was not a condition to realize God's Reconciliation. It was because of God's mercy and love to reconcile the human being to Himself. Hence God could do what he did through Jesus Christ on the cross to himself (incarnation).<sup>23</sup>

The sovereign initiative of God to reconcile the world to himself is a very unique Christian concept and understanding. God's Reconciliation cannot be earned through human efforts, nor can it be 'called' to happen.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>21</sup> John de Gruchy, *Reconciliation, Restoring Justice*, London: SCM Press, 2002, 18-19.

<sup>22</sup> According to Cilliers Breytencach, Only in the LXX, the idea of Old Testament's atonement is used to bridge the understanding of this term to the Hellenistic world: Cilliers Breytenbach, *Versöhnung. Eine Studie zur paulinischen Soteriologie*, Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1989, 220.

<sup>23</sup> About this long and in-depth discussion, see: Ulrich Wilckens, *Der Brief an die Römer*. Evangelisch-Katholischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament (EKK), Band 6/1, Neukirchen: Benziger, 2003; Cilliers Breytenbach, *Versöhnung. Eine Studie zur paulinischen Soteriologie*; Peter Stuhlmacher, „Sühne oder Versöhnung? Randbemerkungen zu Gerhard Friedrichs Studie: Die Verkündigung des Todes Jesu im Neuen Testament“, in: Festschrift Eduard Schweizer, *Die Mitte des Neuen Testaments*, Göttingen: 1983.

Any matter related to the church, our faith and confession, or to the Scripture cannot be isolated in a vacuum state. Expressing, Living Out, Embodying, Following...etc., always implies outreaching expressions. Because of the expressed confessions we are called "Christians". Accepting being a "Christian" as one's identity cannot be an option to choose, once you confess it. Living out one's confessional identity, which is based on the divine truth and Scripture can only be ontological. Hence, accepting and receiving God's gift of Reconciliation means a New Being according to Imago Dei, like it is expressed in Genesis: "God saw all that he had made, and it was very good (Gen 1:31)". This means that the 'others', if understood from the mission paradigm of the 15<sup>th</sup> century and onwards - the 'objects of mission' are no less human beings than myself.

Burdened relationships or troubled situations and conditions or oppressive realities need to be named and identified. It requires courage and a strong commitment towards justice, what we call here "Prophetic Ministry". The main purpose of addressing and naming unjust conditions and situations is to restore peace.<sup>25</sup> However, peace is not something one can enjoy and claim for one's own. "Peace" is a communicative and relational term.<sup>26</sup> Thus, there is no "peace" or "unpeace", when one is alone. One can have "peace" only with the other.<sup>27</sup> Peace is restored, when justice is done to everyone. A semantic understanding of "peace" from the North-East-Asian regions' letters can be of help: "Peace" is written: □ □ .

This is a combination of the letters "balance" and "harmony". It is a misunderstanding to seek peace through absolute equality. The first letter for "balance" doesn't say that.<sup>28</sup> It rather means that when everyone gets the fruits of the soil into one's mouth balanced according to one's needs, peace can be enjoyed. Therefore, "peace" can only be understood from the co-relational perspective, as much as "reconciliation".

That fact that no one is a lesser human being, because everyone is invited into the reconciled relationship to God, and therefore justified (not reduced to one's miss-deeds), sets the human being in totally new relationship. "My neighbor" is no longer my immediate community, but even those, 'outside the gates'.

---

<sup>24</sup> Gerhard Sauter, „Was ist, was heißt Versöhnung?“, in: Gerhard Sauter (ed.), *Versöhnung als Thema der Theologie*, Chr. Kaiser Gütersloher Verlagshaus, Gütersloh: 2007, 10.

<sup>25</sup> John de Gruchy, calls this the "restorative justice" in his volume: John de Gruchy, *Reconciliation, Restoring Justice*, London: SCM Press, 2002.

<sup>26</sup> Jürgen Moltman, *Ziel der Mission*.

<sup>27</sup> Theo Sundermeier, *Mission – Geschenk der Freiheit (Bausteine für eine Theologie der Mission)*, Lembeck, Frankfurt A. Main: 2005, 250.

<sup>28</sup> Premen D. Niles made an attempt to point out equality in partnership, in terms of power struggle between the 'missioning churches' and the 'missionized churches' (West – East). Although the term "equality" in terms of power seems to be persuasive, indeed, an absolute equality is not to be foreseen in any human relationship. Rather the Asian term showed here, describes a relationship, which is based on everyone's individual need, without greed.

## Conclusion:

Despite its many limitations, Edinburgh 1910 has been described in many positive ways. On the one hand it proved effective in re-shaping the religious demography of the world<sup>29</sup>, although through ways to be subject to discussion and critical assessment. On the other hand, it resulted in the birth to the founding of the International Missionary Council (IMC, 1921). As the only formal outcome of Edinburgh 1910<sup>30</sup>, the IMC directed towards the founding of the World Council of Churches (1948) with other regional ecumenical organizations following.

Mission, thus, cannot be understood as merely in a narrow sense. As the attempt above shows, "Mission" implies a lot more, even the 'living out one's faith' and reaching out to my neighbors without any prejudice or judgments.

It is evident that "Reconciliation" and "Healing" has been emerging as key points of Theology. Not only is this phenomenon shown and culminated in the recently held CWME meeting in Athens in 2005, where the theme read, "Come Holy Spirit, Heal and Reconcile", but I also would assess that a series of attempts in the discourse on Mission trends to be more inclusive and comprehensive towards togetherness of all involved parties. Critical observation on the history of the missionary engagement show that there are deep wounds and unsolved grievances on both sides (missionizing and missionized), however, I believe that only a common aim can provide a common ground, which shall be in the same time future-oriented and constructive in nature.

The call to "be reconciled in God" as an invitation give the human community, along with all God's created household a room, a safe room to encounter each other towards a common future. According to the Scripture, "being reconciled in God" means that we have become a new creature. As a new being, we do no longer judge the 'other' according to flesh...

Throughout the mission history and the missionary movement, there are – definitely – great sacrifices and great people who took the 'object' or 'mission fields' seriously. And those shall be recognized correctly. However, this paper is to make an attempt to reflect critically on the concept and ideas of mission and what's behind those. With the wish and hope and prayer that God's every day's renewing and re-creating mission will go on, I am closing this brief contribution.

---

<sup>29</sup> David A. Kerr, Kenneth R. Ross (ed), *Edinburgh 2010, Mission then and now*, Regnum Books International, Oxford: 2009, 307.

<sup>30</sup> Kenneth R. Ross, *Edinburgh 2010 – Springboard for Mission*, William Carey International University Press, Pasadena: 2010, 19.

## Abstract

"Asia" has been known as the icon and expression of "Variety", "Diversity" and "Cultural richness". Asia – as a continent – forms the largest piece of soil on earth and is home to almost 4 billion people. Asia is often associated with the term "cultural richness", which refers to an expression of a huge variety of diverse forms of cultures; different languages (probably the most languages in numbers in the world) and different religions and religious practices. While Asia bears the birthplace of three significant world religions, it shows the least evangelized peoples but on the contrary the largest local churches. Looking into the history of mission and evangelization in Asia, it becomes evident that Christianity came to show its presence mainly through missionaries from overseas and hence, we cannot think of the Asian context without taking seriously into account the reality as the 'field' of mission and evangelism. That is to say, the Asian continent – with exception of a few – has received Christianity through external sources, in a way that has put the Asian context on the 'receiving end'. A discourse on mission in the Asian context must pay attention to the huge spectrum of diversity and variety. Without paying respect and accepting the 'difference', while repeating the 'old paradigm' of mission of the past<sup>31</sup>, the church and many other Christian faith-based organizations will not be able to play an active part in the diversity of the Asian context, but all sides will only get trapped in isolation. This brief contribution tries to shed light to the cultural differences between the 'missionizing' and 'missionized' ends through the metaphor of a dining table (table community) of a rectangular shape or a round table. These two metaphors show illustratively the distorted human-human relationship, but also human being's relationship to God. "Reconciliation" as a theological term in the field of mission Reconciliation in the theological language goes beyond fixing and recovering of broken or distorted relationships. The biblical message of reconciliation goes beyond healing of wounds in our hearts and relations. "Be reconciled in God" is a declaration towards recovering the whole creation in God's Image and goes beyond any imagination and system of defining good and evil. The invitation "Be reconciled in God" is His divine invitation out of God's own sovereign initiative. It is the primary declaration of God's Righteousness.

The call to "be reconciled in God" as an invitation give the human community, along with all God's created household a room, a safe room to encounter each other towards a common future. According to the Scripture, "being reconciled in God" means that we have become a new creature. As a new being, we do no longer judge the 'other' according to flesh...

---

<sup>31</sup> The "past" refers here mainly to the period of the most active mission endeavors of the 15<sup>th</sup> – 19<sup>th</sup> century, before the concept of "Mission Dei" (God's Mission) came into the discourse of mission in Willingen / Germany, 1952.