

**Transformational missiology – an  
emerging trend in evangelical missiology  
in Asia: an analysis with reference to  
selected Asian writers**

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## DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis was composed by myself and is the result of my own research.

All quotations in the text have been distinguished and the sources of information acknowledged.

Warren R. Beattie.

## ABSTRACT

In the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, global Christianity began to take on a new shape. The statistical centre of gravity of the church shifted and the church began to have a significant presence in the non-western world. There has been a growing interest in non-western churches, in their theology and missiology. This thesis addresses one branch of this non-western church, by selecting a group of Evangelical writers in Asia and considering their approach to missiology. The writers are Vinay Samuel (India), Vinoth Ramachandra (Sri Lanka), Hwa Yung and Ng Kam Weng (Malaysia) and Melba Maggay (Philippines). The study argues that the selected writers' approach to missiology can be described as transformational missiology.

The thesis will adapt a framework developed by the non-western missiologist Samuel Escobar at the Iguassu consultation in Brazil in October 1999, to help set this approach to missiology in relation to other evangelical models in the post-World War II era. It will consider Escobar's categorizations of missiology, which look at the influence of European and North American missiology on non-western theologians. The thesis will suggest the need to take account of the concepts of "mission as transformation" and propose a modified framework as a constructive way of interpreting the selected writers approaches to missiology in Asia.

The thesis will argue that the evangelical writers in Asia who favour transformational missiology do so as a function of both their Asian backgrounds and their Evangelical identity. The former encourages them to deal with the issues that the church faces in its Asian setting by forging an Asian Christian identity and developing forms of missiology that are appropriate for Asian contexts. Their evangelical heritage shapes the traditions of missiology that they draw on and influences how they use the Christian scriptures as a resource in theology. The thesis will consider how both their Asian and evangelical identities shape their approach to missiology and lead to the emphases of transformational missiology.

This thesis highlights the contribution of Asian writers to evangelical missiology, and emphasizes that evangelicals in Asia are grappling with the demands of their Asian settings and are concerned about their Asian identity as they engage in missiological reflection. It argues that in transformational missiology, evangelicals in Asia are wrestling with forms of mission that relate closely to Asia, that create space for mission in Asia and that engage with Asian contexts. In particular, the study indicates that the selected writers are engaging with issues such as their global context, the multi-religious nature of Asian societies, nation-building, developing civil society and promoting just societies.

The thesis is organised in three parts. Part one explores the opportunities and constraints that Christians in Asia face in the multi-religious setting and which necessitate the need to develop contextual forms of missiology and to forge Asian Christian identity. Part two critiques Escobar's framework for missiology, and shows how the Asian and evangelical backgrounds of the selected writers lead to their adoption of transformational missiology. Part three reviews and critiques transformational missiology in relation to the five selected writers, Asia and evangelicalism. This part suggests that the emphases of transformational missiology on Asian themes, the kingdom of God and community make it a flexible model of missiology for contemporary Asia.

Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth.

Worship the Lord with gladness;  
come into his presence with singing.

Know that the Lord is God.

It is he who made us, and we are his:  
we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.

Psalm 100:1-3

To my mother, with love and gratitude

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## ABBREVIATIONS

ALCOE	Asian Leadership Congress on Evangelism
ALCWE	Asian Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization
AMA	Asian Missions Association
AMC	Asian Missions Congress {first congress}
AMC II	Asian Missions Congress {second congress}
ATA	Asian Theological Association
ATESEA	Association of Theological Educators in South-East Asia
BJP	Bharatia Janata Party
CCA	Christian Conference of Asia
CNI	Church of North India
CSCA	Centre for the Study of Christianity in Asia
CSCNWW	Centre for the Study of Christianity in the Non-Western world
CSI	Church of South India
CWM	Council for World Mission
DAWN	Discipling a Whole Nation Movement
EACC	East Asian Christian Conference
EATWOT	Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians
EFA	Evangelical Fellowship of Asia
EFC	Evangelical Free Church {Malaysia}
EFI	Evangelical Fellowship of India
EFICOR	Evangelical Fellowship of India Commission on Relief
FABC	Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences
IFES	International Federation of Evangelical Students
IMC	International Missionary Council
INFEMIT	International Federation of Evangelical Mission Theologians

ISACC	Institute for Studies in Asian Church and Culture
KRIM	Korean Research Institute for Missions
LCOWE	Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization
LMS	London Missionary Society
NECF	National Evangelical Christian Federation {Malaysia}
OCMS	Oxford Centre for Mission Studies
OMF	Overseas Missionary Fellowship {currently OMF International}
PAS	Parti Islam SeMalaysia
PCTA	Programme of Cultures and Theology in Asia
PIM-Asia	Partnership in Mission-Asia
RSS	Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh
SPCK	Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge
UMNO	United Malays National Organization
VHP	Vishwa Hindu Parishad
WEA	World Evangelical Alliance {formerly World Evangelical Fellowship (WEF)}
WCC	World Council of Churches

## PREFACE

An understanding of what constitutes 'Asia' follows the *Dictionary of Asian Christianity* (DAC) as outlined in the Introduction on page xxiii, using their latter description of Asia after the seventh century:

Asia topographically speaking, stretches from Turkey to Siberia and south to Papua. This volume does not use a strictly topographical or geographical definition for Asia but instead adds cultural and historical tests to determine the extent of Asia.

Thus we decided that the DAC should cover the Persian area of western Asia until the Arab conquest of the seventh century, and from that point on it should cover the area from Pakistan to the east. Language ... culture and empire decide this as much as geography. Russia is not included nor are the Pacific Islands. While this may seem to be somewhat arbitrary, it is confirmed by the way in which Asian church history is taught in most seminaries in Asia today.

To avoid repeating the names of the Asian writers chosen for this study, the phrase "selected writers" is used to refer to them collectively.

## INTRODUCTION

Near the front of the sanctuary of Prinsep Street Presbyterian Church in Singapore, set high up on the wall and easily visible to members of the congregation, is a small white memorial plaque which has the following text:

In loving memory of Song Hoot Kiam pupil of James Legge D.D. When he was baptized in 1840 there were six Protestant communicants in all of China. When he died in the year of the great martyrdom there were 60,000.<sup>1</sup>

This example from Singapore, of a Chinese-born member of the diaspora church, indicates that at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Asian Christians were ready to document with a straightforward enthusiasm this expansion of Christianity into the Asian region.<sup>2</sup> At the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the expansion had resulted in a faith tens of millions strong and spread across the Asian continent.

Today the task facing Asian Christians is to develop models of Christian theology that facilitate mission in Asia so that they can establish an Asian way of being the church and an Asian way of doing theology. Different models for understanding mission have been developing over the last sixty years since World War II. These models provide a basis within which churches understand their presence and activity, and through which they are interpreted. These models are still in a process of flux as trends such as globalisation challenge the identity and character of the churches in Asia.

Writers such as Vinay Samuel and Vinoth Ramachandra have been identified as important writers on mission in the Asian social context.<sup>3</sup> By exploring their work, and placing it alongside the work of other prominent Asian writers, who are less well known to Western audiences, new ways of understanding the thinking and concepts of mission in Asia will be explored. This thesis will explore various models which have developed in different parts of the world. It will then seek to delineate one model and demonstrate its effectiveness for relating to Asian contexts and settings.

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<sup>1</sup> This refers to the year 1900.

<sup>2</sup> T.E. Yates, *The Expansion of Christianity* (Oxford : Lion, 2004).

<sup>3</sup> Samuel was the focus of a study by Chris Sugden. C. Sugden, *Seeking the Asian Face of Jesus* (Oxford: Regnum, 2005). Ramachandra give the Duff lectures at New College, Edinburgh, in Spring 2005.

### ***The rationale and originality of the thesis***

This study describes the way in which a group of five contemporary evangelical writers in Asia is making a distinctive contribution to global missiology by re-positioning the place and role of the Asian church. The five selected writers are Vinay Samuel (India), Vinoth Ramachandra (Sri Lanka), Hwa Yung, Ng Kam Weng (both from Malaysia) and Melba Maggay (Philippines). This study will suggest that these writers favour an approach to missiology which will be termed transformational missiology – an approach to mission which emphasizes the transformation of individual lives, communities, and wider societies. This model of transformational missiology will be considered in relation to the different Asian countries in which the five are writing and in relation to other forms of evangelical missiology in Asia today.

Samuel Escobar, the Peruvian theologian and missiologist, has set out a framework of evangelical missiology in the post-World War II era which has provided a benchmark critique of evangelical missiology in this period. The missiological writings of the selected writers are explored within the contours suggested by Escobar's framework. In this he divides missiology into three categories namely "post-imperial missiology" (from the United Kingdom and Europe), "managerial missiology" (from the United States of America, based around a cluster of organizations and people in Pasadena, California) and "critical missiology from the periphery" (from the two thirds world). The selected writers are presented as forming a particular group within Escobar's latter category.

Transformational missiology will be related to the ideas of "mission as transformation". Whilst the concept of transformation in relation to missiology is not a new idea, an analysis of ideas of transformation in relation not just to a movement, but to the wider church is overdue. The ties of Samuel to this movement have been considered in part through a study by his colleague Chris Sugden. However, the way in which ideas of transformation are handled by those who do not identify so closely with the "mission as transformation" movement has not been analyzed. This study will suggest that there is a common interest in certain biblical bases for missiology, in theological emphases such as Jesus Christ and the kingdom of God and in themes that relate to the global, and to society and religion in Asian settings

Transformational missiology is of interest as an evangelical form of missiology which emphasizes transformation rather than the mere transmission (in the sense of the propagation and expansion) of the Christian faith. The study will consider how those who stress the elements of transformational missiology put more stress on nurturing Christian communities

than on the expansion of Christian communities associated with church-planting models of missiology.

### ***Specific Research issues***

A study in theology of mission

Theology of mission is concerned with the basic presuppositions and underlying principles which determine from the standpoint of Christian faith, the motives, message, methods, strategy and goals of the Christian world mission.<sup>4</sup>

The subject of this thesis is the emergence of a particular theology of mission within a number of Asian settings. It examines this in relation to the variety of evangelical models of theology of mission and global evangelicalism. The study seeks to contribute to the somewhat limited literature on theology of mission in Asia. In the west, scholars such as Bosch<sup>5</sup> and Jongeneel<sup>6</sup> have developed paradigms for missiology. Although they are concerned about the way in which missiology from the two thirds world can offer new impetus to the contemporary study of missiology, their own work does not fully incorporate the insights from these contexts.<sup>7</sup>

Within evangelicalism, recent publications offer a critique of models of evangelical missiology. In the United Kingdom, David Smith is outspoken in his criticism of approaches to mission in the modern world that fail to take account of changes since World War II.<sup>8</sup> In the United States, Engel and Dyrness critique evangelical missiology for drawing on western patterns rather than moulding adequately to two thirds world contexts.<sup>9</sup> Assessments of evangelical missiology in Asia are very limited. Wickeri and his Asian colleagues offer an introduction to the topic and a survey of three countries.<sup>10</sup> Within Asian Protestantism there

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<sup>4</sup> G. Anderson, "Theology of mission," in *Concise Dictionary of the Christian World Mission*, ed. Stephen Neill, Gerald Anderson, John Goodwin (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1971).

<sup>5</sup> D. Bosch, *Transforming Mission* (NY: Orbis, 1992). J. A. B. Jongeneel, *Philosophy, Science and Theology of Mission in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries: A Missiological Encyclopedia. Part 1: The Philosophy and Science of Mission* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1995).

<sup>6</sup> Jongeneel's work is excellent in the area of historical bibliography. His use of categories like "missionary cybernetics" are more difficult to follow.

<sup>7</sup> Neither Bosch nor Jongeneel makes much of resources from the two thirds world.

<sup>8</sup> D. Smith, *Mission after Christendom* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2003).

<sup>9</sup> J. F. Engel, and W. A. Dyrness, *Changing the Mind of Mission. Where Have We Gone Wrong?* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2000).

<sup>10</sup> P.L. Wickeri, A. Tizon and Hee Mo Yim, "A Survey of Evangelical Missiological Concerns with Particular Reference to Asia," in *The People of God among all God's Peoples: Frontiers in Christian Mission*. ed. Philip L. Wickeri (Hong Kong: CCA, 1999), 289-325. V. Samuel, "Christian Mission in Contemporary Asia," *International Review of Mission* 87 (April 1998): 205-212.

are contributors to theology of mission such as C.S. Song, K. Koyama and the Korean theologian Y.B. Kim.<sup>11</sup>

Several studies explore the implications of theology of mission for the Roman Catholic church. Pieris offers an exacting theology of liberation;<sup>12</sup> Karotemprel<sup>13</sup> has developed a theology of mission for the church, deriving from Asia, which focuses on biblical and historical issues; Seigel and Mercado deal with themes that relate to Asian settings.<sup>14</sup> There have been surveys of the Catholic Church in Asia, which focus on its emphasis of developing models of the local church which are inculturated in Asia,<sup>15</sup> and the Federation of Asian Bishops produce regular reports on Asia emphasizing the needs of the local church communities in Asian contexts.<sup>16</sup> This thesis will show that the selected writers, all Protestant, put an emphasis on transformation that is deep-rooted, that relates to Asia and that is more marked than might have been expected within evangelicalism with its traditional emphases on evangelization.

#### Escobar's framework

A model for analyzing evangelical missiology found in the work of Samuel Escobar has been chosen as a starting-point for this study.<sup>17</sup> Escobar deals with contemporary missiology within global evangelicalism, recognizing that Asian missiologists are part of a wider non-western movement that he styles a "critical missiology from the periphery"; he also notes the contribution of strands of missiology from Europe and North America that are still influential for evangelicalism as a whole.

The study will suggest that evangelical groupings engage in missiology according to Escobar's categories of managerial missiology; post imperial missiology and a critical missiology from the periphery. The study agrees with Escobar's analysis that the selected writers engage in "a criticism of existing patterns of mission" and "they propose a

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<sup>11</sup> C.S. Song, *Christian Mission in Reconstruction: an Asian Attempt* (Madras: CLS, 1975).

<sup>12</sup> A. Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1986).

<sup>13</sup> S. Karotemprel et al, eds., *Following Christ in Mission. A Foundational Course in Missiology* (Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 1996).

<sup>14</sup> M. T. Seigel and L. N. Mercado, eds., *Towards an Asian Theology of Mission* (Manila: Divine Word Publications, 1995).

<sup>15</sup> J.H. Kroeger, *Asia-Church In Mission: Exploring Ad Gentes Mission Initiatives of the Local Churches in Asia and the Vatican II Era*. Quezon city (Philippines: Claretian Publications, 1999).

<sup>16</sup> G.B.Rosales and C.G. Arevalo, eds., *For All the peoples of Asia. Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences: Documents from 1970 to 1991* (NY: Orbis Books, 1992).

<sup>17</sup> S. Escobar, "Evangelical Missiology: Peering into the Future," in *Global missiology for the 21<sup>st</sup> century: the Iguassu dialogue*, ed W. Taylor (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2000), 101-122.

missiology [for Asia] which corresponds to the missionary challenges of the day.”<sup>18</sup>

However, the study will critique Escobar’s framework by suggesting that his description of managerial missiology is too negative and that the framework does not take adequate account of the movement of mission as transformation. The study will assess the extent to which the concept of transformational missiology is the most useful way of describing and understanding one strand of evangelical missiology which is emerging in Asia.

This analysis is not intended to be a dialogue on missiology merely within evangelicalism between the selected five writers and other evangelical missiologists, but will try to be a dialogue between the five and other Asian missiologists. It is hoped that a comparison of the work of the selected writers with both evangelicals and other Asian missiologists will help to clarify what are important issues to address in Asian missiology and in Asian evangelicalism.

### Evangelicals in Asia

The study will take account of how evangelicals in Asia connect to the history of evangelicalism, so often assumed to be a Euro-American approach. It will relate the missiology of Asian evangelicals to the wider world of evangelicalism. In his introduction to a recent and significant symposium on methodology and evangelical theology, John Stackhouse Jr. bemoans the fact that most participants were in mid-life, were educated in the evangelical heartlands like United States, Canada, the United Kingdom and Germany, were all male and all Caucasian.<sup>19</sup> Part of the purpose of this study is to bring the voices of those from different cultures, different races and different backgrounds to the debate surrounding evangelicalism and its theological and missiological reflections.<sup>20</sup> The spread of global evangelicalism to non-western regions and the status of evangelicalism in the non-western world have received relatively little scholarly attention.<sup>21</sup> Lewis has made a start but

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 112-113.

<sup>19</sup> J. Stackhouse Jr. ed., *Evangelical Futures: a Conversation on Theological Method* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 10.

<sup>20</sup> M. Noll, D. Bebbington and G. A. Rawlyk, eds., *Evangelicalism: Comparative Studies of Popular Protestantism* (Oxford: OUP, 1994).

<sup>21</sup> M. Hutchinson, ed., *A Global Faith: Essays on Evangelicalism and Globalisation* (Sydney: Centre for the Study of Australian Christianity, 1998).

significant gaps remain.<sup>22</sup> Freston's studies of evangelicalism show that there are many facets of non-western evangelicalism which need further study<sup>23</sup>.

In contrast to the work of scholars like Hans-Ruedi Weber,<sup>24</sup> who have tracked the impact of western ecumenism on the Asian church, there remains much work to be done on the impact of evangelicalism. The extreme sensitivity felt about the west by those in parts of Asia and in parts of the Islamic world makes this an urgent priority. This study also raises questions about how evangelical congresses and movements like the Lausanne 1974 congress shape evangelicalism and allow a forum for different ideas.<sup>25</sup> It remains to be seen to what extent the Lausanne movement is open to a new missiological agenda and a new style of doing theology.

### World Christianity

There is an increasing awareness of the need for theologians in the non-western world to contribute to theology and to the theology of mission. Shenk, in 2001, argues that the field of theology of mission is poised to receive new directions from the non-western world. He sees Asia as one of the most important regions of the world in this respect.<sup>26</sup> A recent survey of theology of mission from a thematic perspective tries to connect the history of theology of mission to the rise of non-western Christianity. It is on this topic and this connection that the thesis is focussed.<sup>27</sup>

This study will consider the ways in which Christianity can be examined against the backdrop of what has been termed "world Christianity." This is a term which has been adopted by Sanneh and defined in contradistinction to global Christianity.<sup>28</sup> The idea of the changing nature of Christianity as a world religion has been well documented in recent years

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<sup>22</sup> D.M. Lewis, ed., *Christianity Reborn: the Global Expansion of Evangelicalism in the Twentieth century* (Grand Rapids, MI:Eerdmans), 2004. Lewis points out that the countries of Korea and the Philippines in Asia did not get receive any specific analysis.

<sup>23</sup> P. Freston, "Globalisation, Religion and Evangelical Christianity: a Sociological Meditation from the Third World." Unpublished paper, delivered in Brazil, 2001.

<sup>24</sup> H.R. Weber, *Asia and the Ecumenical Movement 1895-1961* (London: SCM), 1966.

<sup>25</sup> J.D.Douglas, ed. *Let the Earth Hear His Voice: Official Reference volume, papers and responses International Congress on World Evangelization , 1974 , Lausanne, Switzerland* (Minneapolis: World Wide Publications, 1975).

<sup>26</sup> W.Shenk, "Recasting Theology of Mission: Impulses from the Non-Western World." *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* (July 2001): 98-107.

<sup>27</sup> S. Bevans and R. P. Schroeder *Constants in Context. A Theology of Mission for Today* (N.Y.:Orbis, 2004).

<sup>28</sup> See L. Sanneh, *Whose Religion is Christianity?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 22-34.

by Walls and others.<sup>29</sup> World Christianity needs to be appreciated in several ways. It can be seen in part as a statistical phenomenon<sup>30</sup> given that the shift of the centre of gravity from north to south has brought a new weight to the place of the church in the non-western world. This has led to the emergence of voices from the non-western world<sup>31</sup> and a desire for these voices to be heard, which in turn has led to a greater awareness and re-assessment of the theological emphases and agenda of and by the non-western church.<sup>32</sup>

There is a growing participation in the mission of the church which is evidenced in the rise of what were called non-western missionary movements and now are described in terms of the globalization of mission.<sup>33</sup> The context of world Christianity has brought an awareness that churches in different parts of the world will want to approach theology, church and mission in new ways. It has also encouraged theologians to look together at issues from different regional perspectives. Walls talks about the possibility of Christians across the world, not only being able to read the bible together, but to read it in a new collective way.<sup>34</sup>

This study, written by a U.K. trained teacher in the field of missiology, long based in Asia, will argue that the theological energy of evangelicalism is not restricted to the traditional heartlands of the Anglo-Saxon diaspora and Europe but that it is thriving in Asia.

Evangelicals in Asia are wrestling with important issues like identity and searching for forms of mission and missiological response which are appropriate for the Asian church and which promote its spiritual life.<sup>35</sup> There is a renewed interest in the importance of religion in relation to evangelical thinking in Asia, although there are limits as to how well this experience and these perceptions are reflected in terms of new and creative theological formulations.

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<sup>29</sup> A. Walls, *The Cross-cultural Process in Christian History* (NY: Orbis, 2004). W. Bühlmann, *Coming of the Third Church: an Analysis of the Present and Future of the Church* (Slough: St. Paul Publications, 1976).

<sup>30</sup> D. Barrett, ed., *World Christian Encyclopedia. A Comparative Survey of Churches and Religions in the Modern World, A.D. 30-A.D. 2200*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (N.Y.: OUP, 2001).

<sup>31</sup> S. Thistlethwaite, "Commentary. Winning Over the Faculty," in *The Globalization of Theological Education*, ed. A.F. Evans (N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1993), 29-32.

<sup>32</sup> P. Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: the Coming of Global Christianity*, (Oxford: OUP), 2002.

<sup>33</sup> S. Moon, and D.T. W. Lee, "Globalization, World Evangelization and Global Missiology," in *One World or Many*, ed. R. Tiplady (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2003), 213-228.

<sup>34</sup> A. Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Modern History* (New York: Orbis, 1996), 11-15.

<sup>35</sup> M. Lee, "Characterizing Asian Theology (1): Re-configuration of Western theology." Unpublished Faculty Seminar Paper. Trinity Theological College, 21<sup>st</sup> February 2002, 4.

## **Structure and methodology**

The writers from Asia who have been selected for this study

At the centre of this study is a group of five contemporary evangelical writers. The choice of writers has been made in relation to a number of criteria: the writers identify with evangelical organizations;<sup>36</sup> they represent important strands of Asian missiology and theology with the exception of North Asia; they are theologians, missiologists and educators whose work is read and interacted with across Asia;<sup>37</sup> they have a body of published work in English and interact with issues related to the mission of the church in Asia.<sup>38</sup> The inclusion of Melba Maggay allows the perspectives of evangelical women in Asia to be represented. Maggay, whose doctoral work was in cross-cultural studies, and Ng Kam Weng would not describe themselves primarily as missiologists, although their work involves them in missional issues.<sup>39</sup>

The selected writers maintain wide-ranging Christian links. Vinoth Ramachandra works with International Federation of Evangelical Students (IFES) in a regional capacity in Asia. In recent years, he has taken more interest in scientific and technological issues in the region, which fits with his scientific training in nuclear engineering. Vinay Samuel is connected with a think-tank on mission in Washington, D.C., U.S.A. and maintains connections with the Oxford Centre for Mission Studies (OCMS), Oxford, U.K. and Christian projects in Bangalore, India. Ng and Maggay have been directors of research institutes in Malaysia (The Kairos Research Centre) and in the Philippines (Institute for Studies of Asian Church and Culture (ISACC) respectively.<sup>40</sup> Their work is connected to a specifically national context but goes beyond denominational church activities. Hwa Yung was involved in a similar way at the Centre for the Study of Christianity in Asia (CSCA) in Singapore but has recently become Bishop of the Methodist Church in West Malaysia. Of the group, his work is the most directly connected to congregational life.

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<sup>36</sup> Hwa is connected to the Lausanne Movement, International Federation of Evangelical Missions Theologians (INFEMIT) and the Asian Missions Congress (AMC); Maggay is connected to the Institute for Studies of Asian Church and Culture (ISACC). Ng is connected to the Kairos Research Centre. Ramachandra is connected to the International Federation of Evangelical Students (IFES); Samuel is connected to INFEMIT, to the Lausanne movement and the AMC.

<sup>37</sup> Hwa Yung and Ng Kam Weng were both teaching courses at CSCA from 2001-2002 aimed at those engaged in missiology across Asia.

<sup>38</sup> The choice of English is to help ensure that writers are read across Asia. Some like Maggay also publish in local languages like Tagalog.

<sup>39</sup> M. Maggay, "On Proclamation, Church and Unity," in *The People of God among all God's Peoples: Frontiers in Christian Mission*, ed. Philip L. Wickeri (CCA: Hong Kong, 1999), 231-241.

<sup>40</sup> Ng is a member of the Centre of Theological Inquiry (CTI), Princeton.

The selected writers represent a spectrum of Asians who have wide international experience, but who all speak local languages and spend large amounts of time in their own Asian settings. Four of the five members of the selected writers have been partly educated in the U.K. at traditional universities such as the University of Cambridge, the University of London and Queen's College, Belfast. Maggay spent some time as a research fellow at Tyndale House (a Biblical Research centre) in Cambridge. Some of the writers consciously write some of their work for a wider audience and have readerships in the west as much as in Asia. This is particularly true of Samuel and Ramachandra.<sup>41</sup>

All five are involved in international networks such as the IFES, the International Federation of Mission Theologians (INFEMIT), and the Lausanne movement. Taken together those writers allow for a reasonably diverse representation of evangelicalism in Asia. Their theology is not essentially a grass-roots theology but reflects the theology of writers who have studied theology and who seek to contribute to the Asian church through their research and writings.

The issue of what constitutes theology in Asia and even the legitimacy of describing a field of "Asian theology" is a vexed topic.<sup>42</sup> For this study it was felt that a more appropriate approach was to talk about missiology in Asia in the sense of missiology written by writers drawn from across the Asian region. This suggested that the group of selected writers ought to represent the different regions of Asia and to be writers whose work was acknowledged and read across Asia: they are indeed both representative and read. This study will analyze and critique their engagement with missiological issues in the Asian setting and how their work is reshaping the missiological agenda to enable the church to be more authentically involved in mission in Asia.

## Methods

The thesis will draw primarily on the published works of the selected Asian writers. Where possible these are supplemented by unpublished sources and in some cases by lecture materials given at CSCA in Singapore. Complementing these writings is material collected

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<sup>41</sup> Ramachandra's books are published by IVP and Paternoster in the UK suggesting a western readership.

<sup>42</sup> G. Gispert-Sauch, "Asian Theology," in *The Modern Theologians*, ed. D. Ford (Blackwell: Oxford, 1997), 456-460. See also S. Kwan, "A Discursive History of the Asian Theological Movement - a Critique of its Binarism," *Journal of Theology and Cultures of Asia* 1 (2002):93ff.

through interviewing four of the selected writers.<sup>43</sup> This has allowed for contemporary perspectives on topics such as globalization, which the writers are researching, but which have not yet been published. It also enabled a wider discussion of some of the themes and perspectives in the thesis which do not appear in print. As two of the group gave lectures for a post-graduate course in Asian missiology at CSCA in Singapore it was possible to have more extended contact with them and gain an understanding of their thinking about the wider Asian church and issues which impact it. The thesis will also interact with secondary sources in the area of evangelical missiology, Asian missiology and, to a lesser extent, Asian theology.

### Limitations and issues

I am conscious that to make a choice of writers that are in any sense representative of the Asian region is no easy matter. Asia is a large and varied region and the description of Asian when applied to either theology or missiology could be misconstrued. In this thesis, I have preferred to talk of writers, theology or missiology in Asia, implying that the common link is the Asian setting rather than some intrinsic Asian identity. By drawing on a group of writers across Asia the intention has been to try to show something of the scope of evangelical missiology in the region: the final choice of writers was made to reflect the key geographical areas of Asian theology such as India, and South-East Asia. The focus of this study is missiology in Asia rather than mission, where mission refers to the activity of the church and missiology is theological reflection on and about the church and issues which affect its mission in the world: its aim therefore is less one of coverage and rather more the examination of issues and processes.

### Personal dimensions

Part of the motivation for this study was a recognition of the gap in awareness, even among evangelicals, of Asian evangelical writings, and the desire to encourage the reading and appropriation of Asian texts for courses on Asian missiology. This makes more urgent an assessment of missiological treatments by Asian writers in relationship to other branches of evangelical missiology.

As a Scottish person, there are some tensions for me as I come to look at missiological writing in Asia. Although my initial interest had been in comparing evangelical missiology in Asia with other forms of missiology in Asia, the nature of the thesis itself led more

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<sup>43</sup> The author was unable to interview Melba Maggay.

naturally to a study of evangelical missiology. The contribution of Asians to global evangelical missiology is a topic that can reasonably be examined by those outside of Asia and is of interest both within Asia and beyond.

### Structure of the thesis

The first part of the study sets forth the context of the church in Asia in relation to World Christianity and shows how evangelicals in Asia are ready to approach theology of mission in new ways. It locates evangelicalism in its Asian settings, shows how the settings themselves can restrict mission and how these restrictions need to be negotiated. This section outlines two key issues - the construction of identity and the topic of contextualization.

The second part shows that the selected writers adopt an approach to mission that can be termed transformational missiology. It critiques the framework developed by Escobar and considers how transformational missiology relates to it. This section shows that transformational missiology has both an Asian and an evangelical identity. It is derived from the Asian settings and has Asian roots. It is also influenced by the Christian scriptures and certain missiological emphases. This part concludes by showing the Asian character and nature of transformational missiology as it engages with Asian contexts.

The third part shows how transformational missiology deals with issues of evangelical identity and Asian Christian identity. It discusses the extent to which transformational missiology is a form of contextual theology in Asia that deals with some of the key issues that confront Christians in Asia and offers directions for the future.

**Part One**  
**Evangelicals and Mission in Asia**

# CHAPTER 1

## Opportunities for Mission in Asia

### 1.1 World Christianity

The global expansion of Christianity through the missionary movement has shaped the world we now inhabit and has contributed to the contemporary context of world Christianity.<sup>1</sup> The current global context has been described by Walls as representing a shift in the centre of gravity of Christianity with the majority of Christians now residing in the “south” or “non-west.”<sup>2</sup> This shift of the church towards the non-west has been studied at a statistical level by Barrett.<sup>3</sup> It is associated with new vitality in non-western Christianity both at a church level and in the rise of non-western missionary movements. The change of character of the church is welcomed by Americans like Hiebert<sup>4</sup> who sees the church as benefitting from globalisation by becoming a world-wide body. In his opinion the hegemony of the West is decreasing with this shift.

#### 1.1.1 World Christianity and Asia

##### World Christianity and mission

Christianity is entering a new phase at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. There is a growing Asian church which represents around 8.5% of the world Christian population. Evangelical Christians in Asia form a significant part of this emerging phenomenon and they need to define their role and contribution to the Asian church. This study aims to analyse the articulation of their theological and missiological concerns. While the impact of the economic power and theological traditions of the churches of the “north” is significant, Christians in Asia are now in a position to be part of churches and movements which are led by Asians and whose identity is shaped by Asians themselves in their activities and theologizing.

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<sup>1</sup> S. Moon and D.T. W. Lee, “Globalization, World Evangelization and Global Missiology,” in *One World or Many*, ed. R. Tiplady (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2003), 257-262.

<sup>2</sup> A. Walls, *The Cross-cultural Process in Christian History* (NY: Orbis, 2004), 63-64.

<sup>3</sup> D. Barrett, ed., *World Christian Encyclopedia. A Comparative Survey of Churches and Religions in the Modern World. A.D. 30-A.D. 2200*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (N.Y.: OUP, 2001) Barrett’s figures are recognized as reasonably “reliable” and calibrated across the globe, if tending to the higher end of the spectrum.

<sup>4</sup> P.G. Hiebert, “Globalization as Evangelism,” in *The Globalization of Theological Education*, ed. A.F. Evans (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1993), 72.

There have been opportunities for mission across the world in preceding centuries: the growth of the world Christian movement and its expansion to Asia have resulted in a growing confidence and self-awareness of the church in Asia. There is however, a need for forms of mission which will thrive in Asia. I argue the need for transformational missiology. The combined work of the selected writers can be interpreted as one contemporary component of a series of movements that have been establishing Christianity in Asia over a period of almost two thousand years. Evangelical Christians in Asia are conscious of the fact that they are part of this historical process which shapes the church and its theology. They realise the church's need to come to terms with elements of its western history in Asia in the post-World War II era.

Evangelicals in Asia are also part of a wider tradition of evangelicalism. There are historical resources which they can draw on from other parts of evangelicalism, traditions from Europe and from North America; there are the resources of the Christian scriptures and of Christ and his kingdom. The opportunities for mission in Asia and the growing evangelical voices point the way to new scope for the development of evangelical missiology in Asia.

How to make sense of mission in Asian cultures which are part of a changing global world is a critical issue for missiologists in Asia. Asian peoples are acutely conscious of the need to affirm their identity and their own distinctiveness. The Asian church has to relate to this process in two ways: it must seek to be authentically Asian and at the same time it must seek to be authentically Christian.<sup>5</sup> The selected writers are particularly concerned about the Asian location of the Asian church and how to relate the church's mission to this setting. They are conscious of the wider forces at work in Asian society which stress indigenization and Asian identity. They are keen to find ways to affirm the Asian identity of the church and yet they see some limitations about the way in which, in its present form, Asian theology is achieving this task.

The writers selected for this study take into account the way in which the wider global setting of Christianity affects the church in Asia and in particular the western dimensions of Christian heritage. World Christianity has been deeply influenced by western elements, indeed Christianity is often perceived in Asia as a religion which has a western flavour. In addition the theological heritage of the church has been influenced by western theological models and western styles of theological reflection. The selected writers in Asia seek to deal with these issues and the tensions which result from them.

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<sup>5</sup> Hwa Yung, Interview by Warren R. Beattie. 19<sup>th</sup> June 2002, Singapore.

## Contemporary Christianity in Asia

There has been an explosion of activity within Asian Christianity in recent years. This is reflected in a growing and expanding church, and an increasingly self-determined church; examples of exceptional churches in terms of scale and range of activities<sup>6</sup>; growing missionary movements; growing representation in international bodies; new theological institutions; and the continuing quest for Asian forms of theology and missiology. In all these ways the Asian character of the church is being established. There is a new confidence in the Asian Christian movement, reflected in the rise of churches, organizations, seminaries and mission movements within and across Asia.<sup>7</sup>

The populations of China, India and Indonesia mean that Christian minorities in these countries represent tens of millions of Christians. Using Barrett's figures for Christians in 2000, the following are estimates of the size of Christian communities in Asia: Philippines 68.1 million (89.9% of the population), India 62.3 million (5.8%), Sri Lanka 1.7 million (9.3%), Malaysia 1.8 million (8.2%).<sup>8</sup> Given their significance in terms of the overall Christian population in the world, it can be seen why it is important that Christians within Asia and evangelicals, as part of this Asian constituency, share their thoughts on missiology.

Previous literature on the role and presence of the church and mission in Asia has given an impression that this minority group is of little relevance to the Asian context. In North-East India, particularly in the small states of Nagaland and Mizoram, large percentages of the population are Christian. In South Korea, Christians constitute around a third of the population (with a majority of Protestants). In the Philippines (with a majority of Catholics) Christians are by far the largest religious grouping. Christians in East Timor have a significant presence, and in Indonesia, Christians form a sizeable community.

The role of non-western missionary movements as an indicator of Christian activity is recognized by evangelicals. Reliable figures suggest the number of "missionaries" of Indian origin<sup>9</sup> to be upwards of 40,000<sup>10</sup> with more than 12,000 from South Korea. Recent

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<sup>6</sup> The church founded by ChoYeong Ki in Seoul would be an example of this.

<sup>7</sup> Many indications of the vitality and scale of Asian Christianity are found in a recent dictionary on Asia. S. W. Sunquist, ed., *A Dictionary of Asian Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001)

<sup>8</sup> Barrett, *World Christian Encyclopedia*, 594, 360, 695, 474. Using mid-2000 figures rounded down to the nearest hundred thousand. For comparison, China had 89 million Christians (7.1%); Indonesia 27.8 million (13.1%); South Korea 19 million (40%).

<sup>9</sup> This refers to long-term missionaries working cross-culturally within India.

<sup>10</sup> .P.J. Johnstone, *Operation World: 21st Century Edition*. 6th ed. (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2006), 74

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 747-749.

estimates indicate around 200,000 people involved in Protestant mission world-wide.<sup>11</sup> This means that as a proportion of the global missionary taskforce, there are sizeable Asian missionary communities working outside their own contexts, supported and encouraged by active Christian communities.

The selected writers share the new consciousness of the Asian church that they are part of an emerging and growing body of people who are in a position to influence Asia and the wider world. This shift in the numerical realities and scale of the church in Asia (the Christianizing of Asia) is being matched by a desire to “Asianize” Christianity to create forms which are more at home in Asian cultures.<sup>12</sup> The new movements and institutions mentioned above are trying to inject an Asian ethos into theological “groups” or “movements” and are moving towards new approaches to theologizing and doing mission.

## **1.2 Evangelicals and Asia**

In the next section attention will turn from the Asian context of the selected writers to the specific nature of evangelicalism in Asia and their links with the wider movement of Evangelicalism. A particular interest will be in the nature of evangelical missiology and how global and Asian influences on missiology through congresses and networks shape the selected writers.

### **1.2.1 Global Evangelicals**

Definitions of evangelical

I cannot suppose we differ in our ideas of the Christian religion. You have given an excellent description of it. We only affix a different meaning to the term Evangelical.<sup>13</sup>

Jane Austen’s comments to her niece Fanny Knight, during a critical period of evangelical influence in the United Kingdom, are a reminder that the problem of defining the term evangelical, though a real and continuing issue, is not one of recent origin. Alistair McGrath<sup>14</sup> suggests that there are six controlling “convictions” which distinguish

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 747.

<sup>12</sup> Gittins describes this dual process. A. J. Gittins, “Beyond Liturgical Inculturation. Transforming the Deep Structures of Faith,” *Irish Theological Quarterly* 69 (2004): 47-53.

<sup>13</sup> P. Hughes-Hallett, *The Illustrated Letters of Jane Austen* (London: Collins 1990), 128.

<sup>14</sup> A. McGrath, *Evangelicalism and the Future of Christianity* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1988), 50-51.

evangelicals: an emphasis on the scriptures, perspectives on Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit as well as emphases on personal conversion, “the priority of evangelism for both individual Christians and the church as a whole” and “the importance of the Christian community for spiritual nourishment, fellowship and growth...” The importance of the Christian scriptures and Jesus Christ are common emphases.<sup>15</sup> McGrath’s convictions have significant points of overlap with the set of four categories developed by the British historian of evangelicalism, Bebbington<sup>16</sup> - “*conversionism*, the belief that lives need to be changed; *activism*, the expression of the gospel in effort; *biblicism*, a particular regard for the bible ... ; *crucicentrism*, a stress on the sacrifice of Christ on the cross.”<sup>17</sup> The Anglican evangelical Stott distinguishes the Trinitarian emphasis of “the authority of God in, and through, scripture; the majesty of Jesus Christ in, and through, the cross; and the Lordship of the Holy Spirit in, and through, his manifold ministries.”<sup>18</sup> This allows for a Trinitarian perspective. Such a scheme has the advantage that in the context of the non-western world where priorities may well be different it allows for a flexible starting-point of comparison.

### Global evangelicals

The historical roots of evangelicalism come from within Protestantism in a European and later a North American context. Christians within a range of Protestant churches identified with the emphases discussed above which led to the growth of associations and movements within Europe and later America.<sup>19</sup> From these centres evangelicalism has spread to other parts of the world through the various arms of the diverse missionary movement. It can be characterized as a polycentric and networked movement, and not controlled by any one organization or group. The Anglican theologian Ford believes that the networked character and global reach of evangelicalism mean that it can only be compared with Catholicism as a

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<sup>15</sup> E. Rommen, “Evangelical Theology,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of World Mission*, ed. S. Moreau. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000).

<sup>16</sup> D. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Routledge, 2002), 3.

<sup>17</sup> Bebbington’s language of ‘-isms’ rather than his categorisation has been a source of contention – “We may not particularly relish Dr Bebbington’s four rather esoteric ‘ism’ words!” J. Stott, *Evangelical Truth* (Leicester: IVP, 1999), 27.

<sup>18</sup> Stott notes that James Packer has proposed the ‘Lordship of the Holy Spirit’ in a set of categories similar to Bebbington. Stott, *Evangelical Truth*, 24-28.

<sup>19</sup> D. Bebbington, “Of this Train, England is the Engine: British Evangelicalism and Globalisation in the Long Nineteenth Century,” in *A Global Faith: Essays on Evangelicalism and Globalisation*, ed. M. Hutchinson (Sydney: Centre for the Study of Australian Christianity, 1998), 139-140.

global form of Christianity.<sup>20</sup> The work of Barrett<sup>21</sup> and his colleagues has played an important role in evidencing the extensive nature of evangelicalism giving recent figures of around 500 million adherents.<sup>22</sup>

### **1.2.2 Evangelical congresses and missiology**

One of the ways in which evangelicalism and evangelical missiology has been shaped is through the influence of a series of networks, congresses and conferences which have encouraged international participation. In 1946 the Evangelical Alliance in the UK and the equivalent body in the USA set in motion discussions that would lead to the founding of the World Evangelical Fellowship (WEF) in 1951.<sup>23</sup> The development of the International Federation of Evangelical Students (IFES)<sup>24</sup> as an international movement in 1947 was also an important step in the international spread of evangelicalism; this led to links between students and graduates in regions like Asia and across the world. Vinoth Ramachandra is a staff member with IFES in Asia and others like Hwa Yung have been involved and see this as an important movement for promoting reflection on Christian life in Asia. By their structures, these networks have encouraged the participation of indigenous movements in larger networks of a genuinely international nature and in different ways have encouraged evangelical interactions in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century.

These interactions were taking place against a wider background. In 1948, the World Council of Churches was formed. The International Missionary Council (IMC) was merged with the World Council of Churches (WCC) in 1961 and the councils of the former were linked to the WCC Commission on World Mission and Evangelism. This was an important transition. In the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the IMC was an organization with whom many

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<sup>20</sup> D. Ford, "Christian Wisdom for the New Millennium," in *Plurality, Power and Mission: Intercontextual Theological Explorations on the Role of Religion in the New Millennium*, eds. Philip L., Wickeri, Janice K. Wickeri and D.M. A. Niles (London: CWM, 2000), 111-134.

<sup>21</sup> D.B. Barrett, and T.M. Johnson, "Annual Statistical Table on Global Mission," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, 23 No 1 (Jan 1999): 24-25.

<sup>22</sup> Cited in Wickeri. Wickeri, P. L., Tizon Al and Hee Mo Yim, "A Survey of Evangelical Missiological Concerns with Particular Reference to Asia," in *The People of God among all God's Peoples: Frontiers in Christian Mission*, ed. Philip L. Wickeri, Hong Kong: CCA, 1999), 289.

<sup>23</sup> P. Das, "The Evangelical Movement in India: its Roots and Motivations 1793 – 1966, in *Pilgrimage 2100. A Self-Reflection on Indian Evangelicalism*, eds. Siga Arles and I. Ben Wati (Bangalore: Centre for Contemporary Christianity, 1995), 24. The WEF has recently become the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA).

<sup>24</sup> R.A. Fryling, "IFES movement" In *Evangelical Dictionary of World Mission*

Evangelicals who were part of Protestant denominations had sympathies. With the change to the WCC, there was less confidence in the latter organization's missional intentions.

In the 1960s there were conferences in Wheaton, U.S.A and Berlin, Germany which allowed evangelicals to focus on issues connected with the movement and evangelization. The most influential of the evangelical conferences in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century has been termed the Lausanne movement, following on from an initial congress at Lausanne, Switzerland in 1974.<sup>25</sup> Escobar charts the influences, from the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century onwards, which led to shared evangelical participation in these conferences as follows: the growth of evangelical movements and churches; a growing interest in scholarship which embraced missiology; the development of large-scale evangelistic projects; and the involvement of "volunteer" organizations which gave a diffuse character to evangelicalism.<sup>26</sup>

#### The Lausanne congress 1974

The Lausanne 1974 congress is often seen as a watershed in Evangelical theology. The Anglican historian of mission, Timothy Yates comments on Lausanne that it evidenced "a maturity of judgements which bears comparison with 1910 [Edinburgh]."<sup>27</sup> Part of the importance of Lausanne was the way in which it embraced members of the church from around the world, continuing a trend started earlier in the century but going beyond it.<sup>28</sup>

In a survey of evangelical theology of mission of this period, Glasser emphasizes the trinitarian basis of evangelical missiology, the revelation of God in the scriptures, the importance of Christ as saviour, and the central place of the Holy Spirit in initiating the activity of mission and empowering Christian believers. The priority for mission is "world evangelization and church growth" within an understanding of the nature of human beings as alienated from God. Mission leads to a calling of Christians into the church, a universal body which will exist in local communities.<sup>29</sup> Glasser affirms that Christians are to be involved in their local communities and societies, promoting just and ethical ways of living,

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<sup>25</sup> See Jacob Thomas for an Asian assessment of this movement. J. Thomas, *From Lausanne to Manila: Evangelical Social Thought: Models of Mission and the Social Relevance of the Gospel* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2003).

<sup>26</sup> S. Escobar, "Missionary Dynamism in Search of Missiological Discernment: an Evangelical Perspective on Mission," *Evangelical Review of Theology* 23 No.1. (1999): 71-73.

<sup>27</sup> T.E. Yates, *Christian Mission in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 200.

<sup>28</sup> See H.R. Weber, *Asia and the Ecumenical Movement 1895-1961* (London: SCM), 36-38, 131-132, 182-185.

<sup>29</sup> A. Glasser and D. MacGavran. eds. *Contemporary Theologies of Mission*. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983, 100-105).

and while he recognizes that an emphasis on the growth of the church is not to take away from this, he is clear that the priority of evangelization remains as the goal of mission.

The statement emerging from the Lausanne congress, the Lausanne covenant, affirmed the trinitarian dimensions of Christian mission, whilst attempting to strive for greater balance between the engagement in society in terms of evangelization and social responsibility. It encouraged evangelicals to take greater account of the particularities of different social contexts, and recognized the failings of evangelical missions down through the years. Looking back at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Escobar affirms the gains of the Lausanne congress. He recognizes the more wholistic understanding of mission, allowing that this takes place in the context of an affirmation of evangelization as a major aspect of mission; he affirms the insights about the contextual nature of mission and the need to relate mission to different societies and to patterns of spirituality and leadership; he acknowledges too a greater awareness of the global dimensions of mission in terms of involvement of Christians from the two thirds world and the need for co-operation in mission from the west and two thirds world in terms of Christian denominations and networks.<sup>30</sup> The Lausanne movement gained insight in these matters, in part, through the contribution of two thirds world participants.

#### Lausanne as a gateway for change

There were positive dimensions of the conferences at Lausanne and Manila for non-western theologians. As well as being a more international forum for evangelicalism, Lausanne allowed the agenda of mission to be broadened to include a wider and more integrated agenda which included social action. The rationale for this seemed to come in part from the non-western theologians, especially those from Latin America. Samuel talks of how Latin American theologians had to really push to have issues connected to society to be on the evangelical agenda.<sup>31</sup> This can be seen in their discussions on these themes in the Lausanne congress and their contributions afterward in the area of radical discipleship.<sup>32</sup> In his assessment of Lausanne, Wickeri points to the more radical spirit of Lausanne in Asia. Vinay

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<sup>30</sup> Escobar, "Missionary Dynamism," 72-75.

<sup>31</sup> V. Samuel and C. Sugden, "Dialogue with Other Religions – an Evangelical View," in *Sharing Jesus in the Two Thirds World*, ed. V. Samuel and Chris Sugden (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 190-197.

<sup>32</sup> See C. Sugden, *Radical Discipleship* (Basingstoke: Marshalls, 1981) and R. Padilla, *Mission between the Times* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985).

Samuel would be an example of a theologian who shares this outlook.<sup>33</sup> Despite this, the Asian branch of the Lausanne movement has generally published materials on themes connected with more traditional evangelization approaches of the church.

Escobar summarizes the contribution of the Lausanne movement saying that “we had a clear demonstration that at grassroots level, across the world, significant progress has been made in the practice of mission following the agenda of Lausanne I.”<sup>34</sup> He cites the involvement of two thirds world voices and practitioners of wholistic forms of mission. His continuing concern would be the failure to allow new movements to have adequate independence from the packages developed in the west.

There has been concern, in the two thirds world, that the world movement has shifted from the more wholistic agenda initially agreed and that the evangelism conference at Pattaya in 1980 was trying to turn away from a healthy emphasis of a broadly conceived agenda for evangelization, which saw wholistic elements as integral, to a more narrow one.<sup>35</sup> The Lausanne II conference at Manila 1989 has also attracted criticism, especially from non-western writers including Vinay Samuel. Despite the fact that Lausanne encouraged a broad spectrum of opinions, and Manila was very diverse, there was still concern that there would be “an ideological strait-jacket” at the conference.<sup>36</sup> Escobar describes the 1989 participants as follows: “they detected a mood of retreat from the territory gained in 1974 to narrower and “safer” positions... and a tendency to use Lausanne II as a marketing launch for missionary packages devised in North America.”<sup>37</sup> Although some Asians felt that this fear was not entirely grounded, there was still a concern that the insights contributed by two thirds world participants were being overlooked.

This suggests that global evangelicalism still exhibits a deep-seated tension between its global character and its Anglo-Saxon roots. The Lausanne congress sparked a good deal of positive co-operation between Evangelical groups but tensions remain. A rethinking of evangelicalism is now taking place, and non-western theologians are at the forefront of

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<sup>33</sup> P.L. Wickeri, Al Tizon and Hee Mo Yim, “A Survey of Evangelical Missiological Concerns with Particular Reference to Asia,” in *The People of God among all God's Peoples: Frontiers in Christian Mission*, ed. Philip L. Wickeri (Hong Kong: CCA), 299-300.

<sup>34</sup> S. Escobar, “Global Scenario at the Turn of the Century,” in *Global Missiology for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: the Iguassu dialogue*, ed W. Taylor (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2000), 44-45.

<sup>35</sup> K. Bediako, “World Evangelisation, Institutional Evangelicalism and the Future of Christian world mission,” in V. Samuel and A. Hauser, *Proclaiming Christ in God's Way* (Oxford: Regnum, 1989), 55-64.

<sup>36</sup> V. Samuel and C. Sugden, “Lambeth, San Antonio and Manila – Three World Gatherings on Mission,” *EFAC Bulletin* Issue 39 (Advent 1995): 3-4.

<sup>37</sup> S. Escobar, “Evangelical Missiology: Peering into the Future,” 106.

creativity in this movement, but they have to shout to be adequately heard. This study, through exploring the selected writers' approach to missiology, aims to make space to allow these key voices to be heard.

### **1.2.3 Non-western evangelicalism**

Part of the tension experienced by non-western evangelicals is that the scale of their participation in global Christianity is not fully appreciated. Evangelicalism is one of the largest and most dynamic sections of the church in the contemporary world, but it is not always recognised as such.<sup>38</sup> Writing from the context of Latin America, Freston suggests reasons for this. He feels that Western scholars tend to focus their assessment of evangelicalism on North American or European activities and overlook what is happening in non-western contexts.<sup>39</sup> The historian Lewis comments that many western researchers are "genuinely surprised" to realise that evangelicalism has made significant progress in non-western areas.<sup>40</sup> Lewis quotes Marty who suggests that "evangelicalism is the characteristic protestant way of relating to modernity" and suggests further that in this light "the study of evangelicalism's development in the non-western world becomes all the more important, for as the non-western world encounters 'modernity' evangelicalism's influence may well grow and expand."<sup>41</sup>

The German historian Koschorke has remarked that the "shift of centres" of Christianity is an oft-repeated theme in terms of the modern study of Christianity.<sup>42</sup> Using collections of historical documents, he aims to show that "the polycentric character of Christianity," as a faith that moved to different centres, is not just true in the modern world but that it has been a recurring feature down through history.

Lewis' compendium summarizes evangelicalism's North Atlantic identity in the wake of the reformation but points to how this has moved out in a "polycentric" way:

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<sup>38</sup> Wickeri, "A Survey of Evangelical Missiological Concerns with Particular Reference to Asia," 289.

<sup>39</sup> Freston, "Globalisation, Religion and Evangelical Christianity," 3-6. He gives the example of the British anthropologist, Coleman's perception of the Swedish Word of Life church with some 2000 members as a large church; this would not be judged large by Brazilian standards. The same would be true compared to Cho Yeong Ki's church in Seoul.

<sup>40</sup> D. Lewis, "Introduction," In *Christianity Reborn: the Global Expansion of Evangelicalism in the Twentieth Century*, ed. D. M Lewis (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, MI, 2004), 2.

<sup>41</sup> Lewis, "Introduction," 2.

<sup>42</sup> K.F. Koschorke, "The Polycentric Nature of World Christianity: Documentary evidence, 1450-1990." Unpublished Seminar at New College, University of Edinburgh. Tuesday 21st March 2006.

There is of course, no single “evangelicalism” but a multiplicity of evangelicalisms, and the articles in this volume demonstrate how difficult it is to establish a unified field of vision for such an amorphous movement. ... this work illustrates how amazingly diverse this expression of traditional Christianity became as it moved out of its North Atlantic context and became indigenized in the bewildering array of cultures ... and ethnic groups which it encountered in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.<sup>43</sup>

It is in non-western contexts that evangelicalism is thriving. Freston points out that countries like Brazil and Nigeria have huge populations of evangelicals. Brazil represents “the world’s second largest community of practising Protestants” and includes many evangelicals.<sup>44</sup> The focus of evangelical mission is shifting from “north” to “south” alongside the shift of the centre of gravity of Christianity. This is true in Asia as well. When it comes to the individual countries of Asia it is clear that huge sections of the church in places like China share an affinity with evangelicalism. Wickeri observes that in China the “overwhelming majority ... regard themselves as evangelical.”<sup>45</sup> In Korea, too, many members of Protestant churches would consider themselves to be evangelical. In the countries of South-East Asia, evangelical churches are continuing to grow and evangelical identity is affirmed.<sup>46</sup>

In his review of a recent dictionary of evangelicalism, Gerald Anderson wonders about the lack of interest in describing the contribution of evangelicals from “Europe, Asia, Africa and Latin America who have made a significant contribution” to evangelicalism. He notes that despite its western and Atlantic roots “to its great credit” evangelicalism had moved beyond its “traditional Anglo-Saxon base.”<sup>47</sup> The statistical scale of evangelicalism makes it important for Asian evangelicals to develop a role and a voice in today’s world.

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid, 3.

<sup>44</sup> P. Freston, “Contours of Latin American Pentecostalism,” In *Christianity Reborn: the Global Expansion of Evangelicalism in the Twentieth Century*, ed. D. M Lewis (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, MI, 2004), 221.

<sup>45</sup> Wickeri, “A Survey of Evangelical Missiological Concerns,” 291-302.

<sup>46</sup> In some places, like Latin American and Malaysia, Pentecostal churches are growing even faster than Evangelical churches, where the two are distinguished as different forms of Protestantism.

<sup>47</sup> G. Anderson, Review of *Biographical dictionary of Evangelicals* edited by Timothy Larsen, *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 28 No. 1 (Jan 2000): 38.

### **1.2.4 Evangelicalism in Asia – its emergence and presence**

The coming of Christianity to Asia has been represented by diverse strands down through the ages. Historians like Moffett<sup>48</sup> emphasize that the roots of Asian churches were formed during the first millennium from the Middle East rather than from Medieval Europe. These early churches and missions include groups like the St. Thomas Christians<sup>49</sup> and Nestorian Christians.<sup>50</sup> Following those efforts came the era of Catholic missions associated with the expansion of the European nations to Asia. The Portuguese were in the vanguard of these missional interactions with Asia, in areas like India and Sri Lanka. Spanish representatives of the Catholic church made serious efforts to evangelize the area of the Philippines.

Protestant interactions with Asia came through the chaplains of the Dutch East India Company and the East India Company.<sup>51</sup> These efforts were circumscribed by the limitations placed upon chaplains by the trading companies who were sensitive to any upheaval that religious matters could cause in their trading areas. More significant in terms of a lasting impact was the arrival of the German missionaries Ziegenbalg and Plutschau in the Indian town of Tranquebar in 1706. The coming of the Danish-Halle mission saw Evangelical representation within Protestantism forms of which was to allow contact with the local population not mediated through a trading company and concerned merely for the colonial traders and officers themselves. As a result of their efforts an Asian church came into being which reflected Evangelical concern about the word of God preached and a response of conversion to the message of the gospel. There was an interest in literacy and an Indian ministry so that the church could be self-determining. These characteristics reflect the fact that Evangelicalism in Asia was to be given space to form its own Asian identity in the 18<sup>th</sup> century a process that was to continue into the 19<sup>th</sup> century and beyond.

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<sup>48</sup> S.H. Moffett, *A History of Christianity in Asia. Vol1 Beginnings to 1550* (N.Y.:Orbis, 2001). See also J.England, *The Hidden History of Christianity in Asia: Churches of the East before the year 1500* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1996).

<sup>49</sup> P. Geevarghese "India, Early Christianity," in S. W. Sunquist, ed. *A Dictionary of Asian Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmanns, 2004).

<sup>50</sup> Scott W. Sunquist and the China Group, "Nestorian church," in S. W. Sunquist, ed. *A Dictionary of Asian Christianity*. Moffett, *A History of Christianity in Asia. Vol.2 1500 to 1900* (N.Y.:Orbis, 2005), 106-108.

<sup>51</sup> Neill, *A History of Christian Missions* (London: Penguin Books, 1984), 222 and 232ff.

The “19<sup>th</sup> century,” stretching from 1792 to 1910, was the period in which evangelical Christianity began to see its sphere of influence embrace the whole globe.<sup>52</sup> The formation of further Asian Protestant churches in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was influenced by the significant number of evangelicals who formed part of the western missionary movements. In an article assessing the evangelical movement in India, Pradip Das suggests a framework with three periods: the first period focuses on the coming of Protestant missions with their evangelical components; the second period covers the series of ecumenical developments over the 19<sup>th</sup> century through the second half of the twentieth century which includes the Edinburgh 1910 conference and the founding of the IMC in 1921<sup>53</sup>; the third period is that following the World War II.<sup>54</sup>

Overall the 20<sup>th</sup> century was one of definition and consolidation of Asian evangelicals. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, they put more emphasis on their Asian and Protestant identity and less emphasis on evangelical identity, a pattern which continued through World War II.<sup>55</sup> But during the period after World War II this emphasis had changed. Evangelical agencies began to emerge which started to form global alliances such as the WEA and the IFES movements. Individually and as churches Asian evangelicals began to identify themselves more as evangelicals. Within mainstream contemporary churches there are now many individuals who would describe themselves as evangelical.

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, national movements started to form in Asia. The historian Pierard indicates that this process of missionary councils, shifting to national Christian councils and finally councils of churches was a wider process, which accelerated following the post-World War II era.<sup>56</sup> In India, following on from the IMC, with a visit from John R. Mott in 1912, the National Missionary Council was formed which functioned as a missionary council

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<sup>52</sup> M.A. Noll, “Evangelical Identity, Power and Culture in the Great Nineteenth Century,” in *Christianity Reborn: the Global Expansion of Evangelicalism in the Twentieth Century*, ed. D. M. Lewis (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, MI, 2004), 31.

<sup>53</sup> Das, “The Evangelical movement in India,” 22. Das points to the founding of the Evangelical Alliance in London in 1846 as an important development within the context of “ecumenical developments.”

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid*, 19-24.

<sup>55</sup> The IMC was a network which harnessed evangelical interests in mission and outreach; its demise and the rise of the WCC, may have encouraged evangelicals to identify their distinctive interests in mission and evangelization.

<sup>56</sup> R.V. Pierard, “Viewing Denominational histories in Global Terms,” in *A Global Faith: Essays on Evangelicalism and Globalisation*, ed. M. Hutchinson (Sydney: Centre for the Study of Australian Christianity, 1998), 144-145. He gives the examples of China, with an Edinburgh continuation committee, then a National Christian conference in 1922. A National Christian Council was formed in Japan in 1922.

until 1923 when it changed to become the National Christian Council of India.<sup>57</sup>

Evangelicals in the Indian context saw the importance of joining together to confirm their evangelical identity and resources. The formation of an association in 1951 encouraged “commitment to an evangelical basis of faith, fundamentals that needed to be conserved and passed on, priority of sharing the gospel inviting people to a personal faith in Christ and a passionate desire to pray for the revival of the church.”<sup>58</sup> This united people in the Evangelical Fellowship of India (EFI). Vinay Samuel notes that this movement had many representatives from the Church of South India and the Mar Thoma church.<sup>59</sup>

In the Philippines, American missionary agencies had taken the initiative with an Evangelical Union created in 1901 for the purposes of “comity, unity and cooperation.”<sup>60</sup> A visit from John R. Mott to the Philippines led to the formation of the National Christian council in 1929 where leadership was in Filipino hands. More recently the Philippine Council of Evangelical Churches seeks to promote cooperation between Evangelicals and to maintain links with the wider world. The National Evangelical Christian Fellowship (NECF) Malaysia seeks to perform a similar role in Malaysia.

#### Asian evangelical congresses and networks

Evidence for increasing Asian agency in relation to mission and evangelism within the evangelical movement can be seen in the conferences which have taken place since the late 1960s. The Asia-South Pacific congress on evangelism, held in Singapore, in 1968 was an event which would show Asian leaders playing a key role in the evangelization of Asia. This was just two years after the congress in Berlin (1966) and was to be followed by new networks in mission and theology. One of the concrete outcomes of the 1968 conference was the formation of the Asian Theological Association (ATA), aimed at encouraging theological education and training within evangelicalism.<sup>61</sup> The Asian Missions Association (AMA) met in Seoul in September 1973 with 25 Asian representatives from 14 nations. Its

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<sup>57</sup> Das, “The Evangelical Movement in India,” 23.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid, 24-26.

<sup>59</sup> V. Samuel, “Evangelical Societies and the Church in India,” *International Review of Mission* 81 (July 1992): 383-384.

<sup>60</sup> T. Valentino Sitoy Jr. “Evangelical Union of the Philippines,” in Sunquist *A Dictionary of Asian Christianity*. This movement was replaced with a new organization called the Philippine Fellowship of Evangelical Churches in 1938.

<sup>61</sup> It held consultations on specific themes during the 1970s and early 1980s contributing to an evangelical understanding of issues in Asia. See K. Gnanakan, ed. *Biblical theology in Asia* (Bangalore: Theological Book Trust, 1995).

second conference produced a declaration on mission “The Seoul Declaration on Christian mission.”<sup>62</sup>

The Lausanne movement held a conference in 1970 which dealt with Asia, as part of a policy of trying to follow on from the original congress in different parts of the world.<sup>63</sup> The first of those conferences assessed the growth of movements in Asia like the Asian Theological Association (ATA), and the Asian Missions’ Association (AMA), and outlined some of the issues which face the church in Asia. These included the social context in terms of economics and justice, the problem of religious freedom and the suffering experienced by the church in Asia. At the level of theological reflection, the International Federation of Evangelical Missionary Theologians (INFEMTI) has allowed a forum for Asians to share in wider discussions on mission and to reflect on issues of interest to Asia through its Asian wing Partnership for Mission – Asia (PIM-Asia).<sup>64</sup> Samuel has been involved in this movement as general secretary.

### Asian missions and missionary movements

The rise of missionary movements from within Asia and Asian evangelicalism can be seen as part of the process of the emancipation of the Asian church: this process dates back to the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and not just the late 1950s or 1970s. There have been several missionary congresses which have had a clearly Asian origin and character and which show the scale of missionary movements in Asia and their relative independence within global Evangelicalism. In the 1970s, the AMA consultations had a self-consciously Asian dynamic.<sup>65</sup> The Asian Missions Congresses held in the 1990s have allowed for discussion of Asian issues in mission with practitioners from Asia.<sup>66</sup>

The first Asian Mission’s Congress (AMC) was partly encouraged by the support of the Evangelical Fellowship of Asia (EFA) (1983), which emerged from within the WEF

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<sup>62</sup> See Asian Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, *Together obeying Christ for Asia’s Harvest* (Singapore: ALCWE, 1978), 59-60.

<sup>63</sup> Wickeri notes “the formation of regionally-based continuation committees all over the world.” Wickeri, “A Survey of Evangelical Missiological Concerns,” 301.

<sup>64</sup> Hwa and Maggay have been involved in this movement and participated in wider discussions relating to issues in Asia.

<sup>65</sup> D. Cho, *New Forces in Missions: the Official Report of the Asian Missions Association* (Seoul: East-West Centre for Missions Research and Development, 1976), 33. There was a conscious decision to limit the involvement of western observers.

<sup>66</sup> Asia Missions Congress, *World Missions the Asian Challenge* (N.p.: AMC, 1990). Asia Missions Congress, eds. M. Castillo and Katie Sisco, *Into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Asian Churches in Mission. A Compendium of the Asia Missions Congress II* (N.p.: EFA, 1998). There was less sensitivity about western participation by this point.

movement and was to give representation in Asian countries. What marked this congress was the degree of participation with a 1,302 delegates and the strong sense of Asian leadership in missions. There was a biographical dimension to the conference with delegates reflecting on issues from a personal perspective as Asian participants. By the second Asian Mission's Congress (AMC II), there had been a growth of national missionary movements within Asia that reflects a growing agency within Asian missions.<sup>67</sup>

Christian agency in Asia is clearly seen in the rise of Asian missionary movements.<sup>68</sup> A work by James Wong in the 1970s showed the extent to which the Asian church had been active in missions.<sup>69</sup> Missionary activity has continued in Asia from the late nineteenth century, with particular strides being taken in the post World War II era. These movements have deep roots. Indigenous missions received early encouragement in India in 1884, with the founding of the Methodist Conference of South India which wanted to engage in work in Malaysia with William Oldham going there in 1885. The Indian Missionary Society was founded in 1903 with input from V.S. Azariah.<sup>70</sup> India has a growing number of missionaries working cross-culturally within India, states like Mizoram within India making their own unique contribution since the 1920s.<sup>71</sup> Korea missions<sup>72</sup> and diaspora activities date back to 1907 through the 1930s and 1950s and on to the present day.<sup>73</sup> The Philippines,<sup>74</sup> and even the People's Republic of China<sup>75</sup> are associated with growing missionary movements which are beginning to describe their histories, their theologies, missiologies and their aspirations for the future.<sup>76</sup> In the post-World War era indigenous

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<sup>67</sup> M. Castillo, "Developing National Mission Movements," in *Into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Asian Churches in Mission. A Compendium of the Asia Missions Congress II*, eds. M. Castillo and Katie Sisco (N.p.: EFA, 1998), 80-83.

<sup>68</sup> Rajendran, *Which Way Forward Indian Missions?* 54.

<sup>69</sup> M. L. Nelson, *The How and Why of Third World Mission: An Asian Case Study* (South Pasadena, CA: William Carey, 1976). J.Y.K. Wong et al., *Missions from the Third World: A World Survey of Non-Western Missions in Asia, Africa and Latin America* (Singapore: Church Growth Study Centre, 1973).

<sup>70</sup> J. Wong et al., *Missions from the Third World: A World Survey of Non-Western Missions in Asia, Africa and Latin America*, (Singapore: Church Growth Study Centre, 1973), 65-66.

<sup>71</sup> S. Nengzakhup, *Amazing Mizo Missions*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Bangalore: SAIACS Press, 2000).

<sup>72</sup> T. Park, *A Two-Thirds World Mission on the Move*, Unpublished PhD Thesis. Fuller School of World Mission, 1991.

<sup>73</sup> S. Moon, "Acts of Korean: a research report on Korean missionary movement," Unpublished paper, CSCA, March 2003.

<sup>74</sup> Luis Pantoja, Sadiri Joy Tira and Enoch Wan eds., *Scattered: the Filipino Global Presence* (Manila: Life Change, 2004).

<sup>75</sup> P. Hattaway, *Back to Jerusalem: Called to Complete the Great Commission* (Carlisle: Piquant, 2003).

<sup>76</sup> The Chinese diaspora is less studied but see Wan Chee Wan, "Indigenous Missions Movement in Singapore," Unpublished paper, 2005.

missions have grown significantly.<sup>77</sup> The networked character of evangelicalism can be seen from these organizations and fellowships in Asia. Asian Christians who are part of mainline denominations and independent ones have chosen to form associations to promote Christian endeavour. Although there are still concerns raised about the links between Asia and international evangelicalism, Asian evangelicals are clear that their own organizations in Asia are led by Asians who can engage independently with the issues that confront the Asian church.<sup>78</sup>

### **Conclusion**

The result of all this change and development is that, in the sectors that identify with evangelicalism, the emerging church in Asia is seeking new understandings of mission. Through exploring the writings of five prominent and published evangelicals this study shows that evangelicalism is at a stage where it is ready to develop a theology and missiology commensurate with its growing influence in Asia. The selected writers belong to, emerge from, and are shaping evangelical churches and movements within Asia. While Christianity has deep roots in Asia, these churches were founded over the period from the 1800s onwards and current movements represent a process of mission originating in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

This study looks at the ways in which missiology is shaped and moulded by Asian settings and the global forces which impact Asia. These influence the formation of a religious identity for the church in Asia which is shaped between the dynamics of the global and the local. What is innovative in the new writing emerging from Asia, as in the work of the five selected writers, is their appreciation of the contemporary pressures of the global. They recognize the importance of negotiating identity. The Asian church needs a missiology that will support its mission in Asia giving it an authentic Asian identity as a church which will help it do mission. The selected writers recognize that missiology in Asia needs to take account of this new global context and at a local level takes account of contextual theology. However, they do not only deal with a narrow issue-centred theology, but they are finding ways of relating theology to wider contexts in Asia – recognizing that the contemporary Asian setting is profoundly shaped by global forces as well as by its long and varied history.

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<sup>77</sup> K. Rajendran, *Which Way Forward Indian Missions?* (Bangalore: SAIACS Press, 2000), 55-64.

<sup>78</sup> V. Samuel, and C. Sugden, "Mission Agencies as Multinational Corporations," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 7 No.3 (Oct 1983): 152-155.

## CHAPTER 2

### Constraints for Mission in the Multi-religious Settings of Asia

#### 2.1 Globalisation, religions and Asia

In the contemporary world, global religions, rather than diminishing in influence, are taking on a more significant role. The concept of religious resurgence describes what has been happening within Asian societies at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>1</sup> The Malaysian Tan Kang San, describes the situation in Asia as follows:

Asia is undergoing tremendous challenges: the challenge of economic and social interdependence that comes with globalization; the challenge of religious resurgence among Asian traditional religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, and Chinese and Japanese religions; the growth of Islam and Islamization in Southeast Asia ...<sup>2</sup>

Non-western writers are urging a clearer appreciation of religious diversity and a better understanding of global faiths. The African theologian Kwame Bediako has suggested that through mission Christianity has become a non-western religion in Africa.<sup>3</sup> This allows people in the non-western world to respond to the gospel in their own way and in terms of their own agenda, provided that non-western Christians are afforded a sufficient degree of freedom to express their point of view within the global Christian community.

The relationship between Christian mission and religious traditions of the world, especially the other global faiths, is receiving increasing attention within evangelicalism. Again, writing from the context of the Malaysian church, Tan Kang San argues that:

... we need to accept the reality that our modern world demands deeper engagements with both secular and other religious belief systems... The challenge of raising a new generation of scholars in Islam, Buddhism and Hinduism is an urgent task within the evangelizing church in a multicultural setting.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ng Kam Weng, Interview by Warren R. Beattie, 20<sup>th</sup> June 2002, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

<sup>2</sup> Tan Kang San, "Evangelical Missiology from an East Asian Perspective: a Study on Christian Encounter with People of Other Faiths," in *Global Missiology for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. The Iguassu Dialogue*, ed. W. Taylor (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2000), 302-303.

<sup>3</sup> K. Bediako, "The Gospel and the Transformation of the Non-Western World," in *Anglican Life and Witness: a Reader for the Lambeth Conference of Anglican Bishops 1998*, eds. Samuel and Sugden, (London: SPCK, 1997), 168-172.

<sup>4</sup> Tan Kang San, "Globalization and the Church: Challenges to Evangelization and Discipleship," Conference speech delivered in Malaysia, February 2002, 8-9.

This emphasizes the need to understand the resurgent religions and to adapt current approaches to engagement in mission.

This chapter will look briefly at the multi-religious setting of Asia and the contours of the other faiths which have always surrounded Christianity. It will point to the fact that this context of religious diversity has been a feature of Asia down through history and remains so today. In the light of these changing religious influences, this chapter will deal with three issues. Firstly: the religious diversity which exists in Asia, and how majority religions such as Hinduism in India and Islam in Malaysia relate and often co-exist with minority faiths. This religious diversity will be related to issues of pluralism and its implications for Christians in Asia. Asia is a plural continent. Asian Christians and evangelicals have to face this reality, which allows certain freedoms and, at times, significant limitations. Secondly: the relationship of Christians to the state will be examined in terms of the constraints imposed by the Hindu influences on Indian society and the Islamic influences in relation to Malaysia. Given this religious diversity and its pressures, evangelicals have sought to create “space for mission”. This will lead to a reflection on power and Christians, including its relevance for evangelicals in Asia. Thirdly: this chapter will conclude by considering how evangelicals in Asia need to construct contextual forms of missiology and the importance of developing a credible Asian Christian identity.

Given this significant religious diversity within the countries from which the selected writers emerge, this chapter will start with a survey of these within Asia.

## **2.2 Religions in Asia and religious constraints**

### ***2.2.1 Religious diversity in Asia***

#### Hinduism in India

Writers on India point out the difficulties of terminology and concepts in relation to Hinduism, which is grudgingly accepted as a suitable designation. The term itself, in English, is of relatively modern origin being used from the time of British and European assessments of religion in India. Weightman describes Hinduism as a concept used to relate to the collective beliefs of the hundreds of millions of Indian people. Common themes include “sacred geography” in relation to India, writings and associated mythology and

activities like ritual and pilgrimage.<sup>5</sup> It is possible to think of Hinduism as “an evolving religious tradition.”<sup>6</sup> Village culture and the immense number of villages throughout India have had an impact on the diversity of Hinduism as have the pilgrimage sites throughout India where Hinduism is flourishing. Pilgrimage sites connect it strongly to the land of India in that they “reinforce the sanctity of the sacred geography of India to which Hinduism is so closely tied...”<sup>7</sup>

Some writers consider that Hindu identity was in part a reaction against the colonial period in India, for the development of Neo-Hinduism as a force for social change was influenced by Ram Mohan Roy and the development of the Brahma Samaj movement in 1828.

Frykenberg notes that there was a shift from the organizations of the 1820s onwards with more aggressive movements forming into the late 19<sup>th</sup> century right through to the emergence of Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>8</sup> This reaction against the past and outside forces still seems to influence a significant part of the political landscape in modern India.<sup>9</sup> Though Hinduism remains the majority religion in India the rise of other religions continued to influence the Indian sub-continent: these included Buddhism and Jainism, Christianity, Islam, and, from the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Sikhism. The encounters with these religions shaped Hinduism as it responded in its complex diversity to the challenge of competing belief systems.

### Islam in Malaysia

Scholars of Islam stress that the Islamization of South East Asia came through trading contacts rather than military force and took place over a long period of time. The Indian ocean was an important trading route for the region and Muslim sailors and traders were active in ports, harbours and “settlements” along the coasts of South East Asia, resulting in an Islamic presence. Later Islamic communities were formed and this resulted in the emergence of ports like Pasai with a sultanate by the 13<sup>th</sup> century. By the time of the Portuguese capture of Malacca in 1511, there had been a more general Islamization of the region. Malacca appears to have become Muslim around 1400 and its influence, because of

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<sup>5</sup> S. Weightman, “Hinduism,” in *The New Penguin Handbook of Living Religions* ed. John R. Hinnells (London: Penguin books, 1997), 261.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Weightman, “Hinduism,” 290.

<sup>8</sup> R.E. Frykenberg, “Gospel, Globalization, and Hindutva: The Politics of Conversion in India,” in *Christianity Reborn: the Global Expansion of Evangelicalism in the Twentieth century*, ed. Donald M. Lewis (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, MI, 2004), 108-114.

<sup>9</sup> Gavin Flood, “Indian religions and the Hindu tradition,” in *Cambridge Illustrated History of Religion* ed. J. Bowker (Cambridge: CUP, 2002), 48.

its strategic position, spread along the coast through “dependencies.”<sup>10</sup> Other coastal regions may have functioned as centres of Islam in a similar way – ports like Aceh, Surabaya and Makassar and later areas like the Moluccas and the southern Philippines. It has been recognized that Islam in South East Asia acquired a distinctive local character as a result of local cultures mixing with Islamic (especially Sufi) elements yet maintaining a firmly Islamic character.<sup>11</sup>

The coming of the United Dutch East India Company and the increasing contact with European peoples had an impact on the power structures of South East Asia. The advent of Christianity interacted with a process of reform which was being carried on within Islam in this period, with other influences coming from the Middle East. The 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century saw a number of reform movements within Islam. Although these affected Indonesia more than the Malayan peninsula, a renewal of interest in the teachings of Islam and a renewed emphasis on Islamic education were to be influential in the shaping of Malay identity. The desire to be different from the colonial powers was more coherent in Indonesia than in the Malayan peninsula, though offshoots of Indonesian movements were found there too, in part reflecting a reaction against Christianity. Islamic communities formed political parties and alliances to address this issue in the context of growing national strength. This was to provide a foundation for Islamic reaction and rebuilding with the disintegration of colonial influence at the end of World War II.

The current percentage of those espousing Islam in Malaysia is around 58% of the population. This means that over 40% of Malaysia opt for other religions, with some 26% following Chinese religions, 8% Christianity and around 7% Hinduism.

### Christianity and Islam in the Philippines

Although Islamic expansion tends to be historically continuous in regions where it takes root, there are exceptions: the Philippines offers an Asian example of this in Asia as does Spain in the West.<sup>12</sup> From its areas of strength in the southern Philippines, Islam had penetrated to the north of the country, but nowadays the majority of the country is Christian with pockets of Islam in the southern areas like Mindanao. The coming of Islam to the

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<sup>10</sup> A. J. Johns, “Islam: Islam in Southeast Asia,” in *The Encyclopedia of Religion* 16 vols., ed. Mircea Eliade (N.Y.: Macmillan, 1987), 407-409. Johns, “Islam,” 407-408.

<sup>11</sup> Penelope Johnston, “Islam,” in *Cambridge Illustrated History of Religion*, ed. J. Bowker (Cambridge: CUP, 2002), 291-292.

<sup>12</sup> A.T. Welch, “Islam,” in *The New Penguin Handbook of Living Religions*, ed. John R. Hinnells, (London: Penguin books, 1997), 167-168.

Philippines took place in the wider context of the trade and contact with neighbouring countries. By the 13<sup>th</sup> century the trade had expanded from Malacca and other key ports in the Malayan peninsula to extend to Java and the Molucca islands. There is evidence that Arab traders reached Sulu in the Philippines in the late 13<sup>th</sup> and early 14<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>13</sup> It would appear that Islam spread from Sulu to Mindanao by the 16<sup>th</sup> century and later spread north through the islands by the period of the Spanish arrival. The process of Islamization appears to have taken place gradually as merchants and traders gained a role and acceptance in society.<sup>14</sup>

The coming of Christianity brought a major shift of allegiance in the Philippines. Tensions still exist between the two communities. In the early 1980s, Peter Gowing lamented the lack of peace in the southern Philippines and the need for three different groups, the government, “the Muslim rebels” and “the Marxists” to set out a common agenda for peace and progress.<sup>15</sup>

### Religion in Asia and pluralism

In all three countries under consideration there has been tension between the Christian community and another major religion. In India and Malaysia, the issue of religious identity has been complicated by the presence of colonial occupation and even in the 20<sup>th</sup> century religious and ethnic identity continue to be issues connected with national identity and have impacted religious movements which have had political overtones. In the Philippines, the minority of Islamic people have struggled with their ethnic and national identity in a different way. Given the modern context of religious resurgence these factors put pressure on Christians, including evangelicals in Asia. There are feelings of negativity towards Christianity in relation to its colonial past. This ill-feeling, coupled with the minority status which Christianity experiences in India and Malaysia, can lead to limitations for Christian participation in these countries and this is an issue dealt with by the selected writers.

The religious map of Asia is neither monolithic nor fixed. Although there are countries like India, Malaysia and the Philippines where one major religion has come to have an enormous impact on the country, there have been encounters between different faiths and changes of

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<sup>13</sup> Oscar Evangelista, “Some Aspects of the History of Islam in Southeast Asia,” in *Understanding Islam and Muslims in the Philippine*, ed. Peter Gowing (Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1988), 17-22.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, 21-23.

<sup>15</sup> P. Gowing, “Contrasting Agendas for Peace in the Muslim South,” in *Understanding Islam and Muslims in the Philippine*, ed Peter Gowing (Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1988), 157-158.

religious allegiance down through history. A diachronic view of one limited context, using an area lying outside the main focus of this study, illustrates this point Moonjang Lee describes the historical process of religious transmission in Korea as follows. Korean folk belief was heavily influenced by shamanistic cosmology. From the time of the Shilla kingdom till the end of the Yi dynasty, Confucianism was central for education and became the “state teaching” of the Yi dynasty.<sup>16</sup> Shamanistic beliefs and Buddhism continued to be followed by some of the population during the Yi and Choson periods. The 18<sup>th</sup> century saw a significant Catholic presence, followed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century by Protestantism. This shifting pattern in Korea is a reminder that not all Asian cultures will view themselves as having one continuing “dominant” religion or that religious change is necessarily a problem. Whilst it is true that there have been significant periods of religious conflict in Korea, M Lee highlights the concept of co-existence as a modern reality in Korea.

M. Lee introduces two important themes in his survey, one implicitly and the other explicitly: the relationship between religion, citizens and the state; and the complexity of dealing with religious plurality and its implications for Christians and for Asian Christians whose contexts may be different from those of the traditions of western theology with which theologians in Asia still interact. He contrasts the idea of pluralism in the west as “a newly experienced reality” with the Korean situation, itself representative of a pattern usual in Asia, where Christians have had centuries of experience in dealing with other religious traditions.<sup>17</sup> The experience of religious diversity in Asia means that Christians in Asian countries are accustomed to dealing with the social reality of pluralism and its religious dimensions.

### **2.2.2 Pluralism**

All Asians deal with religious plurality. Evangelicals deal with it on two levels – as a social reality and as a theological reality. Western theological approaches to pluralism have been set within the context of an historically Christian society where new religious movements and world religions tend to present as minority faiths. The concern to adopt a non-triumphalistic theological method has affected their approach, which has often developed into a relativistic stance. Pluralism in Asia has a very different history. Christianity has always been the minority faith within religious cultures, yet within the constraints of these

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<sup>16</sup> M. Lee, “Experience of Religious Plurality in Korea: its Theological Implications,” *International Review of Missions* 88 (351) 2000: 400.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, 407.

other faiths Christianity has continued to grow. Tan notes that this brings other challenges for evangelical Christianity:

... the problem of religious plurality has been a fact of life in Asia since the first millennium. How Christians relate to other faiths is a long-standing issue in Asia. Today, the problem is heightened as the church in Asia witnesses the revitalization of other religions, the ethnic violence that is often divided along religious lines ...<sup>18</sup>

This section will explore how evangelicals are seeking to negotiate pluralism in Asia.

### A theological framework

Alan Race has suggested that the categories of exclusivism, inclusivism and plurality are an important starting-points in discussion of religious pluralism.<sup>19</sup> A brief summary of the categories is found in Kwok:

Currently there are three major paradigms in conceptualizing Christianity's relationship with other religious traditions. ... the exclusivist position... that outside the Christian faith there is no possibility for salvation for truth is revealed only in the Bible and its interpretation guaranteed by the church. ... the inclusivist position which stresses that God's salvation is for all and affirms that other non-Christian wisdom traditions may contain some truth. ... The pluralistic approach emerged when the West was forced the diversity of culture and traditions in the postcolonial period of political independence.<sup>20</sup>

This pluralistic approach essentially stresses the idea that all faiths are of equal validity and that assessment of truth claims is not the most constructive way to approach religious difference.

Knitter has pointed out that evangelicals can be divided into two broad categories within exclusivism, which he labels "total replacement" and "partial replacement" models, with the latter of these sharing some inclusive elements.<sup>21</sup> The former model stresses the disjunction between God and God's revelation in the Bible from all other religious positions; it emphasizes the unique character of Christ, Christian faith and the Christian view of salvation which is proclaimed as though all other perspectives are of no intrinsic worth, unable to reconcile human beings to God: dialogue with such faiths is of little help. The latter model

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<sup>18</sup>Tan, "Evangelical Missiology from an East Asian Perspective," 296. Tan prefers an approach which affirms Christian distinctiveness.

<sup>19</sup> Race's framework is discussed by Knitter in relation to his own work. P.E. Knitter, *No Other Name?* (N.Y.: Orbis, 1985), xiii-xiv.

<sup>20</sup> Kwok, Pui-lan, *Post-colonial Imagination and Feminist Theology*. (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 198. Kwok's observation about the western cast of this discussion is addressed below.

<sup>21</sup> P. Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions* (NY:Orbis, 2002), 25-30.

recognizes that the “sense of God in human nature” is an innate human experience and that the Christian scriptures themselves reflect such perspectives in places.<sup>22</sup> This model, whilst stressing that Christ is unique and that salvation as understood in Christian terms is revealed through Jesus Christ and comes from him alone, recognizes insights about salvation from the other faiths themselves. Such a position is open to the possibility of dialogue and interaction with other faiths, where such dialogue is an encounter that respects the religious belief of the other and stresses proclamation rather than proselytism.

#### Non-western theologians and pluralism

Some Asian theologians like Kwok and Moonjang Lee are concerned that discussion of pluralism starts too often from within a framework that is over influenced by the west and by Christianity. (Kwok does, however, interact with this western framework.) Western theological responses to pluralism can be seen from an engagement with multi-culturalism and its religious dimensions in the post-World War II contexts of independence. Kwok applies this Christian and western perspective to the way the categories of plurality are applied in that she feels Christianity is still taken as a reference point for constructing religious identity and religious difference.<sup>23</sup>

Kwok’s shift to a theology of religious difference focusses on this question:

How do we move toward a de-absolutized, pluralism-endorsing understanding of Christianity’s relation with non-Christian traditions without losing the distinctiveness of Christian identity and the solid foundation on which to base committed Christian praxis?<sup>24</sup>

Moonjang Lee challenges western readings of religious pluralism but for different reasons. He notes that feelings of triumphalism are not an issue that confronts Christians in contemporary Asia. Lee makes an important point about Asia:

What we observe in the multi-religious context of Korea, ... is that Christianity, regardless of its status as a world religion, is a minority religion and its experience of other religions is radically different from that of western Christianity.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 35.

<sup>23</sup> Kwok, *Post-colonial Imagination and Feminist Theology*, 198. Kwok points to the way even in which “religion” is conceived and studied is shaped by western conceptualisations.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 205.

<sup>25</sup> M. Lee, “Experience of Religious Plurality in Korea,” 405-7.

According to Moonjang Lee, viewed from his evangelical and Protestant perspective, this means that for Koreans<sup>26</sup> “it is still a difficult existential commitment to become a Christian in Korea” and in some Asian countries there is a need to “plead for religious tolerance toward Christianity.”<sup>27</sup> Lee suggests that different historical circumstances mean that Christians in Korea may be exclusive because of a religious environment that encourages religious loyalty and “missionary practice” as well as an inherited western tradition where religious identities are generally single not multiple and that scholars are expected to critique religion within the framework of their own religion (*gyo*).<sup>28</sup> Lee argues that there is a sense in which Korean Christianity has been “excluded” but that now “traditional, exclusive religions, like Buddhism and Confucianism and including Christianity now co-exist in a religiously democratic milieu.” M. Lee concludes that it is important for Asian theologians to develop responses from their own context.

The selected writers desire to take a distinctive approach as non-western evangelicals in relation to western views of pluralism and evangelicalism. They adopt an approach that stresses plurality in the public square and the need for the Christians as a minority group to share in plural societies with an appropriate attitude. There is an interest in evaluating other religions in relation to the Christian scriptures themselves.<sup>29</sup> The selected writers re-assess the religions and relate to them in dialogue, where dialogue includes the possibility of sharing, through apologetics and witness, the Christian faith and the hope of salvation.

### **2.3 Christians and the state in Asia**

This section considers the pressures of the multi-religious setting in terms of the relationship of Christians to other religions, to the state and to power, with resulting issues of marginalization. Two examples typify the challenges evangelicals face in Asia. In Malaysia this can be seen in how the religion of Islam has an impact on social and political participation for Christian: in India in Hinduism’s relation to social life which results in a sensitivity on the part of many Indians to Christian concepts of conversion, the marginalization of Christians in social life, and tensions in how to deal with wider issues of

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<sup>26</sup> This is in contrast to many Western theologians, or Asian theologians who operate within a western theological discourse.

<sup>27</sup> M. Lee, “Experience of Religious Plurality in Korea,” 406.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, 407-409. M Lee does not specify evangelicals, but his remarks would apply to them.

<sup>29</sup> Hwa, Yung, “Towards an Evangelical Approach to Religions and Culture,” *Transformation* 17 No.3 (July 2000): 88.

justice as a result of the caste system. In both societies there are serious issues for Christians as they bear witness to their Christian faith and engage in society.

The colonial heritage affected the control and the distribution of power in the Asian churches; it also impacted theological development and the contextual nature of theology, given the control of theological education by western people. Peter Lee has noted that “western-packaged sectarian theological points of view and ecclesiastical traditions are still casting long and heavy shadows on the Asian scene.”<sup>30</sup> This is a result of the ambiguities caused because of the way in which “Christianity coincided with Western penetration.”<sup>31</sup> The 20<sup>th</sup> century, however, saw changes in the balance of power and relationships between east and west. The end of World War II changed the political landscape in Asia. The new scenario of potential and uncertainty in Asia has been described as a time of “Asian revolution.”<sup>32</sup> At times, this has resulted in pressures from local faiths and religions and from their leaders and rulers in relation to Christianity, as for example, in India and Malaysia.

The end of the colonial period has left a mixed legacy for Christians in Asia. There is the negative association of Christianity with colonialism and movements of reaction against Christianity as in India in relation to Hinduism and in Malaysia to Islam. There is the positive aspect of church leadership being in Asian hands with the associated opportunity for Christians to be involved in the post-World War II nation-building. One of the beneficial legacies for Asian countries at the end of the period of colonization was the determination to move forwards in terms of nation-building and to deal with the future on their own terms. This can be seen in the kinds of approaches adopted in Singapore and Malaysia, with its Vision 2020 programme<sup>33</sup> and the interest in establishing “Asian values.” It allows the possibility of participating in shared social visions in these countries.

### Creating “space for mission”

The comment has been made by Ng that at times there is little “space for mission” in today’s Asia with its context of religious sensitivities and religious resurgence.<sup>34</sup> This is not an

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 128.

<sup>31</sup> P.K.H. Lee, “Between the Old and the New,” in *The Emergent Gospel – Theology from the Developing World*, eds. S.Torres and Virginia Fabella (London: G. Chapman, 1978), 127-9.

<sup>32</sup> T.V. Philip, “Christian Conference of Asia: a Historical Overview,” *Asian Journal Theology*, 9 No.1 (1995): 2-29.

<sup>33</sup> Vision 2020 is a plan for economic and social development in Malaysia.

<sup>34</sup> Ng, Interview.

entirely new situation in Asia, but it takes on a new urgency in the wake of World War II and the end of the colonial period with its associations with Christianity and in the context of religious resurgence connected to strongly nationalist sentiments which are suspicious of Christianity.

The experience of Asian Christians has often been that of marginalization and even, at times, that of persecution.<sup>35</sup> This puts pressure on the church in various ways. The legacy of the colonial period makes it harder to find space. As a result, the church must make certain that it has an identity that is deeply rooted in Asian cultures so that it is not marked out as being different or foreign. Ng argues that Christians must cultivate their voice in the public square and, where appropriate, contribute to nation-building to preserve social space for themselves and their witness. The problems that Christians face in contemporary Malaysia can be seen from a brief review of its recent history.

### **2.3.1 Religious resurgence and religious constraints in Malaysia**

#### Islam in modern Malaysia - the post-war era and Independence

After World War II, events moved quickly within Malaysia with the creation of the Federation of Malaya in 1948 and then the creation of an independent Malayan state in 1957, which became Malaysia in 1963.<sup>36</sup> The ethnic identity of Malays and the place of the Malay community were important political issues after World War II. Malays constituted only a slight majority of the population in Malaysia<sup>37</sup> so there was a potential political problem at the time of independence if the Malay community was divided politically. As a result the political party United Malays National Organization (UMNO) became a key political party and ultimate focus of Islamic direction in the country.<sup>38</sup> The place of ethnic identity in Malaysia has had a heightened role since the riots in the 1960s which targeted Chinese people. This gave a more urgent dimension to racial tension in Malaysia.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> V. Samuel, "Religious Change and Conversion of Low and Outcastes to Christianity. Exploring the Social Horizons of Church Growth in North India," Unpublished Paper, 2003.

<sup>36</sup> Johnston, "Islam," 292.

<sup>37</sup> Daniel K.C. Ho, "Malaysia," in *A Dictionary of Asian Christianity*, ed. Scott W. Sunquist (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001). The place and identity of the Malay community continues to be a concern for Malays, despite their hold on power.

<sup>38</sup> Movements like Parti Islam SeMalaysia (PAS) are currently seen as more radical than UMNO.

<sup>39</sup> I.C. Prescott, "Creative Access Mission in East Asia," Unpublished D. Miss., Fuller Theological Seminary, 2001, 96. Prescott uses official figures to show that six times as many non-Malays were killed or injured.

Prescott observes that in the wake of independence in countries in South-East Asia the issues were not simply the legitimacy of Islam in a political role, but more about how Islam was going to shape politics. This was exacerbated by the perception that Islam as an integral way of life had been suppressed in the colonial era.<sup>40</sup> In recent years, the Islamic resurgence in Malaysia has been a feature of national life. Political parties like UMNO and Parti Islam SeMalaysia (PAS the Islamic Party of Malaysia) and Party Rakyat have indicated that they are not secular. They are interested in Islam's relationship to education, economics, the law and cultural life and the place of Malays as Islamic in Malaysian society<sup>41</sup> - in that sense, the government displays a spiritual emphasis in its approach to policy-setting. This resurgence has a number of practical consequences. Even though Malays benefit in many ways from their preferential status, political groups have tended to make Malay advancement a focus to the exclusion of other groups.<sup>42</sup>

### Non-Malays in Malaysia

The favouring of Malays and Islam in Malaysia does have an impact on other communities. Non-Malays in Malaysia need to be able to make sense of the resurgence within the Islamic community and consider how it affects them. Batumalai notes the response of non-Malays to Islamization:

... non-Malays have demonstrated a fear of Islamization. They are wary of interpreting both Islam and the phenomenon of Islamic resurgence for fear it may be unacceptable to the government and certain Muslims.<sup>43</sup>

The connection between Malay ethnicity and identity with Islam can be seen as a factor which shapes the religious freedoms of other communities in Malaysia. As long as this remains a key issue it will be difficult for other faiths, especially with Christians well represented in the prosperous Chinese community, to have a higher social profile.<sup>44</sup> This stance of protectionism towards Malays is fuelled by pressures from PAS and the Muslim Youth Movement, Angkatan Belia Islam. These groups tend to put Malay interests more forcibly at the centre of their agenda and this in turn affects the ruling UMNO party.

In the Islamic world conversion from Islam to another faith is often viewed primarily as a move away from Islam rather than a move towards another faith. In Malaysia, the law

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid, 90.

<sup>41</sup> S. Batumalai, *Islamic Resurgence and Islamization in Malaysia: a Malaysian Christian Response*, (Ipoh, Malaysia: St John's Church, 1996), 65-66, 93-95.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, 1-3.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid, 67. Prescott also uses the word "fear."

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, 10, 12-13.

makes it awkward for people to change their allegiance from Islam and sometimes such activity can be viewed as criminal.<sup>45</sup> Inevitably this has an impact on interactions with a faith like Christianity which is seen as emphasizing proclamation and conversion. Batumalai recognizes that although people have the right to profess, practice and propagate (with restrictions) their faith, the freedom is by no means “absolute” and quite different from countries in north Asia like Japan and Korea or western Europe. Over the years media access to these religious groups has been reduced.<sup>46</sup>

Religious groups have to be aware of the need to be prepared for collective action in Malaysian society if they want to maintain adequate freedom where restrictions can be imposed. In this context it is important for Christians to appreciate the wider Islamic aims in society and to try to promote goodwill in turn. There are penalties for Muslims themselves in regard to religious matters which can be severe. This impacts other religious groups in relation to Islam and creates a climate of fear. The government is well aware of the problem. The Deputy Prime Minister has discussed these topics in a speech entitled “No room for fear”. It would seem, however, that fears remain.<sup>47</sup>

In a document summarizing the impact of globalisation, the National Evangelical Christian Federation (NECF) is clear about the problems with a list of concerns which show the restrictions on non-Muslims in Malaysia.<sup>48</sup> These restrictions include land-use and visas for representatives of other religions.<sup>49</sup> There have been restrictions with regard to the use of Christian literature and the Bible in Malay which affect ordinary church life, in regard to buildings, and activities like baptism. The uncertainty surrounding these matters causes concern as does the situation regarding Christian literature and the use of Malay language.

In a discussion of freedom for Christian witness, Prescott shows that Christian groups have experienced serious pressure over the last twenty years, with an intention of discouraging activity as much by threat as by direct action.<sup>50</sup> It is recognized by the NECF that Malaysia’s stance affects its credibility and reputation in the international stage if it is seen to

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<sup>45</sup> Prescott, “Creative Access Mission in East Asia,” 102-104.

<sup>46</sup> Batumalai, *Islamic Resurgence*, 134-138.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid*, 138, 141-144.

<sup>48</sup> NECF Malaysia, *Engagement or Isolation: A Malaysian Christian Perspective on Globalization*. KL: WEF, 2000), 37-38.

<sup>49</sup> Batumalai, *Islamic Resurgence*, 123-125.

<sup>50</sup> Prescott, “Creative Access Mission in East Asia,” 94-103.

be a country which limits religious freedom and human rights,<sup>51</sup> which could well be inferred from its current policies on religion.<sup>52</sup>

### Space for mission in Malaysia

Given the situation in Malaysia, the NECF challenged the church not to be passive or defeatist but to be involved in Malaysian life. “Like it or not, the Church is a part of the nation’s civil society although it remains voiceless if it chooses to be.”<sup>53</sup> The NECF see a potential role for Christian organizations in public advocacy, education and informational networking in Malaysian society. They recommend that the church needs to be more involved in the advocacy of justice and righteousness. They do not explore the tensions of how this can be done in an Islamic society like Malaysia, but they imply that it is imperative for people of faiths other than Islam to make their views known in contemporary Malaysia.

The modern context is shaped by the interaction of religions in Malaysia, by factors like the presence of colonial powers and by global religious resurgence. Christians in Malaysia find themselves under pressure in various ways, partly by the political and religious forces they encounter and partly by the history of their own responses to these forces. This creates a challenging environment for Christian faith and for participation in civil society.

### **2.3.2 Caste, marginalization and socio-political constraints in India**

In the context of the challenges of the modern world and global forces, D’Souza affirms:

Today’s India is a turbulent place where globalization, religions, traditions, peoples and politics have come to the fore and are in tension with each other.<sup>54</sup>

Yet it is in this contemporary India that evangelicals like Vinay Samuel engage in ministry as they seek to find forms of mission which relate the gospel to India and which deal with the social and economic issues which Christians face in ministering to Indian society. The way in which India relates to the wider global context was exemplified in a recent incident. The American evangelical Winter found himself pilloried in India for making blanket

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<sup>51</sup> NECF Malaysia, *Engagement or Isolation*, 39, 47.

<sup>52</sup> Batumalai, *Islamic Resurgence*, 132-135. Christians do recognize that within Malaysia, there are those who espouse more moderate perspectives like Muzzafar and who seek a more open society.

<sup>53</sup> NECF Malaysia, *Engagement or Isolation*, 49-52.

<sup>54</sup> J. D’Souza, “The Indian Church and Missions Face the Saffronization Challenge,” in *Global Missiology for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: the Iguassu Dialogue*, ed. W. Taylor (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2000), 391.

criticisms of Hinduism, when these were picked up by Hindu organizations and posted on their web-site as if to highlight the problems of Christian insensitivity.<sup>55</sup> It is unlikely that Indian Christians working in India would have made such sweeping comments. This reflects the way in which evangelicals working there have to take account of both the past context of Christianity in India with its connections to western colonialism and contemporary Indian perceptions of the west.

### Neo-Hinduism in modern India

During the British colonial period, it is suggested by Frykenberg, that two forms or “faces” of Hinduism as an institution emerged. One is connected to the Indian state and its institutions as seen and shaped by Brahman influences, as it attempted to create an integrative nature to Indian society. The other is the origin of movements that came to represent the “nationalistic religion of “Hindutva”” from the 1820s onwards.<sup>56</sup> It is possible to see the nationalist movement in a very unfavourable light. Kancha Ilaiah describes the movement as follows:

Hindutva represents the Brahminization of India. It is the last-ditch, well-organized attempt by many of the upper castes and the neo-Ksatriyas to maintain their hegemony over Indian society and to co-opt those groups of people who have never been in their “Hindu” fold.<sup>57</sup>

This approach to other peoples came to be represented by organizations like the RSS. Although the RSS is a cultural organization, it has an interest in seeing India in particular way: “Rather than the secularism of the Congress party, RSS promoted a nationalism that saw India as fundamentally a Hindu state.”<sup>58</sup> The Bharatia Janata Party (BJP), which was founded in 1980, actively promotes the interests of a nationalistic form of Hinduism, which is consciously against “foreign influences” and the interests of Muslims and Christians and has been one of the consequences of the influence of the RSS. These movements have reacted to outward pressures like colonialism and inward pressures like the mass movements of conversion amongst low-caste peoples to Christianity.

### The caste system and Christians in India

Indian society can be divided up into three essential divisions – caste, outcaste and tribals. Within the caste division itself there are the categories of Brahmins, Ksatriyas, Vaisyas who

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<sup>55</sup> Frykenberg, “Gospel, Globalization and Hindutva,” 108-109.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid, 112-114.

<sup>57</sup> D’Souza, “The Indian Church and Missions,” 398.

<sup>58</sup> Flood, “Indian religions and the Hindu tradition,” 52.

are elevated in terms of status and power and a fourth group Sudras who are subservient and “ritually suspect.”<sup>59</sup> The Dalit peoples have an even lower status in this framework being set apart from these four categories. The word “Dalit” is the group’s own term for their situation as the “oppressed” minorities of India who make up 15-20% of the population. The tribal people form another large population bloc and their situation has also been challenged by the rise of the Hindutva movement and other forces in the modern world.

The implications of the caste system have been described like this:

Each has a generic identity, each belongs within its own ethnic “birth” group and each is seen or perceived to be a distinct and separate species of people. Under such circumstances inter-dining, intermarriage is unthinkable. This is the Brahmanical perspective. Whether derived from systematic empirical observation or “invented” as a rationalization for hegemonic domination, this perspective has had an enormous influence over ruling communities and elites and has done so for millennia.<sup>60</sup>

There is an association with the three uppermost castes of concepts of purity and “clean” people. One important effect of caste is to lead to the marginalization of low caste groups in society.

The place of caste in Indian society has been fiercely critiqued in the 20<sup>th</sup> century from within India. The Indian theologian Monodeep Daniel points to the example of Ambedkar and how his experience of discrimination led to a struggle to educate and empower “outcastes.” Ambedkar knew that it was not just a matter of politics but of people’s place in society – “their salvation lay in their social elevation.”<sup>61</sup> Ambedkar saw “the Hindu fold” as responsible for the loss of privilege and dignity of the poor. He was intensely critical of Hinduism.<sup>62</sup> Caste has implications for those in the lower groups in relation to both Hinduism and to Christianity.

The relationship between outcastes and Christianity is vexed. Christians, like those in the St. Thomas tradition who identified with higher castes were seen as remote from ordinary people.<sup>63</sup> However, if Christians identified with the lower castes and outcastes they were

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<sup>59</sup> S. Clarke, “Hindutva, Religious and Ethnocultural Minorities, and Indian-Christian Theology,” *Harvard Theological Review* 95 No. 2 (2002): 198-9.

<sup>60</sup> Frykenberg, “Gospel, Globalization and Hindutva,” 111.

<sup>61</sup> M. Daniel, “Models of Leadership in the Indian Church: an Evaluation,” Unpublished paper delivered at CSCNWW, Edinburgh, May 2006, 6.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid*, 6. Ambedkar is quoted as saying “I will not die a Hindu” and advocating in stark language that “people of every caste should flee from it [Hinduism] as from the plague.”

<sup>63</sup> Daniel, “Models of Leadership in the Indian Church,” 9.

seen as compromised, compromised with a “caste identity.”<sup>64</sup> Despite these problems, Christians have made an impact on caste in India. In the area of social work, missionaries made some concessions to Dalits in the inclusion of young people in schools and the fact that hospitals were open to people irrespective of caste.<sup>65</sup> The church continues to promote the cause of the Dalits in the modern world but ambiguities remain.

### Conversion and caste

In the context of recent political movements, conversion remains a contentious matter in India. Tension over this matter has increased in recent decades, and it is often viewed and portrayed as the result of foreign or outside influence. Frykenberg describes conversion in the following terms:

For many peoples in India ... conversion is also a form of social or political protest. It is a means of escape from caste domination and the thralldom of untold centuries. Many followers of Christ see conversion only in theological terms... Many others, however, see conversion in more earthly and mundane terms. For them, conversion is seen as rescue from bondage and a realigning of loyalties and priorities, both social and political as well as cultural.<sup>66</sup>

An historical discussion of conversion in India has been carried out by a Korean scholar, Sebastian Kim with first-hand experience of India. He has taken a specific interest in the way in which debate, rather than dialogue, points to differences and tensions between Christians and Hindus. He has surveyed possible reasons for these tensions, such as the impact of conversion on Christian communities in terms of their political or socio-economic make-up, the way in which Hindu counter-movements have exacerbated tensions and the differing attitudes to conversion held by Christians who view it in largely spiritual terms and Hindus who by contrast stress the socio-political dimensions.<sup>67</sup> Kim notes the tension to maintain a “common identity as Indians and yet keep a self-identity as Christians within the dominant Hindu community.”<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> D’Souza, “The Indian Church and Missions,” 399. D. de Sousa, “Relevant Patterns of Christian Witness in India,” in *The Church in Mission*, ed. M. Malipurathu, (Anand, Gujarat: Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, 2002), 284.

<sup>65</sup> The “revolution” stopped there. K. Rajaratnam, “The Indian Christian Church and Dalit Liberation,” *Gurukul Journal of theological studies* 11 Nos.1&2 (2001): 1.

<sup>66</sup> Frykenberg, “Gospel, Globalization and Hindutva,” 119.

<sup>67</sup> S. C.H. Kim, *In Search of Identity. Debates on Religious Conversion in India* (Oxford: OUP, 2003), 4-7. Kim’s study pays attention to the historical contours of this discussion in “debate” from the mid-nineteenth century onwards.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid*, 192; 197.

Writers like Clarke and Rajaratnam assert that the church has been more interested in embracing Dalits into the Christian community and not interested enough in issues of justice given the scale of problems facing Dalits over the decades.<sup>69</sup> Clarke sees a need to “imagine alternative models that legitimize and empower multiple religious, cultural, political and social self-expressions of the various communities that make up the Indian nation.”<sup>70</sup> He favours a model of liberation. In this way Christian concern for Dalits is to be transformed into the mission of the church.<sup>71</sup> However, Kim points out that some Christians, particularly in North-East India, where Christians are in a majority in some states, reject socio-economic liberation as a principal motivation and include frankly spiritual motives for their decision to become Christians.<sup>72</sup> Amongst the selected writers, Vinay Samuel has wrestled with the problems of poverty, deprivation and injustice in India. Whilst taking cognizance of the needs of the poor in India, he emphasizes models of justice rather than liberation.

### Space for mission in India

The above issues have serious implications for the church in India. D’Souza recognizes that the Indian church must work harder at developing an Indian identity. There are concerns about outside movements which tend to emphasize “homogenizing” versions of Christianity especially from the west.<sup>73</sup> This is an issue for the church and for Indians as a whole in the face of the Hindutva movement’s push to have what can be seen as “an extremist religious identity” foisted upon India.<sup>74</sup> It is important for Indian Christians to take stock of the sensitivities of India, but at the same time recognize the aspirations of many who have over hundreds of years chosen to be Christian. Frykenberg calls for a new encounter between people of different perspectives in India. “People in India, as well as people in the world, can no longer afford to clothe the gospel’s long-standing history within Hindu culture in ambiguity, ignorance, obfuscation and obscurity.”<sup>75</sup> This means a new attitude to missions and one which is unequivocally Indian, moving away from outside influences and patterns. It means that Christian communities need to change and be ready to recognize their failings within the history of India.

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<sup>69</sup> Rajaratnam, “The Indian Christian Church and Dalit Liberation,” 3.

<sup>70</sup> Clarke, “Hindutva, Religious and Ethnocultural Minorities, and Indian-Christian Theology,” 209.

<sup>71</sup> Rajaratnam, “The Indian Christian Church and Dalit Liberation,” 4.

<sup>72</sup> Kim, *In Search of Identity*, 194.

<sup>73</sup> Rajendran on the Europeanizing of Indian Christianity. K. Rajendran, Interview by Warren R. Beattie, 15<sup>h</sup> January 2002, Singapore.

<sup>74</sup> D’Souza, “The Indian Church and Missions,” 402.

<sup>75</sup> Frykenberg, “Gospel, Globalization and Hindutva,” 129-132.

### 2.3.3 Power, the state and Christians

Having considered some of the implications of the history of Christianity in specific Asian countries, this section will consider the implications of power in relation to missions in the past and present.

#### Taking account of power in missions

Wickeri considers some of the issues of power which confront the church in the two thirds world and in the west at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. He observes, “All religious and theological discourses are at the same time discourses about power.”<sup>76</sup> He notes that there are three strands to modern discussions of power and mission which need to be taken into account. These include<sup>77</sup> the “different histories and narratives of power” by which he means the church in different contexts and its encounter with colonial forms of power in the last few centuries; the relationship between Christianity and the colonial powers; finally the new dimensions of power in the context of globalisation.<sup>78</sup>

Given that the Asian countries at the heart of this study have been influenced by colonialism, the impact and legacy of power in the colonial period must be considered.<sup>79</sup> In terms of mission it is important to recognize the constraints of power as well as its possible advantages. Colonial power was used to inhibit the spread of Christianity as well as to foster it. Fergusson notes an unwillingness to disturb Indian cultural life in ways that would have an adverse impact on economic life for the British colonial powers. This was true in terms of the restrictions on entry of missionaries but it affected other things. Many expatriates in India in general in the early 1800s had a negative view of missionaries.<sup>80</sup> A British leader in India viewed religion in the following terms:

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<sup>76</sup> P.L. Wickeri, “Plurality, Power and Mission: Intercontextual Theological Explorations on the Role of Religion in the New Millennium,” in *Plurality, Power and Mission: Intercontextual Theological Explorations on the Role of Religion in the New Millennium*, eds. Philip L. Wickeri, Janice K. Wickeri and D. M. A. Niles (London: CWM, 2000), 15.

<sup>77</sup> The links between power, structures, and social knowledge have been recognized by sociologists like Stephen Lukes. See Haughard’s summary of Lukes, M, Haughard, *Power: a Reader*. (Manchester: MUP, 2002), 38-41.

<sup>78</sup> Wickeri, “Plurality, Power and Mission,” 15-17. Wickeri notes the way in which “western discourses” including theological ones hold a position of power in two thirds world contexts.

<sup>79</sup> T. B. Hansen and Finn Stepputat, “Introduction,” in *Sovereign Bodies. Citizens, Migrants, and States in the Postcolonial World*. Ed. T. B. Hansen and Finn Stepputat (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton UP, 2005), 3-4.

<sup>80</sup> N. Fergusson, *Empire: How Britain Made the Modern World* (London: Allen Lane books, 2003), 139.

We are very far from being averse to the introduction of Christianity into India ... but the means to be used for that end shall only be such as shall be free from any political danger or alarm... Our paramount power ... imposes upon us the necessity to protect the interests of the native inhabitants in the free and undisturbed possession of their religious opinions.<sup>81</sup>

However, there is no doubt that later, from 1813 onwards, the colonial era allowed Christians greater freedom and opportunity to pursue their varied missionary aims in India.<sup>82</sup>

### Evangelicalism and power

In the context of evangelicalism, Noll recognizes that the 19<sup>th</sup> century was a time when the outward movements of mission were leading to Christianity's global phase, a period of change "from what evangelicalism was to what it has become..."<sup>83</sup> The ambiguity of the last century of evangelical missionary effort in terms of its relationship to colonial powers is well captured in his comment:

... the theme of power is especially appropriate as the 19th century witnessed the developments that moved evangelicals from their western location – where they were either the disadvantaged struggling against the powers that be or negotiating for power as it was defined by interaction among social forces of relatively equal weight – out into the broader world. In that broader world evangelicals experience power quite differently – on the one hand, evangelical missionaries were allied with or at least associated with the dominant forces of imperial power; on the other hand, new evangelicals in emerging churches were usually dependent on missionaries and were often also numbered among the least powerful in their own societies.<sup>84</sup>

For evangelicals a number of issues remain. Noll helps illumine how evangelicals were aware of power at some levels as in "the power of the gospel" but less aware in others, especially the general human capacity to seek power over others: "when it came time to understand how the interpretation of scripture can reflect as well as reveal power relationships, to remember that the gospel spoke to human structures as well as to human hearts, they forgot."<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid, 137.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid, 139. After 1813, the Evangelical missionary agencies and others like the Clapham sect pushed for change with the renewal of the charter of the East Indian Company.

<sup>83</sup> M. A. Noll, "Evangelical Identity, Power and Culture in the Great Nineteenth Century," in *Christianity Reborn: the Global Expansion of Evangelicalism in the Twentieth Century*, ed. D. M Lewis (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, MI, 2004), 33-37. Noll talks of the inter-related themes of identity, power, and culture as critical for understanding evangelicalism in this period.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid, 36.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid, 46.

This western power and influence are still present in evangelicalism and its networks. It is not at the forefront of discussion in Asia, but it still impacts evangelicalism. Samuel has been concerned about the impact of missionary organizations and the way in which local churches lose personnel to international agencies due to the latter's greater financial power.<sup>86</sup> Ramachandra expresses similar misgivings about movements of global mission which assert themselves without reference to local situations.<sup>87</sup>

Dealing with the imbalance of power and resources in global evangelicalism is one issue facing evangelicals in Asia. However, within Asia and Asian evangelicalism, another challenge is the minority status of the church and the pressures on it to be able to promote the welfare and interests of its members in the face of overwhelming political pressures. Christians in places like India or Malaysia often find that they are viewing the world from the position of a minority. From this perspective, some of the assumptions tend to be quite different from those made by people doing theology in the west. In the west, there is a concern about elements of triumphalism in Christian theologizing and the importance of making space for those of different persuasions. In stark contrast to this, in parts of Asia it can be a challenge to find any space whatsoever for the Christian voice. Far from being anxious about triumphalism, the selected writers are acutely conscious that the church in Asia is often pressurized or even persecuted and that suffering is a common consequence of the church's mission.<sup>88</sup> Concerns remain about the need to share power and to be sensitive to the impact of power in Asia.

#### **2.4 Evangelicals negotiating the complexities of mission in contemporary Asia**

In the light of the above discussion of Christianity in relation to Asia, with its varied religions and historical linkages, it is critical that evangelicals are seen to develop forms of Christianity that relate closely to Asia and strengthen Asian Christian identity. This means a continual engagement with the issue of contextualization and sensitivity to the construction of identity in relation to its Christian and Asian components.

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<sup>86</sup> V. Samuel and C. Sugden, "Mission Agencies as Multinational Corporations," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 7 No.3 (Oct 1983): 152-155.

<sup>87</sup> V. Ramachandra, "The Honor of Listening: Indispensable for Mission. One-sided Nationalistic Vision Hinders Global Perspective and Partnership in Mission," *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 30 (Oct 1994):404-409.

<sup>88</sup> Bong Rin Ro, ed., *Christian Suffering in Asia. "The Blood of the Martyrs is the Seed of the Church,"* (Taichung, Taiwan: Evangelical Fellowship of Asia (ATA), 1989).

### **2.4.1 Developing contextual forms of missiology in Asia**

Many voices from within the non-western world stress the importance of contextualization. Writing as a Latin American evangelical, Padilla has raised the importance of the place of contextualization in the 1980s. Given what he saw as “theological dependence” on the west he made a plea for a new approach to theology that addressed the concerns and realities of the non-western church, so that they would avoid a loss of identity. This requires contextualization of the Christian message not simply in ideas but so that it is “incarnate” in the church in the non-western world.<sup>89</sup>

Tuwere makes a similar appeal from the Asian-Pacific region. He sees a need for “relevant living theology for their situations”<sup>90</sup> Contextualization is about making the gospel in Jesus Christ real and vivid in each context - that is its underlying aim:

Authentic contextualization begins with what God has already done in the story of Israel and supremely in the story of Jesus Christ. This is the overarching story that must illumine all other stories within a context or culture. It must go on by living that story so that it is our story.<sup>91</sup>

Writing in the Taiwanese context, Huang Po Ho makes observations about the benefit of contextualization and its impact in relation to the identity of the church. The Taiwanese church has gone through historical processes in relation to Taiwanese forms of theology. These include the historical phase of transmission as the receiving stage (importation); the stage of struggle following the World War II era (indigenization); the stage of identity (contextualization); finally the stage of reflection (reconfessing). In the context of Taiwanese history, Huang sees close and important connections between the contextualization of theology and the contextualization of the church.<sup>92</sup>

#### **Terminology**

Contextualization and inculturation are two important terms in the discussion of theology in context. The former was introduced in 1972 by Shoki Coe drawing on the heritage of engagement with local situations found in descriptions such as “indigenization” and

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<sup>89</sup> R. Padilla, *Mission between the Times* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 96-97.

<sup>90</sup> I. Tuwre, “What is Contextual theology: a View from Oceania?” *Pacific Journal of Theology* Series II (27) 2002: 7.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid*, 11.

<sup>92</sup> Huang Po Ho, “Retrospect and Prospect of Doing Contextual Theology in Taiwan,” *Journal of Theology and cultures of Asia* Vol 1 (2002):84-85. In Taiwan he places this from around the time of Coe’s article at 1985.



“accommodation.”<sup>93</sup> Contextualization had a new focus on the contemporary world and its shifting needs and challenges. Shorter defines inculturation as “the on-going dialogue between faith and culture or cultures ... the creative and dynamic relationship between the Christian message and a culture or cultures.”<sup>94</sup>

The two terms largely represent the contemporary struggle to relate gospel and local situations and cultures, one predominating within Protestantism and the other within Catholicism. Bosch divides up contextualization into the component parts of indigenization and socio-economic patterns. He stresses that inculturation (his term for the former), and liberation (for the latter) are the two models of “contextual theologies proper” and talks of the double movement inherent in contextualization, “the inculturation of Christianity and Christianization of culture.”<sup>95</sup>

An approach to contextualization that takes account of Asian settings in their totality is found in Archie Lee. Lee’s concern that:

Theology done in a foreign way, using non-Asian texts alienated from the Asian socio-political context and cultural-historical contexts disregarding the Asian experiences and despising without discrimination the richness of the Asian spirituality will be far from the hope of nourishing ... the Asian people.<sup>96</sup>

Lee’s verdict was that western theology was laid over Asian culture. In advocating a contextual approach, Lee differentiates texts and traditions from contexts. For Lee, Asians have two texts. “The Asian text we inherited from our own Asian cultural-religious traditions and the biblical text we received from the Judeo-Christian communities.”<sup>97</sup> Text in this sense can mean cultural, historical and religious elements which are present in Asian cultures. The critical task for A Lee is to take these two texts, the biblical text and the Asian text and find a method of integration that makes sense of both as these twin texts are then applied to the contemporary Asian contexts.<sup>98</sup> Lee has given as a rationale for adopting such an approach the fact that he finds himself more familiar with the biblical tradition, and less

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<sup>93</sup> S. Coe, “Contextualising Theology,” in *Third World Theologies*, Gerald H. Anderson, and Thomas Stransky eds. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973): 120-121.

<sup>94</sup> A. Shorter, *Toward a Theology of Inculturation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1994), 5. This is based on ideas of culture as “a transmitted pattern of meanings, embodied in symbols, a pattern capable of development and change.”

<sup>95</sup> D. Bosch, *Transforming Mission* (NY: Orbis, 1992), 453-457. Bosch recognizes the idea of translation, using inculturation as a contextual theology which stresses the aspects of translation.

<sup>96</sup> A. Lee, “Prophetic and Sapiential Hermeneutics,” in *Doing theology with Asian resources*, No.12. ed. J.C. England (ATESEA: Singapore, 1993), 2-3.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid*, 2-3.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid*, 8.

familiar with his Chinese tradition with its “texts” and heritage. This leads him to give a functional priority to Asian heritage in his approach which leads to the Bible, as a resource, tending to have a somewhat subsidiary role.

### Models of contextual theology

Within Evangelicalism, the theologians of the ATA have responded to the challenge of contextualization in Asia. A consultation on the Bible and theology in Asia in 1974 was an attempt to deal with key issues in this debate. It included outline approaches to contextualization, with the overall verdict being that contextualization was to be sensitive to socio-economic issues but these were not to dominate theological discussion.<sup>99</sup> The final statement recognized the importance of interacting with Asian religious traditions and noted the complexities of Christian life in Asian societies given the dominance of other religions.<sup>100</sup>

Roman Catholic theologians wrestling with the same issues adopt the language of inculturation. Shorter looks at the implications of this for Christian faith in culture. Inculturation represents the contextualising of theology in “each historical instance”. It recognizes that Christian faith cannot exist except in specific “cultural forms.”<sup>101</sup> Shorter handles important challenges in this process such as the content of what is inculturated: “inculturation is a dialogue between the Christian message and a human culture.”<sup>102</sup> Gittins makes the point that inculturation’s scope is not simply “transformed liturgies” but rather “transformed lives.”<sup>103</sup> He explores inculturation as “fruit of a set of processes” rather than a method, and sees inculturation to mean “faith is embodied” rather than “faith is inserted” in a culture.<sup>104</sup> He sees inculturation as a reciprocal process which involves “the Christianizing of a culture and the culturing of Christianity.”<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Declaration of the Sixth Asia Theological Consultation, in *Biblical theology in Asia*, ed. K. Gnanakan (Bangalore: Theological Book Trust, 1995), 266-267.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid, 267-280.

<sup>101</sup> Shorter, *Toward a Theology of Inculturation*, 11-12.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid, 15-16.

<sup>103</sup> A. J. Gittins, “Beyond Liturgical Inculturation. Transforming the Deep Structures of Faith,” *Irish Theological Quarterly* 69 (2004): 47-49, 57-59.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid, 50-54. Gittins uses a linguistic model to probe the nature of models of inculturation and reflects on the parallels of deep structures of language and culture: “the transformation of deep structures into new surface structures (culture and faith) that are acceptable and meaningful to local people themselves.”

<sup>105</sup> R. Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies*, (N.Y.: Orbis, 1986), 57.

An important contribution to contextual theology has been made by Robert Schreier. He looks at the role of various elements in the construction of a local theology: the role of the theologian, the role of the community, the role of tradition and previous local theologies, basing his analysis on the search for “themes” in a culture that offer fruitful ways of theologizing.<sup>106</sup> He draws on “cultural semiotics” to help isolate important symbols and activities within a culture and to discover their meaning.<sup>107</sup> This emphasis puts a stress on meaning within a culture rather than simply an analysis of how things function. Schreier’s purpose is to foster a methodology that will encourage the local Christian community to facilitate real engagement with their own culture in a way that is enduring.

Another Catholic model of contextual theology for Asia has been developed by de Mesa. De Mesa shares the concern that Asian churches need to take stock of their Asian identity and setting. From the context of the Philippines he writes that the:

Theology, as faith seeking understanding, does not arise in the abstract. It is born and developed in a concrete setting, culture and history. It is, therefore, culturally and historically relative. ... Theological language in Asia in order to be meaningful has to have a recognizable reference to the lived-experience of Asians, to their search for well-being for what is worthy of humankind.<sup>108</sup>

The theological agenda must be determined by starting with the issues that are pressing and that are thrown up by Asian contexts. De Mesa is aware that issues of identity are involved in such an endeavour. In terms of methodology, he envisages two poles of activity - one is culture and the other is what he terms the Judaeo-Christian tradition:

Within the basic process of theologizing – mutually respectful and critical interaction between the culture and the faith tradition - we emphasized the contribution of a specific theological method towards the achievement of cultural identity in contemporary society among the peoples of Asia.<sup>109</sup>

De Mesa, however, puts rather more emphasis on culture as a starting-point than the scriptures. He states: “It is clear that doing theology as inculturation is not a matter of applying to our present situation what we think we have discovered from the biblical tradition.” De Mesa’s emphasis on the Judaeo Christian tradition rather than “the scriptures”

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid, 29. Such a thematic approach resonates with the selected writers.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid, 56-74.

<sup>108</sup> J. de Mesa, “Doing Theology as Inculturation in the Asian Context,” in *New Directions in Mission and Evangelisation. Vol 3. Faith and Culture*. J.A. Scherer, and S. B. Bevans, (N.Y: Orbis, 1999), 122.

<sup>109</sup> De Mesa, “Doing Theology as Inculturation in the Asian Context,” 127.

reflects his Catholic stance and he implies that he wants to be quite cautious about how the scriptures are to be interpreted and applied in his Filipino context.<sup>110</sup>

### Reflections on contextual theology and the selected writers

Writers like Samuel, Hwa and Maggay stress that mission in Asia must take account of contexts by which they mean that mission must be integrated into the cultures of local settings. Samuel has observed that “mission as transformation is mission in context”.<sup>111</sup> The models of mission need to be tailored and related to specific contexts taking account of cultural and socio-economic elements. Hwa specifically describes this process of contextualization as one of “inculturation” - of relating the gospel to specific cultural contexts, based on a prior understanding of the gospel or faith tradition, although recognizing some place for the socio-economic dimensions.<sup>112</sup>

The Filipino writer Melba Maggay sees the need for non-western contributions to theology<sup>113</sup> and for the development of a contextual Asian theology. She has challenged the notion that the gospel can easily be transferred from culture to culture “regardless of whether the social context is third or first world”.<sup>114</sup> Asians should take issues that concern them and develop relevant theological formulations. She gives the example of the relationship of the cross and spirit powers:

We need to do contextualization from within, surfacing gospel themes from out of the deep structures, the root metaphors by which our cultures define and sustain themselves. This is in contrast to contextualization from without, which is merely adaptation of gospel themes formulated from the outside.<sup>115</sup>

Maggay recognizes the place and role of the western theological tradition, but feels that it must be transcended for the sake of the mission of the church in Asia.

Ng is more open to the socio-political dimensions of contextualization, though his interest is more in nation-building than liberation. He uses the term “responsive theology” to describe his approach to theology in Malaysia. By this he means that he wants to engage with social

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<sup>110</sup> There are hints here that the Bible, or at least its interpretation, can be imposed on Asia.

<sup>111</sup> V. Samuel, “Mission as Transformation,” in *Mission as Transformation*, eds. V. Samuel and C. Sugden (Oxford: Regnum, 1999), 229.

<sup>112</sup> The selected writers tend to view this in terms of “justice” rather than Bosch’s category of “liberation”.

<sup>113</sup> “The growing emergent churches of the non-western world are now uniquely in a position to refigure the shape of Christianity.” M. Maggay, *Jew to the Jew and Greek to the Greek. Reflections on Culture and Globalization* (Manila: ISACC, 2001), 9.

<sup>114</sup> Maggay, *Filipino Religious Consciousness*, 8, 10, 18.

<sup>115</sup> Maggay, *Jew to the Jew*, 9.

realities in Malaysia by drawing on other theological models and adapting them to his own situation. He affirms Schreiter's model and sees it as a valid way of engaging with the Malaysian setting in the context of describing a "responsive theology".<sup>116</sup> Ng and Ramachandra also appreciate that the ideas of both cultural change and social change are implicit in Schreiter's work, although they recognize that it is not always easy to map cultural identity in practice.<sup>117</sup> Schreiter's notion of a thematic approach to local contexts, loosely adopted, and based around the concerns of the church would fit with the general perspective of Ng and Ramachandra when it comes to determining a theological agenda. Ramachandra adopts a somewhat eclectic approach to contextualization, but there are points of contact with de Mesa and his interest in relating faith tradition to culture and Ramachandra's language of missiology as a "conversation with the Bible" in relation to specific cultures.

The selected writers discuss the idea of contextual theology through the filter of Protestant terminology, but lean to models of "inculturation" in the sense of a process that relates mission to culture and seeks to be embedded in Asia in ways that lead to a deeply and genuinely Asian form of missiology. There is some interest in the socio-political or socio-economic dimensions of contextual missiology; these are viewed as contextual efforts towards nation-building and the establishment of just societies rather than in terms of "theologies of liberation."

#### **2.4.2 Forging identities in Asia**

As a sociologist interested in identity and nationality, Smith suggests that modern identity depends on a number of factors.

Identity is always a matter of social and spiritual location. For in that location lies a sense of security, so indispensable to the much-desired individuality and uniqueness of persons and families alike...<sup>118</sup>

Smith notes that as well as national "myths" there are religious "narratives" which shape a people's consciousness, what he terms "collective memories" He gives the example of Judaism and how religion through scriptures and reflections on the scriptures have been

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<sup>116</sup> This is Ng's preferred term. Interestingly, Ng's other choice of model is that of Bonino indicating a certain catholicity of approach. Ng critiques Schreiter in Ng, Kam Weng, *Doing Responsive Theology in a Developing World* (Petaling Jaya, Mal: Pustaka SUFES, 1994,) 63-68.

<sup>117</sup> They share Schreiter's concerns about "positivist approaches" to culture. Vinoth Ramachandra, Interview by Warren R. Beattie, 24th January 2002, Singapore.

<sup>118</sup> A. Smith, *Myth and Memories of the Nation* (Oxford: OUP, 1999), 59, 60-69.

“both the source and vehicle of shared memories.”<sup>119</sup> He recognizes too the idea of multiple identities and the way in which religious identities can either strengthen national identity or be seen to be in conflict with it, especially in global faiths like Islam, and forms of Christianity such as Roman Catholicism and Evangelicalism.

Multiple identities are a feature of ordinary life in Asia but minority groups and those who face oppression are more likely to see identity as critical in everyday life. The ways in which identities are formed by “narratives” and can be exploited for political ends are issues which will affect communities and ultimately the church as well.<sup>120</sup> Berghoff sees that “collective identity has become a modern confessional formula through which individuals profess membership in a collectivity.”<sup>121</sup> Like Wickeri with his talk of “narratives,” Berghoff speaks of the “myths” which form identity and which can become “hardened” if there is a feeling of pressure or danger against the community.

### Introducing identity

In a discussion of Sinhalese and Buddhist identity in Sri Lanka, Obeyesekere, observes that identity is “elusive” in character and is not a concept that would be found in the dictionary in his language. Ethnic and national identities are easily placed through birth but the formation of other identities can be more complex.<sup>122</sup>

Exploring the issues which face modern Christians in the context of global forces, Wickeri treats identity as a part of the human makeup which becomes more urgent as the pressures on modern society increase.

We cannot live without religious and cultural boundaries. Such boundaries have a positive significance, insofar as they help people create and maintain their identities over against all forms of hegemony and totalitarianism. ... Individuals, families and communities, increasingly have multiple and overlapping religious and cultural identities. There is never a clear boundary between culture and religion in any context and in multi-religious contexts, boundaries may become even more blurred.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid, 208ff.

<sup>120</sup> Wickeri speaks of “identity politics.”

<sup>121</sup> Peter Berghoff, “Identity,” in *Brill Dictionary of Religion*. 4 vols., ed. Kocku von Stuckhard. (Leiden: Brill, 2006).

<sup>122</sup> G. Obeyesekere, “On Buddhist identity in Sri Lanka,” in *Ethnic Identity: Creation, Conflict and Accommodation*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. eds. Lola Romanucci-Ross and G. A. De Vos (Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press, 1995), 231, 242-243.

<sup>123</sup> See Wickeri, “Plurality, Power and Mission,” 9-12 on the importance of identity.

An Asian theologian has spelled out the dilemma of identity that faces the Asian church in the contemporary global context. Choong Chee Pang<sup>124</sup> points out the uncertain place of religion in Huntington's scheme of civilizational blocks, given that the west is simply the west (and not Christianity in a "Christian west"), although Islam and Hinduism are given prominence as religions, as is Orthodoxy. The result is that western Christianity, particularly Protestantism, is marginalized, despite its significant statistical presence and its influence on shaping western culture. In addition, when Choong considers where Asian Christians would fit into Huntington's scheme of civilizations he finds that there is no obvious category in which they belong. Choong's concern is that Huntington tends to use the labels "western" or "the west" as general 'synonyms' for Christianity or western Christendom. Thus Huntington emphasizes the identification of Christianity with the west. This immediately creates an "identity crisis" for Christians in the non-western world, especially in Asia, where virtually all major world religions – Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity and Islam- have their origin and roots".<sup>125</sup>

This represents the core tension facing the status of Christianity in the west and its minority status in Asia. It indicates that cultivating identity in the Asian context is an important part of the work of mission for the Asian church.

#### The Asian identity crisis - contemporary concerns

Christians in Asia find themselves living and working in an Asian setting with divergent histories and in that context they have to negotiate who they are as Asian Christians: the issue of identity therefore assumes great importance. Philip has described some of the problems for Asian Christians in terms of this dislocation. He suggests that Christians were isolated in the colonial period and there was "a minority consciousness".<sup>126</sup> Sometimes the Asian church was in danger of being a sub-culture in its own country. This problem is felt to be most acute for the church in parts of India and China. Underlying the problems of dislocation and the retreat into a sub-culture is the fundamental issue of identity. The problem can be baldly stated as follows:

It is this identity crisis – a crisis of identity inherited during the colonial period which is the main problem for all churches in Asia. They have failed

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<sup>124</sup> Choong, Chee Pang, "A Friendly Observer's View of North American Global Mission Responsibility Today," in *Mission at the Dawn of the 21st Century*, ed. Paul Varo Martinson, (Minneapolis, Minn.: Kirk House Publishers, 1999), 362.

<sup>125</sup> Choong, "A Friendly Observer's View," 363.

<sup>126</sup> T.V.Philip, *Reflections on Christian Mission in Asia* (Delhi: ISPCK/ CSS, 2000), 73.

to find a new identity in relation to the peoples of Asia. They are still an alienated people ...<sup>127</sup>

Not all Christians in Asia were content to stay within this identity dilemma and its attendant issues of dislocation. The rediscovery and reconstruction of identity for the Asian church remains a critical issue.

### Hyphenated identity and theology

A stimulating engagement with this tension of Asian and Christian identity at the level of theology comes from the Indian theologian Duraisingh.<sup>128</sup> He looks at how Christianity has brought ideas from the west to India and the pressure of this for Indian Christians as they renegotiate their identity and are involved in theological activity.” He makes the following point about the factors contributing to identity:

We are not simply Indians who also happen to be Christian; nor are we Christians who, by accident of birth, happen to be also Indian Christians. We are Indian Christians, hyphenated wholes, wherein both the components of our complex heritage are in a wholistic and coalescing relation.<sup>129</sup>

Duraisingh contrasts this deep-seated understanding of identity of “doubly-determined characteristics of Indian-Christians” with the approach of a supra-cultural gospel which needs Asian dress. It is not just a case of giving Christianity a Hindu flavour or “christianizing” aspects of the Hindu faith. There has to be an ongoing process of deep-level interaction of the two faiths. In connection with the work of Pannikar, Duraisingh talks of the “process of image-formation” as the backgrounds of Christianity and Hinduism come together in the minds of Indians, giving rise to “doubly-determined imaginative structures.”<sup>130</sup> By this he appears to mean structures that start from both Christian and Hindu sources as mediated by the consciousness of individual theologians. Duraisingh stresses the deeply rooted nature of these structures, contrasting them with “Christian consciousness at the cognitive level” and suggests that the resources for theology are found at a deep level in the “root images that express the actual life orientation of our faith communities.”<sup>131</sup> Such a thought echoes the idea of Gittins, who sees the process of contextual theology as the change in terms of “the transformation of deep structures into new surface structures (of both

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid, 77.

<sup>128</sup> C. Duraisingh, “A New Expression of Identity,” *Religion and Society* 26 No. 4 (Dec 1979): 95-101.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid, 96.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid, 97-98.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid, 99.

“culture” and “faith”) that are acceptable and meaningful to local people themselves.”<sup>132</sup> In this way faith is “embodied” rather than simply “inserted” into the new culture.

Duraisingh emphasizes the importance of local and historical elements in theologizing in relation to the traditions that exist in India.<sup>133</sup> His idea of “doubly-determined imaginative structures” offer creative paths for theology, although he appears to give space not just to social or cultural ideas but to those of Hindu writings as well.

For Evangelicals in Asia, there is a need to negotiate this issue of multiple identities and to deal with the alienation of Christianity in Asia. It is important that evangelicals come to terms with their Asian Christian heritage and to assess how it has shaped them as Christians. They can also draw on the Christian scriptures as a resource which can, as Smith points out, shape their religious identity and act as a collective narrative. There is a need, too, to find ways of integrating this Asian and Christian heritage so that their identity is seamlessly both Asian and Christian.

#### Identity reviewed

From the writers that have been surveyed, identity emerges as an issue which pervades discussion of Christianity in Asia. In India, Malaysia and the Philippines the construction of identity is seen to be a critical issue allowing for different factors in the historical context.

It is clear that in India identity has been an issue for the movements of Hindu nationalism in the colonial period.<sup>134</sup> Viswanathan has shown that recognition of Christian identity for Indians was a vexed matter, both in relation to other Indians and to the colonial powers.<sup>135</sup> Caste has also influenced identity for Christians. “The problem is that the Christianity that emerged through the missionary effort during the colonial rule ended up taking on a caste identity.”<sup>136</sup> Wilfred notes that in the Dalit context there has been a negative identity of

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<sup>132</sup> Gittins, “Beyond Liturgical Inculturation,” 57.

<sup>133</sup> Duraisingh emphasises this local connection as opposed to the global dimensions of the theological task.

<sup>134</sup> Gavin Flood, “Indian religions and the Hindu tradition,” in *Cambridge Illustrated History of Religion*. ed. J. Bowker (Cambridge: CUP, 2002).

<sup>135</sup> G. Viswanathan, “Coping with (Civil) Death: the Christian Convert’s Rights of Passage in Colonial India,” in *After Colonialism. Imperial Histories and Postcolonial Displacements*, ed. Prakash Gyan (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), 200-206.

<sup>136</sup> Joseph D’Souza, “The Indian Church and Missions Face the Saffronization Challenge,” in *Global Missiology for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: the Iguassu Dialogue*, ed. W. Taylor (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2000), 399.

“servitude.”<sup>137</sup> The subject of identity for the Indian church has received recent attention in relation to Hindu resurgence and the associated pressures on conversion with several Indian states have passed, or are considering passing, anti-conversion laws. This has sparked renewed and urgent interest in the question of Christian identity in relation to India.<sup>138</sup>

This leads D’Souza to observe:

... much work must go into understanding and developing a genuine Indian identity. This is the need for both the church and larger society in the light of the Hindutva attempt to develop an extremist religious identity for the nation. The future of our great nation lies in the acceptance and development of a pan-Indian identity.<sup>139</sup>

This is partly an issue of where Christian identity is seen to lie: is it grounded in Asia with a clearly Asian identity or is it pointing towards a more westernized or international identity?

In Malaysia, the ethnic identity of Malays and their politically supported progress has been a key issue. The identity of Malays as Bumiputra, the people of the land, is a key factor in the conception of Malay social and political identity. Against a background of colonization and the associations of the church with the west, this has led to a suspicion of anything western. This leads to a range of problems for Christians from other communities. It creates special problems for Malays who are or who become Christians – although this is currently a relatively small number of people.

In the Philippines, the issue is one of self-confidence, as well as the need to rebuild a sense of identity in a modern nation. De Mesa points out that “Filipinos need to find themselves, re-establish continuity with their own past history and culture, gain status in their own eyes as a distinct people, ... re-evaluate their achievements... future.”<sup>140</sup> This forms part of his explanation of the rise of nationalist movements. However, he sees the Christian faith tradition as a resource that can help forge the cultural identity of the Filipino people if it is sufficiently connected with Filipino concerns.

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<sup>137</sup> Felix Wilfred “Religions as Agents of Hope: Challenges for the New Millennium,” in *Plurality, Power and Mission: Intercontextual Theological Explorations on the Role of Religion in the New Millennium*, eds. Philip L., Wickeri, Janice K. Wickeri and D.M. A. Niles, (London: CWM, 2000), 55.

<sup>138</sup> S.C.H. Kim, *In Search of Identity. Debates on Religious Conversion in India* (Oxford: OUP, 2003), 3-5, 197-200.

<sup>139</sup> D’Souza notes that even contextualization approaches have been criticized as “deceiving innocent Hindus,” D’Souza, “The Indian Church and Missions,” 402.

<sup>140</sup> De Mesa, “Doing Theology as Inculturation in the Asian Context,” 125.

## **Conclusion**

Christians in Asia are becoming aware that their faith is shaped both by the cultures and religions of Asia and the global forces which are at work in this region. These global forces have played a part in shaping the transmission of Christianity and the way in which societies have responded to Christian believers. The same global forces have been shaping the other religions in Asia. Although there are majority faiths in many of the Asian countries, such as Hinduism in India, and Islam in Malaysia, even these countries have significant groupings of religious believers from different faith communities.

Religious change occurs in Asia and has been part of the historical process of societies in Asia. In some instances as in South-East India, in the Philippines, in South Korea and especially in North-East India there are substantial and occasionally majority Christian communities. These Christian communities have been established at many points in the history of Asia from the earliest days of the church, with St. Thomas Christians, through the era of the Nestorian church and on to the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The selected writers as evangelicals in Asia are familiar with situations of plurality both social and religious. Often their concern is to negotiate the issue of living in societies which are plural by finding common ground within society, while trying to preserve their own religious identity and respecting the identity of others. Christians in Asia are often a religious minority and in some instances as in regions of India and in West Malaysia they find themselves part of ethnic groups which are political minorities as well. At times, as with Christian Dalits in India, they are part of groups who are marginalized within society. In the context of religious resurgence, Christians can find that they are viewed negatively in particular because of the associations of Christianity and the colonial period. The selected writers are seeking ways of understanding religion and drawing on their experience of plural societies by engaging in dialogue in ways that make sense of Christian faith and commend it to others. They are concerned about issues of justice and poverty which relate to power and powerlessness in Asian societies. They are wrestling with missiological models that deal with those issues at a social level both for themselves and for others. Although it has not always been easy for Christians to be involved in politics or even civil society they suggest ways in which Christians can be more involved in the public square through nation-building and participation in civil society.

The selected writers are developing models of mission that help Christians in Asia negotiate the missiological, religious and social issues that the church faces at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. They are conscious of the need to create space for mission by forging an

appropriate Asian Christian identity. The core chapters of this study will consider how the selected writers try to shape their Asian Christian identity by dealing with their Asian settings and associated heritage, and the Christian scriptures and their evangelical heritage. It is in the interplay of these two areas that an evangelical missiology which helps with Asian Christian identity is shaped.

The selected writers realize the need to develop forms of contextual missiology, that are at home in Asia cultures and models that show that Christian faith is a credible faith option that contributes positively to Asian societies. They also recognize that such models must be demonstrated in the life of Christian communities that show forth the values of the kingdom of God in a credible way through lives of integrity and service. These are the challenges which face the development of evangelical missiology in contemporary Asia.

**Part Two**  
**Transformational Missiology – an Emerging Trend in**  
**Evangelical Missiology in Asia**

## CHAPTER 3

### Escobar's Framework and Evangelical Missiology – Locating Transformational Missiology in Asia

This chapter considers the framework put forward by the Peruvian missiologist Samuel Escobar.<sup>1</sup> This framework, derived in relation to evangelical missiology will be critiqued and modifications proposed. This new framework will be used vis-à-vis to the selected writers to suggest a way of looking at evangelical missiology in Asia which will be called transformational missiology. Transformational missiology as a form of evangelical missiology in Asia, will be discussed in relation to the greater openness towards more contextual forms of mission and interest in the social settings of mission that have characterized evangelical missiology from the time of the Lausanne congress onwards, especially in two thirds world contexts. It will be critiqued in terms of the emphases of evangelical missiology noted in chapter 1, in particular the recent tendency to give priority once again to evangelization in mission as opposed to more wholistic concepts of mission.

#### 3.1 Missiology – definitions and frameworks

##### 3.1.1 Basic terms defined

##### Missiology

At the start of this discussion on models of missiology I will define the terms used. In the context of this study, mission refers to the activity of churches or Christian communities in sharing their faith and its implications in the world; missiology<sup>2</sup> is used to refer to reflection about mission.<sup>3</sup>

The following definition from Escobar, would fit the general approach adopted in this thesis:

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<sup>1</sup> S. Escobar, "Evangelical Missiology: Peering into the Future," in *Global Missiology for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: the Iguassu Dialogue*, ed W. Taylor (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 200), 101-122.

<sup>2</sup> The multi-disciplinary nature of missiology and its relation to other fields of study such as history and anthropology is explored by Tippet. A. Tippet, *Introduction to Missiology* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1987), xxi-xxv.

<sup>3</sup> L. Ramambason, "The Study of Mission in Theological Institutions," in *Ecumenical Missiology: Contemporary Trends, Issues and Themes*, ed. Lalsangkima Pachuau (Bangalore: The United Theological College, 2002), 268. Ramambason reflects on the ambiguities in the discussion of the term "missiology."

I define missiology as an interdisciplinary approach to understand missionary action. It looks at missionary facts from the perspectives of the biblical sciences, theology, history and the social sciences. ... Missiology is a critical reflection on praxis, in the light of God's word.<sup>4</sup>

This study focuses primarily on theological dimensions of mission viewed in relation to the Christian scriptures, although it recognizes that missiology can draw on other disciplines and does not want to preclude these from this study. Bosch affirms the notion that there is no single perspective on theology of mission but that different Christian groups come to mission in their own way and in their own time.<sup>5</sup> Ramachandra has made the point that missiology should not just be seen as an academic discipline which looks at the practicalities of mission, but a perspective which lies at the heart of all theological reflection.<sup>6</sup>

### Theology of mission

The concept of a 'missiological theology' has been used to connect theology and mission. The writings of Bosch and Jongeneel use this idea of missiological theology as an important way of putting missions at the core of thinking about theology. They express an interest in the idea that the emerging theologies in the two thirds world can 'rejuvenate' the theological process.<sup>7</sup> The idea of a missiological theology is close to the spirit of Walls' emphases in his writing. Real life issues need to be at the centre of the theological agenda: a neglect of this can lead to sterility and irrelevance in theological endeavour. A concern for mission helps to keep vital matters at the heart of the theological agenda.<sup>8</sup> This thesis sees the focus of missiology as centred around theology of mission and theologizing about mission. Kirk gives a useful definition:

The theology of mission is a disciplined study which deals with questions that arise when people of faith seek to understand and fulfil God's purposes in the world, as these are demonstrated in the ministry of Jesus Christ. It is a critical reflection on attitudes and actions adopted by Christians in pursuit of the missionary mandate. Its task is to validate, correct and

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<sup>4</sup> S. Escobar, "Evangelical Missiology: Peering into the Future," 101.

<sup>5</sup> D. Bosch, *Transforming Mission*. (NY: Orbis, 1992), 8. Bosch follows Soares-Prabhu.

<sup>6</sup> V. Ramachandra, *Gods That Fail. Modern Idolatry and Christian Mission* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster Press, 1996), 18.

<sup>7</sup> J. A. B. Jongeneel, *Philosophy, Science and Theology of Mission in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries: A Missiological Encyclopedia. Part 2: Missionary Theology* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1997), 9-11, 17-18.

<sup>8</sup> A. Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Modern History* (New York: Orbis, 1996), 43-54. Walls does not appear to use the term "missiological theology," possibly sharing Ramachandra's wariness of such terminology.

establish on better foundations the entire practice of mission.<sup>9</sup> In Asia, two thirds world theologies and their missiological focus has stimulated thinking about theology itself. Hwa Yung<sup>10</sup> has an interest in theological approaches which deal with issues faced in everyday life in Asia and which encourage a missiological focus to theology. He makes an effort to connect the concepts of theology of mission to a general missiological outlook in theology and makes the proposal that “Asian theologies should be theologies of mission.”<sup>11</sup> Such an equivalence is justified by Hwa on three grounds: the fact that Asian theological reflection has emerged out of a context of mission, that the agenda of Asian theology and its issues show a degree of overlap with issues in mission theology and finally that theology must be missiological and pastoral.<sup>12</sup> Hwa sees many of the issues he and his colleagues face as coming from ‘real-life missiological endeavours’.<sup>13</sup> This leads him to propose that Asian theologies must show the following characteristics: they must be theologies of mission; they must address the socio-political context and empower in the area of pastoral concerns which implies they are wholistic and that they take spiritual theology seriously; they should show appropriate contextualization and self-theologizing - in other words that they are deeply embedded and refashioned for Asian contexts. Asian theologians also need to make a connection with the theological traditions of the church universal.<sup>14</sup> An interest in the potential role of non-western elements in shaping the missiological debate is clear.

In this study, I would like to stress the importance of non-western voices as a central element of new directions in evangelical missiology. The impetus that the two thirds world gives to missiology is a reminder of the global character of the church’s missiological task and the way in which the world church is involved in the task of missiology.<sup>15</sup> The Korean writer David Lee urges that the agenda for missiology must be determined by Asian missiologists themselves.<sup>16</sup> It is in that spirit of critical reflection on mission that this study explores what

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<sup>9</sup> A. Kirk, *What is Mission? Theological Explorations* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1999), 21.

<sup>10</sup> Hwa, Yung, *Mangoes or Bananas. The Quest for an Authentic Asian Christian Theology* (Oxford: Regnum Books, 1997). See also Gnanakan’s comments. “We are challenged to see theology as missiological ...” K. Gnanakan, *Kingdom Concerns*. (Bangalore: Theological book Trust, 1989), 207.

<sup>11</sup> Hwa, *Mangoes or Bananas*, 17-26, 56-58.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, 18-19, 20-26.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, 19.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, 56-58.

<sup>15</sup> Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 495-496.

<sup>16</sup> David Lee, Interview by Warren R. Beattie, 28<sup>th</sup> March 2002, Singapore. D Lee offers comments on the nature of mission and the agenda for Asian missiology, as one personally engaged in missionary movements.

is happening in Asia by considering models of missiology from the west and Asia and by proposing a model for missiology in Asia drawn from the work of Asian writers themselves.

### **3.1.2 Frameworks for missiology**

Before Escobar's framework is explored in greater detail, attention will be given to other frameworks of missiology which have a bearing on evangelical missiology, like those of Bosch and Sundermeier.

#### **Bosch**

Escobar is not alone in his assessment and critique of missiology in the post-World War II era. David Bosch's work<sup>17</sup> offers a much longer historical survey and suggests frameworks for how mission can progress in what he calls a "postmodern paradigm."<sup>18</sup> The context of Bosch's thinking is his attempt to make sense of the world that faces the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and how mission and missiology must be reshaped to deal with that world. Bosch paints a picture of the pessimism of missions and relations with the "younger churches" in this context.<sup>19</sup> He is conscious of the need for churches in the two thirds world to move forwards in mission. Their potential for shaping the missiological agenda is evident, and Bosch is aware that missiology will need to progress with a mixture of "continuity and change" in non-western contexts.<sup>20</sup> In terms of his engagement with non-western and Asian contexts, Bosch's approach is rather limited.

However, Bosch's critique of categories like theology of mission and his postmodern paradigm with its diverse categories and its clear reflections on issues in missiology have shaped the formation of this study. As well as theological topics which affect mission like Christology, eschatology and ecclesiology, Bosch engages with the debate over contextualization and inculturation and the issue of theology of religions. He points the way to issue that engage two thirds world writers in the field of missiology. This study has also been influenced by Bosch's work on biblical studies and mission in his opening chapters.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 262ff.

<sup>18</sup> In the context of a discussion of postmodernity, Solomon speculates that the resurgence of neo-Confucianism is more significant for South East Asia. The backdrop of postmodernity which frames Bosch's discussion is not necessarily a critical Asian concern. R. Solomon, *Living in Two Worlds: Pastoral Responses to Possession in Singapore* (Peter Lang: Frankfurt, 1992), 253-255, 292.

<sup>19</sup> Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 364-365.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 365-366

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, 32-33. See especially Bosch's interest in the kingdom of God and mission.

Bosch offers a diffuse framework and one which is not close enough to the contours of Asian missiology to be a primary choice for this study, but his paradigm and insights offer important points of reference for thinking about missiology.

### Sundermeier

Another writer who has influenced this study is Theo Sundermeier. His overview of theology of mission, which looks at historical, biblical and theological influences, has encouraged reflection on the resources which can be used for missiology. Sundermeier's model connects with the broad framework of this thesis in his recognition of resources for missiology and areas of engagement. He singles out the Christian scriptures; the 'tradition of mission history and theology'; the reflection on mission from the wider ecumenical movements; and the input from two thirds world theologies and the impact of world events on today's world.<sup>22</sup> Like Bosch, Sundermeier's framework tries to take account of the contexts of theology and he is aware of the importance of the two thirds world contribution to mission.

At the conclusion of his missiological framework, Sundermeier notes the importance of a set of issues – mission and religions, mission and dialogue, and mission and development. Although topics considered in this study go beyond Sundermeier's categories, the areas of religion and economic development do form part of the discussion. The structure of this thesis share points of contact with Sundermeier's thinking, especially as regards the influence of world Christianity, the influence of Asian backgrounds and the place of the Christian scriptures in shaping evangelical missiology in Asia.

### Other writers

There are other frameworks of missiology whose themes interact with this thesis. These include Kirk's study of theology of mission, particularly his understanding of theology of mission.<sup>23</sup> His framework of core issues, however, does not fit so closely issues that are of importance to the selected writers. There are points in common such as justice, the encounter with other faiths and the proclamation of the good news of the gospel. Jongeneel's exhaustive study of missiology has also informed the author's understanding of core concepts, as for example his interest in the potential of two third world theologians and

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<sup>22</sup> Theo Sundermeier, "Theology of Mission," in *Dictionary of Mission: Theological, Historical, Perspectives*, eds. K.T. Muller, T. Sundermeier and S.B.Evans (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1997).

<sup>23</sup> Kirk, *What is Mission?*, 56-142. Kirk's themes include the gospel as "announcing good news," "justice for the poor" and "encounter with religions of the world."

the energy they can bring to missiology.<sup>24</sup> Bevans and Schroeder's recent work<sup>25</sup> on theology of mission with its discussion on world Christianity, *missio dei*, the place of Christology, and dialogue, interacts with core issues in this thesis.

### **3.2 An overview of Escobar's framework**

#### **3.2.1 Escobar introduced**

There are several reasons for choosing Escobar and his framework as a basis for this thesis, the major one being the way in which Escobar deals with different dimensions of evangelical missiology across the globe. While his framework interacts with different international trends in evangelical missiology including those in North America and Europe, his interest moves towards missiologists in the non-western world including Asia. Two of the selected writers, Samuel and Ramachandra, are discussed by Escobar as examples of "critical missiology from the periphery."<sup>26</sup>

Escobar is a Latin American from Peru. However, he offers a non-western perspective on missiology that engages with Asia and is of interest to many within the evangelical missiological community. At the World Evangelical Association (WEA)<sup>27</sup> Iguassu Missiological Consultation, held in Brazil in October 1999, Escobar delivered a paper in which he considered evangelical missiology and its future.<sup>28</sup> He suggested three missiological trends or approaches which he felt were important within evangelicalism. These three trends are described as 'post-imperial missiology', 'managerial missiology' and a 'critical missiology from the periphery'. Escobar's outline of these trends will be taken as a framework for analyzing evangelical missiology including missiology in Asia. Given that the WEA represents evangelicals from many different countries, and recognizing that Escobar is critical in his paper of missiological trends within evangelicalism, his critique is of interest to different strands of global evangelicalism.

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<sup>24</sup> Jongeneel, *Philosophy, Science and Theology of Mission in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries, part 2*, 9-11, 17-18.

<sup>25</sup> S. Bevans, and R. P. Schroeder. 2004. *Constants in Context. A Theology of Mission for Today*. (N.Y.:Orbis, 2004), 239-243, 295-303.

<sup>26</sup> Escobar, "Evangelical Missiology: Peering into the Future," 113-118

<sup>27</sup> At the time in 1999, it was called the World Evangelical Fellowship.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, 107-114.

## Movements encouraging “a critical missiology from the periphery”

Escobar prefaces his discussion of missiological trends by observing wider trends within evangelical missiology. As Evangelicals became increasingly active and reflective after World War II, the Lausanne movement facilitated new directions in missiology. Escobar recognizes that Lausanne allowed for a more international discussion and that delegates were generally open to the new insights. “Lausanne I was characterized by the openness to hear from that new reflection, at the same time contextual and engaged.”<sup>29</sup> The idea that the Lausanne movement is seen as facilitating the work of evangelicals in Asia, as they wanted to get more involved in development and wholistic themes, is shared by others like Samuel. There was, however, concern amongst Evangelicals that the Lausanne movement has struggled at times to maintain this agenda and that the second Lausanne congress at Manila 1989 “did not represent the plurality of the non-western church” which was seen by the reluctance of radical evangelicals to attend.<sup>30</sup>

Other Asians, like David Lee<sup>31</sup> have pointed out the importance of the Lausanne movement for helping to move missiology beyond its western roots and acknowledging its emphasis on wholism. “One of the most significant changes in Evangelical Missiology after the Lausanne congress has been in opting for holistic missiology.”<sup>32</sup> There is also a recognition on the part of Wickeri and his colleagues of the more ‘radical spirit of Lausanne’. Recognizing the more wholistic elements of the emerging missiology, they acknowledge that “Lausanne has helped to broaden the perspective of evangelical missiology in Asia ...”<sup>33</sup>

## Escobar’s framework

Escobar sets out three missiological approaches.<sup>34</sup> Post-imperial missiology is described as the kind of missiology which has developed in the UK and Europe following World War II. It is distinctive in the way that it was “characterized by a clear post-imperial stance” and recognizes new realities in mission. It seeks to analyze history as well as biblical resources

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<sup>29</sup> Escobar, “Evangelical Missiology: Peering into the Future,” 103-105, 112.

<sup>30</sup> V. Samuel, “The Development Movement – an Overview and an Appraisal,” *Transformation* 13 No.4 (Oct 1996): 12-16.

<sup>31</sup> D. T.W. Lee, “A Two-thirds World Evaluation of Contemporary Evangelical Missiology,” in *Global Missiology for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: the Iguassu Dialogue*, ed. W. Taylor (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2000), 137.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid*, 137-138, 140.

<sup>33</sup> P.L. Wickeri, Al Tizon and Hee Mo Yim, “A Survey of Evangelical Missiological Concerns with Particular Reference to Asia,” in *The People of God Among all God’s Peoples: Frontiers in Christian Mission*, ed. Philip L. Wickeri (Hong Kong: CCA, 1999), 302, 318.

<sup>34</sup> Escobar, “Evangelical Missiology: Peering into the Future,” 103.

so that missiology could progress in new directions.<sup>35</sup> Managerial missiology is a form of missiology associated with institutions in Pasadena, California in the USA which stresses quantitative analyzes of mission, has a “pragmatic orientation” to missiology and draws on the social sciences.<sup>36</sup> A “critical missiology from the periphery” refers to missiologists in the non-western world and their particular approaches to mission which adopt a more critical stance to missiological themes as they deal with the legacy of mission at the end of the twentieth century.<sup>37</sup>

This study will analyze these trends in relation to Asia and it will locate the selected writers in the context of a critical missiology from the periphery. Escobar presents these trends as relating to different regions of the world, but this study proposes that there are two broad groupings within evangelicalism in Asia which draw on the missiological trends outlined by Escobar. One grouping is located within the critical missiology from the periphery, the other draws on managerial missiology. This study will focus on the former grouping and will give the missiology developed by the selected writers the designation “transformational missiology.” This implies the adoption of an approach to missiology specifically for Asia as adopted by the selected writers.

This study will suggest that there is a missiological trend which can be termed ‘mission as transformation’ which has helped to inform the kind of critique which is taking place in Asia and which has shaped in part the critical missiology from the periphery.<sup>38</sup> It is proposed that the selected writers represent the grouping of critical missiology from the periphery, drawing in part on the insights gained from the “mission as transformation” movement, but adapting and going beyond these in relation to Asia. The designation for the grouping associated with transformational missiology is the concept at the heart of this study. The other grouping in Asia draws on the trend designated by managerial missiology which represents both an emphasis on quantitative approaches to missiology and an emphasis on evangelization as the key missiological priority. Those who adopt “transformational missiology” are more critical of managerial missiology as an approach to mission in Asia. Both groupings, however, are sympathetic to the insights of post-imperial missiology.

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid, 107.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, 109-112.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, 112-114.

<sup>38</sup> In terms of the this study’s terminology the concept of “mission as transformation” functions as a “missiology of transformation.”

The identification of the selected writers with transformational missiology will be shown by pointing to the overlap between the themes and approach which occur in their writings on missiology and the themes of transformational missiology as defined below. There are members of the focal group who clearly identify with the “mission as transformation” movement, like Samuel. Others like Hwa, Ng, and Maggay have more limited connections to this movement.<sup>39</sup> The study will show the way in which transformational missiology goes beyond this movement and how these writers exhibit an interest in wider themes of transformation and not just in the movement itself. Ramachandra is not directly linked to the “mission as transformation” movement: how he connects to the broader category of transformational missiology will be considered in more detail as the study progresses.

### **3.2.2 Post-imperial missiology**

In the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century there has been a revision of mission activities within global evangelicalism, particularly compared with those taking place in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. This has taken the form of a re-assessment of mission as missiologists have tried to make sense of issues like the historical process of transmission of the gospel and its contextualization in non-western cultures, the place of identity, and the impact of Christianity in the religious contexts of the world.

Escobar uses the category of post-imperial missiology<sup>40</sup> to designate the influence of European-style studies on mission particularly in the post-World War II era. By this he means a missiology which takes account of the implications of colonialism and the historical ebb and flow of missions in the preceding centuries,<sup>41</sup> which recognizes the reality of decline in the western church and the shift of the centre of gravity of the church from the “north” to the “south.”<sup>42</sup> It is also an approach which in the context of emerging independent nations in places like Asia and Africa, tries to deal seriously with the interactions of mission and the colonial period in the aftermath of that era.

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<sup>39</sup> These writers have all contributed to the journal *Transformation*. Samuel suggests that Maggay’s *Transforming Society* is the political theology which most closely identifies with the movement.

<sup>40</sup> Escobar’s choice of post-imperial rather than post-colonial is doubtless deliberate and seems to suggest an era rather than an identifiable school of thought.

<sup>41</sup> Escobar, “Evangelical Missiology: Peering into the Future,” 107-110.

<sup>42</sup> These terms are taken to mean the economically richer countries of Europe, North America and Asia as opposed to the poorer countries of the world (the latter often situated in the southern hemisphere.)

For Escobar this kind of missiology is epitomized by the approach to biblical studies of writers such as Stott, and Yoder<sup>43</sup> and to a fresh analysis of mission and history by writers like Warren, Neill and Mehl.<sup>44</sup> When it comes to the nature of the church as a global church, Escobar recognizes the work of Walls and Stanley as significant.<sup>45</sup> Other contemporary exponents of this emphasis in Europe would include missiologists like Kirk and Smith<sup>46</sup> and the historian Jenkins.

Some non-western writers, such as the African Kwame Bediako and the Sri Lankan Ramachandra are generally positive about the use of history in mission studies and the parallels which can be drawn with the early church in particular and the modern world.<sup>47</sup> Others, like David Lee, who was a respondent to Escobar's paper at Iguassu, whilst conceding that Walls' idea of a global hermeneutic community is a positive lens and model with which to view missiology, has concerns about a missiology that draws too much on making parallels with earlier eras of history. Such an approach put too much emphasis on diachronic comparisons rather than on contemporary assessments of mission in a particular region. Lee reckons that other models of missiology, drawing on the analysis of social sciences and its contribution to the study of missiology are more relevant for contemporary situations than a return to Christian history. This is D. Lee's defence of 20<sup>th</sup> century missiology - with its social science background - over against the use of Christian history as a lens to view mission history.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> J. Stott, *Christian Mission in the Modern World* (Eastbourne: Kingsway, 1986). M.Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1970). J.H. Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1972).

<sup>44</sup> M. Warren, *Social History and Christian Mission* (London: SCM, 1967). R. Mehl, *Sociology of Protestantism* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1970). S. Neill, *Colonialism and Missions* (London: Lutterworth, 1966).

<sup>45</sup> In terms of the specific analysis of the North American missionary endeavour, Escobar points to B. Stanley, *Bible and the Flag Protestant Missions and British Imperialism in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Leicester: Apollos, 1990).

<sup>46</sup> D. Smith, *Mission after Christendom* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2003).

<sup>47</sup> K. Bediako, "World Evangelisation, Institutional Evangelicalism and the Future of Christian world mission" in *Proclaiming Christ in God's Way*, ed. V. Samuel and A. Hauser (Oxford: Regnum, 1989), 64-69. V. Ramachandra, *The Recovery of Mission: Beyond the Pluralist Paradigm* (ISPCK: Delhi, 1996), 224-229. Ramachandra is generally more positive of the aims of post-imperial missiology.

<sup>48</sup> Lee, Interview.

### 3.2.3 A critical missiology from the periphery

This section will begin with the categorization of “a critical missiology from the periphery.” Escobar uses this category for the emergence of missiology in non-western regions of the world, Asia, Africa and Latin America. As a Latin American himself, Escobar uses this designation in a functional way, recognizing historical and geographical distinctions within the church. It is applied to a group of people who have been conscious of their identity as one part of the global church after World War II, and who are aware of the missiological critique and development that have taken place in that era. It is “critical” in the sense that they want to move beyond previous approaches to mission done in the west, many of which emphasized the need for the church to expand, and they want to make a more *qualitative* analysis of mission, asking questions about the nature of mission in the non-western world.

The designation “periphery” comes from Escobar himself. An interplay between concepts of centre and periphery is a feature of academic studies in the post-colonial period, where there is a concern that the preoccupations of the west, as the centre, dictate the agenda of study in the humanities.<sup>49</sup> Writers have observed that centre-periphery contrasts can be associated with other contrasts such as power and powerlessness or authenticity and a lack of authenticity.<sup>50</sup> Categories of centre and periphery can be viewed as contingent descriptions, with the possibility that roles can change over time.<sup>51</sup>

These insights fit with the kind of emphases that have been asserted in terms of world Christianity, especially in relation to the idea that the statistical centre of gravity is shifting implying a new non-western centre to the world church, but still “peripheral” in terms of its role, as yet, in the formulation of theology and missiology. It could be argued that as a non-western person Escobar is using the label “periphery” both positively, in the sense that missiologists from the periphery are continuing to make a contribution, and negatively, in that the work of the missiologists from non-western areas is not fully recognized.

Writing in the west, Engel and Dyrness suggest the structure of missions needs to change from a movement that starts from the “centre”, meaning the west as a region which retains

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<sup>49</sup> L. Gandhi, *Post-colonial Theory. A Critical Introduction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), 3-5, 45-46. Gandhi discusses this theme in relation to the humanities. It fits with the wider discussion of the shift of centre of gravity in Christianity.

<sup>50</sup> A. Cohen, “Introduction: Discriminating Relations – Identity, Boundary and Authenticity,” in *Signifying Identities: Anthropological Perspectives on Boundaries and Contested Values*, ed. A. Cohen (London: Routledge, 2000), 1-6.

<sup>51</sup> A. Cohen, “Peripheral Vision: Nationalism, National Identity and the Objective Correlation in Scotland,” in *Signifying Identities: Anthropological Perspectives on Boundaries and Contested Values*, ed. A. Cohen (London: Routledge, 2000), 164-167.

economic power and theological hegemony, to one that moves “toward a poor and needy periphery.”<sup>52</sup> Such an analysis, despite its not entirely accurate designation of the periphery as necessarily “poor and needy,” does begin to challenge the assumptions of evangelicals in the west about mission and acknowledges the need for different kinds of partnership in missions. In fact, as this study will show, “the periphery” has insights to offer the west in terms of its contribution to missiology.

The relationship between western and non-western evangelical thinking on mission has been fostered by Walls whose research projects have encouraged an approach to the history of missions that takes account of the present global nature of Christianity. African voices such as Sanneh and Bediako emphasize similar themes from non-western perspectives.<sup>53</sup> Within Evangelicalism, Latin American voices have also been important from Lausanne onwards. Writing in the 1980s, Rene Padilla stressed the need for Latin Americans to develop and make known their own theology of mission.<sup>54</sup> The need for regions such as Asia to continue developing their own theology of mission remains a pressing concern, which indeed underlies this thesis.

Discussing the changing post-Christendom world and the implications of the rise of global Christianity, Escobar suggests that the traditional mission models inherited from the Christendom era have become obsolete.<sup>55</sup> He sees potential for change by drawing on the resources of biblical studies. In particular, he advocates a renewed interest in Trinitarian missiology for evangelicals, acknowledging the place of Christology but stressing *missio dei*, God’s initiative in mission, and a greater role for the Holy Spirit in theology of mission.<sup>56</sup>

#### A critical missiology from the periphery in relation to Asia

In considering how Asians relate to missiology from the periphery, Escobar assesses the work of Asians such as Samuel<sup>57</sup> (with Chris Sugden), David Lim<sup>58</sup> and Ramachandra.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> J. Engel and William A. Dyrness, *Changing the Mind of Mission. Where Have We Gone Wrong?* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2000), 48; 49-53.

<sup>53</sup> K. Bediako, “The Gospel and the Transformation of the Non-Western World.’ In, *Anglican life and witness: a reader for the Lambeth conference of Anglican Bishops 1998*, eds.. Samuel and Sugden, (London: SPCK 1989), 65-69. L. Sanneh, *Whose Religion is Christianity?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 25-34.

<sup>54</sup> R. Padilla, *Mission between the Times*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 95-100.

<sup>55</sup> Escobar, “Evangelical Missiology: Peering into the Future at the Turn of the Century,” 101.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid*, 114-121.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid*, 113.

<sup>58</sup> David Lim’s writings were surveyed for this study, but Maggay appeared to offer a more comprehensive discussion of mission topics from the Philippines.

<sup>59</sup> Escobar, “Evangelical Missiology: Peering into the Future,” 112-114.

Escobar sees these non-western missiologists wrestling with themes like the links between mission, poverty and social transformation, and he defends their emphasis on such topics:

...this missiological emphasis is not something added artificially to what otherwise would be purely evangelistic emphasis. It is a concern, that comes from the demands of both the evangelistic and pastoral activity which these practitioners of mission cannot avoid.<sup>60</sup>

The study will suggest that the selected writers are located firmly within the category of missiology from the periphery both in terms of geographical orientation and of missiological perspective. At the same time it acknowledges differences of emphasis between Samuel<sup>61</sup> and Ramachandra – their focus is more international - and the way in which Hwa, Ng and Maggay have related more intensively to their national contexts.<sup>62</sup> This grouping of five people constitutes a missiology from the periphery in the Asian context and they are chosen to represent the various emphases of transformational missiology within that periphery.

#### Theological dimensions of a critical missiology from the periphery

Asian writers are aware that a critical missiology from the periphery will involve a fresh assessment of theological as well as mission issues. They recognize the historical place and role of the western theological tradition, but they are aware that this tradition must be transcended for the sake of the mission of the church in Asia.

Maggay is aware that an adjustment of theology must take place in Asia, starting from the western heritage but moving on from there:

While the western theological tradition is an important part of the heritage of the church the world over, it is only one of the possible readings – what one culture perceives as ‘the barest essentials’ would differ from what another culture would consider as an important focus.<sup>63</sup>

The western legacy of Christianity affects both the agenda of theology and the way of doing theology. This has led to a situation where Asians have to come to theological issues for their own world through the filter of what western theology recognizes as worthy of theological study. Maggay points out reflection on western creeds in Asia can lead to Asian theologians trying to “answer questions raised by Greek sophists...” rather than dealing with matters that are important for Asia.<sup>64</sup> The way theology is approached is just as important as

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid, 113.

<sup>61</sup> The study recognizes Samuel’s long-standing connections with India and Ramachandra’s connections with Sri Lanka as well.

<sup>62</sup> This is not to say they are not active or influential beyond their countries.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid, 10.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid, 17.

its agenda. Maggay wonders if the great gulf seen by some western theologians in terms of “saving souls” and “feeding bodies” comes from a tendency in western people to dichotomize and divide up matters of soul and body as a result of their philosophical heritage.<sup>65</sup> There is a need for two thirds world theologians not just to press for a more contextual theology which engages at a deep level but resolutely and thoroughly to “challenge Western theologies.”<sup>66</sup>

It is in the context of moving beyond western theology that Escobar himself sees the importance of missiologists in the non-western world striving to be credible when they seek to represent the gospel of Jesus Christ and deal with the social issues that confront them.<sup>67</sup>

### **3.2.4 Managerial missiology**

Managerial missiology introduced and critiqued

Managerial missiology is one of the key categories in Escobar’s framework. It was one of the more contentious<sup>68</sup> aspects of Escobar’s presentation and produced reaction in the evangelical community of missiology.<sup>69</sup> He uses this to refer to what could be termed a Pasadena cluster of missiology, based around the contribution of people and institutions around Pasadena in California, USA

This is an important topic, Escobar defining it as a trend that attempts to make Christian mission into an activity that can be quantitatively managed. He uses MacGavran as a focus for his critique, seeing the Church Growth School as being the starting point for subsequent organizations like the *AD2000 and Beyond* movement. Escobar is aware that some missiologists such as Glasser and Van Engen have tried to offer more nuanced assessments of this missiology.<sup>70</sup> For Escobar managerial missiology has two main characteristics: the first is an emphasis on mission in terms of “a quantitative and pragmatic orientation” and the

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid, 30-31.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid, 8.

<sup>67</sup> Escobar, “Evangelical Missiology: Peering into the Future,” 111.

<sup>68</sup> Escobar’s designation of managerial missiology is a term that can be contested. Lee, “A Two-thirds World Evaluation of Contemporary Evangelical Missiology,” 139-141.

<sup>69</sup> “Has Missiology Become Too ‘Managerial’?” (News section). *Mission Frontiers* (Jan 2000): 51. D. Neff, Stepping on Toes. Brazil Missiology Conference Produces Debate,” *World Pulse* 34 No.24 (Dec 1999): 1-2.

<sup>70</sup> A. Glasser and D. MacGavran, eds., *Contemporary Theologies of Mission*. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983). 101-107. C.E. Van Engen, *Mission on the Way: Issues in Mission Theology*. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996).

other is the influence of the functional social sciences on missiology.<sup>71</sup> In terms of the first characteristic, Escobar is concerned that the church growth movement puts too much emphasis on the priority of evangelism and uses statistics to reduce mission to a quantitative enterprise. He sees this as meaning that method takes priority over theology, the place of theological foundations for mission being diminished. In terms of the second characteristic, Escobar feels that particular social science models get too much emphasis leading to vulnerability if the models themselves are superseded.

### The Pasadena cluster and managerial missiology reviewed

Critique of such approaches is by no means limited to Escobar. Engel and Dyrness represent those ready from within Fuller seminary to critique what they see as unhelpful recent trends in evangelical missiological thinking and practice.<sup>72</sup> They recognize the possibility for a new approach to missions and have also critiqued this approach in connection with the search for new paradigms of missiology. They contrast “the prevailing managerial paradigm,” which they relate to modernity, with a “kingdom paradigm.”<sup>73</sup> This provoked negative reactions from those based in Pasadena.

In the U.K., David Smith has similar worries about western models of mission like the *Disciple a Whole Nation Movement* (DAWN) which is the kind of movement exemplified by managerial missiology.<sup>74</sup> He is critical of the way evangelistic movements like *DAWN* view evangelization of non-western countries primarily in relation to the west, giving undue emphasis to the assumed historic priority of the west, which in the context of global mission and the global church has negative connotations. The work of the managerial missiologists would be characterized by an interest in the visible church and its growth, where “church growth” and “people group” terminology are emphasised. The period following the Lausanne movement has seen a number of movements whose interests would be similar such as the *DAWN* and *AD2000* movements.<sup>75</sup> In Pasadena, the influential institute led by Winter

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid, 111.

<sup>72</sup> See also J.T. Phillips and R. T. Coote, eds., *Toward the Twenty-first Century in Christian Mission: Essays in Honour of Gerald H. Anderson*(Grand Rapids. Eerdmans, 1993).

<sup>73</sup> J. F.Engel, and W A. Dyrness, *Changing the Mind of Mission. Where Have We Gone Wrong?* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2000), 83-88. This analysis makes similar points to Escobar.

<sup>74</sup> D. Smith, *Mission after Christendom* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2003), 5-12.

<sup>75</sup> R. T. Coote, “The Numbers Game in Evangelism,” *Transformation* 8 No.1 (Jan-Mar 1991): 1-5. R.T. Coote, “ ‘AD 2000’ and the ‘10/40 Window’: a Preliminary Assessment,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, 24 No. 14 (Oct 2000): 160-166. Coote eirenicly critiques various strategic approaches.

published the *Perspectives* materials which are widely used.<sup>76</sup> Their main emphasis is on strategic perspectives of mission and varieties of church-planting, although recently these have made some space for other outlooks and perspectives with some mention of transformation. Materials of the American Southern Baptist, Garrison, on church-planting movements draw on the same missiological roots.<sup>77</sup>

Although he is equally concerned that missiology develops to a more global form which embraces mission from the periphery, David Lee disagrees strongly with Escobar and his analysis, objecting that a whole strand of missiology cannot be written off in the two word epithet of “managerial missiology.” He believes that the work done by 20<sup>th</sup> century missiologists in the USA has contributed to our understanding of what is needed in mission and to models of missiology that have made a difference.<sup>78</sup>

### Missiology of transmission

Given the criticism of Escobar’s category of managerial missiology, and its slightly pejorative aspects, a more neutral way of dealing with the movements associated with the U.S.A. and particularly the institutions in Pasadena would be to offer an alternative designation. One possible way to do this is to consider the thinking represented by this school as a “missiology of transmission.”<sup>79</sup>

Looking at representative texts from this movement, like those by MacGavran, Glasser, and Winter, there is a strong emphasis on two elements: one key element is a focus on quantitative analyses of the church’s situation; the other is an interest in church-planting and church growth. Missiology of transmission could be delineated as follows. It involves an emphasis on transmission, with the priority of mission as evangelization and the proclamation of the gospel as a message of repentance and hope through faith in Christ. There is a connection between the emphasis on mission as proclamation of the gospel and the way in which church-planting is a key motif in relation to the Christian community. Not

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<sup>76</sup> R. Winter and S. Hawthorne, ed., *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, 3rd ed. (Pasadena: William Carey, 1999).

<sup>77</sup> D. Garrison, *Church Planting Movements* (Richmond, VA: International Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, 2000).

<sup>78</sup> Lee, “A Two-thirds World Evaluation of Contemporary Evangelical Missiology,” in *Global Missiology for the 21st Century*, 138-140.

<sup>79</sup> This terminology was partly suggested as a contrast to mission as transformation and partly to avoid using “evangelization.” It could be contentious - Walls notes that his use of “transmission” was critiqued in terms of whether it included “appropriation.” A. Walls, *The Cross-cultural Process in Christian History* (NY: Orbis, 2004), ix.

only is evangelization prioritised in local contexts, but in terms of global mission<sup>80</sup> there is an interest in the expansion of the church cross-culturally through missionary movements.<sup>81</sup> Missiologists such as David Lee who adopt such a stance appear to be more sympathetic to social science and statistical analysis of world situations.<sup>82</sup>

### **3.2.5 Missiology in Asia in relation to Escobar's framework**

In this section consideration will be given to how Escobar's categories relate to evangelicals in Asia, in the light of the above discussion. Although the focus up to this point has been on the second and third of Escobar's categories, missiologists from different perspectives in Asia take an interest in how the insights of post-imperial missiology can contribute new elements to missiology in Asia. Both those who are sympathetic to managerial missiology and, as will be seen in the subsequent chapters, the selected writers, take an interest in post-imperial missiology in terms of its critique of mission in the past and what can be learned from that.

To an extent, missiologists like David Lee are positive about drawing on the insights of Walls and others who talk about the more global nature of the church and the development of a missiology, a "global missiology" that draws on a new understanding of the church as a product of the missionary activity of preceding centuries.<sup>83</sup> Lee is an advocate of the need to develop a global missiology and sees the role of missiology from the periphery as a crucial part of this. In terms of Escobar's model, global missiology is an attempt to encourage the different strands of evangelical missiology to connect up with missiology from the periphery. At present, there is a lack in terms of the contribution of two thirds world missiologists to global missiology. Lee comments, noting the problems:

...we must admit that missiology by and large is still a western construct that is extending its sphere to the global context. ... It is still burdened with a presupposition that missiological theories and strategies are mostly

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<sup>80</sup> Winter's article in the Lausanne Congress compendium would stress this global dimension and makes strong use of statistical analyses. R. Winter, "The Highest Priority: Cross-Cultural Evangelism," in *Let the Earth Hear His Voice: Official Reference volume, papers and responses International Congress on World Evangelization, 1974, Lausanne, Switzerland*, ed. John D. Douglas (Minneapolis: World Wide Publications, 1975).

<sup>81</sup> These emphases would fit with the perspectives of the members of the WEA K Rajendran and D Lee - Rajendran, Interview. Lee, Interview.

<sup>82</sup> Lee, Interview. Lee takes issue with Walls whom he sees as putting too much emphasis on the analysis of history at the expense of the resources available in the twentieth century from the social sciences.

<sup>83</sup> Lee, Interview. Rajendran, Interview.

universals that fit all situations. It is still shackled with an older paradigm of world evangelization in which western Christendom moves out to a non-Christian world.<sup>84</sup>

David Lee's involvement in missionary movements helps him to recognize the emergence of a missionary community that now spans the globe, and yet which still does not respond fully to the views of two third world missiologists.<sup>85</sup>

The quest to formulate a more global missiology – that is a missiology that is shaped by western and non-western voices - and to participate in global mission as equal partners are distinctive themes promoted by those in Asia who identify with managerial missiology or what has been termed a “missiology of transmission.” Certainly for David Lee and K. Rajendran<sup>86</sup> as active participants in missionary movements these are themes that are of particular interest to Asian protagonists in mission. This desire to see a change in the nature of missionary movements is linked to contrasting visions of mission even within the context of models that give priority to transmission or evangelization. Moonjang Lee has written about the need for the dewesternization of mission including the way in which mission agencies are run and organized.<sup>87</sup> David Lee and Rajendran would concur with the idea that the agenda of missionary movements may be conceived differently by Asians from the way that they are by western colleagues.<sup>88</sup>

David Lee sees two broad groupings within Evangelicalism, the first made up of people like Stott, Escobar, Samuel and others who are concerned both with evangelistic goals and social concern, and the second represented by movements like *AD 2000 and Beyond* and the *WEA Missions Commission* which give priority to world evangelization.<sup>89</sup> These categories of David Lee fits with the division proposed here, with one grouping putting more emphasis on “transformational” issues and the other group emphasising evangelization and quantitative analysis. The writings of the Asian Lausanne movement tend to reflect these latter

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<sup>84</sup> S. Moon and D.T. W. Lee, “Globalization, World Evangelization and Global Missiology,” in *One World or Many*, ed. R. Tiplady (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2003), 264-265. This article was co-authored with Steve Moon.

<sup>85</sup> Lee, “A Two-thirds World Evaluation of Contemporary Evangelical Missiology,” 141. At the Iguassu consultation, David Lee complained that if missiology remains the preserve of western people it will not exhibit truly global dimensions.

<sup>86</sup> K. Rajendran, *Which Way Forward Indian Missions?* (Bangalore: SAIACS Press, 2000), 128-140.

<sup>87</sup> M. Lee, “New paradigms of Partnership in the Asian Context,” Unpublished Paper for the Asian Missions Association, Moscow. 11<sup>th</sup> September 2003.

<sup>88</sup> Lee, Interview. Rajendran, Interview.

<sup>89</sup> Lee, “A Two-thirds World Evaluation of Contemporary Evangelical Missiology, 138. D Lee notes that there is in some senses a spectrum and that others will come somewhere along the spectrum represented by these two groups.

elements.<sup>90</sup> David Lee and Rajendran would be comfortable with the kind of emphases found in a missiology that puts a priority on evangelization and makes this the dominant element in missiology. To that extent they affirm the kind of model described by Escobar as managerial missiology. What distinguishes them as Asians, from those who favour models that put more emphasis on evangelization, is not so much their understanding of evangelization itself but their interpretation of the global nature of missionary movements and their desire to see a greater participation on the part of Asians in these movements.

### **3.3 Beyond Escobar's framework to transformational missiology**

#### **3.3.1 Mission as transformation**

The concept of transformation

This section will consider elements of mission as transformation before considering how these lead on to the contours of transformational missiology. The concept of transformation is linked to dynamic concepts of change. "Mission as transformation" is a designation of missiology used by evangelicals since the 1980s.<sup>91</sup> It was formulated in relation to a movement that wanted to move beyond "development" as a concept in Christian mission and that has been constantly reflecting on related issues since the 1980s. Vinay Samuel and Tom Sine were key figures in this movement.

In theological terms, mission as transformation has tended to emphasize the categories of creation and kingdom, and it views life in the context of God's eschatological purposes for this world and the world to come. It has embraced a diverse social agenda and it is a term which has been used in different social contexts and is seen as capable of contextualization rather than leading to a series of programmed activities.<sup>92</sup> The roots of mission as transformation, which are international, tend to mean that it emphasizes public or social change but it can relate to individual lives as well.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Although participants of the movement include those with broader interests.

<sup>91</sup> V. Samuel, "Introduction." In *Mission as Transformation*, eds., V. Samuel and C. Sugden (Oxford: Regnum, 1999), xii.

<sup>92</sup> "Transformation: the Church in Response to Human need," in *Mission as Transformation*, eds. V. Samuel and C. Sugden (Oxford: Regnum, 1999), 265-266.

<sup>93</sup> V. Samuel, "Mission as Transformation," in *Mission as Transformation*, eds. V. Samuel, and C. Sugden, (Oxford: Regnum, 1999), 228-230.

## The history and background of transformation

Transformation is an important theme but it is not always so clear in the contemporary use of the term “transformation” whether the idea is being used in relation to a particular school of thought or is simply a description which has a more general reference.

Vinay Samuel, the oldest of the Asian theologians discussed here, is an important figure in the movement of the Asian church towards transformation, partly because he has tried to legitimize this understanding of mission in Asia through his own work,<sup>94</sup> and partly because he offers an introduction to the genesis and history of the ideas of transformation.<sup>95</sup> He is a vocal member of a group of missiologists who have been trying to promote and encourage a coherent concept of mission as transformation. He has also been involved with the journal *Transformation*.<sup>96</sup>

While Samuel sees the Lausanne 1974 congress as an important landmark in the search for models of mission which were appropriate for Asia, the key meeting was a conference held in Wheaton (USA)<sup>97</sup> in 1983. Wheaton 1983 was important in that it produced a statement which made use of transformational language.<sup>98</sup> For Samuel, this consultation and an earlier one at Grand Rapids<sup>99</sup> in 1982, led to a general consensus for evangelicals about the themes in mission that are connected with transformation and to other statements on more specific topics,<sup>100</sup> some of which are picked up by other figures under discussion.

## The nature of mission as transformation

The consultation at Wheaton outlined the contours of mission as transformation. These can be summarized under four main categories: the Old Testament theme of creation, the New Testament themes of the kingdom and the local church, the importance of Christian social

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<sup>94</sup> Vinay Samuel, Interview by Warren R. Beattie, 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2003, Oxford, United Kingdom. Samuel explained how important the legitimization of these understandings of mission within evangelicalism were as part of his work.

<sup>95</sup> Documents are listed in the bibliography which are helpful or supportive of mission as transformation. V. Samuel and C. Sugden, ed., *Mission as Transformation* (Oxford: Regnum, 1999), 512-513.

<sup>96</sup> Samuel was also a key figure in the Mission as Transformation conference in Singapore in 2003. Asian Missions Congress, “Mission as Transformation in 21<sup>st</sup> Century Asia,” 6-10<sup>th</sup> December 2003. Unpublished proceedings, Held at Trinity Theological College, Singapore.

<sup>97</sup> “Transformation: the Church in Response to Human Need,” 261-276.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid. See also Samuel, “Introduction , x-xi.

<sup>99</sup> Samuel, “Introduction , x-xi.

<sup>100</sup> Samuel and Sugden, *Mission as Transformation*, 323-476. Samuel’s idea of consensus in evangelical mission circles may be optimistic, but it would hold true in large sections of Asian evangelicalism.

involvement, and the need to take adequate account of contexts in terms of cultures and societies. The first is an emphasis on the biblical theme of creation with its implications for Christians of exercising a responsible stewardship in the world. Such a view derives from the Old Testament<sup>101</sup> and our shared human participation in the creation. The responsibilities are strengthened in practical terms by the New Testament perspectives on Christian stewardship as found in the book of Acts where Christians are seen to share resources and to seek the common good.<sup>102</sup> The second theme is the importance of the local church and the connection between the kingdom of God and the church's mission. The local church is the community which lies at the heart of Christian societies. God's purposes are closely related to the church, but the kingdom is beyond the church. "The kingdom of God is both present and future, both societal and individual, both physical and spiritual."<sup>103</sup> The church is to call people to the hope that God offers through his kingdom and its relation to humanity through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The third theme is the need for measured Christian social involvement in the world and a commitment to social justice. There is to be a measured awareness of "personal and societal sin" but this should not lead to negativity. Rather there is to be a concern for justice and the poor, recognizing that Christians are "not to conform to the values of society but transform them."<sup>104</sup> This involves a balanced perspective on mission. "The mission of the church includes both proclamation of the gospel and its demonstration."<sup>105</sup> This follows the pattern of Christ's example. Fourthly, the statement recognizes the way in which transformation has to be carried out in human societies and cultures, appreciating and affirming the diversity of different contexts.<sup>106</sup>

### Samuel's perspectives on mission as transformation

In a review of transformation at the end of the 1990s, Samuel affirms the biblical elements of transformation in the context of God's creation, giving a particular emphasis to the theology of the kingdom of God and the importance of communities. Christology is affirmed in relation to the model of Christ's example and its costly nature. Samuel gives added

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<sup>101</sup> The statement points to Psalm 24 and Leviticus 25.

<sup>102</sup> "Transformation: the Church in Response to Human need," 266-267.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid, 269-270; 274-276.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid, 263-4. This draws on Romans 12.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid, 269-270.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid, 268-269. This consultation discusses how the use of transformation was an attempt to inject more biblical perspectives and language to the efforts of Christian development by using a new framework.

emphasis to the idea of mission as mission in context relating the interplay of evangelism and social action to this. He also makes it clear that Asian Christians need to take account of global contexts and sees non-western contributions as an important element in the contemporary global world.

Samuel affirms the theology of the kingdom of God and the place of communities. He asserts that “transformation is the transformation of communities to reflect kingdom values.”<sup>107</sup> The category of the kingdom of God points to a “Christological concern” and this is an intrinsic part of transformation.<sup>108</sup> It emphasizes Trinitarian elements as well with an interest in the concept of God as creator and the place of the Holy Spirit. This has been given emphasis by the elements of the Pentecostal movement who have “identified the role of the Holy Spirit in bringing the experience of transformation, especially for the poor.”<sup>109</sup> A connection is made between the kingdom as key theological theme and eschatology in the sense that perspectives on eschatology shape understandings of the context of transformation.

The place of communities is also vital. It is in the context of community that reconciliation is made and solidarity is expressed. Communities need to become communities of change, as the “emphasis of the gospel as transformation is on change and hope.” Community building is an activity that takes place over time and “it is inviting people to join a church, not just to change allegiances... You are there on a journey of self-transformation, of community transformation.”<sup>110</sup> Samuel sees this process as generally involving communities and not just individuals.

The connections between proclamation and transformation are affirmed. Mission as transformation is a model that integrates both elements of evangelism and social action. Writing in 1998 and looking back at the discussion of mission as transformation from the perspective of the present, Samuel looks closely at the elements of mission which are involved in this model.<sup>111</sup> In the introduction to a compendium on mission as transformation, Samuel looks at the history of discussion about the use of “creation and

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<sup>107</sup> Samuel, “Introduction,” xii.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid, xii. Considerable emphasis is given to the kingdom (and to some extent eschatology) in the opening sections of the book.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid, xiii. The close connection between INFEMIT, OCMS, Regnum and the Journal *Transformation* are clearly noted.

<sup>110</sup> Samuel, “Mission as Transformation,” 230-232. He makes the same point of the community versus individual dimensions in the context of describing faith as a journey.

<sup>111</sup> Samuel, “Mission as Transformation,” 227-235.

evangelism mandate” language from the 1970s onwards.<sup>112</sup> He notes the tension between theory and practice – missiologists were trying to find theological models to unite two concepts which practitioners were saying could not be separated.

The idea of societies and cultures is underlined by transformation being about mission in context. When Samuel expands on some of the underlying concepts he sees context as important and he suggests that “context is always local.”<sup>113</sup> In a recent article on globalisation, Samuel sees challenges for social transformation and nation-building<sup>114</sup> that face the Christian churches.<sup>115</sup> In this regard, he sees two concepts relating to the Christian in society. Firstly, Christians are to promote concepts of the nation which “allow room for alternative views of society and religion.”<sup>116</sup> Secondly, Christians are to contribute to civil society especially in relation to religion and against totalitarian views of society which have religious origins.

Christ’s example is underlined in that incarnation and sacrifice are important qualities in mission as transformation. The incarnation offers a model for participation in the world, not seclusion from it.<sup>117</sup> The category of sacrifice indicates that mission is a serious undertaking.<sup>118</sup> Samuel suggests that “the church needs to continue to develop its praxis and its reflection.”<sup>119</sup> It needs to:

... express the Lordship of Jesus over every area of life, economic, religious, personal, political. It does not give priority to any area of life as an area for mission, but insists that religious change is at the heart of all real change. But this change will be effected whenever people address issues of life directly, rooted in a gospel perspective.<sup>120</sup>

In his summary, Samuel emphasizes the contribution of non-western participants to transformation. Mission as transformation facilitates approaches to missiology which includes non-western elements<sup>121</sup> in that it allows for models of missiology which are

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid, 228.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid, 228-230. Samuel comments that the idea that ‘context says that theology must always be local’ has important implications for systematic theology.

<sup>114</sup> There is a juxtaposition of themes as well – transformation and nation-building.

<sup>115</sup> V. Samuel, “Evangelical Response to Globalization: an Asian Perspective,” *Transformation* 16 No.1 (Oct-Dec 1999): 4-7.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid, 4-7.

<sup>117</sup> See the concept of “costly discipleship.” Samuel, “Introduction,” xvi.

<sup>118</sup> Samuel, “Introduction,” xvi.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid, xviii.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid, xvi.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid, xiii-xiv, xv. Samuel describes mission as the mother of theology and suggests that biblical and other reflections stem from mission which is both cross-cultural and inter-cultural.

developed locally and are therefore more diverse. The possibility of a more diverse model of mission relates well to people in the modern world because:

... in the increasing globalization of the world, people recover their identity by focussing beyond the reach of economics to religion and race. There is a great focus on the contextualization of all expressions of faith, and on indigenous religious expressions as being most authentic.<sup>122</sup>

In considering other global elements, such as the shift to a single global market and globalisation, Samuel suggests that the future holds new possibilities for models of mission: he sees some existing missionary models as too 'homogenous'. The Oxford Centre for Mission Studies (OCMS) enables a forum for this reflection on mission as transformation to be part of a theological process which is a genuine attempt at global missiology.<sup>123</sup>

### Mission as transformation reviewed

For the missiology associated with transformation, the emphases of mission are connected to the biblical centres of creation, the concepts of the kingdom of God and the implications of these emphases not just for belief but for Christian living. It is not just the proclamation of the gospel and incorporation into the church or the kingdom community but the implications of being part of that community that are significant. These emphases are connected to the example and model of Jesus Christ in the New Testament.

Those who adopt mission as transformation emphasize the role of the Christian community in local contexts and the need for Christians to live as participants in the kingdom of God, showing forth their values in local contexts. This group encourages social involvement. In terms of the Christian community, the idea of nurturing a kingdom community is foremost. The interest in trinitarian themes is a reminder that the place of God in relation to the creation is important; the place of Christology is the core and the Holy Spirit is clearly present. It is a model of missiology that is supportive of an integrative perspective on Christian mission where categories of evangelism and social involvement are not separated out but mission is thought of in more wholistic terms. While Samuel was most involved in the development of this model for Lausanne and Wheaton onwards, the other four writers draw on the insights from this movement, which has influenced evangelical missiology to varying degrees.

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid, xv-xvi. Note the focus on identity here and the awareness of a downside of the clash of local conflicts in terms of identity – “no-one allows you to hold your identity in peace.”

<sup>123</sup> Ibid, xiii. See his concerns too about the limits of 'enterprise' in non-western missions.

### **3.3.2 Transformational missiology as an Asian model of missiology**

This study is suggesting that the selected writers form a group of people who belong to the category of a critical missiology from the periphery and are distinguished by their shared interest in a number of missiological themes and emphases. It is the concept of transformation and the theological emphases associated with it which are critical for understanding the themes which are taken up and used by the selected writers. These themes overlap with ideas that are found in the mission as transformation movement but there are adaptations as the selected writers relate particularly to the Asian settings in which they find themselves. Taken as a whole these emphases constitute what is being termed transformational missiology.

In addition to the themes reviewed above in relation to transformation there are several points to underline in terms of transformational missiology. The selected writers give due place to biblical themes from both Old and New Testaments. In terms of mission in context, there is a particular interest in relating mission to the multi-religious nature of Asian society, as well as to the social settings of Asia. There is also interest in mission in its global context.

The selected writers emphasize that the Old Testament setting of creation drawing out its implications for justice and ethics in relation to the poor. Christ's life, death, resurrection and the theological understanding of salvation are additional biblical themes of note and the suffering that can come from following the example of Christ in mission is emphasized by Asians as one dimension of mission in context. The selected writers emphasise the Christian community in local contexts and the need for Christians to live as participants in the kingdom of God, showing forth its values in local contexts so that social involvement is encouraged. In terms of the Christian community itself, the idea of *nurturing* a kingdom community which can be a credible witness is foremost and this is seen as of as much importance as simply planting or expanding churches.

In terms of "mission in context," there is a clear engagement with the structural dimensions of Asian societies to which the selected writers want to respond, and in which they want to be involved in the public square by developing ways of engaging in nation-building in terms of developing civil society and promoting justice. This is particularly strong in the Malaysian and Filipino societies. One other element which receives less attention in the wider mission as transformation movement is the religious dimension of Asian contexts, the selected writers wanting to respond to the religions by re-appraising their significance in Asia. This involves deeper understanding of religions in Asia, an attempt to develop Asian

responses to plural societies at a social level and in terms of religious belief as well as reflecting on what Christians should be doing in terms of dialogue, apologetics and witness. Scrutiny of the global context must take account of issues such as justice and economics and within evangelicalism, the roles of the traditional “centre” and “periphery,” with increasing attention paid to the place of non-western participants in mission. There is a shared critique of narrowly-defined evangelical structures of mission, a concern about the balance of resources between the centre and periphery of evangelical missions and a concern for balance in the project of global mission. The selected writers display caution towards concepts and models of global mission, recognising that the global church is made up of local communities and the emphasis in Asia needs to be rooted there with the building up of communities of integrity. Within Asia, the selected writers put an emphasis on transformation, not simply as a way of promoting social action versus other kinds of action, such as proclamation, but rather in the light of an interest in a more wholistic and realistic perspective on Asian societies and a desire to relate mission to them. In the following chapters these characteristics will be explored as being of special relevance for the selected writers.

## CHAPTER 4

### Settings for Mission in Asia - Towards Transformational Missiology (1)

The contours of transformational missiology have been outlined in the preceding chapter. This chapter and the one following will examine how the selected writers derive their missiology in relation to Asia. Their missiology is shaped by both their interactions with the contemporary settings in Asia and with the Christian scriptures: they are not doing missiology by simply applying the Christian scriptures to Asia in a remote way.<sup>1</sup> The interactions with Asian settings leads to an emphasis on certain social and religious themes and these are discussed in this chapter.

#### 4.1 The review of mission by Asians in the post-World War II era

There is a general perception that contemporary missiology in Asia needs to take account of the history of mission in Asia, to evaluate what has gone before and to build on that foundation. Such a conviction is shared by Protestant (including evangelical) and Roman Catholic theologians alike. There is a particular interest in the ethos of Asia and its requirements in the post-World War II era. This section explores attitudes to mission and approaches to missiology by Asian missiologists, before considering in greater detail the views of the selected writers.

##### 4.1.1 Protestant missiologists

###### Asian society and mission

Protestant writers display a special interest in the nature of Asian society in the post-World War II era and Asian agency in mission. Their assessments have taken place through the work of the East Asian Christian Council (EACC) from the late 1950s and latterly through the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) up to the present. There has been a concern in Asia

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<sup>1</sup> In the sense suggested by Archie Lee, they take some account of Asia as “text” as well as “context.” A.C.C. Lee, “Prophetic and Sapiential Hermeneutics,” in *Doing theology in Asian Ways*, No. 12. ed. J.C. England (ATESEA: Singapore, 1993), 2-5.

to move mission towards Asian leadership and to move it closer to the everyday realities of life in Asia.<sup>2</sup> The Indian historian T.V. Philip observes that a shift of power was taking place in Asia in the 1950s, with the result that the influence of the west was waning. The legacy of western imperialism had its impact on both Christian mission in Asia but also on Asian society:

The post-war period saw the Asian countries in the midst of great political, social and cultural changes affecting all aspects of human life and that of society. So Christianity and Asian revolution was the topic of discussion in Christian circles in those days.<sup>3</sup>

The phrase “Asian revolution” indicates the degree of political upheaval that was taking place in Asia in that period. This is reflected in the fact that the suffering of Asian peoples and the search for justice were seen as important themes for Asian theologians. An engagement with the broader social setting and its global implications can be seen in the way in which the three categories of the EACC’s agenda for reflection were - Asian society, international affairs and religion.<sup>4</sup> This imperative to engage with Asian religions continued to be an important theme.

#### Asian agency in mission

With the changes of political influence came an interest in how the church and mission organized their affairs. The questions of Asian leadership and agency were paramount. These tensions of leadership were clear in a consultation on “Missionary Service” held by the EACC in 1972. The consultation recognized that the modern missionary movement had made its contribution to the church in Asia but realized that the Asian character of churches would be restricted if responsibility for mission was not taken up by Asians.

This inevitably led to a consideration of the place of missionaries and missionary movements in Asia. For some, like Koyama, there was a place for missionaries, or at least the “missionary mode of life.”<sup>5</sup> From the context of the Philippines, Nacpil spoke more strongly, suggesting the need to “shift our reality from the fact of modern missions which is dead ... to the fact of the new reality of the church in Asia.”<sup>6</sup> Notions of church growth and

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<sup>2</sup> T.V.Philip, “Christian Conference of Asia: a Historical Overview,” *Asian Journal of Theology*, 9 No.1 (1995): 4-5. The EACC was founded in 1957 and became the CCA in 1973.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 13.

<sup>4</sup> Philip suggests that the mood of the era is captured in Panikkar’s study of the decline of western power in “Asia and Western dominance” and such studies were typical.

<sup>5</sup> East Asia Christian Conference, *Missionary Service in Asia Today* (KL: University of Malaysia, 1971), 73-74.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 114.

church extension simply did not do justice to mission for Asian leaders. There was a need to shift from mission to the church in mission. Nacpil stressed both an appropriate “selfhood” for the church in Asia and the need to develop understandings in theological terms of that selfhood.<sup>7</sup>

Philip recognized this concern for selfhood at different points in the history of the Asian church. In the early stages of the EACC, it was not theology of mission but rather the twin participation of churches and western missionary organizations which was crucial. Into the 1970s, the CCA would emphasize the Asian responsibility and style of leadership by saying that engagement in mission would be with “resources and structures consistent with the church’s selfhood.”<sup>8</sup> This meant an emphasis on the agency of Asian churches in taking responsibility for their own situations.

This concern for Asian agency is echoed in Song’s review of mission in 1975. He adopts a very critical perspective. From the opening pages where he discusses moratoria and the need for “a break from bondage to missionary ecclesiology developed in the west and ‘transplanted’ to Asia,” Song is on the offensive and his theme is clear – “the thrust of mission must be in Asian hands.”<sup>9</sup> Song’s work highlights the need for sympathy with Asian cultures and the Asian religious context. He is critical of mission which makes conversion of others its main goal. He points to his own approach to Asian theology: a theology of reconciliation using the category of God as creator with a special concern for history, rather than simply a stress on soteriology and an emphasis on christocentrism in mission. These things he views as divisive, separating Asian people from their context and into Christian or non-Christian groupings. There is little affirmation of the heritage of mission in Song, but his analysis indicates the concerns held by some Asian theologians about missionary efforts in Asia.

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 135.

<sup>8</sup> Philip, “Christian Conference of Asia,” 10-12; 9.

<sup>9</sup> C.S. Song, *Christian Mission in Reconstruction; an Asian Attempt*. (Madras:CLS, 1975), 7-8.

#### 4.1.2 Catholic missiologists

Roman Catholic reflection on mission in relation to Asia in the post-World War II era was shaped by a succession of documents on mission which came from the Vatican: *Ad Gentes* (1965), then *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975) and latterly *Redemptoris Missio* (1990). These have been supplemented in recent decades by Asian materials.<sup>10</sup> Bevans and Schroeder summarize the different emphases and impact of these documents. The Trinitarian thrust of *Ad Gentes* allowed for a broad concept of mission as *missio dei*, despite a focus on the implications for evangelization.<sup>11</sup> *Evangelii Nuntiandi* made Jesus' own life of service and his proclamation of the kingdom of God the starting-point for missiological reflection and the church's role as a continuation of this ministry, "Mission, in other words, is what it means to be church, because to be church means to share in the mission of Jesus, which was to preach, to serve and to witness with his whole heart to the kingdom of God."<sup>12</sup> *Redemptoris Missio* focussed on an affirmation of Christology, a statement of the unique character of Christ in terms of salvation, whilst allowing the freedom of the Holy Spirit in making known the grace of God. This stressed the positive character of the gospel and the fact that "all peoples have a right to the fullness of truth."<sup>13</sup> Its Christological emphasis reflects the way in which the church was responding to the issues of religious resurgence and identity in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century.

#### Mission and theology of mission in Asia

By the 1990s, Asian theologians were actively refining Catholic missiology in relation to specific Asian contexts. Seigel and Mercado, as Catholic theologians in Asia, were responsible for organizing a symposium on theology of mission in the mid-1990s which represents one of the few concerted efforts to do this.<sup>14</sup> They suggest that an analysis of the history of mission in Asia will lead to some basic realizations. The general minority status of the church in Asia must be recognized. Colonialism has left a legacy which should make Christians wary of ever engaging in political and economic oppression, and should help the church to think about how it conducts itself. This leads Seigel and Mercado to stress

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<sup>10</sup> See the following sections.

<sup>11</sup> S. Bevans and R. P. Schroeder *Constants in Context. A Theology of Mission for Today* (N.Y.:Orbis, 2004), 286-7.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, 305-306.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, 324.

<sup>14</sup> M. T. Seigel and L. N. Mercado eds, *Towards an Asian Theology of Mission* (Manila: Divine Word Publications, 1995).

harmonious interaction with neighbours rather than divisiveness and to emphasize salvation in terms of a theology of reconciliation.<sup>15</sup>

There is a strong emphasis on the place of the local church community as the starting-point for mission and missiological reflection in Roman Catholic theology. The first of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) saw the local church being built up as a "truly local church" in Asia an important priority.

The local church is a church incarnate in a people, a church indigenous and inculturated. And this means concretely a church in continuous, humble and loving dialogue with the living traditions, the cultures, the religions – in brief, with all the life realities of the people in whose midst it has sunk its roots...<sup>16</sup>

The stress on the local church is clear but this is seen as a resource for mission and a help in terms of the church as a contextual community in Asia. The fifth FABC congress extended this thought to "serving the needs of the peoples of Asia."<sup>17</sup> Reflecting on the mission history of the churches in Asia, Metzler admits that in percentage terms the churches in Asia tend to be small.<sup>18</sup> He acknowledges the need for further study and critique of the missionary movements to enhance the mission of the church. Such a critique recognizes the minority status of the churches in Asia, and the need for the Asian churches to consolidate their Asian character and to maintain harmonious interactions with their Asian neighbours of different religious groups.

### Themes in Catholic Missiology

Major Catholic themes for mission in Asia include inculturation, a recognition of social and economic issues and a negotiation of religion in Asia. The diversity of Asia and its social challenges are also recognized.<sup>19</sup> The Catholic Church's ability to respond to this is acknowledged to have been facilitated since Vatican II and a greater open-ness to cultural flexibility. The Indian missiologist Kavunkal notes that there is no single Asia:

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<sup>15</sup> M. T. Seigel and L. N. Mercado, "The Status of Mission in the Asia-Pacific Region," in *Towards an Asian Theology of Mission*, ed. M.T. Seigel and L.N. Mercado (Manila: Divine Word Publications, 1995). 7, 13-16.

<sup>16</sup> H. Kroeger, *Asia-Church In Mission: Exploring Ad Gentes Mission Initiatives of the Local Churches in Asia and the Vatican II Era* (Quezon city, Philippines: Claretian Publications, 1999),121.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 127.

<sup>18</sup> J. Metzler, "The Mission History of Asia and the Pacific Region," in *Following Christ in Mission. A Foundational Course in Missiology*. ed. S. Karotemprel et al (Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 199), 262.

<sup>19</sup> R. Hardawiryana, "Mission in Asia: Theological Perspectives," in *Towards an Asian Theology of Mission*, ed. M.T. Seigel and L. N. Mercado (Manila: Divine Word Publications, 1995), 24-5, 26-30.

The leading characteristic of Asian missiology is its sensitivity to the Asian context. Asian missiology flows from a profound reflection on the word of God in the context of the Asian reality. Both collective as well as individual theologizing in Asia begins with an analysis of the context, and is firmly grounded in the context. It is this rootedness in the Asian reality that gives Asian theology and missiology its uniqueness.<sup>20</sup>

The implications of context make the quest for identity a key consequence for Kavunkal who connects this to the desire for liberation.<sup>21</sup> It is context which makes the need for inculturation so urgent. This means Asian churches need to discover their own approaches, separately from the west. Kavunkal sees the kingdom of God as an important resource for this. In terms of religion, he talks of “biblical communality” and comes close to the perspectives of those in the CCA. “We are one with others as God’s children. Creativity binds us with other people in their open-ness to God.”<sup>22</sup> Kavunkal’s perspectives on Christology are to avoid “Christo-monism” but he affirms that the historical Jesus can be the focus for the disciple’s life.<sup>23</sup> This is a view of the Christian community committed to its own position but not foisting it on other groups.

Catholic theologians are also wrestling with the implications of Christ’s message and salvation in the context of other religions in Asia. The practice of missiology is influenced by the structure of Catholicism in that local churches in Asia tend to view themselves in relation to the regional and global network of Catholicism. The concept of the “local church” is shaped by that context. There are many points of common ground between Roman Catholic and the evangelical missiology of the selected writers: these include the centrality of Christology, the emphasis on the kingdom (linked to Jesus Christ’s proclamation) and the role of the church as community.

#### **4.2 The selected writers interact with settings in Asia**

This section begins with the selected writers’ view of Christianity and mission in Asia in the post-World War II era, and then reflects on how they view identity in relation to Asia.

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<sup>20</sup> J. Kavunakal, “Asian Mission Theology,” in *Towards an Asian Theology of Mission* eds. M.T. Seigel and Leonard N. Mercado, (Manila: Divine Word Publications, 1995), 95.

<sup>21</sup> Liberation and the poor are the dominant concerns of Pieris. A. Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1986), 62-68.

<sup>22</sup> Kavunakal, “Asian Mission Theology,” 105

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, 111. Kavunkal comments that “Christo-centrism is a commitment to discipleship, not an obligation to save Jesus Christ from other religions!”

#### **4.2.1 The selected writers review mission in Asia**

In their review of mission history, the selected writers affirm the contributions of the Christian churches to Asian society, whilst recognizing some of the vicissitudes of the missionary era. They recognize that the construction of an evangelical missiology must take account of the issues which face Asian Christians as a product of both their history and their contemporary situation.

##### The review of mission history by the selected writers

Ramachandra is concerned that the relationship between mission and Asia needs to be re-explored. He approves of the way in which historians, like John England and others, are bringing to people's notice the history of the church in Asia and he emphasizes that it has a long and important heritage in Asia.<sup>24</sup> He is positive too about the evidence of Christian agency in mission with new missionary movements originating from Asia. He appreciates the recent critique by scholars like Brian Stanley to reconsider the colonial experience of Christianity:

The colonial experience was a complex story, varying from period to period and from country to country. The relationship of Christian missionaries and European churches to that experience is even more complex and is only now beginning to be explored. ...Unresearched generalizations usually have a political purpose. They buttress ideologies which ... serve to disguise either a quest for power or the consolidation of power, in this case, over national Christians.<sup>25</sup>

It is time for Asians to re-evaluate the missionary era and its relation to the colonial period from their own perspectives. Ramachandra notes, for example, that Christian missionaries were involved in the promotion of Asian languages and wider religious scholarship, giving the example of the publication by Rhys Davids of a work on Buddhism through the SPCK.<sup>26</sup>

This is not to say that Ramachandra ignores the dark side of mission. Christians need to turn from attitudes of arrogance. "To identify the truth of gospel with the moral superiority of Christians would be to turn the gospel on its head."<sup>27</sup> He notes that people are:

...not to deny that the message of the cross has often been linked to domination, avarice and racism. Church history right up to the present day

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<sup>24</sup> V. Ramachandra, *Gods That Fail. Modern Idolatry and Christian Mission* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster Press, 1996), 214.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 215-216.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 216. As a former scientist he notes that the "missionary contribution to medical health in Asia and Africa has been nothing less than extraordinary."

<sup>27</sup> Ramachandra, *Faiths in Conflict*, 168.

gives example of this ugly and shameful story. But we rightly see these as betrayals of the message rather than as its logical entailment.<sup>28</sup>

However, Ramachandra feels it is important to be balanced in recognizing the impact of Christian mission and missionaries, suggesting that it is “a story to be recounted, with humility and courage, in a world losing touch with history.”<sup>29</sup> The way forward for the church is to demonstrate the nature of God’s reconciliation in the world by becoming a multi-cultural community. If this community is true to its calling it will be involved in suffering following the “way of the cross.”<sup>30</sup>

A similar stance is taken by Samuel. The development of the Asian church can be limited by its missionary past:

The continent suffered in the colonial era from an excessive emphasis on missionaries from outside. But now in post-colonial days missionaries are being replaced in certain places by strong national churches and national missionary movements. Far from being left-overs from a colonial past, these churches have a strong sense of identity and a strong commitment to their task.<sup>31</sup>

Whilst accepting the place of mission in the foundation of Christian witness in Asia, Hwa senses the importance for local Christians to have the confidence to explore, and in some cases recover, their Christian identity. He gives the example of John Sung,<sup>32</sup> who promoted the cause of Christian mission.

... John Sung had a clear consciousness of his identity as a Chinese Christian. He believed in the principles of self-support, self-government and self-propagation and challenged the Chinese church to practice them. Further by fully availing himself of the gifts of tongues, healing and prophecy, and other spiritual gifts in his time, against a background of western rationalism, he clearly affirmed the importance of reading the bible from within his own context and hence the right to self-theologizing.<sup>33</sup>

Sung was ready to be critical of mission influence, especially where it was exercised through financial power. According to Hwa, his diary was filled with references to this very matter.<sup>34</sup> Hwa evidently affirms Sung’s worry that Chinese Christians could be over-influenced by

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid, 130.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, 168, 169-171.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 171.

<sup>31</sup> V. Samuel, and C. Sugden, “Christians in Asia,” in *Christianity a World Faith*, ed. P. Brierely, (Tring: Lion Handbook, 1985), 163.

<sup>32</sup> Irene Tay, Hwa Yung, and the China Group, “John Sung,” in *A Dictionary of Asian Christianity*, ed. Scott W. Sunquist (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001).

<sup>33</sup> Hwa, Yung, “Kingdom Identity and Christian Mission,” The 5<sup>th</sup> David Adeney Memorial Lecture. Thursday 31 August 2000, Singapore Hakka Methodist Church, 8

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, 6-8.

western missions. He is conscious of the need for Asians to maintain their identity without undue dependence on western influence.

Ng shares the concerns of Ramachandra that historical perception is important and needs to be corrected, talking of the need to rebuild the narrative of Christian history in Malaysia. He would see it as a denial of history if the contributions of missionaries to social life in Malaysia, particularly in the area of education, are being neglected or ignored.<sup>35</sup> He suggests that the history of Malaysia is not simply an Islamic history, but a multi-cultural history to which Christians including Christian missionaries have contributed, and this is in danger of being suppressed for political or religious reasons.

Maggay notes the ways in which missions in the Philippines had problems relating to Filipino culture because western missionaries were not aware of their own cultural leanings. In Maggay's opinion, this led to a failure to understand the pre-occupations of Filipino people in the context of "a religion centred on the acquisition of power and a religion preoccupied with the problem of guilt."<sup>36</sup> Maggay is not particularly hostile to Christian missions, either from the period of Iberian colonialism or from the later era of American influence in the Philippines, but with her interest and expertise in Filipino culture, she does recognize the deficiencies of such movements in terms of understanding deep-seated cultural issues.

Taken as a group the selected writers recognize the role played by missions in the establishment of the church in Asia. They recognize that this history has been hidden, that Asian elements need to be recovered and they affirm that the legacy of missions to Asian societies needs to be reviewed if an appraisal is to be made which allows for the positive contribution of missions to Asian societies. Failures and deficiencies are not overlooked, nor are the limits of non-Asians to transmit Christianity into Asian soil. In today's world, the Asian identity of the churches needs to be clearly established.

#### **4.2.2 Identity**

The selected writers are interested in the issue of identity in relation to the church in Asia. Identity is being shaped in the modern world particularly under the pressures of globalisation with its homogenizing tendencies. Social identity is affected as such tendencies tend to

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<sup>35</sup> Ng, Interview.

<sup>36</sup> M. Maggay, *Filipino Religious Consciousness* (Manila: ISACC, 1999), 12.

mean that local societies and cultures can be pressurized and so feel threatened. These global pressures on identity force Asian theologians to respond by building a clear Asian Christian identity.

### The modern world and identity

“Asian nations and cultures are in a race to define their identities” is Vinay Samuel’s description of contemporary Asia and this process characterizes the contemporary Asian scene.<sup>37</sup> The need to define identity has implications for new nations and ancient ones. It affects new nations like Singapore where there has been a self-conscious attempt at constructing a new multi-cultural identity and it affects other nations like India, also a product of colonial pressures, where the process of defining identity has an impact on minorities who whether for religious or cultural reasons can find that their identity is “suppressed.”<sup>38</sup>

Hwa talks unequivocally of the importance of nurturing and developing the Asian identity of the church in Asia because of the context of resurgent religions in Asia and the way in which people are turning back to their cultural roots. This means that the Asian church must be very careful not only to clarify its own identity, but to do so in ways that are distinctive from outside or “alien” varieties of Christianity.<sup>39</sup> Churches which do this will be able to proclaim the gospel in a way that speaks with power to their own culture and context.

The lack of Asian identity leaves an Asian Christianity which is ‘culturally deformed’ according to Hwa.<sup>40</sup> As a result, Hwa welcomes the new focus on contextualisation and indigenization. This leads to another emphasis in his work, the push to establish indigenous forms of Christianity which promote Asian identity: this includes the need for an indigenous gospel in Asia.<sup>41</sup> Christians have a basic theological identity as children of God<sup>42</sup> and at the same time a cultural identity that depends on their social setting. This dual Christian and cultural identity may well be challenged in countries like Malaysia, but Christians need to deal with the pressures of being Christian in Asian societies whilst at the same time being

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<sup>37</sup> V. Samuel, “Christian Mission in Contemporary Asia,” *International Review of Mission* 87 (April 1998): 2.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>39</sup> Hwa, “Kingdom Identity,” 10.

<sup>40</sup> Hwa, Yung, “Towards an Evangelical Approach to Religions and Culture,” *Transformation* 17 No.3 (July 2000): 90.

<sup>41</sup> Hwa, “Kingdom Identity,” 22-24. See also 1-3 & 5-22.

<sup>42</sup> This comes from his reading of the New Testament e.g. Romans 8:14-17. Hwa observes that Samuel talks of Christian identity as an identity as children of God. Hwa, Yung, *Mangoes or Bananas* (Oxford: Regnum Books, 1997), 197.

committed to those societies in a wholehearted way. Hwa is concerned about forming the identity of Malaysian Christians so that they are seen as genuinely Malaysian. Mission in the Malaysian setting needs to show that Christians are rooted in society. For Ng, the church must have a clear sense of its theological identity which he views as coming from theological traditions like the creeds adapted to context. Where identity is challenged, Ng sees a danger for Christians adapting to the modern world in that “the quest for relevance ends up with a surrender of Christian identity.”<sup>43</sup>

Ramachandra affirms the place of Christian identity as it is shaped both by the local and international contexts, so that “we become truly global Christians is not by detaching ourselves from the local ... but rather by seriously engaging with the local as members of a global community that has re-defined our identities.”<sup>44</sup> In a similar way, Maggay looks at identity in the context of the biblical picture of worship in the book of Revelation (Revelation 7), from which she draws this lesson from the eschatological vision of worship: “We are not meant to be free-floating citizens of the world with no permanent address, but people who are rooted somewhere, located in a piece of geography, with a history and a cultural memory.”<sup>45</sup> Like Ramachandra, Maggay explores the nature of what it means to have identities that do justice to our local world and the global world. Maggay suggests that modern identity is shaped by both the local and the global and she quotes approvingly from Walter Brueggeman who says “to be in history is to be in a place somewhere and answer for it.”<sup>46</sup>

Establishing an Asian identity for Christians involves taking stock of the past and responding to the pressures which confront Asian Christians in the present. The agenda of evangelical missiology developed by the selected writers is shaped by their interactions with the social and religious issues which they face in the contemporary settings of Asia. In terms of the former, their missiology is influenced by poverty and economic disparity, the need for engagement in the public square and the development of Christian values. In relation to the distinctive religious settings of Asia, their experience and interpretation of religious

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<sup>43</sup> Ng, *Doing Responsive Theology*, 59.

<sup>44</sup> V. Ramachandra, “Globalisation: Towards a Theological Perspective and Critique,” at <<http://www.micahnetwork.org/events/documents63.doc>>, accessed Friday 6<sup>th</sup> December 2003, 21.

<sup>45</sup> M. Maggay, *Jew to the Jew and Greek to the Greek. Reflections on Culture and Globalization*. (Manila: ISACC, 2001), 9. The context of the description is the worship of the ‘lamb’ in Revelation 7:9-10.

<sup>46</sup> Maggay, Melba. “Globalization and Culture” at <<http://www.micahnetwork.org/events/documents/58.doc>>, accessed Friday 6<sup>th</sup> December 2003. Maggay says that “to be truly global is to be truly local ...”

resurgence and spiritual realities encourages them to respond with a renewed effort to understand and to make sense of Asian religions. They see these as issues which require a distinctive and renewed evangelical theological response: reflecting and interacting with them is their contribution as evangelicals.

### **4.3 Asian settings - economics and society**

The selected writers recognize several areas of social life that relate to Christian mission and which derive from the Asian setting. Economic issues in Asian societies include poverty and the distribution of wealth, issues of justice, the need for ethical frameworks and the avoidance of corruption. Christians need to respond to and engage with Asian societies and this includes involvement in the public square.<sup>47</sup> Transformational missiology, as a framework for mission, emerges in the new interaction with the demands of contemporary Asia.

#### **4.3.1 Economics and society**

##### **Poverty**

Poverty is a major issue in many Asian countries, though Japan and Singapore represent countries where relative wealth is more common. The struggle against poverty has been an inspirational challenge to Samuel, who is described by Chris Sugden as a theologian of dignity, in the context of poverty in India. Maggay gives a vivid description of what motivates her to engage as a Christian with social issues and politics in the context of the Philippines:

... we walk the streets and there are the hungry eyes and the outstretched hands, and the threat of menace from police bursting big and burly with their pot-bellies.hovels litter the roadside, reeking with slime and refuse and the smell of putrid air and urine. There are the run-down whores plying their wares, assorted derelicts with big lonely eyes staring out of dingy halls - the pure, unedited, unexpurgated text of the seamy side of the Philippines. ... Maybe if we were a little richer, if we had been born in some place such as the United States where poverty is, at least, not always visible and does not meet you on every corner, maybe it would be possible to keep God out of politics. ... But we are not in the United States or some such place. We are

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<sup>47</sup> This is a phrase used particularly by Ng and Ramachandra in relation to public life as opposed to private. Ng draws on Neuhaus' work on the "naked public square."

called to be disciples in a situation where the needs of the many do not take the form of loneliness or angst but of empty bellies and uncertain justice.<sup>48</sup>

She concludes that it is in such a setting that it is a “God who takes the side of the poor” who requires a response from Christians.<sup>49</sup>

For Hwa, the challenge of poverty is a reminder to evangelicals of the need to be engaged in society. He disapproves of evangelicals viewing Christian faith simply in terms of personal piety and hopes that Asian evangelicals will break out of this mould. Hwa’s rationale is that the message of the Bible is essentially wholistic, not separating matters of the body from those of the soul. He relates this to a model of socio-political engagement, which deals with the whole person, especially if they are needy. Hwa points to the example of British evangelicals like Wilberforce who impacted their societies and “had a powerful and transforming relevance in the worlds of their time.”<sup>50</sup>

### Wealth

Asia is a continent of plenty as well as a continent of want. This impacts the church and Christian mission in different ways. In 2002, speaking of the financial resources of the church in Singapore, Choong Chee Pang made the following comment to a conference where Singaporeans were attending.

An Australian Christian friend of mine responded in utter disbelief a few years ago on his first visit to Singapore when I told him that virtually every Singapore Christian graduate who had a good profession and who was now in his or her middle age was a millionaire. You know for sure that I was not kidding at all.<sup>51</sup>

In another conference, on globalisation, Choong expressed concern about how Asian Christians perceive and use their wealth. This has clear implications for other churches, like the Chinese diaspora church in Malaysia. Hwa is aware that in a society like Malaysia, with its growing economy and increasing opportunity, the prosperity gospel has apparent attractions for some evangelicals and he recognizes the pitfalls of this.<sup>52</sup> Samuel has been involved in several study projects on wealth and money internationally. This is one of the

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<sup>48</sup> Maggay, *Transforming Society* (Oxford: Regnum books, 1994), 9-10.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, 9-10.

<sup>50</sup> Hwa, Yung, *Beyond AD 2000. A Call to Evangelical Faithfulness* (Kuala Lumpur: Kairos Research Centre, 1999), 37-40. Hwa makes a case for the impact of Enlightenment thinking in the west leading to a differentiation for matters of the body and the soul.

<sup>51</sup> Choong Chee Pang, “Globalization and the church,” in *The Challenge and Impact of Globalization – Towards a Biblical Response*, eds. S.C. Tong and Allan Wong (Singapore: Graduates Christian Fellowship, 2002), 49.

<sup>52</sup> Hwa, *Beyond AD 2000*, 20, 25-26, 44.

ways in which Samuel sees social transformation being possible through a judicious use of wealth shared to others.<sup>53</sup> Wealth impacts Asian evangelicals in terms of how they relate to others in society and how they engage in mission.

#### **4.3.2 The public square**

The selected writers advocate Christian presence in the public square in Asia. This emphasis on Christian interaction with Asian societies is clearly seen as part of the church's mission in Asia. The relationship of Christians to the nation is most clearly discussed in relation to Malaysia (within the religious context of Islam), the Philippines (with its social context of poverty) and India (with its religious context of Hinduism and a social context of class difference). Despite his origins and continuing work in Sri Lanka, Ramachandra's treatment of public life is more general and less closely related to the specific Sri Lankan situation; some of Samuel's writing similarly adopts a more general perspective.<sup>54</sup> Samuel sees a connection between mission and social change, and stresses the necessity for Christians to seek change in many Asian contexts: "praxis says there is no neutral relationship to the world. It is a commitment to change it."<sup>55</sup> He wants to emphasize the importance of culture and he is concerned with the way in which societies and cultures are being shaped in today's global context.<sup>56</sup>

Significant attention is given in the writings of Ng to Christian responses to Asian societies. It appears to form an important part of Ng's work to show how Christians can play an active role in Asian societies, both as their Christian duty and responsibility, and also as an intrinsic part of the church's mission. He deems it to be increasingly important that Christians in Asian societies are able to work in the public square, taking account of the multi-cultural and multi-religious settings of Asia:

Can we develop Christian leaders ... to take their Christian concerns into the public square? We desperately need a public theology that enables Christians to work with people of other faiths to promote civil society without compromising their Christian identity.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> D. Bussau, and V. Samuel, *How Then Should We Lend?* (Oxford: Opportunity International, 1998)

<sup>54</sup> At times he writes more directly for India.

<sup>55</sup> V. Samuel, "Mission as Transformation," in *Mission as Transformation*, eds. V. Samuel, and C. Sugden (Oxford: Regnum, 1999), 229 & 230-231.

<sup>56</sup> Samuel, Interview.

<sup>57</sup> Ng, K.W, "Leadership for Mission in Asia: Facing the Challenge of Resurgent Religions," *Transformation* 17 No.3 (July 2000): 117.

Ng is aware that in parts of Asia, Islamic and Buddhist non-governmental organizations have taken a lead in engaging in social criticism and Christians need to be careful they are not left behind. Christians who are involved in the public square<sup>58</sup> need to relate their Christian faith to public life<sup>59</sup> using appropriate registers of discourse. Ng finds the terminology of the American political theologian Yoder, who talks of the discourses of “creation, salvation and Ceasar” helpful in Malaysia.<sup>60</sup> Ng recognizes that Christians need to become adept at dealing with issues in the public sphere by appreciating the issues and developing appropriate skills to handle them.

Another important area for Ng is the possibility of building up the “cultural underpinnings”<sup>61</sup> of Asian society. Such wider cultural underpinnings are necessary to promote a diverse modern society with multi-cultural elements and to promote democracy. “It is imperative to infuse into local cultures sentiments that will support democratic institutions which in turn must be constantly reinforced by democratic practices in civil society.”<sup>62</sup> Ng’s motivation to reflect more deeply on these issues is prompted by his pessimism about the Malaysian context and his desire to target selected areas where Christians can really contribute to Malaysian society.

An interest for public life and the public square is found in the work of Ramachandra. His writing is often of a more general nature, informed by his role and interest in society in the whole Asian region. Ramachandra’s understanding of the public square emerges from his treatment of biblical themes in mission.<sup>63</sup> The deeply social implications of the Christian gospel for Ramachandra can be seen in his comment about the way the Roman Empire reacted to the implications of Christianity. “This message, if true, subverted the world of politics ... Caesar himself would have to bow the knee to this crucified Jew.”<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> See Ng, *Doing Responsive Theology*, 1-11. See also p.11-16 and 72 in terms of specific examples for Christians in Malaysia.

<sup>59</sup> Ng Kam Weng. “From Political Action to Cultural Transformation,” *Kairos* (Feb 2002):11.

<sup>60</sup> Ng, Interview.

<sup>61</sup> Ng Kam Weng. “Sojourners and Cultural Renewal,” *Kairos* (Jan 2001): 3.

<sup>62</sup> Ng discusses the way in which religious belief (including Christianity) can be a counter to the power of the state. Ng, K.W., *Bridge-Building in a Pluralistic Society: a Christian Contribution* (PJ: Pustaka SUFES, 1994), 49-54.

<sup>63</sup> H. Peskett, and V. Ramachandra, *The Message of Mission: the Glory of Christ in all Time and Space* (Leicester: IVP, 2003).

<sup>64</sup> Peskett, and Ramachandra, *The Message of Mission*, 26; cf. 39-40, 196-200. Note the “gospel” language in this section.

In his discussion of multi-religious societies, such as India, he recognizes the complexities of faith in the modern world<sup>65</sup> but sees it as important that Christians learn to seek justice and promote justice for all in an even-handed manner both in states which are sympathetic to Christianity and in those which are not. In the context of pluralism, Ramachandra looks at how Christians need to deal with the complex issue of public truth: “Can we live in a pluralistic environment and make universal truth claims while still respecting the diversity of human cultures and religious beliefs?”<sup>66</sup> For Ramachandra the answer lies in respecting a plurality of views, without compromising one’s own religious beliefs.<sup>67</sup> Ramachandra encourages Christians to be involved in public life based on what he describes as creation mandates in the Old Testament.<sup>68</sup> In other words a concern for human worth, dignity and human justice as creation ordinances and for creation itself, should prompt Christian participation in society.<sup>69</sup>

Maggay is interested in the stance the Christian community adopts towards the state as it interacts in public life. She notes the “contingent” nature of government and the need for flexibility in responding to this:

Political practice needs to be constantly challenged and renewed by the changeless norms of scripture and the particular pressures of a given time. Dissent, therefore, is not an option that may be dispensed with in the life of a nation.<sup>70</sup>

Maggay looks at the contrasting models of the state suggested in two places in the New Testament, Romans 13 and Revelation 13. Following Yoder, she sees the former passage as suggesting a personal ethic of submission but not “uncritical obedience” and suggests the need to separate out injunctions for Christians as individuals and those for the community in its entirety.<sup>71</sup> The New Testament is conscious of the possible failings of the state and portrays scenarios where “state power has become a beast, an apostate authority that needs to be resisted and dethroned.”<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Ramachandra, *Faiths in Conflict*, 82-84.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid*, 119-124, 124-132, 132-134.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid*, 159, 158-165.

<sup>68</sup> Genesis 1:26-31 & 2:15-20

<sup>69</sup> Ramachandra views Genesis 1 as important for Christian understandings of mission as New Testament passages like Matthew 28. Vinoth Ramachandra, Interview by Warren R. Beattie, 24<sup>th</sup> January 2002, Singapore.

<sup>70</sup> Maggay, *Transforming Society*, 25.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid*, 27-28.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid*, 29.

Given these descriptions of the church found in the Bible, especially the New Testament, Maggay's conclusion is that "the church is to be a constant sign to the authorities that there is a new order, a kingdom that while not of this world, is in this world and continually poses a threat to established arrangements of social reality."<sup>73</sup> She favours Dooyewerd's distinction between the church and its inward community life based around the sacraments and worship and its outward life in society. She sees "peoplehood" and "penetration" as twin dimensions of the church's task in society and says the church should avoid gaining power for its own ends and becoming just another political lobby. "The church has no need to play politics in order to wield influence. Simply by being itself, by being true to the power of its convictions and the purity of its purpose, it has power."<sup>74</sup> The prophetic, priestly and kingly offices of Jesus offer models of participation for the church in terms of promoting justice, mediating God's resources to the world and offering a model of service.<sup>75</sup> In her thinking about the church's involvement in society, Maggay takes seriously the fallen nature of society, the need for the church to have a broad social agenda and be committed to prophetic involvement. It needs to consider lessons from the models of engagement through history and take seriously the *cost* of such engagement, particularly in the Asian sphere.<sup>76</sup>

The selected writers show a clear interest in Christians responding to the needs of Asian societies and being part of the shaping of the public square in Asia in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. As they respond to this requirement of participation in societies, they are looking for biblical models which they can appropriate and adopt to facilitate such engagement.

### **4.3.3 Values**

The debate about what form society should take in Asia and how it should be shaped has led, in particular, to a lively discussion about the role of *values* in society.<sup>77</sup> These values are often described as though they are quintessentially Asian, as opposed to the general western values which pervade the globalized world, and reflect the sensibilities of the Asian religious

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid, 36.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid, 40-44. See also V. Ramachandra, "Globalisation: Towards a Theological Perspective and Critique," 19-21.

<sup>75</sup> Maggay, *Transforming Society*, 68, 71, 72-74. See Ng on the "munus triplex," the three-fold office of Christ in Ng, Kam Weng, *From Christ to Social Practice* (Hong Kong: Alliance Bible Seminary, 1996), 28-33.

<sup>76</sup> Maggay, *Transforming Society*, 30, 96.

<sup>77</sup> See G. Sheridan, *Asian Values, Western Dreams: Understanding the New Asia* (St. Leonards, N.S.W.: Allen & Unwin, 1999). Sheridan is Australian.

and cultural scene. Sometimes they are also considered as an alternative to Christianity and its Christian values.

### Asian values

In his discussion of Asian values, Ng considers the way in which values are ‘disseminated’ through modernity by the mass media, which portray implicitly both western and Asian values, so that “...it’s here in the entertainment industry that the clash of cultures and civilizations becomes most apparent.”<sup>78</sup> He suggests that Asian values can be taken to include the following “strong family values, respect for authority, consensus in decision-making and supremacy of the community over the individual...”<sup>79</sup>

Hwa looks beyond some of the positive economic values of hard work and thrift to some of the paradoxes of contemporary Asian values like the dangers of nepotism in relation to family ties and other forms of corruption because of the lack of accountability of those in authority. In this context, Asian leaders themselves can be drawn in to promote the virtues of Asian values against Western values. Hwa sees this debate as offering opportunities for Asian Christians to share their perspectives on values in Asian societies. However, it is critical that Christians prepare carefully and define their own position on Christian values since “what these values are and how they can be instilled into Asian society will be a key question in the coming years.”<sup>80</sup>

Ramachandra expresses scepticism about the way in which Asian leaders or elites use Asian values language for their own ends, giving the example of Mahatir Mohammad in Malaysia, Lee Kuan Yew in Singapore, and recent Chinese regimes.

It was common to hear these men expounding the superiority of “Asian values” in defence of their highly authoritarian or patronizing styles of leadership. ... By “Asian values” they meant not only the virtues of family loyalty and hard work... but much more dubiously, the rejection of participatory democracy and all political dissent.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Ng K. W., “Modernity in Malaysia: Christian Perceptions and Opportunities,” in *Modernity in Malaysia: Christian Perspectives*, ed. Ng Kam Weng (Kuala Lumpur: Kairos Research Centre, 1998), 4-7.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid, 1, 4.

<sup>80</sup> Hwa, Yung, “The Role of the Church in Vision 2002,” in *Modernity in Malaysia: Christian Perspectives*, ed. Ng Kam Weng (Kuala Lumpur: Kairos Research Centre, 1998), 63-66. Like Ng he looks at early church models for inspiration.

<sup>81</sup> Ramachandra, *Faiths in Conflict*, 36-37; 38-39. Ramachandra notes somewhat ironically Mahatir’s comments that “Asian values are universal values” and “European values ... European values.” Ramachandra makes similar comments elsewhere. Ramachandra *Gods that Fail*, 20.

Ramachandra is interested in the way the language of Asian values is used to promote what he sees as “myths” of Asian economic success, not that success is a “myth” but the reality of the economic success is that there are wider factors at play including United States intervention in East Asia to protect some of the more authoritarian regimes.<sup>82</sup>

Like Ramachandra, Ng has some misgivings about the way in which the Asian values discourse can be misused. In the context of religious freedom, Ng notes how there are trends, particularly in Islamic societies, to erode the freedoms of religion which had been enjoyed in the colonial period. These developments are justified on grounds that social institutions should conform to local customs or Asian values.<sup>83</sup> There are certainly tensions here. Inevitably, this can have an impact on Christians who are in minorities. It is in this context that it becomes acutely important for Christians “to frame their value system using the language of public discourse.”<sup>84</sup> Ng is conscious that the construction of values is at the heart of the challenge to construct the character of Asian societies and he is concerned that Christians play an active role in this.

Such a situation forces Christians to examine the way in which Christian values can contribute to society and particularly societies in Asia and to recognize the varied responses of the group to this issue. Ramachandra stresses the need to deconstruct the language of Asian values. Hwa and Ng put more emphasis on the way in which Christians can enter the debate and make use of it to promote Christian values. Hwa suggests that this situation puts pressure on Christians to show how aspects of democracy have been enhanced, historically, by western civilization’s Christian roots. He goes on to say that for his context, “if Christians are concerned about freedom and justice, and genuine social transformation and economic progress, they need to ask how the values of the kingdom can be woven into the fabric of Malaysian society.”<sup>85</sup> When he ponders how Christianity can influence society, Hwa thinks that Christians values, even if not always welcome, provide a resource for helping society in Malaysia. Hwa fears that freedom, mutual accountability, equality and public transparency may diminish in Malaysia. By holding firmly to their own values Christians can make a real difference.

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<sup>82</sup> Ramachandra, *Faiths in Conflict*, 148-155.

<sup>83</sup> Ng, “Leadership for Mission in Asia,” 115.

<sup>84</sup> Ng Kam Weng, “From Political Action to Cultural Transformation,” *Kairos* (Feb 2002):10-11. Ng suggests that Yoder’s categories of the language of redemption of creation and of Caesar offer different registers of discourse for different situations in the public square. Ng, Interview.

<sup>85</sup> Hwa, “The Role of the Church in Vision 2002,” 64-65.

The “Asian values” debate is part of the contemporary context of Asian discussion about society. It is a reminder of the way in which Asian cultures are resurgent and how Asian societies seek to forge a future for themselves using their own intellectual resources and categories. At times, such language appears to be used to stifle debate, participation and the freedom of minorities. It does, however, give opportunities to Asian Christians to participate through the value system of their faith in the Asian societies in which they live. To do this successfully they need to be aware of the sensitivities which surround the debate and to adopt an appropriate discourse.

#### **4.4 Asian multi-religious settings**

This section looks at the way in which the selected writers are responding to what they see as religious issues that merit greater evangelical appreciation. They recognise that there is a need to understand religion better because the Asian situation is one of resurgent religion and also there are spiritual and religious realities which are not adequately addressed by western theology.

##### ***4.4.1 Interacting with religions in Asia***

The selected writers, religion and evangelicalism

The issue of how evangelical missiology responds to and interacts with Asian religions is an important element of this study. Evangelicals of western origin can appear to be over-critical of Asian religions but the selected writers are anxious to adopt a more open approach to Asian religious thinking. When Hwa discusses Christian responses to other religions he disapproves of the rejection of non-Christian religions as demonic just because they have Asian cultural associations and would like to encourage evangelicals to be more aware of other religious traditions within Asia.<sup>86</sup> In religiously plural contexts, Christians must be people who understand the religious mind of the other communities such as Muslims and Buddhists. This is important for two reasons: one is to establish Christian identity in the face of the plurality of belief in society; the other is that the outward-looking nature of Christianity means that Christians will want to bear witness to their faith in the light of other religious faiths. In order to do that authentically and honestly “the church must acknowledge

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<sup>86</sup> Hwa, “Towards an Evangelical Approach to Religions and Culture,” 86-91.

the missionary nature of its faith.”<sup>87</sup> Hwa points out that both Christian and Muslim people in Malaysia need to be more open about this as they move towards inter-religious dialogue. Batumalai makes the point that in a setting like Malaysia it is important that Christians have a better understanding of Islam, but recognizes that sometimes there is an unwillingness on the part of Muslims to enter into an adequate study and appreciation of other religions.

Others in Asia express similar sentiments. Samuel points out the difference between approaching religions in terms of “falsification” of certain points as opposed to “demonisation” of the whole framework.<sup>88</sup> He notes that evangelical societies, even in Asia, can have a somewhat limited approach to religious encounter, viewing one Indian missionary agency as lacking “a more positive appreciation of people’s religious culture.”<sup>89</sup> Discussing evangelical mission between Berlin 1966 and Lausanne 1974, Samuel offers a critique of evangelicalism in relation to other religions. He recognizes that real interaction with other religions has been problematic for evangelicals. He advocates that in the same way that Lausanne put social action on the agenda in the 1970s, “it is time for us to put dialogue with other religions also.”<sup>90</sup> Samuel observes that “Latin Americans have brought social change to the fore, Indians must bring plurality of religions to the fore ... Social change is not enough ... it needs a religious reality that promotes this view.”<sup>91</sup> This makes a connection with the context of religious resurgence in Asia and the contribution that Asians can make in terms of offering new approaches to religions.<sup>92</sup>

New insights into “religious dialogue” would be a genuine benefit that Asian evangelicals could offer to evangelicalism generally. Although there is an urgent need for evangelicals to engage with religious issues, it can be a contentious area of debate for some strands of evangelicalism. Samuel hopes that Asian evangelicals will see the need to grapple with the reality of other religions and that Asian theologians can lead the way in this area.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Hwa, Interview.

<sup>88</sup> Samuel, “Mission as Transformation,” 235.

<sup>89</sup> Samuel, V, “Evangelical Societies and the Church in India,” *International Review of Mission* 81 (July 1992): 389.

<sup>90</sup> V. Samuel and C. Sugden, “Dialogue with Other Religions – an Evangelical View,” in *Sharing Jesus in the Two Thirds World*. Ed. V. Samuel and Chris Sugden, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 187.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid*, 194.

<sup>92</sup> Note that although Asian evangelicals critique pluralist positions on inter-religious encounter they also critique what they see as simplistic evangelical perspectives as well.

<sup>93</sup> Samuel is aware that religions are not closed systems in Asia and that Asian religions are also entering the west. Samuel and Sugden, “Dialogue with Other Religions,” 194-196.

As an Indian, Samuel suggests that a lack of self-critical reflection on evangelicalism as a religion results in a lack of critical analysis in relation to other religions. Evangelicals lean to “cerebral” views of religion which stress “faith and belief” at the expense of “world-views” that deal not just with beliefs but with the lived out reality of religion in everyday life.<sup>94</sup> As a result, Samuel is concerned that evangelical understandings are grounded in systems of theology which relate badly to the spiritual realities of Asia. These comments indicate that Samuel sees evangelicalism needs to change in terms of its approach to other religions.

#### Understanding religions in Asia

The selected writers accept religious diversity at a social level but they draw boundaries in terms of some religions implications of other faiths. Yet they desire to gain a better understanding of religions in Asia, to relate to people of other faiths and to dialogue with them.

The attitude of Samuel is instructive regarding an Asian stance to religion in the context of his own commitment to transformation.

What happens to other communities which have other religious commitments? There are some common grounds and starting points. For us in our involvement it is that religion is important for life. Respect for religion is important. But the whole tradition of the west was of Christians not respecting other religions, seeing religions as full of untruth, and temples as abodes of evil spirits. ... But when I first went into a temple, it was not of a fear of evil spirits which I had grown up with from childhood, it was an experience of discovery, the presence of peace, and the presence of God, my Jesus weeping over, crying over, drawing people to himself... My cry was, did you ever hear their prayers Jesus? They were people with genuine cries. Did you hear them Jesus? You are the only true God. No Hindu who hears me say this would misunderstand my respect for religion or my commitment to Christ or my commitment to religion. The tradition of the Christian faith that has gone beyond falsification to the demonisation of other religions has been the biggest stumbling block for Christian mission in the context of other religions.<sup>95</sup>

Samuel sees the influence of religious belief and observance as a social phenomenon playing an important part in Asian life: “religion is bound up with our family life; our sense of identity and our national histories. We Asians do not separate religion from our social,

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid, 194-198.

<sup>95</sup> Samuel, “Mission as Transformation,” 235.

political, economic and personal lives.”<sup>96</sup> In this context, the religions in Asia are best viewed as “belief systems” that, in the culturally determined expressions of a shared understanding of life, take on the nature of “symbolic systems.”<sup>97</sup> Thus Hindus in Tamil Nadu share a common identity which is shaped by their local culture and the local expressions of their religious faith with other Hindus in South India, but it is an identity which is slightly different from those, for example, in regions of North India.

The implications of this social integration of religion are particularly important in the context of resurgent religions. “All the world’s major religions are strongly present in Asia ... Christians cannot live their faith in a way that pretends that these other faiths do not matter. They need to talk; to enter into dialogue with them.”<sup>98</sup> Samuel sets his discussion on religion firmly in the context of views of mission where mission includes proclaiming Jesus Christ, but also involves showing that there are “transforming possibilities” in Jesus Christ.<sup>99</sup> Samuel does not shrink from describing the potential to share Christ in Asia and describes it as a place where “vast masses of people in the continent know nothing of Jesus at all.”<sup>100</sup> At the same time, Samuel is clear that the church’s mission must address social issues like poverty, justice and human rights in the context of other religious traditions where they live.<sup>101</sup>

The minority status of Christianity in Asia is important for Ramachandra. He contrasts the cross of Jesus Christ and its symbolic powerlessness with the power of the eastern religions. This is not the typical way in which western scholars regards Christianity against the historical background of Christendom.<sup>102</sup> In this regard, Ramachandra also notes that analysts need to be careful how they apply labels to religions in the context of Asia where religion and political power are often intertwined. He suggests that if scholars apply religious terms to describe ethnicity and culture they should try to be even-handed in the way they do this – applying such descriptions equally to all religions including

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<sup>96</sup> V. Samuel and C. Sugden, “Christians in Asia,” 159.

<sup>97</sup> See definitions of religion in C. Auffarth and H. Mohr, “Religion,” in *Brill Dictionary of Religion*. 4 vols, ed. Kocku von Stuckrad (Leiden: Brill, 2006).

<sup>98</sup> Samuel and Sugden, “Christians in Asia,” 175-181.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid*, 175.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid*, 175.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid*, 175-176.

<sup>102</sup> Ramachandra, *Gods That Fail*, 211-212.

Christianity.<sup>103</sup> It is clear that Ramachandra seeks to look again at the models which are used to deal with Christian understandings both of itself and of other religious beliefs.<sup>104</sup>

Ng sees a greater “mastery of Asian religions” as a necessary precursor to a deeper understanding of the churches’ role in its Asian context.<sup>105</sup> Ng would like to see networks of Asian theologians for the Asian religions in the Islamic, Buddhist, and Chinese spheres. There needs to be an emphasis on local contexts coupled with adequate attention to the implications of the gospel in a global world, given the nature of Asia as a society where global forces are present.<sup>106</sup> He himself would like to give more attention to the inter-religious encounter. Such study would form the basis for a constructive contribution to the area of theology of religions.<sup>107</sup> The issues of religious realities and spirituality in the context of multi-religious societies, mean that there is a need to develop a theology of Christian experience. This theology would take account of the way in which Christian spirituality is shaped by competing religious experiences of Islam, Buddhism and Hinduism. For Ng, western models of theology are limited in terms of spirituality in the Malaysian context.

Maggay’s interactions with religion in the Philippines centre around what she terms “Filipino religious consciousness.” She is concerned about the problems faced by evangelical Protestants given “the cultural distance between its theological ethos and indigenous ways of thinking and feeling.”<sup>108</sup> The former has an emphasis shaped by western ways of thinking on ideas associated with sin and guilt; the latter are concerned with the powers that are active in everyday life and the universe.

There is a general consensus amongst the selected writers that evangelicals in Asia must press for new understandings in the area of religion. They must be ready to move beyond the descriptions of religion developed by evangelicals in the west. Such an attitude is prompted by the exigencies of the contemporary Asian situation. This is most strongly felt in two areas, namely the area of religious resurgence, as it is experienced by Asians in today’s world, and the attempt to describe and make sense of the spiritual in Asia.

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<sup>103</sup> Ramachandra, *Faiths in Conflict*, 126.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 119-132.

<sup>105</sup> Ng, “Leadership for Mission in Asia,” 114-117.

<sup>106</sup> Ng, Interview.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>108</sup> M. Maggay, *Filipino Religious Consciousness* (Manila: ISACC, 1999), 15.

#### 4.4.2 Religious resurgence

Participants at the Edinburgh 1910 World Missionary Conference wondered if the influence of global religions other than Christianity would fade, but instead there has been a growing resurgence of Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism and of Chinese national consciousness.<sup>109</sup> As Hwa reflects on the resurgence of Islam in Malaysia, and the rise of the “fundamentalist BJP in India,” he feels the concept of resurgent ideologies and religions<sup>110</sup> is a reality in contemporary Asia.<sup>111</sup> This gives rise to one particular concern in terms of the western heritage and identity of the Christian church in Asia. At the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Chinese and Islamic worlds are not looking towards the west, but have a sense of their own capacity to create change in their societies. In many ways the Asian church still looks to the west. This needs to change for the church to maintain or even establish its Asian identity.<sup>112</sup>

Ramachandra suggests that modernization has prompted religious “revitalization,” with new religious movements emerging from traditional faiths experiencing a new lease of life and a flourishing of interest in religion.<sup>113</sup> This may be caused by a reaction to the way religion has been marginalized in the modern period, though it is partly a product of the interaction with Christianity in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.<sup>114</sup> In places this has resulted in new forms of religion in the context of contemporary religious and political challenges:

...the resurgence of religious faiths in the Indian subcontinent owes much to the example and impact of Christian missions as well as ... secular humanism. The resurgence is as much innovation as it is recovery.<sup>115</sup>

Ramachandra notes the difficulties that religious resurgence has brought to India in terms of a rise of nationalist sentiments and corresponding pressures on the Christian church which is viewed, with suspicion, as foreign.<sup>116</sup>

Responding to Huntington, the American political scholar,<sup>117</sup> Ramachandra considers the way in which civilizations other than western culture are asserting their global influence,

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<sup>109</sup> Samuel makes a similar point. V. Samuel, “Mission in the Context of World Religions,” *AD 2000 and Beyond: a Mission Agenda*, ed. V. Samuel and C. Sugden (Oxford: Regnum, 1991), 149-151.

<sup>110</sup> Hwa, *Beyond AD 2000*, 1-2.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid*, 37, 39-40.

<sup>112</sup> Hwa, Interview. Hwa sees the development of a greater confidence in Asian identity will help with the contextualization of Christianity in Asia.

<sup>113</sup> Ramachandra, *Faiths in Conflict*, 148.

<sup>114</sup> Ramachandra, *Gods That Fail*, 18-21.

<sup>115</sup> Ramachandra, *Faiths in Conflict*, 168-170

<sup>116</sup> Ramachandra, *Gods That Fail*, 19.

<sup>117</sup> S. P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (NY: Simon & Schuster, 1996).

especially the issue of “Islamic resurgence.”<sup>118</sup> In Ramachandra’s writing, perceptions of Islam are carefully scrutinized and he is concerned that Huntington does not sufficiently distinguish Islamic fundamentalism from Islam.<sup>119</sup> Writing in the mid-1990s, Ramachandra was concerned that Huntington’s thesis has two major weaknesses. The first was the justification of politics in terms of culture and religion without sufficiently distinguishing these phenomena; the second was the question of whether it is really differences of culture and religion that precipitate conflicts.<sup>120</sup>

Hwa, however, would say that one of Huntington’s key presuppositions that there is a resurgence of traditional cultures and religions in non-western societies is confirmed in Asian societies today<sup>121</sup> and he believes that many in the elites of Asian societies are drawn to non-western values. In responding to this in Malaysia,<sup>122</sup> Hwa considers that Islamic resurgence brings new pressures for the church there and it has to learn how to deal constructively with these.<sup>123</sup>

Samuel prefers to use the language of religious mobilization to describe the phenomenon of religious change. He thinks of religion as a useful way of describing “social capital” which draws on “spiritual capital” to achieve its ends of mobilizing people in a cause.<sup>124</sup> Samuel views such an adoption of religion as taking place within contemporary Hinduism. Religious mobilization could be a possible resource for Christians as well in that they can use the gospel positively to empower themselves.<sup>125</sup> Samuel is conscious that the religious resurgence in Asia can mean continuing reactions against Christianity – “the ancient religions after repelling Christian witness for centuries are now re-asserting themselves.”<sup>126</sup>

The Asian churches are now living and functioning in a time of religious and cultural resurgence.<sup>127</sup> The churches need to consider how they present their message in the context of the wider society with its renewed interest in religion. In countries with strong religious

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<sup>118</sup> Ramachandra, *Faiths in Conflict*, 13.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid*, 17.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid*, 37.

<sup>121</sup> Hwa, “Towards an Evangelical Approach to Religions and Culture,” 86.

<sup>122</sup> Hwa, Interview.

<sup>123</sup> Hwa, “Towards an Evangelical Approach to Religions and Culture,” 86.

<sup>124</sup> Samuel, Interview.

<sup>125</sup> V. Samuel, “Religious Change and Conversion of Low and Outcastes to Christianity. Exploring the Social Horizons of Church Growth in North India,” Unpublished Paper, 2003.

<sup>126</sup> V. Samuel and C, Sugden, “Christians in Asia,” 157. He gives the example of the freedom of religion bill in 1979 which asserted Hinduism in India.

<sup>127</sup> Ng, Interview.

traditions like Islam in Malaysia, or Hinduism in India the churches need to enable people to see the gospel as relevant to their lives and to nation-building.<sup>128</sup>

#### 4.4.3 Spiritual realities

Another area where the Asian religious setting is seen to differ from the west is that of the realm of the spiritual. Hwa, for example, is of the opinion that there are “spiritual realities” in the Asian religious context<sup>129</sup> which need to be recognized and appreciated so that Christians can respond to the distinctive needs of Asian peoples in appropriate ways.<sup>130</sup>

Hwa has begun to query whether much of the discussion of charismatic and Pentecostal theology in Asia wrongly categorises expressions of Asian spiritual phenomena according to western charismatic phenomena in western theological categories.<sup>131</sup> It is not that Hwa is denying the impact of the Pentecostal-Charismatic renewal in the global church or even in Asia,<sup>132</sup> for he takes pains to show the global impact of Pentecostalism and the Charismatic renewal<sup>133</sup> in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>134</sup> According to Hwa, “there is an abundance of evidence in support of non-western origins and contributions to the global Pentecostal-Charismatic movement.”<sup>135</sup>

An explanation for the relationship between Asian indigenous Christianity and Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity is best found in the close relationship between the biblical culture

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<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

<sup>129</sup> Hwa Yung, “Strategic Issues in Missions – an Asian Perspective,” *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 40 No.1 (Jan 2004): 28-30. This concern is echoed by other evangelicals such as Moonjang Lee.

<sup>130</sup> On this theme see M. Lee, “New paradigms of Partnership in the Asian Context,” Unpublished Paper for the Asian Missions Association, Moscow. 11<sup>th</sup> September 2003.

<sup>131</sup> Hwa Yung, “Endued with Power,” in *Truth to Proclaim: Gospel in Church and Society*, ed. Simon Chan (Singapore: Trinity Theological College, 2002). Hwa Yung, “Pentecostalism and the Asian Church,” *Asian and Pentecostal – The Changing Face of Pentecostalism in Asia*, (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, forthcoming). (Pagination from draft chapter of 2003.)

<sup>132</sup> Hwa, “Endued with Power,” 1-2. These movements may represent as much as 28% of global Christianity.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid. Hwa follows Barrett’s statistical account of these movements.

<sup>134</sup> For a fuller account of the global spread of Pentecostalism see M. Dempster, Byron D Klaus and Douglas Peterson eds., *The Globalisation of Pentecostalism: A Religion made to Travel* (Oxford and Irvine: Regnum books, 1997).

<sup>135</sup> Hwa, “Endued with Power,” 5. The importance of global movements is noted in his study as well.

and its world-view and the experience of Asia and its world-view.<sup>136</sup> Hwa discusses worldview at some length<sup>137</sup> and looks at the way in which western materialistic world-views, shared by many of the educated in Asia, leaves no place for “the miraculous, answers to prayer, the work of angels or demonic powers and related ideas – the very realm where Pentecostalism makes its impact.”<sup>138</sup>

A discussion of the “excluded middle” offers help with this issue of world-view.<sup>139</sup> This is a concept which has been developed by Hiebert as a western anthropologist working in Asian contexts. Hiebert’s concept describes how a post-enlightenment scientific world-view tends to exclude the spiritual elements of Asian world-views where these spiritual elements act as a buffer between the natural world and the world of the supernatural – hence the term ‘middle’- but in doing this they have an interpretative value in relation to the role of the spiritual in everyday life. For Hwa, such an “excluding” analysis would be true in theological terms of the approach of other Christian groups including evangelicals, in contrast to Asian world-views which are more “supernaturalistic” and more “wholistic.”<sup>140</sup> Given that they hold to such world-views, Hwa notes how various groups in Asia locate themselves in relation to branches of the church with more western, Pentecostal-Charismatic elements or how they even relate to what could be termed indigenous movements. He is concerned that by grouping Asians too readily with Pentecostal-Charismatic groups, however, scholars miss the importance of this identification with indigenous movements in Asia and their interest in the world of the spiritual.

Hwa offers observations which help with spiritual theology. There is much that can be learned from the Pentecostal-Charismatic church in Asia which has helped people to contextualize their faith in Asian cultures. In this sense Pentecostalism is a contrast to “much of ... evangelical and ecumenical theology ... that does not and cannot engage the Asian world of demonic spirits, astrology, and the occult, as well as the wholism of Asian world-views.”<sup>141</sup> There is a need for Asian churches to develop a Christian world-view that deals with these realities and yet connects it them to the modern world. It will be helpful for Asian churches to encourage the adoption of Asian models of spirituality and theology.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> Hwa, “Pentecostalism and the Asian Church,” 11.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid, 11.

<sup>138</sup> Hwa, “Endued with Power,” 6.

<sup>139</sup> P.G Hiebert, “The Flaw of the Excluded Middle,” *Missiology* 10 No.1 (1982): 35-47.

<sup>140</sup> Hwa, “Endued with Power,” 6.

<sup>141</sup> Hwa, “Pentecostalism and the Asian Church,” 13-14.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid, 14.

Maggay sees the solution to the interest in spiritual power in the Philippines lies in the development of an evangelical theology that is sympathetic to Filipino interests.

The task of evangelism must be sensitive to the longing for access, for traffic with the supernatural forces that govern most Filipinos' lives. The preaching of the gospel needs to be accompanied by visible demonstrations of power in a culture where anyone speaking for God is assumed to have a measure of intimacy with spiritual powers.<sup>143</sup>

Hwa, Ng and Maggay would like to develop ways to deal with these spiritual realities.<sup>144</sup> Although at present this remains a partly fulfilled intention and vision rather than a reality within evangelicalism,<sup>145</sup> there are signs of progress, though still areas which appear to need fresh theological analysis in Asia.<sup>146</sup> Hwa offers a summary of some: "prophetic and healing gifts, or deliverance from demonic bondage that come through idol worship, use of charms, witchcraft and other similar occultic practices" and also basic Christian experiences of "worship and prayer."<sup>147</sup> Hwa considers that there are felt needs which also need to be discussed and analyzed and which explain why Asians make religious choices which lead them to avoid Christianity and see it as irrelevant to their needs.

In Asia, there is an intense interest in the other-worldly dimensions of life.<sup>148</sup> The recognition of the need for a greater awareness and understanding of spiritual realities and the spiritual side of life represents a positive beginning on the part of the selected writers. They would like to re-orientate Asian Christians in relation to other religious perspectives in Asia. It will be a real contribution to the evangelical church world-wide if they can share insights from their experiences in relation to Asian expressions of spirituality.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has investigated the way in which the selected writers shape missiology in relation to Asia by reflecting on and interacting closely with Asian settings. This can be seen

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<sup>143</sup> Maggay, *Filipino Religious Consciousness*, 21.

<sup>144</sup> Hwa, Yung, "A Systematic Theology that Recognises the Demonic," in *Deliver Us from Evil: An Uneasy Frontier in Christian Mission*, ed. A. Scott Moreau et al., (Monrovia, CA: MARC, 2002), 3-27.

<sup>145</sup> Ng, Interview.

<sup>146</sup> See also Juliet Thomas, "Issues from the Indian Perspective," in *Deliver Us from Evil: An Uneasy Frontier in Christian Mission* ed. A. Scott Moreau et al., (Monrovia, CA: MARC, 2002), 126ff.

<sup>147</sup> Hwa, "Endued with Power," 9.

<sup>148</sup> See Solomon on interest in the "spiritual world" in the Chinese diaspora in Singapore. R. Solomon, *Living in Two Worlds: Pastoral Responses to Possession in Singapore*, (Peter Lang: Frankfurt, 1992), 48-74.

in the response to the history of mission, which tries to take account of weaknesses and to build on the positive achievements of mission in relation to Asian societies. The recognition of the problem of Christian identity in Asia is of one area where evangelical missiologists are trying to analyze seriously problems facing Christians. This desire to fashion missiology in relation to Asia can be seen too in matters pertaining to the Asian social setting such as interaction with economic issues and the desire to see evangelicals as active participants in the public square in Asia.

In the area of religion, there is a general appreciation of the need to recognize the distinctively Asian characteristics of religion and the impact of religious resurgence on Asian societies. There is a pressing need for evangelicals to be empathetic to Asian religious beliefs and to find ways of developing a greater understanding of these religious systems. There are hints of a more innovative attempt on the part of the selected writers as Asian evangelicals interact with religious issues in Asia and seek greater engagement with religion on behalf of global evangelicalism.

The selected writers take seriously the concerns of the Asian social and religious settings in relation to mission and are trying to shape their missiological agenda in relation to these matters. In that sense, they are reflecting on the Asian settings as part of the process of an interaction of text and context in Asia. This suggests that the selected writers are concerned with the needs of the “Asian text” as well as the “scriptural text” in their search for a contextual missiology that deals adequately with Asia, not just pasting on biblical reflections to Asia, without adequate reflection on Asian realities. The way in which reflections on the “scriptural text” informs their missiology and forms part of their foundation for an evangelical missiology will be the subject of the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 5

### The Christian Scriptures in Asia – Towards Transformational Missiology (2)

#### 5.1 The Christian scriptures as a resource for missiology

The central place of the Christian scriptures in evangelical theology is recognized by diverse scholars. In the west, Bebbington<sup>1</sup> includes their centrality in his definition of evangelicalism. Writing for Malaysia, Hwa has stressed the importance of the “sola scriptura” principle in evangelicalism from the place of the Bible for Christians from Luther onwards.<sup>2</sup> These sentiments are echoed by Samuel when he talks about the Bible as a resource for the Indian context.<sup>3</sup> A similar interest in the place of the Bible is seen in Ramachandra’s desire to have “a conversation” with biblical themes and the Asian situation.<sup>4</sup> He suggests that Christians in the modern world need to return to “their biblical roots and articulate conversations with the thought-patterns that shape today’s world.”<sup>5</sup>

#### 5.1.1 The Christian Scriptures in Asia and the post- World War II era

The idea that there is interest in and commitment to the Christian scriptures within evangelicalism is not surprising, but the way in which the Christian scriptures are handled in the post-World War II era needs further scrutiny. The use of the Bible in non-western contexts and by non-western people is the subject of scholarly debate.<sup>6</sup> This debate centres around how the sacred Scriptures of Christianity relate to Asian cultures and to other Asian sacred Scriptures. It also involves how to include a sacred text like the Christian scriptures

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<sup>1</sup> D. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Routledge, 2002), 1-11.

<sup>2</sup> Hwa, Yung, *Beyond AD 2000. A Call to Evangelical Faithfulness* (Kuala Lumpur: Kairos Research Centre, 1999) 6, 13.

<sup>3</sup> V. Samuel, “Appropriating Christ and the Bible: the South Asian Experience,” *EFAC Bulletin* (Easter 1995): 20-21.

<sup>4</sup> V. Ramachandra, *Gods That Fail. Modern Idolatry and Christian Mission* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster Press, 1996), 58-91, 92-105. Ramachandra discusses biblical books such as Genesis and Job.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, 22; 19-25. The idea of a conversation reminds his readers that it is not a one-way process of simply applying the Bible to Asian contexts.

<sup>6</sup> Sanneh sees the Bible as a resource which can promote the vernacular. L. Sanneh, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture*, (N.Y: Orbis Books, 1989). See also L. Boff, “What are Third World Theologies?” in *Convergences and Differences*, ed. L. Boff and V. Elizondo (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1988), 3-16.

which has not significantly contributed to the shaping of Asian cultures over centuries. This tension is seen very clearly in A. Lee's partiality for the Chinese scriptures<sup>7</sup> or in Song's interest in transposition and the historical leap.<sup>8</sup> Ariarajah<sup>9</sup> sees certain hermeneutic stances that amount to a "bondage to a particular attitude to scripture": he wrestles with biblical texts that insist on a more exclusive approach to Christ's unique character.

Although evangelicals in Asia are sensitive to these issues, they still see a place for the Christian scriptures to speak to contemporary situations in Asia, especially as such interaction is shaped by issues that emerge from the Asian settings themselves. As a result, some Asian theologians criticize evangelicals for being too text-centred in their starting-point to theology. An example of this would be de Mesa's critique. "It is clear that doing theology as inculturation is not a matter of applying to our present situation what we think we have discovered from the biblical tradition."<sup>10</sup> De Mesa considers that by holding too tightly to the Scriptures, and the scriptural theological agenda, theologians will develop perspectives which are foreign to Asia.

#### Kwok and Sugirtharajah

In the field of biblical studies generally there has been renewed discussion of hermeneutics in relation to the changing character of the world. The implications of this in a "post-colonial world" have been given particular attention by Asians such as Sugirtharajah and Kwok Pui-lan.<sup>11</sup> Kwok offers a summary of the debate.<sup>12</sup> The rise of non-western voices in biblical interpretation offers alternatives to a discourse of interpretation that is centred around the west; it challenges western power in the discussion; it links interpretation of the Christian scriptures to two thirds world settings where other Scriptures and faiths form part of the

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<sup>7</sup> A.C.C. Lee, "Old Testament Prophetic Literature and Hong Kong in a Post-Colonial Context," Unpublished Seminar delivered at New College, University of Edinburgh, November 1998. Lee grew up more familiar with the Christian scriptures rather than with Chinese writings.

<sup>8</sup> C.S. Song, "From Israel to Asia – a Theological Leap," in *Third World Theologies*, ed. Gerald H. Anderson, and Thomas Stransky (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973), 211-222. (Trends in mission vol. 3).

<sup>9</sup> S.W. Ariarajah, "Towards a Theology of Dialogue," *The Ecumenical Review* 29 No.1 (1977): 8.

<sup>10</sup> J. De Mesa, "Doing theology as inculturation in the Asian context," in *New directions in Mission and Evangelisation. Vol 3. Faith and Culture*, eds. J.A. Scherer and S. B. Bevans (NY: Orbis, 1999), 125.

<sup>11</sup> R.S. Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Reconfigurations: an Alternative Way of Reading the Bible and Doing Theology* (London: SCM, 2003). P.L. Kwok, *Post-colonial Imagination and Feminist Theology*. (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005). They both currently live in the west.

<sup>12</sup> Kwok *Post-colonial Imagination*, 64.

debate; it allows for a place for non-western participation (rather than its being sidelined) and it allows for interaction with discourses such as post-colonialism and postmodernity.<sup>13</sup>

This means that there is genuine interest in the way in which non-western voices are involved in the interpretation of the Scriptures, although Sugirtharajah is aware that the label “third world hermeneutics” can be counter-productive.<sup>14</sup> In language that relates to the earlier discussion of “missiology from the periphery,” he laments that as non-western interpreters “we have been pushed further to the periphery in the name of postmodern celebration of the local and the different.”<sup>15</sup> Non-western biblical interpretation has raised the question of favoured biblical books and passages for the construction of a theology of mission. Sugirtharajah notes a preference in the 19<sup>th</sup> century for the “Matthean missionary commission” (Matthew 28) and “the missionary journeys of Paul” (Acts 13-21).<sup>16</sup> For Sugirtharajah the association of these texts with the colonial period of missionary expansion makes them problematic.<sup>17</sup> Kwok agrees that the Matthean commission was adopted in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries “to justify missionary efforts” and that as a result the Scriptures ended up being used to maintain western superiority and the weakness of other societies.<sup>18</sup>

## Reflections

There are points of overlap and points of divergence with theologians like Kwok and Sugirtharajah and the selected writers in their joint affirmation of the contribution of non-western interpreters, their appreciation of the legacy of history as it affects mission, their recognition of the distinctive religious and cultural character of Asian contexts and the way in which judicious use of biblical resources can influence emphases in mission. Unlike the selected writers, however, Kwok and Sugirtharajah draw back from seeing the Christian scriptures as offering resources that can engage with Asia in terms of mission which bring radical change as well as hope, nor do they accept either Ramachandra’s desire to wrestle with the grand narrative of scripture<sup>19</sup> or Samuel’s interest in the gospel as a fresh voice for Asia. Yet, Samuel and Ramachandra do link up with Kwok and Sugirtharajah in their

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid, 61-62, 68-70, 78-80. For Kwok, the participation of non-western voices, going beyond “the monopoly of white, middle-class men,” allows new questions about the historical and literary contexts of the Bible.

<sup>14</sup> Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Reconfigurations*, 106

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 173.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 17-19, 27.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 2. Sugirtharajah mentions the “Nazareth manifesto.”

<sup>18</sup> Kwok, *Post-colonial Imagination*, 61. Kwok connects colonial tradition and the Bible –“The bible is an integral part of the colonial discourse.”

<sup>19</sup> Peskett and Ramachandra, *The Message of Mission*, 11-12.

conviction that reflecting anew on the role of the Christian scriptures is a resource for mission.

### **5.1.2 The selected writers and the Christian scriptures**

In the light of the above discussion, attention will turn to how some of the selected writers discuss the use of the Bible and its potential as a resource in Asia.

#### **Samuel on the Bible and Christ**

In an article dealing with India, Samuel suggests that there are two helpful resources which can be brought to bear on the religions in India, “the Bible” and “Christ” and talks of “the appropriation of the Bible” so that it can be “resource to shape the public sphere.”<sup>20</sup> In India, different Scriptures, including Christian, are treated as religious texts by many people so that the Christian scriptures do not necessarily form a barrier to engagement.<sup>21</sup> Samuel approves of the way the Christian scriptures deal with religious topics. By this he means that the Christian approach to religious language:

... places right at the heart of things the idea that people especially ordinary people should understand, a view with momentous consequences for social and cultural awakening with people feeling that the social enterprise as such is not discontinuous with God’s universal plan...<sup>22</sup>

As the Christian scriptures deals with everyday life and situations that relate to everyday life, they offer new perspectives on society and ethics for individuals in their private and working lives. This is achieved by the narrative structure of the Bible which relates “truth” to the world of people:

In a religiously plural context like India, the bible with its realism, its recognition of the uniqueness and particularities of culture without undermining the unity of humankind is become an increasingly attractive resource to shape the public sphere.<sup>23</sup>

In this way the Bible can have an impact on Indian society and can be “an invaluable resource for social transformation.”<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> V. Samuel, “Appropriating Christ and the Bible: the South Asian Experience,” *EFAC Bulletin*. (Easter 1995): 18-20.

<sup>21</sup> Samuel suggests that there is open-ness to Christ, if not to Christianity, in India.

<sup>22</sup> V. Samuel, “Appropriating Christ,” 23.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, 23.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, 23.

## Ramachandra and interactions with biblical roots

A similar awareness that the Bible needs to be read in an engagement with modern contexts in Asia is clearly expressed in Ramachandra.<sup>25</sup> Christians in the modern world need to interact with “their biblical roots and articulate conversations with the thought-patterns that shape today’s world.”<sup>26</sup> Ramachandra takes a strong stand on the place of the message of the Christian scriptures as a starting-point for understanding what mission is:

In a missionary engagement with the world, we tell the biblical story in the face of all the other stories that the world offers for its ultimate *raison d’être* ... If the gospel is true, it must be relevant to every aspect of human activity. However, in that act of engagement a process of mutual conversion occurs. Even as the fundamental lie of the world is unmasked by the gospel message of, and obedience to, the fullness of ‘the truth that is in Jesus’ (Ephesians 4:21).<sup>27</sup>

In seeing a role for the Bible as a resource for missiology, Ramachandra explains that he sees Christian mission as embedded in God’s activity in the world as made clear in the Scriptures. He recognizes a grand narrative, countering those who take alternative positions. Whilst recognizing readers approach texts differently he (and Peskett) “...believe that readers may reliably assume that there is more in the text than the reflection of their own faces.”<sup>28</sup>

## Hwa and the Bible from within Asian contexts

Hwa observes a tendency for evangelicals in Asia to read the Bible through the lens of popular spirituality texts from Asia or through academic texts from the west. In an attempt to move beyond these approaches, Hwa affirms the need to develop an Asian Christian hermeneutic and suggests that “Asian Christians must begin to learn to read and understand the Bible from within their own contexts...”<sup>29</sup> Hwa advocates a reading that takes account of the wholistic dimensions of mission found in the New Testament, pointing out that there are many examples in the gospels such as Luke 4 and Luke 6 which point to a concern for spiritual and physical realities.

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<sup>25</sup> H. Peskett and V. Ramachandra, *The Message of Mission: the Glory of Christ in all Time and Space* (Leicester: IVP, 2003), 37-52. Ramachandra looks at the modern world and its concerns of “worth”, “work” and “earth-keeping” in relation to Genesis.

<sup>26</sup> V. Ramachandra, *Gods That Fail. Modern Idolatry and Christian Mission* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster Press, 1996), 22.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*, 23.

<sup>28</sup> Peskett and Ramachandra, *The Message of Mission*, 11-12.

<sup>29</sup> Hwa, Yung, *Mangoes or Bananas. The Quest for an Authentic Asian Christian Theology* (Oxford: Regnum Books, 1997), 224. For Hwa, Western readings on the spiritual and *minjung* readings which play down the spiritual both equally avoid the implications of the scriptures.

In different ways, Samuel, Ramachandra and Hwa see the essential message of Christianity that is to be shared in Asia as one that derives from the Christian scriptures. Samuel speaks of the gospel as a story to tell and to be shared in the contexts of Asia.<sup>30</sup> Ramachandra affirms the idea of the grand narrative of the Bible as a message that needs to be communicated with Asia. Hwa sees the Christian story and beliefs as forming the heart of the message which needs to be contextualized both in terms of the Scriptures and the historical Christian tradition.<sup>31</sup> The focus on the Christian scriptures derives from the fact that these Scriptures are seen as still central in shaping mission in Asian contexts.

## **5.2 Biblical and theological foundations of transformational missiology**

Having considered general issues in current Asian scholarship and the views of the selected writers, the following discussion will look at the implications of several sections of the Christian scriptures as they are appropriated as a resource for missiology. The selected writers draw on the Old Testament in relation to creation, justice and ethics, and God's working in history; they use the New Testament as a resource in connections with themes such as Jesus Christ, soteriology and justice, the kingdom of God and the community of the people of God. The use of both testaments indicate that the selected writers draw on a wide biblical foundation for their missiology and that their concept of missiology is not restricted to texts that relate to mission as the proclamation of the gospel to the nations.

### **5.2.1 Old Testament**

#### **Creation and ethics**

Biblical passages in the Old Testament deal with the social implications of mission grounded on a common human identity based on creation. Ramachandra makes a strong case for seeing humanity in creation as an important and universal element that allows for a wider basis or foundation for doing theology.<sup>32</sup> He suggests that the idea of human beings as the crown of creation, made in the image of God, has implications for human worth and human rights. Making creation a starting-point for theology allows for a more inclusive anthropology as its starting point is human beings as individuals. Ramachandra points to

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<sup>30</sup> Samuel, Interview.

<sup>31</sup> Hwa, *Mangoes or Bananas*, 42-43,57-58.

<sup>32</sup> Peskett and Ramachandra, *The Message of Mission*, 37-52. See K.Gnanakan, *Kingdom Concerns* (Bangalore: Theological book Trust, 1989), 58-73.

other Old Testament books in addition to Genesis and the creation narratives which emphasize God's justice, the Psalms and the laws of the Pentateuch in Israel having a bias towards the weak and vulnerable. He draws the inference that "Christian witness to the character and purposes of Yahweh/Christ necessarily includes social and political action on behalf of the poor."<sup>33</sup> Consideration of the portrayal of God in Deuteronomy 10, with its themes of the love of God (10:15) and the justice of God (10:18), leads Ramachandra to God's concern for the marginalized such as the orphan, the widow and the stranger. The character of God is seen to shape the identity of the people of God as an ethical community. He suggests that Christians should follow this approach towards the weak in the modern world when it comes to the impact of economic decisions in a global world, a stance forming part of the contemporary challenge of mission.<sup>34</sup>

### God and mission

Although the concept of *missio dei* is derived from missiological writing its roots can be seen in an understanding of God's purposes in mission and both Samuel and Ramachandra draw on the Old Testament for making sense of God's activity and mission. Samuel defines mission primarily in terms of *missio dei*, which involves considering what God is doing in the world. This relates to his interest in God at work in history<sup>35</sup> and the Old Testament roots of God's purposes:

God is working in history to move the whole nation to fulfil his purpose and that is the grand vision of God's mission. ... God's mission in the world *missio dei* motivates our involvement in the world. ... That is why I say mission is individuals coming to Christ, challenging corrupt and sinful systems, structures and cultures and enabling individuals and communities to experience God's transforming power.<sup>36</sup>

Samuel sees *missio dei* involves interpreting mission in broader terms than simply evangelism<sup>37</sup> and the Old Testament is an important resource for Samuel in terms of shaping his understanding of how God's purposes are to be shared with the world. Ramachandra has indicated that *missio dei* is a primary category for conceptualising mission. The essence of mission is God's reconciling of all things to himself, and his calling of Christians to be part

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<sup>33</sup> Ramachandra draws similar inferences from his study of the New testament in terms of Luke 4 and the poor in Luke's gospel. Peskett and Ramachandra. *The Message of Mission*, 113.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, 114-119.

<sup>35</sup> See V. Samuel and C. Sugden, "God's Intention for the World – Tensions Between Eschatology and History," in *Mission as Transformation*, ed. V. Samuel, and C. Sugden (Oxford: Regnum, 1999), 166-207.

<sup>36</sup> V. Samuel, "Mission as Transformation," *Transformation*, 19 No. 4 (Oct-Dec 2002): 244.

<sup>37</sup> Samuel, Interview.

of that mission. These perspectives of reconciliation are found in Colossians, which looks at the cosmic dimensions of God's purposes. Emphasising that mission needs to be seen as God's prerogative, Ramachandra states:

The *missio dei* points to God's reaching out in redeeming and reconciling love to all the creation. The *missio dei* embraces both the church and the world, and the church is called to the privilege of participation in this divine mission.<sup>38</sup>

*Missio dei* is a broad concept of mission that does not predefine or restrict mission to certain specific activities. It does not mean, for example, that mission is simply evangelization. The category of *missio dei*, like the category of creation, pushes evangelicals to have broader perspectives when it comes to mission.

### Eschatology

There is some interest in the eschatological dimensions of mission. Samuel uses prophetic books like Daniel and Zechariah to reflect on God's activity in history. He sees key moments in biblical history such as the exile when the people of God were forced by events to look forward to the consummation of God's purposes.<sup>39</sup> In a study on Revelation, Ramachandra explores how the concept of "new" in new heaven and earth suggests that creation itself is transformed and that the "eschatological city" is graced by a new community. "Thus the biblical drama, which began with a couple in an earthly garden, finds its climax in a multi-national city in a renewed and transformed earth."<sup>40</sup> Ramachandra suggests that such a vision is given to motivate the church – "the church is that missionary community drawn from all nations, which lives God's future in the present."<sup>41</sup> From another vision described in Revelation - the multitude from every nation tribe and people worshipping God - Maggay draws the conclusion that it implies that human ethnicity will not fade but is an enduring character of human beings. She sees this as an encouragement in a homogenizing world and testimony that nations and ethnic distinctiveness will endure into the world to come.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Peskett and Ramachandra, *The Message of Mission*, 29. Ramachandra is interested in texts like Genesis 1, as much as texts like Matthew 28. Ramachandra, Interview.

<sup>39</sup> V. Samuel and C. Sugden, "God's Intention for the World," 169; 194-198.

<sup>40</sup> Peskett and Ramachandra, *The Message of Mission*, 268.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid*, 275.

<sup>42</sup> M. Maggay, *Jew to the Jew and Greek to the Greek. Reflections on Culture and Globalization* (Manila: ISACC, 2001), 53.

## Justice

When Maggay considers justice from a biblical point of view she points to the role of the Old Testament Laws in Exodus and Deuteronomy with their concern for the poor and those who were vulnerable in society.<sup>43</sup> She moves beyond the purely personal way in which individual needs are provided for in these laws with the more structural provisions of the Jubilee year in Leviticus 25:

The Old Testament reflects this concern for structural mechanisms that would correct imbalance in the social system. ... Land as the primary means of production of wealth may not be sold in perpetuity, discouraging speculative buying and ensuring periodic readjustments when the economic order becomes unduly symmetrical. Faced with the complex nature of the power structures we are dealing with, we have no choice but to see to it that our social structures and institutions reflect the same protection for the rights of the weak.<sup>44</sup>

Maggay sees the Scriptures as offering principles and guidelines with regard to justice, though the detail must be left to specific circumstances. Considering the Christian response to political structures, and given her views of the “contingent nature” of government, Maggay believes that the demands of justice mean that there must be a place for dissent if the activities of government are to be properly assessed and challenged.<sup>45</sup> From a Christian perspective, this means that as social circumstances change there is a role for Christians to reflect both on the contemporary *and* the “changeless norms of scripture” and to bring both to bear in terms of political involvement.<sup>46</sup>

Ramachandra finds Old Testament books such as Genesis and Deuteronomy stimulate wider reflections on justice. Noting the wider context of the connections between justice itself and God’s concern for justice in the Psalms, Ramachandra notes the implications for Christians.

God’s people follow him in doing justice, that is, restoring to the community all those who, through misfortune, calamity, deprivation, or oppression have been hitherto excluded... Justice is a necessary means to human recreation and reconciliation.<sup>47</sup>

He points to positive examples of Christian compassion in India and Cambodia in relation to medical care and ponders how such views relate to the status of Dalits in India and queries

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<sup>43</sup> M. Maggay, *Transforming Society* (Oxford: Regnum books, 1994), 63. The texts centre around the giving of the law in Exodus 22-23 and Deuteronomy 15 & 24.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, 65.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid, 74-75.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid, 25.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, 113.

whether, by contrast, they are considered fully human by the Hindu religious ideology of India.<sup>48</sup>

In the context of considering God's relation to history, Samuel sees connections between the purposes of God in the Old Testament and the establishment of his kingdom through history and beyond it.

The Christian faith stimulates us to look for the actualizing of the kingdom in history in terms of justice, equal access to the creation that God intended for all, and the creation of human community through love, work, worship and play.<sup>49</sup>

The establishment of the nation of Israel with its covenant relationship and its laws offers a foundation for justice for the people of God. These foundations continue to have relevance for the people of God in later times.

The selected writers view the Old Testament as setting out the relationship between God, his purposes in history and human beings as participants in the created world. God's world is shaped by ethical frameworks and these influence the people of God as they put their hope in the coming of God's kingdom which makes clear his sovereignty in the world.

### **5.2.2 New Testament**

This section will look at some of the sections of the New Testament which the selected writers see as important foundations for missiology. The themes which are central to the thinking of the selected writers deal with Jesus Christ, his identity, and the implications of his life, sufferings and resurrection for salvation and for Christian discipleship. Other important themes include the kingdom of God, its relationship to values and the nature and role of Christian communities.

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<sup>48</sup> Peskett and Ramachandra, *The Message of Mission*, 39-40, 42.

<sup>49</sup> Samuel and Sugden, "God's Intention for the World," 189.

## Jesus Christ

The work of Ramachandra directs attention to the centrality of Jesus Christ in the Christian message. He uses the categories of “Jesus the enigma” and “the scandal of Jesus” at key moments in his writings pointing to the complexity of a focus on Jesus Christ. Yet Ramachandra is insistent that Jesus Christ is the core dimension of Christian faith in Asia, as in the rest of the world, quoting approvingly the African theologian Mbiti on the notion that: “Since his incarnation, Christian theology ought properly to be Christology, for theology falls or stands on how it understands, translates and interprets Jesus Christ at a given time, place and human situation.”<sup>50</sup> The incarnation is viewed as an historical event which serves as the basis for God’s love, undermining it affects “God’s intention to redeem all peoples, while denying the historical event in which that intention is made known and actualized.”<sup>51</sup> Jesus’ incarnation and encounter with one specific culture is part of a process of “divine translation” that can make sense for people of other cultures through the possibility of further translations of the gospel message and its significance.<sup>52</sup>

The historicity of this event necessitates that it be taken seriously and its universal dimensions be considered. Responding to John Driver on the “scandal of particularity,” Ramachandra, unlike C.S. Song, defends the historical character of Christianity: the relationship of human beings to creation means that they are “profoundly contingent and relational creatures,” and the idea of Christianity found in the Bible that “the universal is always mediated through the particular ... resonates with our experience of all artistic, literary and scientific achievement.”<sup>53</sup> He makes his position clear about how he views the centrality of Jesus Christ as a theme from the Scriptures that relates to different societies in asserting:

Those theologians who reject the particularity of redemption through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ indulge in a process of theological translation that leaves us with a message that is no longer recognizable as Christian.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Peskett and Ramachandra, *The Message of Mission*, 74. This is quite a different from emphasis from Asian theologians like Song.

<sup>51</sup> V. Ramachandra, *The Recovery of Mission: Beyond the Pluralist Paradigm* (ISPCK: Delhi, 1996), 238.

<sup>52</sup> V. Ramachandra, *Faiths in Conflict: Christian Integrity in a Multi-Cultural World* (Leicester: IVP, 1999), 132-135. This uses the concept suggested and developed by Andrew Walls in relation to translation as a “metaphor” of Christian mission.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid*, 129.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid*, 131.

He summarizes Jesus' outlook as an "other-oriented lifestyle with self-directed claims" where the claims were startling and demanded attention.<sup>55</sup>

Surprisingly, given his emphasis on evangelical themes, Hwa's published writings do not include extensive descriptions of his views on Christology. Implicit in his writing, however, is the concept of Christian identity rooted in Christ through faith in him<sup>56</sup> and the centrality of the cross in terms of Jesus' offer of salvation and the way of the cross as model for Christian life.<sup>57</sup>

Ng Kam Weng's main writings on Christology come in his discussion of the relationship of Christology to "social practice" in relation to the work of three German theologians and his interest is in the significance of Jesus Christ for the life of the church in the contemporary world. He concludes:

... Christological social practice is not to be conceived as the mere replication of the activities of the historical Jesus. To be sure, the significance of Jesus remains the past example, the prototype or model for social practice. But his significance must not be reduced to his past activities. For the Christian, the significance of Jesus must be eschatological in that the future of the risen one determines the future of the church. The significance of Jesus for his disciples is that he enables them to take responsibility for and to redirect their own history. This requires that Christians follow Jesus' attitude to life and history rather than any specific social programs.<sup>58</sup>

The life of Jesus Christ has both theological and practical implications for the Christian believer according to the selected writers. The theological dimensions will be explored in the following discussion of resurrection and suffering; the practical dimensions of Christian discipleship stem from understandings who Christ is, what his significance is, and how that impacts the individual Christian as he seeks to be a disciple in today's world.

## Resurrection

The resurrection is another core dimension of Ramachandra's Christology and his theology of mission. He connects the resurrection and the cross of Jesus in the early church as being of critical importance in linking the Jesus story to the wider events of God's history "telling

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid, 203; 199-201.

<sup>56</sup> Hwa, Yung, "Kingdom Identity and Christian Mission," The 5<sup>th</sup> David Adeney Memorial Lecture. Thursday 31 August 2000, Singapore Hakka Methodist Church, 2-3; 23.

<sup>57</sup> Hwa, Yung, *Beyond AD 2000. A Call to Evangelical Faithfulness*, (Kuala Lumpur: Kairos Research Centre, 1999), 49.

<sup>58</sup> Ng, K.W., *From Christ to Social Practice* (Hong Kong: Alliance Bible Seminary, 1996), 198.

Israel's story in the form of Jesus' story."<sup>59</sup> He stands out as stressing the importance of history connecting Christian faith in Asia to the longer story of faith in Israel and carried forward as part of a dual identity,<sup>60</sup> concluding:

Resurrection then is the creator's final act of faithfulness to his creation, and the uniqueness of the resurrection of Jesus within history is consistent with Jesus' self-consciously unique role in God's saving purpose for this world.<sup>61</sup>

Ramachandra affirms that mission flows from this consciousness of the resurrection of Jesus Christ the Lord: "Christian mission made sense only on the premise that the crucified Jesus had been enthroned as the true Lord of the whole world, and thus claiming the allegiance of the whole world."<sup>62</sup> Such an understanding, rather than texts on mission to the world like Matthew 28, provides the clue to Ramachandra's perspective on the scope of Christian mission, bound up with the universality of Christ's identity in the resurrection. The costs of mission remain the same - Ramachandra draws parallels with the cost of sharing the message and lifestyle implicit in the story of the risen Jesus in the early church with those involved in modern Asia - for Christians often risk suspicion and marginalization in both contexts.<sup>63</sup>

Ramachandra, along with Samuel, sees an identity as part of God's people from the Old Testament times onwards as compatible with Asian identity, forming a dual identity that enriches people *in* their context rather than drawing them away *from* it.

### Theology of the cross and suffering

An important aspect of Jesus Christ's life was his experience of suffering and death on a cross. Hwa points out that: "... it is not enough to see the cross as an event of the highest theological importance. It is also the central distinguishing mark of the Christian life."<sup>64</sup> The cross is important, not just as a seminal part of the Christian understanding of salvation, but in that the so-called "way of the cross" is seen to be a characteristic part of Christian experience from New Testament times onwards. This idea is very strongly underlined as part of the Christian life in Asia by some of the selected writers.

Writing at a time of political upheaval, Maggay reflected on the words of Jesus about the grain of wheat and its implications for Christian service in John 12: "I knew ... that

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid, 210. As highlighted by Tom Wright.

<sup>60</sup> Samuel does the same and talks about dual identity and history. Samuel and Sugden, "God's Intention for the World," 175-179.

<sup>61</sup> Ramachandra, *The Recovery of Mission*, 215.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid, 226; cf. 224.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid, 227-228.

<sup>64</sup> Hwa, *Beyond AD2000*, 49.

discipleship is a dance of death, and the assurance that within the economy of the kingdom, dying is always productive.”<sup>65</sup> Her observation on Jesus’ simile is to note that dying is connected to both “solidarity” and “fertility” and that Jesus’ own life modelled these two ideals:

What does this mean for those of us who are engaged in social transformation?’ First it seems to me that we cannot have an incarnation without experiencing some form of crucifixion. To be involved, to be immersed in solidarity with others, is to be vulnerable in those places where we are by nature or by social circumstance strong. ... Second ‘obedience unto death’ is the only way to genuine fruitfulness and spiritual power in our work. In Jesus’ career there were many temptations to distract him away from the cross.<sup>66</sup>

In the context of the work of social transformation, the cross is a reminder of the distractions and snares of human life and power, and a reminder that social action is a confrontation with the powers that be. Yet, for Maggay, the cross represents both the power of God at work in Jesus Christ and the power that is available to the church for its life of discipleship.<sup>67</sup>

The cross of Jesus is an important theme for Ramachandra. Drawing on Johannine literature, like Maggay, he sees the story of the cross of Christ implied in the opening of John’s gospel in the metaphors of darkness and light, as a story which challenges modernity and its visions of the human. “It is at the foot of the cross that we are given a different vision of ourselves. For God not only affirms our created humanity but exposes and judges our human sin.”<sup>68</sup> The cross is “scandalous” in that it reverses normal understandings of goodness and human nature, suggesting that those who are aware of their “limitations” are the ones who can come closer to the kingdom of God.<sup>69</sup>

Ramachandra suggests that Jesus left two “abiding missionary principles” - the principle of loving and the principle of dying.<sup>70</sup> Jesus’ example of showing love to the disciples was to be a pattern for them in their dealings with other people (John 13:35 and John 17:23). The second principle is given expression in the story of the grain of wheat and what makes it productive. The single grain which dies in the ground bears fruit (John 12:24) and this is connected to Jesus and his mission on the cross (John 12: 23, 27). Jesus is not recorded as imparting “techniques” or “methodologies” for mission – rather these two powerful

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<sup>65</sup> Maggay, *Transforming Society*, 79.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid, 80.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid, 81-84. Transformation is Maggay’s preferred designation here for her work.

<sup>68</sup> Peskett and Ramachandra *The Message of Mission*, 81.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid, 81.

<sup>70</sup> Ramachandra, *The Recovery of Mission*, 275-278.

principles suggest that his followers are to model their lives on his example and ethos.<sup>71</sup>

This underlines the connection between suffering and Christian mission. When Paul pointed to his authenticity as a Christian, he emphasized his sufferings. This was true for Jesus and Paul and must be true for the disciples in an Asian context as well. The church in Asia represents the poor and those on the margins of society. It reflects the suffering of Christ and allows for the prospect of a renewed and authentic evangelization of Asia from this grassroots church outwards.

Samuel notes the way in which the church is bound up with Christ and his sufferings in the Johannine writings. In the context of how the church should respond to suffering in the world, Samuel reflects on the interplay of cross and resurrection.

The cross of Christ is God stepping into the real world of human misery and suffering, much of which seems so pointless and meaningless.' ... The resurrection is not an inevitable outcome from the crucifixion. It is rather the invasion of God's power to transform the suffering and silence of the cross.<sup>72</sup>

He sees the church's role as "building communities from the grassroots who show through the wholeness of their community life a response to pain and suffering" and in so doing point the way to "transformation."<sup>73</sup> This, for Samuel, is to walk the way of the cross.

### Soteriology

The discussion of Christology leads on to issues of soteriology. Three of the writers take up this issue, which is important, as can be seen from Bebbington's core category of crucicentrism in his survey of evangelical doctrine, and given the vibrant soteriological interest in Asian religious world-views.<sup>74</sup>

In a study on God's purposes for the world, Samuel views salvation in terms of the category of reconciliation to God through Jesus Christ from the biblical books of Colossians and Ephesians.<sup>75</sup> Despite the cosmic dimensions of this plan of salvation, Samuel sees human beings as having the serious responsibility to choose whether they accept the offer or decline; God awaits a response on the part of human beings to what he is offering.<sup>76</sup> Human

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> V. Samuel, "The Church and the Pain of the World," *The Conrad Grebel Review* (Fall 1995): 236.

<sup>73</sup> See John 15:18-16:4. V. Samuel, "The Church and the Pain of the World," 238, 241, a point underscored in the writing of Koyama.

<sup>74</sup> D. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Routledge, 2002), 1-11.

<sup>75</sup> Samuel and Sugden "God's Intention for the World," 180-183. Ramachandra sees such reconciliation as an important aspect of the *missio dei*. Ramachandra, Interview.

<sup>76</sup> Samuel and Sugden, "God's Intention for the World," 180-181.

agency is part of salvation and although salvation is cosmic, Samuel is not universalist or inclusivist in his outlook: salvation is experienced by those who confess Christ and choose consciously to enter his kingdom. “Those who do not confess Christ are not saved by the kingdom in this world: only obedience to and faith in the king can provide salvation.”<sup>77</sup> This perspective would represent a traditional evangelical view. Samuel personally recognizes an inescapable confessional dimension to Christian salvation in the context of the kingdom of God.<sup>78</sup>

Maggay tries to distinguish the restorative and social dimensions of transformation from salvation. She recognizes the strands in the New Testament that speak of the redemption of the creation (Isaiah 65:17-25 and Romans 8:21) and of “human culture” (Revelation 21:24-26). In these passages she sees a basis for social transformation that will be superseded by a deeper eschatological transformation. She distinguishes this wider transformation from the individual’s experience of reconciliation with God:

However, the biblical focus on salvation as primarily forgiveness of sins constrains us to view the work of liberation as primarily recreative rather than salvific, a participation in the recreative powers of the age to come. Structures are transformed rather than redeemed.<sup>79</sup>

Maggay distinguishes the creational basis of human solidarity, using Colossians as her starting-point (Colossians 1:17), with the “solidarity in Christ” that comes from a personal experience and confession of Christ (Romans 8:16).<sup>80</sup>

Ramachandra’s view of soteriology is often implicit: in his discussion of resurrection he indicates that those in Christ who are reconciled will experience the new creation.<sup>81</sup>

Reflecting on the opening chapter of Colossians, he looks at how the focus of soteriology is reconciliation with God in peace and harmony:

The universe, then, stands in need of peacemaking. And the means of peace the way by which the universe is reconciled to God, is the blood of his cross. ... On the cross the rebellion of sin, and the disruption to the harmony of creation caused by sin is, once and for all defeated. The powers that oppose God’s purposes for all his creation are overcome.<sup>82</sup>

God’s purposes in the Old Testament are connected with the mission of Jesus in the New. In the Old Testament, God’s covenant promises made through Abraham and the election of a

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid, 184.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid, 184-190.

<sup>79</sup> Maggay, *Transforming Society*, 61.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Ramachandra, *The Recovery of Mission*, 211.

<sup>82</sup> Peskett and Ramachandra, *The Message of Mission*, 25.

covenant people together constitute a redemptive covenant related to the mission of Jesus, “the story of Jesus” and its impact on the new Christian community which connects up as “the final phase of Israel’s story.” In this regard, he sees Christianity as concerned not with “adherents” but “converts.”<sup>83</sup> Like Samuel, he does not see these choices as made incidentally or anonymously.<sup>84</sup> This thread of God’s activity of election is implicit in Ramachandra’s discussion on Paul where he considers the “universality of God’s saving love” with the aim of bringing forth a community who will be witnesses to what God has done for the nations.<sup>85</sup> This connects the Christian community and mission but it is a different focus from a general designation of Asian peoples as peoples of God. He underlines the element of choice on God’s part and on the part of the converts. On the other hand, he avoids making categorical statements about those outside the scope of the gospel and the kingdom:

To argue that all who do not make a verbal confession of faith in Jesus as Lord are eternally lost is not only to go beyond the biblical evidence, it is to deny salvation to the Old Testament people of God, the mentally handicapped and little children. Similarly, to argue that all men and women are saved, irrespective of Christ, is to contradict the entire biblical testimony.<sup>86</sup>

It is true that such discussion does not deal fully with categories such as crypto-Christians, those who struggle to be baptised for reasons of economic survival, as in India. This position, however, does not deem such people to be beyond the scope of God’s kingdom or salvation, rather such a stance encourages them to follow the demands of discipleship.

There would appear to be agreement amongst those highlighted here that God’s redemptive purposes for the world are rooted in the biblical vision of creation which is transformed and Christians work towards that transformation with those who identify with the kingdom and those who are at the boundaries of the kingdom and beyond: yet at the same time, each individual must make a conscious choice to respond to God’s offer of reconciliation through Jesus Christ for salvation.

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<sup>83</sup> Ramachandra, *The Recovery of Mission*, 229-231.

<sup>84</sup> Peskett and Ramachandra, *The Message of Mission*, 25. Like Samuel, Ramachandra affirms conscious decisions of individuals, and notes that ‘it cannot be an automatic process that bypasses human decisions.

<sup>85</sup> Ramachandra, *The Recovery of Mission*, 235.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid*, 274. Elsewhere, Ramachandra confirms that he sees a connection between Jesus Christ and redemption that cannot be lightly separated. “Those theologians who reject the particularity of redemption through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, indulge in a process of theological translation that leaves us with a message that is no longer recognizable as Christian.” Ramachandra, *Faiths in Conflict*, 131-132.

## The “Nazareth Manifesto,” the “Great Commission” and the Gospel

In terms of Jesus’ teaching on mission, scholars have noted the way in which certain sections of the New Testament are taken up and emphasized by evangelicals.<sup>87</sup> These include the final section of Matthew 28, labelled the “Great Commission,” and two important sections of mission teaching in Luke’s gospel in Luke 4:18-31 and Luke 24: 40-49 – the so-called “Nazareth Manifesto” and “Luke’s Great Commission.”<sup>88</sup>

The Great Commission<sup>89</sup> (from Matthew 28) does not feature frequently in the work of the selected writers.<sup>90</sup> Discussing cross-cultural missions, Hwa makes a passing reference to the Great Commission and to a Lukan passage about Jesus’ instructions to the disciples (from Acts 1:8). His emphasis is on Christian responsibility expressed through global witness in deed and action, rather than a stress on global evangelization.

Ramachandra uses the text in Luke 4, which he calls the “Nazareth sermon,” to suggest Jesus’ emphases in mission.<sup>91</sup> As well as its significance for the materially poor, Ramachandra views the inference of these verses viewed against the Old Testament as follows:

So Jesus’ mission embraces all those who for, whatever social, cultural or religious reasons, are marginalized, relegated to a place outside the boundaries that hitherto define the covenant nation. He categorically states God’s intention to break down these boundaries.<sup>92</sup>

The preaching of Jesus made the gospel, the good news, and more narrowly the good news of the kingdom of God a central focus. “The gospel” is used by the selected writers as a shorthand for the *kerygma*, the Christian message as good news - the core message of Christian faith. However, it is also used to mean Christian faith with wider implications. The gospel stands for the Christian faith, not just as a message proclaimed, but a way of life

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<sup>87</sup> See Sugitharajah above.

<sup>88</sup> Bosch notes this as the “so-called Nazareth episode” and Luke’s “Great Commission.” D. Bosch, *Transforming Mission* (NY: Orbis, 1992), 89-91. Others label these sections respectively the “Nazareth manifesto” and the “Jerusalem Manifesto.” C. Wright, “The Biblical Basis of Mission,” Unpublished Paper, February 1996, All Nations Christian College, 18. D.C.I. Joy, “Importance of the Nazareth Manifesto for the Church in Asia,” in *Mission Paradigm in the New Millennium*, ed. W.S. Milton Jeganathan (ISPCK: Delhi, 2000), 9-22. This leads to a comparison of the latter with the texts in Matthew 28 – “the Great Commission.”

<sup>89</sup> Ramachandra’s study of biblical passages in relation to mission was shared with Howard Peskett, and the latter interpreted Matthew 28.

<sup>90</sup> Hwa, *Beyond AD 2000*, 31-32.

<sup>91</sup> Peskett and Ramachandra, *The Message of Mission*, 159-163.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid*, 160-162.

to be embraced. Such a wide-ranging concept of “gospel” is affirmed by various selected writers.<sup>93</sup>

### Discipleship

The concept of discipleship allows for a connection to be made between Christ’s life and ministry and his call for others to follow him and his example. The cross and resurrection of Jesus are key theological themes which give meaning to this call. Hwa emphasizes that anyone who wanted to follow Jesus was told that he “must deny himself and take up his cross daily.”<sup>94</sup> Jesus’ life has established the pattern of costly discipleship which Christians are to follow.

The radical faith in God that Jesus taught his disciples and lived himself is based on a vision of life as a sheer gift from a faithful God. What has been freely received must be freely given. Since God alone can be trusted with one’s life and one’s future, the self-centred clinging to life is ultimately futile and self-destructive. ... Only ... in the forgetting of oneself in the love of God and neighbour can one’s true self be realised and one’s true good be received as a gift from God. The resurrection in vindicating the trustworthiness and power of God, simultaneously vindicates Jesus’ unique sonship and the way of self-denying love that he embodies.<sup>95</sup>

The selected writers see a connection between Christian faith and the life of discipleship as a serious matter: severing the implications of discipleship from proclamations of faith is viewed as a weak understanding of Christian faith. In this regard, Samuel is concerned about a “church without disciples.”<sup>96</sup> The theme of costly discipleship is seen to be of contemporary relevance in Asia. Following Christ’s example will shape “Christian social practice” and it must be seen as a serious matter.<sup>97</sup> Maggay underlines the costly nature of discipleship, especially as Christians are involved in seeking what is right and just in society.<sup>98</sup> The challenge of discipleship remains as great in today’s Asian societies as it did in the time of the New Testament.

In the New Testament, the concepts of the gospel and discipleship are key themes and their significance for mission is taken up in other places by Jesus, in texts like the “Nazareth

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<sup>93</sup> Hwa, Yung, “The Role of the Church in Vision 2002,” in *Modernity in Malaysia: Christian Perspectives*, ed. Ng Kam Weng (Kuala Lumpur: Kairos Research Centre, 1998), 60-64.

<sup>94</sup> Hwa, *Beyond AD2000*, 49. See Ng, K.W., “Leadership for Mission in Asia: Facing the Challenge of Resurgent Religions,” *Transformation* 17 No.3 (July 2000): 114; Ramachandra, *Faiths in Conflict*, 132-136. M. Maggay, *The Gospel in the Filipino Context*, (Manila: OMF Literature Inc, 1987).

<sup>95</sup> Ramachandra, *The Recovery of Mission*, 213.

<sup>96</sup> Samuel, *The Meaning of Discipleship*, 54.

<sup>97</sup> Ng, K.W. *From Christ to Social Practice*, (Hong Kong: Alliance Bible Seminary, 1996).

<sup>98</sup> Maggay, *Transforming Society*, 79.

Manifesto” and the “Great Commission,” as he points to the challenge of following him. Jesus’ concept of mission is not expressed in only one or two New Testament texts. This is reflected in the way the selected writers handle the gospels, as they draw on a range of topics as outlined above. The theology of the kingdom of God is another important New Testament theme that they use to develop an evangelical missiology.

### **5.3 The kingdom of God**

The concept of the kingdom or reign of God is a theological category in the New Testament with Old Testament roots.<sup>99</sup> It is used in applied theology to relate to the Christian community and aspects of Christian lifestyle. In theological terms in the New Testament it is seen as God’s kingdom, connected to good news and Jesus’ ministry, and related to other kingdoms both earthly and spiritual.<sup>100</sup> Applied theology takes the kingdom community to be multi-cultural, global and diverse; it is a gospel-driven, value-driven community which seeks to bear witness to the kingdom, to promote justice and kingdom values. It co-exists with other social and religious groupings; its relationship to the church visible and society is complex.<sup>101</sup> The Latin American missiologist Steuernagel has recognized the place of the kingdom of God in evangelical missiology, especially since the Lausanne 1974 congress.<sup>102</sup> The theological motif of the kingdom of God is an important dimension of the work of the selected writers, including those like Hwa and Ng who have been less represented in this discussion of biblical theology. It is a key element in transformational missiology.

#### **5.3.1 Biblical aspects**

A theology centred around the kingdom of God connects through motifs of the reign of God to both Old and New Testaments. Samuel begins his survey of the kingdom with God’s action in history throughout the Old Testament. He includes God’s relationship with his

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<sup>99</sup> Samuel and Sugden, “God’s Intention for the World,” 167-171.

<sup>100</sup> Hence Bosch sees Jesus’ announcement of the kingdom as simultaneously heralding an assault on “evil.” Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 32-33.

<sup>101</sup> See for example K. Gnanakan, *Kingdom Concerns* (Bangalore: Theological book Trust, 1989), 113-135. R. Padilla, *Mission Between the Times* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985).

<sup>102</sup> The idea of Steuernagel’s kingdom missiology is emphasized in Jacob Thomas. J. Thomas, *From Lausanne to Manila: Evangelical social thought: models of mission and the social relevance of the gospel*. (Delhi: ISPCK, 2003), xix . See also V. Steuernagel, “The Theology of Mission in its Relation to Social Responsibility,” Unpublished Ph. D. Thesis. Lutheran School of Theology of Chicago, 1988, 259-263.

people through covenants (Genesis 15), in the Psalms (Psalms 18, 82 and 87), and God's relationship with the nations (Genesis 17, Isaiah 42 and 49, Amos 7). Samuel observes that the biblical books of Daniel and Zechariah look ahead to God's future reign, as they wrestle to make sense of the calamity of the exile.<sup>103</sup> In the New Testament, the ministry of Jesus was taken as a sign of God's renewed purposes. The present dimensions of the kingdom were seen in Jesus activity against evil, but the kingdom had a future dimension that was to be "validated by the resurrection of Jesus Christ."<sup>104</sup> A glimpse of the end of history is given in the book of Revelation (Revelation 21:24-27).

In terms of the scope of mission, the ministry of Jesus included preaching, teaching and healing – in other words it suggested mission in "every area of life."<sup>105</sup> The kingdom has proved a category flexible enough to deal with a range of social issues ranging from economic problems to moral and ethical concerns.<sup>106</sup> Jesus' kingdom is not to be identified with the church. Rather Samuel connects the kingdom and the church thus:

We cannot speak of or understand properly Jesus the liberator without reference to the liberated community. And the community cannot live the liberation relationships of the kingdom without a relationship with the liberator. Much more than that, it is the establishment of God's rule over the cosmos, the whole creation (Ephesians 1:21-22).<sup>107</sup>

Jesus call to discipleship follows his announcement of the kingdom of God.<sup>108</sup> As disciples of Jesus, Christians are to model the life of the kingdom, recognizing that this is a challenging calling which can result in suffering.<sup>109</sup> In the Indian context, in the early 1980s, Samuel reflects on the relationship between Jesus' announcement of the kingdom of God and the calling of the disciples to make sense of the "social stance" of mission.<sup>110</sup> He uses this relationship to show that the kingdom of God has implications for disciples in the contemporary world, writing that the kingdom is a way of understanding how he and his

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<sup>103</sup> Samuel and Sugden, "God's Intention for the World," 167-168.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid, 171. The Gospels are implicit in his summary. Samuel points to Jesus in the gospels in terms of various aspects of the kingdom. V. Samuel, *The Meaning and Cost of Discipleship* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1983), 13-15.

<sup>105</sup> V. Samuel, "Evangelical Response to Globalization: an Asian Perspective." *Transformation* 16 No.1 (Oct-Dec 1999): 6.

<sup>106</sup> V. Samuel and C. Sugden, "An Essay Outlining the Major Issues for Theology and Strategy," in *Evangelism and the Poor: A Third World Study Guide. Rev. ed.*, ed.V. Samuel and C. Sugden (Oxford: Regnum for PIM Asia, 1983), 21.

<sup>107</sup> Samuel and Sugden, "God's Intention for the World," 175-178. Samuel recognizes that there will be reaction to the kingdom.

<sup>108</sup> Samuel, *The Meaning and Cost of Discipleship*, 15;17.

<sup>109</sup> Samuel and Sugden, "God's Intention for the World,"188-190. Samuel points to Colossians 3-4 to explicate the kingdom.

<sup>110</sup> Samuel, *The Meaning and Cost of Discipleship*, 16-17.

Indian colleagues can make real “the righteousness of God’s kingdom in society through our socio-economic and political stance as disciples.”<sup>111</sup>

Maggay notes that the biblical materials on the kingdom of God have several dimensions. The announcement of the kingdoms in the gospel of Matthew (Matthew 10:7-8) focuses on the significance of the kingdom of God for the marginalized such as the sick and the possessed: she shows that Luke 1, which speaks of the coming of the Messiah, and Luke 4, Jesus’ announcement of the Messianic ministry, both deal with the oppressed.<sup>112</sup> Elsewhere in the gospels, the theology of the gospel of the kingdom is related to showing compassion to those in need.<sup>113</sup> The kingdom also has political dimensions in relation to Jesus’ self-concept of Messiah. Maggay recognizes that Jesus’ kingship has a deeper dimension – one that goes beyond this world. The messianic feast described in Luke is a reminder of this.<sup>114</sup>

Hwa sees the kingdom as an important central theme in missiology. He describes the vision of the kingdom of God as stressing four inter-related themes: a proclamation of Jesus as king; a proclamation of the kingdom of God indicates power over spirits and evil; a proclamation of the kingdom of God points to power in the area of healing; a proclamation of the kingdom of God is a statement of God’s reign over human society.<sup>115</sup> Ng likewise suggests that Christians in Asia need to see mission primarily in terms of the kingdom: the response to Asian realities “must be a mission that emphasizes the centrality of the kingdom of God.”<sup>116</sup>

Ramachandra looks at the kingdom of God in relation to Paul’s preaching in Acts.<sup>117</sup> For the early church, Jesus ushered in God’s reign through his unique life, death and resurrection.<sup>118</sup> As Ramachandra compares this passage with Paul’s comments at the end of Acts 28:31, he sees Paul as affirming connections between Jesus as king, and the kingdom of God. This connection needs to be maintained, as Ramachandra agrees with John Stott “that the

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid, 65.

<sup>112</sup> Luke 1:46-55 and Luke 4: 16-21. Maggay, *Transforming Society*, 18.

<sup>113</sup> Compare Matthew 25:35-36 on showing compassion to the needy and Luke 11:20 where offering healing is seen as proof of concern. Maggay, *Transforming Society*, 18-20.

<sup>114</sup> Luke 14:16-24. Maggay, *Transforming Society*, 60 She notes that Jesus says ‘not of the world’ rather than ‘not in the world’ in John 18:36.

<sup>115</sup> Hwa Yung, “Challenges Facing the Asian Church,” An M.Th. course given at Trinity Theological College, Singapore, 2001-2002.

<sup>116</sup> Ng, “Leadership for Mission,” 114.

<sup>117</sup> Peskett and Ramachandra, *The Message of Mission*, 226.

<sup>118</sup> This is Ramachandra’s opinion too. Ramachandra, *The Recovery of Mission*, 235-238.

kingdom of God then in the New Testament is a fundamentally Christological concept ...”<sup>119</sup>  
He takes issues with the category of the kingdom of God being loosely adapted to social ethics irrespective of individual belief and affirmation of Jesus Christ as king.

### 5.3.2 Kingdom themes

#### The kingdom and transformation

Within Asia there has been a strong interest to pick up on this theological category of the kingdom and to adapt it for the Asian setting. As Samuel looked back at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century on the movements of mission as transformation,<sup>120</sup> he noted the important role of kingdom theology in promoting transformation:

Fundamentally Transformation [sic] is the transformation of communities to reflect kingdom values. The recovery of eschatology and the theology of the kingdom of God was fundamental to the development of the notion of transformation. A significant section of this book therefore focuses on the biblical foundations of the understanding of the kingdom of God.<sup>121</sup>

His understanding of mission is based on a theology of mission centred around the kingdom, as opposed to one focused on church-growth. Only the former emphasis leads to a theology of mission that has a “vision of transforming individuals and communities.”<sup>122</sup> Such a theology of the kingdom will lead to a more wholistic understanding of ministry that sees the transformation of a community and includes the establishing of a church, the size of which is less important than the idea that there is a genuine community emerging which is being changed.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> Peskett and Ramachandra, *The Message of Mission*, 255. He points to the work of R.T. France. R.T. France, “The Church and the Kingdom of God,” in *Biblical Interpretation and the Church – Text and Context*, ed. D.A. Carson, (Exeter: Paternoster, 1984), 30-44.

<sup>120</sup> V. Samuel and C. Sugden, *Mission as Transformation* (Oxford: Regnum, 1999). Seven of the twenty-two chapters in the compendium deal specifically with themes related to the kingdom of God.

<sup>121</sup> V. Samuel, “Introduction” in *Mission as Transformation*, eds. V. Samuel and C. Sugden (Oxford: Regnum, 1999), xii.

<sup>122</sup> V. Samuel, “Evangelical Response to Globalization: an Asian Perspective,” 147.

<sup>123</sup> V. Samuel, “Biblical Reflections for Mission in the New Millenium,” Unpublished paper from Oxford Centre for Mission Studies, 2002, 1-3. Samuel expresses his preference for kingdom language and wholistic transformational language in contrast to the language of mission as conversion.

In a similar way, Hwa calls for “the need to reclaim kingdom categories” in theology of mission.<sup>124</sup> Like Ramachandra, Hwa sees a link between the theme of the kingdom of God, found in Jesus’ teaching, and the theme that pervades the New Testament of Jesus as king and Lord. Hwa concludes from this that there needs to be a recovery of “Jesus Lordship over all of life ... in every sphere of human life, be it spiritual, psychological, socioeconomic or ecological.”<sup>125</sup> Such a view would lead to a more wholistic understanding of the gospel. Hwa relates the theology of the kingdom, with its capacity to deal with many dimensions of life, to the emerging interest in mission as transformation in Asia.

### The kingdom and values

The debate in Asian societies about Asian values, offers the possibility for Christians of offering a Christian agenda on values which can be contrasted with the Asian agenda of values. The concept of “kingdom values” is important in this regard. A Christian values-based agenda can be drawn from the gospel and the Christian scriptures. To embrace and live out the values of the kingdom gives a concrete agenda that can be shaped to the different societies in which Asian people live. Hwa believes that “what these values are and how they can be instilled into Asian society will be a key question in the coming years,”<sup>126</sup> despite the challenge of these values to the establishment, in point on which he, Ng and Samuel concur.

Ng’s premise for his theology of social engagement is that the church as a community forms a “people with a unique history who can make a contribution to society.”<sup>127</sup> They share values of justice and integrity that derive from their Christian faith and the Christian scriptures which can have an impact on elements of society in Malaysia “so that they embody more faithfully principles and practices of justice and peace.”<sup>128</sup> Ng points out that what Christians can actually achieve must be measured against the fact that the church is a minority.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> Hwa Yung, “Strategic Issues in Missions – an Asian Perspective,” *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 40 No.1 (Jan 2004): 31.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid*, 31.

<sup>126</sup> Hwa, “Issues in Mission Theology in the Asian Church,” in *Jahrbuch mission*. Frank Kurschner-Pelkmann. Hamburg: Mission Verlag, 1998): 14-33. (The reference is from page 10 of an English translation of this text.)

<sup>127</sup> Ng, Kam Weng., *Doing Responsive Theology in a Developing World*. (Petaling Jaya, Mal: Pustaka SUFES, 1994), 3.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid*, 3.

<sup>129</sup> Ng, Kam Weng, *Bridge-Building in a Pluralistic Society: a Christian Contribution* (PJ: Pustaka SUFES, 1994), 3.

Hwa suggests that “if Christians are concerned about freedom and justice, and genuine social transformation and economic progress, they need to ask how the values of the kingdom can be woven into the fabric of Malaysian society.”<sup>130</sup> He would see the application of such values as leading to greater freedom and open-ness in Malaysian society. Such a stance assumes both a confidence in the values of the kingdom and in the church’s capacity to model them, and an awareness of the limitations of the church’s size. This is a process of dialogue not imposition. Hwa himself points to Matthew’s gospel and Jesus teaching on the kingdom in relation to Christians being salt and light in society (Matthew 5:13-16). He notes too the injunction to Christians to be peace-makers (Matthew 5:9). Hwa considers Christian values include affirming family life, having a code of sexual morality, and responsible attitudes to wealth and stewardship. He notes the long Christian tradition of compassion towards the poor, the sick and at times of social upheaval.<sup>131</sup>

Ramachandra points to Christian values in the early church and their link to Old Testament roots to suggest their origin is that of the general biblical testimony of dealing with poverty. He points to passages such that deal with the needs of the poor such as Exodus 23:2-9; Leviticus 19:9-10 and Deuteronomy 15:1-18 and 24:19-22.<sup>132</sup> He stresses that the kingdom must be proclaimed alongside the values of the kingdom, taking issue with Samartha on this by suggesting that to “call the church to contribute values prised out of that story without proclaiming the story itself, is to call the church to deny its identity.”<sup>133</sup> Ramachandra is mindful that a Christian perspective for society in Asia needs to relate to and embrace other members of society, many of whom do not accept Christian values.<sup>134</sup>

There is a realization that such an agenda begins with Christian communities but must try to impact the structures of society. Samuel suggests that “transforming structures” is important to help those who already espouse the values of the kingdom but “whilst it is possible to be content with the expression of the values of the kingdom in the lives of individuals or small groups if these values do not find structural expression they cannot bring lasting changes.”<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> Hwa, “The Role of the Church in Vision 2020,” 64.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid, 66-70.

<sup>132</sup> Ramachandra, *Gods That Fail*, 138-141.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid, 222.

<sup>134</sup> Ramachandra, *The Recovery of Mission*, 167; following Newbigin.

<sup>135</sup> Samuel, “God’s intention for the World,” 190-194, see also 184.

Samuel sees a link between mission, the kingdom<sup>136</sup> and the development of justice in society:

...Ask do we see a community shaped by the values of the kingdom of God ... and the development of just economic, social and political relationships? If these components are there then wholistic mission is taking place.<sup>137</sup>

He sees the process of the kingdom of God as “the values of the kingdom replacing values not of God in persons, movements, structures. God is thus at work in every corner of the world and history.”<sup>138</sup> His view emphasizes both God’s activity in history and the need for kingdom values to penetrate more than the personal life of Christians as an objective that Christians need to work towards. Given the emphasis put on kingdom values, and Hwa’s point about their importance for Asia in coming years, more attention needs to be given to the biblical basis of the kingdom values as well as how they interact with the debate on Asian values.

### The kingdom and identity

Hwa considers that the kingdom of God is a theological category which can help with the establishment of identity. Christians have a kingdom identity, a dual identity formed both by their identity as children of God<sup>139</sup> and their national or cultural identity.<sup>140</sup> Hwa talks of bringing cultures to the kingdom to be Christianized, recognizing that in doing so there are cultural elements to be affirmed and some to be left behind. “What is good and right must be brought into the kingdom of God to become part of our identity in Christ.”<sup>141</sup> The imagery of Revelation chapter 21 and the eschatological vision of the kingdom of God indicates that all nationalities or ethnicities are to be welcome in the kingdom of God. Hwa relates “a clear sense of kingdom identity” to three things – to the individual’s life of Christian discipleship, to an engagement in mission and to the development of an agenda for Asian Christian thinking.<sup>142</sup> In this sense he puts the theology of the kingdom at the heart of theologizing to establish the Asian identity of the church because the kingdom deals with both the spiritual

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<sup>136</sup> V. Samuel, “Gospel and Culture,” in *Proclaiming Christ in Christ’s Way*, eds. V. Samuel and A. Hauser Oxford: Regnum, 1989), 75.

<sup>137</sup> V. Samuel, “Appendix: a Note on Evaluating Wholistic Mission,” *Transformation* 10 No.3 (Jul-Sep 1993): 6.

<sup>138</sup> Samuel, “God’s Intention for the World,” 193-194.

<sup>139</sup> Hwa, Yung, “Kingdom Identity and Christian Mission,” The 5<sup>th</sup> David Adeney Memorial Lecture, Thursday 31 August 2000, Singapore Hakka Methodist Church, (Unpublished paper - organised by the Discipleship Training Centre, Singapore), 1-2.

<sup>140</sup> Hwa “Kingdom Identity and Christian Mission,” 2-3.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid, 3-7.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid, 19.

and the social realities of life. Hwa is well aware that this is not always welcomed in Asian societies, citing the example of China in the 1920s, but considers that a more whole-hearted appropriation of the theology of the kingdom would help relate Christianity to Asian contexts.

Like Hwa, Samuel puts a stress on integration into the kingdom community, by the grace of God, as a core dimension of Christian identity.<sup>143</sup> Christians have an identity as part of a kingdom community. Samuel compares this to the identity in the people of God in the Old Testament: “individuals gained their identity by belonging to the covenant community of Israel, so followers of Jesus gain their identity by allegiance to him and incorporation into his community.”<sup>144</sup> The theology of the kingdom helps to stress the aspects of identity that are reinforced by the Christian community. What is distinctive in Samuel’s work is the way that these ideas are shown to have particular implications for the poor. Through the kingdom of God, the poor are given a new perspective on their personal identity: “the proclamation among the poor of a gospel that affirms a new identity and dignity requires relationships ... which affirm these things.”<sup>145</sup> Dignity and identity are thus connected to a view of humanity.

Maggay uses the contrast of the imagery in the descriptions of the city of Babel in Genesis and the heavenly city in Revelation to look at the identity and roles that Christians can have in the kingdom of God. Her point is this: from the perspective of biblical theology a specific cultural and ethnic identity are part of the fabric of creation, not trivial or incidental aspects of human life. For Maggay, these identities offer alternatives to the homogenizing tendencies of globalisation. She sees the kingdom of God as encouraging a positive view of identity and diversity. She says of modern Christians that they offer “an alternative social reality premised on the confidence that the kingdoms of this world shall eventually be subject to the kingdom of our God.”<sup>146</sup>

### Concluding reflections on the kingdom of God

In terms of the relationship between theological themes which drive mission, some of the selected writers give real prominence to this theme of the kingdom of God. A theology of

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<sup>143</sup> C. Sugden, *Seeking the Asian Face of Jesus*, 188-192.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid*, 189.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid*, 190-192.

<sup>146</sup> Maggay, *Jew to Jew*, 51; 53-54.

the kingdom encourages Christians to think about issues beyond themselves and to look at the wider world and its challenges.

Hwa<sup>147</sup> suggests that the kingdom is a broader theme for him than, for example, the great commission, and allows a more diverse understanding of what mission involves. In short, he sees the kingdom as an all-embracing concept for mission through which all other categories such as evangelization, justice, and social involvement can be viewed. Ng recognizes that the kingdom of God can be adopted as a category which makes Christian participation in societies wide-ranging and avoids Christians being accused of being individualistic and western.<sup>148</sup> This is important in Asian societies with a high degree of religious and cultural pluralism. It is important, too, in relation to Asian elites who no longer remain passive in their response to Christianity and who question the degree to which churches in Asia are genuinely Asian in their character.<sup>149</sup>

It is important for religious minorities like Christians to show that they are serious about the whole of society. “It is imperative that Christian mission be seen to go beyond narrow self-interest to work with others to resist hegemony that exploits political power.”<sup>150</sup> By using the theological category of the kingdom rather than church the selected writers keep a wider vision of mission and do not reduce mission to a view that the church alone is at the centre of God’s mission. The focus on the kingdom points to an interest in Asian societies and Asian peoples as a whole, rather than a narrow focus simply on Christian communities in Asia.<sup>151</sup>

## 5.4 The Christian community

### Introduction to community

The concept of the church as community provides a paradigm within which the selected writers develop their model of Christian life and discipleship and suggest how evangelicals can contribute more robust forms of Christianity. Implicit within such a model is a critique of Christian communities in Asia which stress the private and personal nature of Christian faith to the exclusion of its social and collective dimensions. The Christian community does not exist simply for its own ends. In the Asian setting, it is imperative for the church to

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<sup>147</sup> Hwa, Interview.

<sup>148</sup> Ng, “Leadership for Mission in Asia,” 115.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid, 114.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid, 115-116.

<sup>151</sup> David Lee is an example of a missiologist who take a different view. He sees the church as more important than the kingdom. Lee, Interview.

model its Christian faith and life both within its own community and in the wider social setting of other communities. This section will consider the idea of community and its relationship to the theology of the kingdom of God. It will then reflect on the way in which such a community needs to be nurtured if it is to fulfil its role in the Asian social and religious context.

This idea of community and the church as community is a recurring theme in the writings of the selected writers. At its most universal level, Ramachandra considers the Christian community in relation to the vision in Revelation (Revelation 21). This vision holds the present and future in tension, and suggests that “the church is that missionary community drawn from all the nations, which lives God’s future in the present.”<sup>152</sup> For Ramachandra, this community can model values beyond itself: “the church ... can also become a laboratory within which civility, reconciliation and democracy can be nurtured in the wider society.”<sup>153</sup> Ramachandra is concerned as well that expressions of Christian faith display integrity in their local settings. He gives the positive example of the “Truth and Reconciliation Committees” in South Africa as an example of how Christian values can be reflected out to a local community.<sup>154</sup>

This concern for the role of the community in local situations is echoed by others. Samuel describes “building up communities of change” as one of the key dimensions of transformation, namely that of fostering “change and hope.”<sup>155</sup> Mission needs to be understood in the context of building up and working with communities over long periods of time. In other writings, Samuel stresses the importance of developing authentic Christian communities in relation to other faiths.<sup>156</sup> This is crucial in the context of Islamic and Hindu communities as it demonstrates the reality of a Christian community and Christianity as more than an individualistic faith. Samuel writes that “the church must model the humanity and justice it professes in its social life.”<sup>157</sup> This has implications for the church’s structures as a community so that it prepares Christians for discipleship that puts an emphasis on service.

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<sup>152</sup> Peskett and Ramachandra, *The Message of Mission*, 276.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid, 276.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid, 170-171. He also notes the unfortunate counter-examples of Ruanda, Burundi, sectarianism in Northern Ireland and European indifference to pogroms against Jews in the 1930s.

<sup>155</sup> V. Samuel, “Mission as Transformation,” in *Mission as Transformation*, eds. V. Samuel, and C. Sugden (Oxford: Regnum, 1999), 231.

<sup>156</sup> V. Samuel, “Modernity, Mission and Non-Western Societies,” in *Faith and Modernity*, ed. P.V. Sampson, V. Samuel and C. Sugden (Oxford: Regnum, 1994), 320.

<sup>157</sup> Samuel, *The Meaning and Cost of Discipleship*, 64-66.

This relationship of the Christian community's collective life as a preparation for engagement in society is important for Ng. He suggests that "as the members of the community are able to nourish one another and are bonded into a collective identity" this will shape them as they work towards social aims,<sup>158</sup> recognizing that the identity of the Christian community can not be shaped apart from its place in society.<sup>159</sup> There is no such thing for Ng as pure naked truth, totally isolated from contextual influences. The Christian community functions in society and is subject to wider forces in society. Ng suggests that the community needs to develop a Christian social practice, which has consequences "towards wider civil society."<sup>160</sup> Community helps establish Christian identity and commends it to the outside world. Ng suggests that Christians are to "strengthen their communal identity and through their caring relationships testify to an alternative and more attractive society."<sup>161</sup>

Hwa envisions a Christian faith centred on the Christian community. He sees three sets of priorities for this community in Asia: the evangelistic proclamation of the Christian message; a sharing in the task of socio-political change; a greater interest in the pastoral needs of the Christian community in its Asian context, especially as this relates to the distinctive spiritual context of Asia.<sup>162</sup> He connects this to the theology of the kingdom of God by saying that the Christian community must:

... bear witness to the inbreaking of the kingly rule of God ... and in its ministry manifest the signs of the kingdom which would include evangelism and the life-changing power of the gospel in personal life, good works and social transformation, exorcism and healing.<sup>163</sup>

This connection between the theme of community and the kingdom of God is important and will be explored in more detail in the next section.

#### **5.4.1 The Christian community as a kingdom community**

It is clear that the theology of the kingdom of God is a wide-ranging concept which has been seen to have application to the contexts of Asia not just for the Christian community but for

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<sup>158</sup> Ng, K. W., *From Christ to Social Practice* (Hong Kong: Alliance Bible Seminary, 1996), 205.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid*, 205.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid*, 207. This has implications for Ng's theology of nation-building in chapter 6.

<sup>161</sup> Ng, K. W., *Bridge-Building in a Pluralistic Society: a Christian Contribution* (PJ: Pustaka SUFES, 1994), 13.

<sup>162</sup> Hwa Yung. "The Mission of the Church," in *Renewal in the Malaysian Church*, ed. Daniel Ho, (Petaling Jaya. Malaysia: National Evangelical Christian Fellowship, 1998), 48-52.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid*, 52.

mission in its social context. Asian writers have put particular stress on the communal dimensions of the kingdom both in terms of the narrower Christian community and its life and also by using the kingdom as a more wholistic concept of how God seeks to be at work in society. This latter dimension is seen as an important counter to Asian religious critiques of Christianity (particularly in Islam) as individualistic.

In biblical terms, Samuel emphasizes the relationship between the Old Testament people of God and those in the New Testament. Samuel notes that concepts of community, covenant and kingdom, are found in both testaments and that the kingdom is seen as the “rule of God in a family or community.”<sup>164</sup> The resurrection of Jesus ushers in a new community that is made up of both Jewish and Gentile people.<sup>165</sup> This new community’s identity is shaped by “the history of Israel and the Messiah as theirs also not as a replacement for but as an addition to their own national history.”<sup>166</sup> The Christian community is “a community that constantly reflects the kingdom.”<sup>167</sup> Christians are given a new identity as they become members of the kingdom of God. This new identity results in a special emphasis on community: “individuals gained their identity by belonging to the covenant community of Israel, so followers of Jesus gain their identity by allegiance to him and incorporation into his community.”<sup>168</sup> What is meant by community emerges in part in relation to the kingdom of God and to mission:

Community change and transformation was the object of Christian mission, the people of God themselves needed to be able to develop community to model the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God was demonstrated in community building and took on a community shape.<sup>169</sup>

In the context of kingdom models of mission, Samuel stresses the importance of the local church as a kingdom community.

In a similar way, the notion of kingdom community lies behind Maggay’s writing on Christian political involvement and is a central way of understanding her approach to Christian life as a model of counter-culture. The language of community is used by Maggay to make sense of the church in terms of its collective nature, but she recognizes the extent to

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<sup>164</sup> V. Samuel and C. Sugden, “The Relationship on Evangelism and Social Responsibility - a Biblical Study on Priorities,” in *Word and Deed*, ed. B. Nicholls (Exeter: Paternoster, 1985), 189-191.

<sup>165</sup> Samuel, “God’s Intention for the World,” 172-173.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid, 175-6, 199. Even though the church is a sign of God’s rule, his plan to govern all things established in the Old Testament is not fulfilled in the church alone.

<sup>167</sup> V. Samuel, “Mission as Transformation,” *Transformation*, 19 No.4 (Oct-Dec 2002): 247.

<sup>168</sup> Sugden, *Seeking the Asian Face of Jesus*, 189.

<sup>169</sup> V. Samuel, “Rebuilding Families – a Priority for Wholistic Mission.” *Transformation* 10 No. 3 (1993): 5.

which the kingdom community and the kingdom of God in its fullness must be differentiated:

Moreover, the church community is not synonymous with the kingdom. The church is a human institution as mixed as our own nature, while the kingdom is a transcendent entity in human history that is a creative force that makes things new and offers a continual critique of human endeavours. While a human community can become a sign of its incarnate power, it is not identical with it.<sup>170</sup>

Maggay sees the idea of community as an important dimension of the church's life down through the ages as it seeks to be a "distinct witness" to the world around it. An early example of this is found in the "early Christian communities" of Acts (Acts 2:45) which showed an example of social life that held goods in common. "The concern for a distinct witness to the concrete presence of the kingdom has led many branches of the church to form communities separate from ordinary structures of society ..."<sup>171</sup>

The kingdom community is the focus of Christian discipleship allowing for a faith that is lived out both individually and collectively and one which takes the Christian into the societies of Asia, bolstered with the values of the kingdom and the model of Jesus Christ. The need for the kingdom community to be maintained is not to be taken for granted and this requires ongoing nurture to equip it for the life discipleship.

#### **5.4.2 Nurturing the kingdom community**

Given that Christians are to function as a community and one marked by its adoption of kingdom perspectives, the selected writers stress the place of nurture. Without proper nurturing the kingdom community cannot thrive and its presence is diminished. As it is often a beleaguered community in Asia, the kingdom community needs to give attention to its own spiritual needs and to nurture those for its health and for its very survival.

The kingdom community and its social vision

To maintain an adequate social vision in Asian contexts the kingdom-community must give suitable attention to the subject of nurture. Maggay gives careful consideration to the idea of nurturing a spiritual community as a strategic minority.<sup>172</sup> In the context of taking evil

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<sup>170</sup> Maggay, *Transforming Society*, 51.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid*, 49.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid*, 87.

seriously,<sup>173</sup> she relates social transformation to the discipline of the cross. Her language of the “discipleship of death”<sup>174</sup> is a striking image. It is clear for Maggay that there are limits to the community’s ability to change society. It must therefore take stock of its situation. It needs to learn to be self-sustaining; it needs to develop a strategic minority and it needs to focus on building its community and its vision.<sup>175</sup> Maggay sees several dimensions to this process: the inner life of the church; the reality of the kingdom; the reality of the opposition that the church faces.

The Christian community needs to protect its inner life (and to “cultivate detachment”), as the church needs to learn “that social transformation requires a long obedience,”<sup>176</sup> but it must not thereby let go of the knowledge that it has potential to help change social structures. The community’s relationship to “the powers of the kingdom of God” means that it is not adequate to think of itself simply as “a struggling minority.”<sup>177</sup> The final dimension of Maggay’s theological vision for the church as community ends with the concept of “radical pessimism” by which she means taking evil seriously in this present world and cultivating “radical hope.”<sup>178</sup> In linking social transformation with the idea of developing and nurturing a spiritual community, Maggay offers both a model of the church and a means of social engagement.<sup>179</sup> Her observations that about a “long obedience” and “transforming society is ultimately the work of God” show that she takes seriously both human and divine elements in the process of the church’s life and social change.<sup>180</sup> For Maggay, Asian Christians need to have a new vision of Christian faith and Christian social engagement: “third-world Christians are waking up to the radical nature of the watered-down Christianity that has been handed down to them.”<sup>181</sup>

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<sup>173</sup> Ibid, 97-98.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid, 79; cf. 71-75, 79-82 and 104. Maggay also looks closely at the church’s interaction with the world and at the concepts of suffering and dying found in chapter 12 of John’s gospel.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid, 90-94. Maggay recognizes that not all Christian communities have or need to have the same vision – there is social flexibility.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid, 94.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid, 106.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid, 101-103. Maggay points to the vision of hope found in Ezekiel in chapter 37. Maggay draws on significant biblical images and events such as Babel, Ezekiel 37, kingdom, Pentecost, and Revelation 22.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid, 90-94.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid, 83-85; 94-95. The element of the struggle of social transformation found at various points fits with the theology of struggle which is found in the Philippines – “the unflinching recognition that the work of transformation will drag us to the cross finds its solace in the fact this is not the end of the story.”

<sup>181</sup> Ibid, 107.

In Malaysia, Ng offers the following advice to the Christian community: it needs to accept its minority status and the Malaysian government's commitment to Islamization and be positive about what can be achieved;<sup>182</sup> it needs to educate Christians to have an integrated view of life<sup>183</sup> it needs to avoid being a besieged minority retreating into a ghetto and rather get involved in public life;<sup>184</sup> it needs to resist authoritarianism;<sup>185</sup> and it needs to sustain its spiritual life and identity as church.<sup>186</sup> There are pressures on the Christian community as it seeks to maintain a social vision, which can impact not only the social participation of the community but its very existence.

#### The kingdom community as a beleaguered community

At times, the Asian church has to function as a beleaguered community and must learn to nurture itself in this context. Hwa sees the need to develop "a theology of social engagement" but Christians are tempted to withdraw from society "like a tortoise into its shell" due to the scale of the resistance which they encounter.<sup>187</sup> A perspective that sees the world as God's locus of salvation would also change that perspective of the Christian community. Christian communities in Malaysia need to change from feeling threatened to a more positive engagement with the world. The early church offers good examples of the way in which it helped the less fortunate.<sup>188</sup>

Extending this concept of the church as a beleaguered community, Samuel refers to churches as "communities of resistance" and gives the example of how such communities can deal with social problems like corruption and make an impact in ways that individuals alone could not.<sup>189</sup> If the church is to serve like this in the world it must acknowledge the challenges which it faces. Given the history of the church and suffering and the model of

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<sup>182</sup> Ng, *Doing Responsive Theology*, 67.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid, 67. See also Ng, K.W., "From Political Action to Cultural Transformation," *Kairos* (Feb 2002):9-11.

<sup>184</sup> Ng, *Doing Responsive Theology*, 30, 36-37, 42; Ng, *From Christ to Social Practice*, 172-180.

<sup>185</sup> Ng, K.W., "Christian Order and the Civil Order," 67.

<sup>186</sup> Ng, *Bridge building in a Pluralistic Society*, 29, 31-32, 36-44. Ng, *From Christ To Social Practice*, 46-47; 165-169; 170-180.

<sup>187</sup> Hwa, *Beyond AD2000*, 37, 39-40. Hwa notes that a western dualistic theology and unbiblical worldview affects this. He notes too that Islamic intellectuals are quite active promoting their own viewpoints.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid, 38-40. Hwa draws on Harnack's observations on the early church and compassion.

<sup>189</sup> V. Samuel and C. Sugden, "Business and Corruption," in *Anglican Life and Witness: a Reader for the Lambeth Conference of Anglican Bishops 1998*, ed. V. Samuel and C. Sugden (London: SPCK, 1997), 121.

Jesus Christ in this respect, Samuel gives a theological background for the church's role in resistance:

The New Testament does affirm that the church is called to announce the defeat of all spiritual forces of darkness, and does challenge it to recognize the spiritual nature of the struggle behind all manifestations of disorder and sin.<sup>190</sup>

Using the language of "transforming spirituality," Ng warns of the danger of being edged out of the economic, cultural and political spheres of Asian life.<sup>191</sup> The church faces challenges in Malaysia and there is a need to avoid the ghetto and the even more radical alternative of emigration. In such a setting, Ng looks at the importance of Christian faith being backed up by a community who can show that it really works in practice:

... the public character of the Christian message implies a social expression. Christian truth is not merely a mental construct of private fancy. It is verified inter-subjectively by a community where membership implies a responsible life-style consistent with its truth claims. Truth needs to be embodied in a community which comprises people of integrity.<sup>192</sup>

At some times, Ng uses a more direct language of political engagement, while at others he uses the language of faith and values to assert the church's role. "The Malaysian church needs to rely on a faith and spirituality that resonate with local sensibilities and addresses local challenges."<sup>193</sup> In saying this, Ng is connecting the outer world of mission with the inner world of spirituality. Ng suggests contours for such a spirituality:

A sense of belonging to a divinely sustained movement is necessary to lift up flagging spirits and keep a socially marginalized group from retreating into a ghetto. ... We must emphasize the communal dimension of faith to ensure that the church acts collectively and effectively. ... The Christian community must devise comprehensive educational plans to nurture Christian faith as a foil against the subtle and pervasive influence of Islamization in the schools. ... we need research on how to develop pastoral strategies ... that will be able to sustain a church under an Islamic polity.<sup>194</sup>

The ideas of spirituality developed by the German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer are seen by Ng as offering resources to nurture the church in settings like Malaysia. "Christians exist only through the community bearing the form of Christ."<sup>195</sup> Ng emphasizes the need for the church to bear the "marks of Christ" because the measure of the church is its *spiritual* calibre

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<sup>190</sup> V. Samuel, "The Church and the Pain of the World," *The Conrad Grebel Review* (Fall 1995): 239.

<sup>191</sup> Ng, Kam Weng, *Bridge-Building in a Pluralistic Society*, 31.

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>193</sup> Ng, *Doing Responsive Theology*, 14-15.

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>195</sup> Ng, *Bridge building in a Pluralistic Society*, 32.

not its “political power” in society.<sup>196</sup> Such spirituality is nurtured in community and relationships.<sup>197</sup> The church by its life offers a call to faith, and rather than retreating from the world, the church is there to be “a concrete summons to the world.”<sup>198</sup>

Ramachandra also sees in Bonhoeffer’s example and theological response to suffering as helpful for Christians in Asia.<sup>199</sup> “Third World Christians, struggling under oppressive regimes and unjust global economic structures, would do well to heed the wisdom of that great Christian pastor, theologian and martyr under the Nazis, Dietrich Bonhoeffer.”<sup>200</sup> Bonhoeffer’s warning that “what befell Christ befalls every man in him” is to be taken seriously in the Asian setting.<sup>201</sup>

It is only as the pressures of the Asian contexts are understood that such a strong emphasis on nurture can make sense. This suggests that the exigencies of some contemporary Asian situations necessitate an emphasis on Christian community which puts a premium on nurture at the expense of other priorities.

#### Nurturing kingdom communities as opposed to church-planting

The view of mission which has been set out in this study could be described as putting more emphasis on nurturing the kingdom community than on expanding it – to use traditional language: it stresses church-nurturing more than church-planting.<sup>202</sup> The selected writers do this as a conscious choice. Ramachandra suggest that an emphasis on church-planting in people groups can lead to a loss of focus of the deeper dimensions of the gospel:

... the moment we make ‘planting churches within people groups’ the aim of Christian mission, even in heterogeneous geographical areas, we inevitably distort the gospel so that it no longer confronts the idolatries of politics and culture. It no longer challenges converts to identify with the ‘outsider’ and even the ‘enemy’. For Jesus ... the latter is not an optional ‘higher teaching’ for a special group within the church, but fundamental to Christian discipleship.<sup>203</sup>

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<sup>196</sup> Ibid, 40.

<sup>197</sup> Ramachandra, *Faiths In Conflict*, 169-171; Ramachandra, *Recovery of Mission*, 281-282.

<sup>198</sup> Ng, *Bridge-Building in a Pluralistic Society*, 40.

<sup>199</sup> Ramachandra, *Faiths In Conflict*, 171. “The church influences the world most when it seeks to be truly church, and not a political or evangelistic organization.”

<sup>200</sup> Ramachandra, *Gods That Fail*, 209.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid, 209.

<sup>202</sup> That is not to say that there is a reluctance to plant churches in other senses, rather the different terms suggest a difference of focus.

<sup>203</sup> Peskett and Ramachandra, *The Message of Mission*, 204.

Samuel sees pressure within evangelicalism in the area of church-planting. He is aware of mission personnel in India who felt obliged to present their work largely in terms of church-planting when their time was *actually* spent in a mixture of both transformational and church-planting activities.<sup>204</sup> Without taking away from the need to proclaim and share the gospel, the modern contexts of Asia puts a premium on the development of genuine and convincing expressions of Christian community. Such a community will take seriously its collective life as well as the needs of the individual and will demonstrate a real and genuine Christian witness to the societies of Asia in the context of a vibrant and empathetic Christian presence.

Writers in Asia are beginning to look more closely at the particularities of the Asian setting. They sense the importance of the dimension of community for the church in Asian societies and they recognize that these societies may need slightly changed emphases in the way in which the church structures itself to make the most of its pastoral resources and to nurture itself in contexts of adversity. There is also a realization that promoting justice in situations of oppression involves a clear stance on the part of the church and its leaders, a deep commitment to Christian values and an experiential spirituality which will help Christians in Asia to deal with reverses, discouragements and even hostility.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter shows that the selected writers take a broad view of the Christian scriptures as a resource for evangelical missiology. The Old Testament, with its description of God as creator and God's intentions in history and for the nations, gives an embracing vision of God's mission, *missio dei*, and God's purposes for the world. The Pentateuch and Psalms paint a picture of God's concern for justice and for the marginalized, emphases which are to be shared by God's people in future generations.

The New Testament scriptures describe the kingdom, and Jesus Christ who brings the gospel of the kingdom, as key dimensions of God's purposes. Jesus Christ's incarnation and resurrection are seen to be important elements of his significance. The former stresses Jesus Christ's identification with human beings and with his death on a cross, a pattern of suffering as the path of obedience in this world; the latter stresses the distinctiveness of Jesus Christ's vocation and its significance in God's purposes of salvation and reconciliation for the world

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<sup>204</sup> Samuel, "Mission as Transformation," 228.

and point the way to Christian discipleship. Jesus Christ's coming is to bring a new concept of the people of God as *the community of the kingdom*.

Rather than simply emphasizing traditional foundations for missiology, such as Matthew 28 and Paul's missionary journeys in Acts, the selected writers focus on themes of creation and justice from the Old Testament and the kingdom of God in the Gospels which offer a socially connected understanding of mission. In Ramachandra, and to a lesser extent in Maggay, there is an interest in Johannine models of theology with their stress on incarnation and suffering and the apocalyptic visions of the Christian community in the book of Revelation.

The selected writers emphasize nurturing the Christian community and rooting it in Asian societies. Discipleship is to be a life of service that commends Christian faith in the midst of struggle. The kingdom community is a source of formation for Christian belief and practice both for Christian spirituality and for refuge when pressurized. The kingdom community has open boundaries and wants to work in partnership with other communities including people from other religions for justice and for social change.

## CHAPTER 6

### Transformational Missiology in Asia

#### 6.1 Transformational missiology

Transformational missiology is a term I use to describe the approach to mission of the selected writers. It derives from concepts within the “mission as transformation” movement, clarifications and emphases of which are found in the selected writers themselves. The aim of this chapter is to show that the focus of the selected writers represents transformational missiology and what that means in relation to the themes which have gone before.

##### 6.1.1 *The concept outlined*

Transformational missiology conceives of mission as God’s mission accomplished through kingdom communities who bear witness to the kingdom of God’s values and ethos in society and who live out their lives in accordance with these values. Two key dimensions of transformational missiology are as follows: the use of biblical foundations that stress themes in Old and New Testaments including creation, justice, Christology and the theology of the kingdom of God and an emphasis on mission in context. As mission in context, transformational missiology results in an engagement in nation-building in terms of developing civil society, promoting justice and participating in wider social structures as well as the proclamation of the gospel. Transformational missiology also involves a response to the multi-religious nature of Asian societies interacting with pluralism, engaging in dialogue and finding appropriate ways to witness to, and defend the place of Christian faith, in Asian societies. It envisages communities of the kingdom which can engage in these spheres at local levels. This engagement can be done collectively or as individuals.<sup>1</sup> Transformational missiology takes account of global forces as these impact societies in Asia and as these impact evangelical structures and approaches to mission. In this study, it represents the way in which the above themes are given a distinctively Asian character.

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<sup>1</sup> In Malaysia and the Philippines it is partly done through institutes which try to develop Christian responses to the surrounding society.

### **6.1.2 Missional communities of the kingdom**

What is distinctive about this thesis is the way it proposes concrete areas of mission in Asian contexts and an emphasis on biblical themes. Within Asian societies the selected writers show a desire to be involved in society by contributing to nation-building, to the building-up of civil society, and to the development of Christian values and the promotion of justice. In relation to Asian religions, there is a desire to re-assess plurality and to develop ways of approaching dialogue, apologetics and witness. There is interest in how the contemporary global context affects such issues and how it shapes evangelical identity and approaches to mission. The community aspects of the kingdom of God and its social setting are especially important.

The focus of transformational missiology is the nurturing of Christian communities as kingdom communities and the transformation of these communities. This model of missiology puts more emphasis on the transformation of these communities and their engagement with societies in Asia, than it does on their mere expansion.

This is not to say there is no interest in evangelism or witness. The idea of sharing the gospel of the kingdom is a core part of the theology of the kingdom, but there is as much interest in the development of communities of the kingdom which have a credible lifestyle reflecting Christian values, and which transform Asian societies. At the conclusion of a survey of themes in theology of mission, Andrew Kirk suggests four kinds of groups which represent the stance of missional communities at the dawn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>2</sup> One of his projected missional communities is formed by people who:

... see mission in terms of gathered communities of people seeking to live faithfully the life and teaching received from Jesus Christ' recognizing the influences of the global world with its powers, religions and modern technologies. Modelling the reign of God in self-conscious communities of faith and obedience will be their design for mission. Though committed in principle to ... growth of Christian communities as cells of the kingdom in diverse societies, their emphasis will be on the quality of discipleship before the quantity of converts made.<sup>3</sup>

Kirk contrasts such a community with those who are more committed to "planting churches and thus increasing the numerical witness of Christian believers in society."<sup>4</sup> Such

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<sup>2</sup> A. Kirk, *What is Mission? Theological Explorations* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1999), 229-231.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, 229-231.

<sup>4</sup> The third group are those who give less importance to the church in terms of an "institution" and give more emphasis to the kingdom and "human flourishing"; the final group synthesizes elements of the other groups.

communities give priority to forms that deal with evangelization, especially in situations where they are forging new territory. Kirk's use of categories like "cells of the kingdom" contrasted with "church-planting" and his description of "modelling the reign of God" and giving priority to the quality of Christian life in community, rather than to evangelization, fits closely with the kind of emphases outlined in this study.<sup>5</sup>

### **6.1.3 Asian components and priorities of transformational missiology**

Models of missiology tend to reflect a particular set of priorities. For example, casting our mind back to managerial missiology, a key priority for this, according to Escobar, is evangelization and church-planting. Such a missiology filters its approach to biblical interpretation to make this the central theme around which missiology is based.<sup>6</sup> This emphasis on evangelization often leads to an interest in concepts of world evangelization or global mission which does not always relate well to the local.<sup>7</sup>

By contrast, the selected writers with their emphasis on transformational missiology give priority to the idea that Christians are rooted in local Asian contexts and they explore mission in these contexts in terms of the category of the gospel of the kingdom, understood as living community. Recognizing that the Lausanne 1974 congress encouraged greater openness about wholism and the place of context in mission, Escobar identified two areas that resonate with the emphases found in transformational missiology: a greater emphasis on mission and wholism and on mission and context. The selected writers are interested in relating mission in a wholistic way to Asian societies and they are concerned about relating mission to local Asian contexts.<sup>8</sup> This study has proposed that the Asian settings act as backgrounds which shape the agenda of mission for the selected writers. This chapter will focus on how the selected writers engage with Asian contexts in relation to the key themes of transformational missiology.

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> See Glasser and MacGavran for those who prioritize evangelization. A. Glasser, and D. MacGavran eds., *Contemporary Theologies of Mission* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983), 101-107.

<sup>7</sup> Steuernagel notes this idea of priorities in evangelical missiology and the 'primacy' given to evangelization. V. Steuernagel, "The Theology of Mission in its Relation to Social Responsibility." Unpublished Ph. D. Thesis. Lutheran School of Theology of Chicago, 1988, 152-158; 234-237; 254-255.

<sup>8</sup> In terms of global mission, there is more interest in the way that global forces impact Asia, than trying to marshal global alliances which promote evangelization.

## 6.2 Transformational missiology and Asia – social themes

In the two preceding chapters, discussion has focused on the way in which the agenda of mission is shaped by the different settings in Asia and the reading of the Christian scriptures in Asia adopted by the selected writers. In this chapter, the emphasis will shift from how the agenda of missiology is fashioned to how transformational missiology represents an actual engagement with the contexts of Asia particularly in the areas of society and religion.

### The kingdom as a pivotal concept in missiology

In the chapter on biblical foundations for missiology, the importance of the concept of the kingdom of God was highlighted. The use of the kingdom of God as a central motif in evangelical missiology in Asia, helps keep the Asian context, as well as Asian Christians, at the centre of discussion. This section will move from the theology of the kingdom to some of the practical ways in which the selected writers draw on this theological concept as they engage practically with Asian contexts.

The theology of the kingdom plays an important role in Maggay's theology. She uses the theology of the kingdom and the idea of the gospel of the kingdom to encourage Christians to be more involved in Filipino society. Given the social context of faith, Maggay worries that "a dichotomy has been made between faith and works, such that it is now possible to speak of becoming a Christian without becoming a disciple..."<sup>9</sup> For Maggay the gospel is "intrinsically prophetic."<sup>10</sup> The theology of the kingdom helps to avoid making a choice between the spiritual and the political and so it facilitates a greater sense of wholism when it comes to mission. Ng sees the kingdom of God as an integral theme in Christian mission. "The Christian see the full attainment of the Kingdom of God as a divine irruption rather than a human achievement of social engineering, or evolution."<sup>11</sup> Christians participate in the work of the kingdom, recognizing that they contribute with God in his purposes, and that they are not the architects who alone build the kingdom.

Over the years, Samuel has come to see the themes of the kingdom of God in relation to both the proclamation of the gospel and the community setting of that proclamation and witness as being of critical importance for Christian mission. This is because "biblical strategies of the kingdom of God give us strategies and tactics for social, political and economic

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<sup>9</sup> M. Maggay, *Transforming Society* (Oxford: Regnum books, 1994), 19.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 19.

<sup>11</sup> Ng, K.W., *Bridge-Building in a Pluralistic Society: a Christian Contribution* (PJ: Pustaka SUFES, 1994), 53.

engagement in particular societies.”<sup>12</sup> Reflecting on the kingdom has a practical impact in terms of how we do mission in society and is not just connected to spiritual themes. Such an attitude is exemplified in Samuel’s work in India with small communities where the Christian community seeks to help bring about transformation for the wider society with those around them.

The Christian community is to be found in the world and the concept of kingdom drives the church out into the wider world to share the gospel and to share its significance with those around them. This idea is given expression in the manner in which the selected writers want to engage with Asian societies in the following specific ways.

### **6.2.1 Nation-building**

A conference was held in Singapore in 2003 on the subject of “Christians in nation-building”. The organizers were mindful of a slogan from a popular poster in Singapore which stated “wear red on ... national day.” The conference cover ironically pondered to what extent the Christian contribution to nation-building might go further than a red tee-shirt on national day,<sup>13</sup> concluding that it really involved maintaining relevant Christian attitudes to politics, race and the economy. In Malaysia, in the late 1990s, the then Prime Minister Dr. Mahathir Mohamad presented a programme for the nation’s future called “Vision 2020” which “seeks to challenge citizens to pool together their rich and diverse resources and work towards a common future and the creation of a modern nation-state.”<sup>14</sup> The interest in nation-building and the shared social involvement in this in Asian societies may reflect the post-independence experience of countries like Singapore and Malaysia or the post-war realities of places like South Korea and Japan: it may also be part of the strategy of political domination.

There has been a long-term agenda in Asia to take this issue seriously within the churches.<sup>15</sup> Asian Christians want to make a positive contribution to Asian societies and they

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<sup>12</sup> V. Samuel, “Biblical Reflections for Mission in the New Millenium,” 4.

<sup>13</sup> Trinity Theological College, “Christians in Nation-building. Conference on the Role of the Church in Building the Nation of Singapore,” Unpublished proceedings, Held at Trinity Theological College, Singapore, 11<sup>th</sup> -12<sup>th</sup> September 2003.

<sup>14</sup> Ng K. W., “Modernity in Malaysia: Christian Perceptions and Opportunities,” in *Modernity in Malaysia: Christian Perspectives*, ed. Ng K. W. (Kuala Lumpur: Kairos Research Centre, 1998), 1.

<sup>15</sup> E. Chew, “A Historical Perspective on Christian Contribution to Nation-Building in Singapore,” in Trinity Theological College, “Christians in Nation-building. Conference on the Role of the Church in Building the Nation of Singapore,” Trinity Theological College, 58-62.

increasingly adopt the language of nation-building to refer to the process of constructing national identity and life in the post-colonial era. This section will consider the context of the emerging nations of Malaysia, India and the Philippines, to see how the relevant writers relate this general theme to their particular countries, beginning with Ng's account which is the fullest on this topic.

### Malaysia - a place in the nation

In Malaysia, with its distinctive political climate, the challenge remains to make sure that the church's mission is taken into the public square so that its claims can be seen to be lived out in the lives of ordinary Christians. In situations where freedom for Christians is, in reality limited, mission may need to incorporate activities such as legal action to protect the precarious freedom of the gospel.<sup>16</sup> Ng is aware that the "space for mission" needs to be protected and this involves building positive links with other religious groups.<sup>17</sup> The gospel's radical nature can mean that even simply sharing the gospel can be viewed by secular powers as bringing a political as well as a spiritual challenge.

Against such a background, Ng uses the language of nation-building to relate to Christian responses to democratic structures in Asia.<sup>18</sup> Looking at the place of values in building a new society he suggests that "we cannot base our nation-building on politics alone. Social consensus is built on education of values that can undergird our common good."<sup>19</sup> Ng is concerned that Christians share and participate in the activity of nation-building as part of their Christian identity, seeing various motivations which encourage Asian Christians to engage in it. There is the positive foundation that can be found in the way in which "... Christianity itself offers a religious and social vision that upholds human dignity and meets the widest requirements of civil life..."<sup>20</sup> He is concerned, however, that if Christians shrink from their responsibilities it will be detrimental for the church in Malaysia. "The fact is, unless Christians are seen to be willing to participate and serve sacrificially in the present effort of nation-building, they will not be given a place in the future of the nation."<sup>21</sup> Asian

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 115-117. Ng sees the example of Paul availing himself of his rights as a Roman citizen gives credence to such ideas. The Kairos Research Centre has adopted a strategy of publicizing the rights of religious groups in Malaysian society.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 116. Compare the experience of the early church in the Roman empire.

<sup>18</sup> Ng, K.W., *Bridge-Building in a Pluralistic Society: a Christian Contribution* (PJ: Pustaka SUFES, 1994), 61-62.

<sup>19</sup> Ng K.W., "From Political Action to Cultural Transformation," *Kairos* (Feb 2002): 10.

<sup>20</sup> Ng, K. W., "Christian Order and the Civil Order," in *Readings in Malaysian Church and Mission*. ed. Goh Keat Peng (Petaling Jaya, Malaysia: Pustaka, SUFES, 1992), 70.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, 13.

Christians need to show that they are ready and willing to make a contribution to their societies, any retreat from the public square into personal mysticism having social consequences. Ng worries about “the tendency among followers of experiential and mystical spirituality to abandon responsibilities in the public square” and wonders whether this results in “unfettered political tyranny.”<sup>22</sup>

Islamization is occurring in Malaysia against the backdrop of a wider world context of resurgent Islam, with many implications for Christians as they seek to live out their faith. Ng is somewhat pessimistic about Islam’s relationship to democracy in Malaysia,<sup>23</sup> being concerned about Islam and the gradual eroding of democratic freedoms in a more totalitarian state; the limiting of senior posts in the Malaysian government to Islamic candidates; the way in which the false dichotomy between a secular or a theocratic Islamic state is presented as the only democratic options in Malaysia. Ng does try to be even-handed in dealing with the reality of the Islamic resurgence at a grass-roots level,<sup>24</sup> expressing clearly what he sees as serious Islamic criticisms of Christianity in its relation to the state.

Christians have a distinguished record in areas like health and schooling and Ng sees such Christian efforts as valid contributions to nation-building, without thinking of purely economic goals as the only worthwhile aims for social progress.<sup>25</sup> This means that, while not ignoring salvation, Christians must strive to move beyond inward piety to the agenda and the work of nation-building.<sup>26</sup> Ng uses the language of faith and values. He stresses the need for the church to avoid retreating into a ghetto or even the deeper retreat of emigration.<sup>27</sup> These options are often adopted because of the difficulties faced by minorities in the social sphere in countries such as Malaysia, and Christians face the temptation of moving out or focusing exclusively on the next world at the expense of the this world.<sup>28</sup>

The mission of the church necessitates Christians being involved in the nation-building of the community in Malaysia.<sup>29</sup> The church’s mission means that it is “to mediate the story of

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<sup>22</sup> Ng, “Leadership for Mission in Asia,” 115.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 11.

<sup>24</sup> Ng, *Bridge-Building in a Pluralistic Society*, 43 and Ng, “Modernity in Malaysia,” 10-11. More critical perspectives on Islam are found in Bat Ye’or. See Bat Ye’or, *The Dhimmis: Jews and Christians under Islam* (London: Associated University Presses, 1985).

<sup>25</sup> Ng, “Modernity in Malaysia,” 12.

<sup>26</sup> Ng, *Bridge-Building in a Pluralistic Society*, 61-62.

<sup>27</sup> Ng, “Christian Order and the Civil Order,” 71-73.

<sup>28</sup> Ng, K.W., “Leadership for Mission in Asia: Facing the Challenge of Resurgent Religions,” *Transformation* 17 No.3 (July 2000): 115-116.

<sup>29</sup> Ng, “Leadership for Mission in Asia,” 116. Although he notes that some have been concerned about such activities detracting from the work of evangelism.

Christ, with its liberating consequences and reconciliation of a world increasingly fraught with tensions and conflicts.”<sup>30</sup> Mission involves both spiritual “formation” and Christian activity in the community,<sup>31</sup> for which Christians must establish or re-establish “credibility” in contexts like Malaysia, showing that the Christian message has a “universal relevance” and is “urgently needed by everyone.”<sup>32</sup>

#### India - participation in social change

In a country like India, Samuel believes that the nature of mission goes beyond the proclamation of a gospel message to a tangible participation in “social change” through transformation.<sup>33</sup> The challenge for Christians is to contribute to society, “providing a biblical vision of a nation where differences, even religious differences, are allowed space.”<sup>34</sup> Christians need to come to terms with what is positive in other religious traditions so that there can be a participation in the shared efforts of nation-building.<sup>35</sup> Communicating this biblical vision within a pluralist context is part of the task of mission as nation-building. This is a task which must be applied to the different situations within Asia.

#### The Philippines – evangelicals going beyond personal interest

The Filipino writer Melba Maggay looks at nation-building and sharing in the life of the nation from the perspective of the Philippines but with an interest in the wider world. She is concerned that traditional Christian and evangelical understandings of mission have unduly stressed the personal dimension, in common with Ng’s view. Although Maggay is aware that the church’s task does not simply involve social action, she is aware that the gospel message must go beyond “the purely personal terms of the evangelical church community.”<sup>36</sup> Such Christian involvement in the life of the nation demands an awareness of the obligations of the gospel on Christians as citizens and concrete responses on the basis of biblical and historical models of modes of action.

It is clear for three of the writers that such understandings of involvement in society and mission involve the establishment of a Christian community capable of understanding and

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<sup>30</sup> Ng, *From Christ to Social Practice*, 211.

<sup>31</sup> Ng, “Modernity in Malaysia,” 6.

<sup>32</sup> Ng, *Doing Responsive Theology*, 12, 30 and 42. Ng relates this to mission as transformation.

<sup>33</sup> V. Samuel, “Evangelical Response to Globalization: an Asian Perspective,” *Transformation* 16 No.1 (Oct-Dec 1999): 6-7.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*, 8.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, 7.

<sup>36</sup> Maggay, *Transforming Society*, 17.

relating to the Asian context with a degree of sophistication and a sensitive yet still biblically and theologically based view of mission which is robust enough for the wholistic expectations of Asian societies. Moreover such a community needs to make real and tangible contributions, prepared and adequately resourced to endure in societies which are not always open and which may, for historical or other reasons, be hostile to Christianity.

### Dimensions of nation-building – civil society, poverty and justice

In the following sections, three particular aspects of nation-building will be explored: these are the engagement in civil society, attempts to deal with poverty and the quest for justice in Asian societies.

#### **6.2.2 Civil society**

An integral part of building strategies of participation in nation-building is the development of civil society.<sup>37</sup> The concept of civil society embraces the spheres of life between the state, the economy and the community. Such mediating structures in society can include voluntary agencies, local groups and church organizations.<sup>38</sup> They allow people to participate meaningfully in public life. Civil society acts as a buffer zone which gives space to society between people and government. It prevents the state from “dominating and atomizing society.”<sup>39</sup> In other words civil society acts as a bulwark against state power and encourages institutions which check the power and growth of the state. It offers “social space” and, as Stackhouse comments, “where the space for these organizations is constricted, torture, political imprisonment, economic deprivation ... and religious repression dominate and dehumanize life.”<sup>40</sup> There are several functions of civil society: it offers networks where trust can thrive; disperses power and so protects individuals; it offers alternative avenues for social activity apart from the state; it mediates between the individual and the state; it educates citizens for democracy; it extends exclusive loyalties by giving common grounds for action; and it liberates the individual by encouraging habits of choice.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> J. Keane, *Civil Society* (London: Polity press, 1998), 32-52.

<sup>38</sup> Ng, “Christian Order and the Civil Order,” 67-69.

<sup>39</sup> Ng, “Missions, Modernity and Asian Religions.”

<sup>40</sup> Ng, “Christian Order and the Civil Order,” 69.

<sup>41</sup> Ng, “Missions, Modernity and Asian Religions.”

## Malaysia and “cultural formation”

Given his strong interest in social engagement, Ng devotes some consideration to models of political action that he would commend in his Malaysian context and which may serve as an example for reflection for other Asian Christians who seek to develop responsive theologies to their societies. Ng talks of “cultural formation” in society being as important as “political action” but both need to be “preceded by spiritual foundation for the life and mission of the church.”<sup>42</sup> Ng draws on the Calvinist Reformed perspective of “covenant politics” to construct a social vision and to help locate it in relation to society. He suggests that “covenant politics envisages an associational public space (civil society) where citizens act together in concert, whether as pressure groups in a democracy or as dissidents under a tyranny.”<sup>43</sup> From these observations and models, Ng draws two sets of conclusions. One is the importance of maintaining separation between politics and religion, as he worries about the exploitation of politics for religious ends.<sup>44</sup> The other is the need to strengthen forms of pluralist democracy in Asian contexts since social plurality is an essential starting-point for creating a social forum which involves members of a society with diverse views.<sup>45</sup> Ng observes that if there is not diversity of belief,<sup>46</sup> it is often those in power, who have already claimed the public square, who ask for it to be left in peace at the expense of alternative perspectives.<sup>47</sup>

When Ng looks at the relationship between politics and civil society he suggests that creating value-shaping institutions is as important as other forms of political action,<sup>48</sup> suggesting the need for “commending moral ideals” rather than “supporting political ideologies.”<sup>49</sup> Ng sees such a stance as taking place within a “wider social agenda” which “demands that Christians adopt long-term strategies that will eventually become influential and effective in various

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<sup>42</sup> Ng, “From Political Action to Cultural Transformation,” 11.

<sup>43</sup> Ng, “A Christian Social Vision for Asia,” 5-10.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, 3-4. He gives examples from India, Indonesia and Malaysia. Ng notes that in Malaysia certain kinds of public office are not open to all citizens irrespective of their religion.

<sup>45</sup> Ng, “Missions, Modernity and Asian Religions.”

<sup>46</sup> Ng, *Bridge-Building in a Pluralistic Society*, 51.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, 51. He quotes the sociologist Hayek on the way the will of people is softened by authoritarianism and how it restrains action. The result of such power is that “it compresses, enervates, extinguishes and stupefies a people, till each nation is reduced to nothing better than a flock of timid and industrial animals, of which government is the shepherd.”

<sup>48</sup> Ng, “From Political Action to Cultural Transformation,” 11.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, 11.

value-shaping institutions in civil societies.”<sup>50</sup> The fact that Christians may not necessarily form political parties to engage in civil society does not mean that Christians in Asian societies can engage carelessly in social and political issues. Ng points out that the church must not imagine that it must be “politicized” to be effective and it must avoid the danger of being identified simply with political powers.<sup>51</sup> Ng stresses the need for Christians to have a clear and developed social vision as a prerequisite<sup>52</sup> for entering the social arena since Christians have to offer a distinctive social vision that supports democracy or lose the public arena by default. Ng recognizes that no one vision will do for all of Asia and that western models will need to be adapted for the Asian setting.<sup>53</sup>

Ng constantly stresses the Christian agenda must be relevant to the broader issues of society.<sup>54</sup> With its emphasis on Christian relationships the Kairos Research Centre, of which Ng is the research director, offers a credible example of the kind of attitude Ng is commending in his writing and of his desire to create a responsive theology for the Malaysian setting.<sup>55</sup> It was founded in 1991 to deal with what it perceived to be the complexities of the Malaysian situation for the church and for its mission:

The Kairos Research Centre seeks to encourage Christian scholars to work together in an interdisciplinary venture drawing from a variety of modern fields of knowledge such as theology, philosophy, science and socio-political theory for the purpose of formulating an integrated Christian knowledge. This will facilitate the development of Christianity in contemporary society, particularly in Malaysia with its multi-religious context.<sup>56</sup>

It is especially interested in the relationship of a minority faith like Christianity in a pluralistic society and the implications for the “uniqueness of Christ” in such a context.

#### India and institutions for long-term engagement

In connection with Indian society and politics, Ramachandra concludes that civil society is a necessity in the modern context.

For democracy to blossom in India, the nurturing of civil society is the need of the hour. By a civil society I mean that realm which is neither the private

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid, 11.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, 11. Ng talks of the way in which “the gospel gets entangled in partisan party politics.”

<sup>52</sup> These themes are pursued in Ng, *Bridge-Building in a Pluralistic Society*.

<sup>53</sup> Ng, “Missions, Modernity and Asian Religions.” Ng points to Yoder and Hauerwas as possible sources of inspiration.

<sup>54</sup> Ng, “From Political Action to Cultural Transformation,” 10-11.

<sup>55</sup> Hwa Yung is a member of the board of Kairos.

<sup>56</sup> Kairos Malaysia, “Kairos Research Centre” at <<http://www.kairos-malaysia.org/>> , accessed 9<sup>th</sup> May 2006.

sphere of the individual citizen nor the public sphere that is totally absorbed into the state: but one that overlaps both the dimension of social life where debate is encouraged on matters of social concern.<sup>57</sup>

Ramachandra gives the example in India of Christian congregations tackling social issues like that of caste and challenging prevailing views and thereby “acting as a transforming ferment in the larger society” by offering a different spiritual vision.<sup>58</sup>

Samuel affirms the importance of civil society in terms of voluntary institutions who are committed to doing good.<sup>59</sup> Noting that the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century has been a time when Asia is building up democratic institutions,<sup>60</sup> Samuel suggests that reliable institutions are crucial if this process of constructive building of society is to occur and to challenge the dominance of market concerns alone.<sup>61</sup> He underlines the need for long-term engagement and the need for commitment to communities in Indian culture. In the Asian context it is important to show the lived out reality of faith, which can only happen if Christians are involved in communities.<sup>62</sup> This is particularly true because India has had almost two thousand years experience of interacting with Christianity and is not “intimidated” by mission.<sup>63</sup> In the Indian context, Samuel stresses that mission is not “primarily the sharing of a faith system ... but the humble unmasking of Christ’s presence.”<sup>64</sup>

#### The Philippines and evangelical social involvement

The period of the Marcos regime in the Philippines is significant for Maggay, as a time when the evangelical church ought to have responded prophetically with “a discerning word” and yet often failed to do so.<sup>65</sup> This leads her to ask hard questions about the content of the church’s relationship to society. She notes that there are those who query the rationale of involvement in society, saying that the church’s role is to evangelize rather than be involved

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<sup>57</sup> V. Ramachandra, *Faiths in Conflict: Christian Integrity in a Multi-Cultural World* (Leicester: IVP, 1999), 83.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid, 85.

<sup>59</sup> Samuel, “Evangelical Response to Globalization,” 6-7.

<sup>60</sup> V. Samuel, “Christian Mission in Contemporary Asia,” *Transformation* 15 No.3 (July-Sep 1998): 2-3.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid, 3-4.

<sup>62</sup> V. Samuel, “Biblical Reflections for Mission in the New Millennium,” Unpublished paper from Oxford Centre for Mission Studies, 2002.

<sup>63</sup> V. Samuel, “Religious Change and Conversion of Low and Outcastes to Christianity. Exploring the Social Horizons of Church Growth in North India,” Unpublished Paper, 2003.

<sup>64</sup> V. Samuel, “Appropriating Christ and the Bible: the South Asian Experience,” *EFAC Bulletin*. (Easter 1995): 22.

<sup>65</sup> Maggay, *Transforming Society*, 11-12.

in social action.<sup>66</sup> Maggay is aware that speaking out about social issues may cause tensions in the church especially in evangelical churches:

I suspect that much of the church's apolitical tendency springs from a sense of threat to the survival of its institutions and evangelistic enterprises. Is it fair to ask: in our willingness to bypass larger social issues so as to secure our freedom to preach are we not acting like any other vested interest.<sup>67</sup>

One solution to this is found by Maggay in the church's social context, where she sees the link between the life of the church and society as critical. She writes as follows:

The failure to acknowledge that the church is the social context out of which evangelism proceeds has resulted in a twisted reluctance to see the feeding of the hungry and the healing of the sick as intrinsic to the gospel.<sup>68</sup>

Such a view reduces the nature of the gospel from its "cosmic dimensions" as found in the preaching of Jesus in the kingdom.<sup>69</sup> Linked to these concerns, Maggay has been the Director of the Institute for the Study of Asian Church and Cultures (ISACC), founded in 1978 "as a reflective arm of the church and a catalyst towards biblically-based responses to political, social and cultural issues in the country."<sup>70</sup> The ISACC mission statement shows the interest theologians like Maggay have in relating theology to everyday life in the Philippines setting. The purpose of ISACC is "to creatively witness to the Lordship of Jesus in all of life by penetrating culture with the values of the kingdom and engaging the powers towards social transformation."<sup>71</sup> The church's mission involves a wide range of activities – "the mission of the church includes both the proclamation of the gospel and its demonstration."<sup>72</sup> ISACC sees itself as seeking "committed and creative responses to issues of national concern among NGOs [non-governmental organizations] and other progressive elements in the country..."<sup>73</sup>

Faith and civil society are thus clearly, if not always consistently linked, in all three countries and by all the selected writers in a variety of ways.

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid, 11-12.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid, 12.

<sup>68</sup> M. Maggay, *The Gospel in the Filipino Context* (Manila: OMF Literature Inc & ISACC, 1987), 26-28.

<sup>69</sup> Maggay, *Transforming Society*, 11-12; cf. 116-22. Maggay uses the language of "witness" and "gospel of the kingdom" for mission.

<sup>70</sup> Maggay is the chief executive officer of ISACC.

<sup>71</sup> Maggay, *Filipino Religious Consciousness*, 44.

<sup>72</sup> Maggay, *Filipino Religious Consciousness*, 44. ISACC is described here.

<sup>73</sup> ISACC, "Who We Are," at <[http://www.isacc.org.ph/about\\_nofr.html](http://www.isacc.org.ph/about_nofr.html)>, accessed 9<sup>th</sup> May 2006.

### 6.2.3 Poverty addressed in Asia

The diversity of economic progress is part of the social backdrop of Asia which affects the church's mission, and it is an issue which to a considerable extent clouds the global image of Asia. Samuel has engaged with themes such as social justice and poverty since the 1980s in India. He and his family have been directly involved in poverty when they moved to a slum area called Lingarajapuram at the edge of Bangalore in 1983 where all contracted water-borne illnesses and one caught typhoid fever.<sup>74</sup> His writings help give perspective on the reality of poverty in parts of Asia.<sup>75</sup> Sugden speaks of Samuel's theology as a theology of dignity, directed principally towards the poor.<sup>76</sup> Given this emphasis it is not surprising that another theologian, Hwa, summarizes Samuel's work by saying that "Samuel's theology is first and foremost an evangelical reflection on mission among the poor in the Indian context."<sup>77</sup>

"Bringing good news to the poor has been a theological priority for Samuel."<sup>78</sup> Samuel's continuing interest in economic issues is part of his attempt to deal with the wider structural problems which underlie poverty. He has sought to bring together Christian economists at a theoretical level and his work to engage in micro-economic development projects more practically.<sup>79</sup> The consequences of poverty and those marginalized by caste are brought out by the American Ron Sider in a survey of Samuel's work.<sup>80</sup> Sider suggests that the problem of caste is viewed by Samuel as an issue of dignity. There are connections between the alleviation of poverty and self-worth in relation to caste:

Samuel insists that economic development by itself cannot break the power of caste and the resulting sense of worthlessness. But when outcastes accept Christ and join his new family, everything changes. Each person understands himself or herself as a son or daughter of God, made in the very image of the creator and called to be a steward of God's creation. This God is opposed to

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid, 67; R. Sider, *Cup of Water, Bread of Life* (London : Triangle, 1996), 114-115.

<sup>75</sup> There are many articles on this theme. See for example V. Samuel, "The Development Movement - an Overview and an Appraisal,' *Transformation* 13 No.4 (Oct 1996): 12-16.

<sup>76</sup> Sugden notes that what is considered dignity in the context of poverty in Asia may have a different emphasis from what is seen as important in the west. C. Sugden, *Seeking the Asian Face of Jesus*, (Oxford: Regnum, 1997), 186.

<sup>77</sup> Hwa, Yung, *Mangoes or Bananas. The Quest for an Authentic Asian Christian Theology* (Oxford: Regnum Books, 1997), 196. Hwa points to Sugden. C. Sugden, *Seeking the Asian Face of Jesus* (Oxford: Regnum 1997), 224-256.

<sup>78</sup> Sugden, *Seeking the Asian Face of Jesus* , 159.

<sup>79</sup> D. Bussau and Vinay Samuel, *How Then Should We Lend?* (Oxford: Opportunity International, 1998.) H. Schlossberg, V. Samuel, and R. J. Sider, *Christian Faith and Economics in the Post-Cold War Era* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994)

<sup>80</sup> He cites, for example, the way in which poverty put pressure on some, in the community where the Samuels lived, to get involved in prostitution and the need to find economic alternatives to this.

caste, oppression and poverty. This God calls the oppressed themselves to change history. As women and outcastes are empowered by faith in Christ and share in the Lord's table with other "respectable folk" they find a new dignity and power to change.<sup>81</sup>

Evidently such a stance cannot deal wholesale with the issue of caste in India. Samuel's focus is on micro-communities and the need for a degree of reality at the community level, with Christians showing integrity there. His emphasis is on a theological understanding of life beyond caste identity, which is made real in specific Christian communities, as a symbolic example of the way forward. He recognizes that for people from the Dalit communities their experience of Christian faith must be translated into social realities and reflect their change of identity. What they experience is a shift "...from a microcosmic religious world of the village and the group, it is a transition to a macrocosmic world of a God, the creator of the universe. They are invited into that world and are made rightful citizens of it..."<sup>82</sup>

Samuel is well aware that Dalit Christians in India need to deal with issues not just at a community level but at a national level: they need to continue to establish an appropriate political identity. He recognizes too that "the reconstruction of religious identity is integrally linked with the search for social and political empowerment."<sup>83</sup> The reason that Christians working in mission with Dalits experience forms of harassment is inextricably linked to the fact that they are giving Dalit peoples a measure of empowerment. This is a reminder that Christian identity is shaped by the way of the cross and its associated pattern of suffering.

#### Maggay on poverty

In a country like the Philippines the needs of the poor must be paramount. Maggay sees the reality of the poor as a reminder to Christians in Asia that they must become more involved in society and not be caught in false questions of priority. She is critical of those who comment that the church's task is to "share the good news of the gospel rather than to help those who are poor and hungry."<sup>84</sup> This leads her to ponder the underlying issue of integrity:

...I certainly do not see how I can operate as a witness to the transforming power of the gospel without having to spell out what it must mean to those who cannot and do not hope to break the cycle of poverty ... Is it really possible to speak with integrity without addressing socio-political issues? ....

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<sup>81</sup> Sider, *One-sided Christianity*, 115.

<sup>82</sup> V. Samuel, "Religious Change and Conversion of Low and Outcastes to Christianity. Exploring the Social Horizons of Church Growth in North India," Unpublished Paper, 2003, 12-13.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid, 14; 15-16.

<sup>84</sup> Maggay, *Transforming Society*, 11-12.

In the light of our own social realities can we remain unmoved and still be faithful to all that we are being called to bear as disciples in this country?<sup>85</sup>

Dealing with problems like poverty is critical because the gospel has “social” as well as “cosmic” significance.<sup>86</sup> Faith has got to be lived out in its social context or these critical elements will be missing. Maggay fears that it is the withdrawal of the Christian community from these social realities that causes it to be distanced and remote. This leads to a loss of position and role for the church and will contribute to the process of secularization in society. She feels that it is this retreat which leaves evangelicals without an adequate connection with context, suggesting that “social action ... does not simply follow the proclamation of the gospel. It needs to be done if the gospel is to be heard at all, especially in third world settings.”<sup>87</sup> For Maggay, poverty forces reflection on the social dimensions of faith, the very practical issue of how to live out faith in Filipino society and engage in “transforming society.”<sup>88</sup>

Maggay is acutely conscious of how global forces are creating a “global middle class” whose financial growth is leaving poorer communities behind and in the case of the Philippines driving such people abroad to find work and currency, with a significant impact on those whose families are fragmented.<sup>89</sup> This is particularly true for women in the Philippines. Maggay’s own work is an example of how Christian women in Asia can participate in the struggle against poverty.

#### **6.2.4 Justice and the Christian community**

The theme of the poor is inextricably connected with justice. This is a critical issue for dialogue in the Asian context. Asia is a continent of plurality and Christians will need to deal with the issue of how faith and those individuals who are part of the community of faith help the lot of the poor. This is an indispensable question for dialogue with those of other faiths. Asian societies are affected by “the naked exercise of power in relationships at all levels”

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid, 12.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid, 48.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid, 21 Maggay comments, “It is part of the process we call ‘evangelism.’”

<sup>88</sup> Ibid, 17. For Maggay, where poverty is so rampant Christians run the risk of either an extreme emphasis towards the political or a flight away to personal concerns - with the latter a danger for some evangelicals in the Philippines.

<sup>89</sup> Maggay notes the irony of Isaiah’s vision where “... people shall build houses and inhabit them.” This is the opposite of what’s happening to citizens of poorer countries globally: Filipinos are constructing abroad and their country is disintegrating at home. M. Maggay, *Jew to the Jew and Greek to the Greek. Reflections on Culture and Globalization* (Manila: ISACC, 2001), 37.

and this creates a longing for justice in everyday life.<sup>90</sup> In the gospels, Jesus challenged the religious leaders of the time not just about their own personal spiritual experience but the way in which the practice of their religious life marginalized those whom they considered to be sinners, and the poor and the sick.<sup>91</sup>

Samuel addresses the issue of justice in his writings and in his ministry. He relates issues of justice to a critique of religious systems and suggests that it is necessary to challenge the religious systems of Asia where they do not promote justice. When Samuel considers the situation in India, he suggests that the poor find themselves unable to see a way forward in the context of their religious beliefs:

...there is no final basis on which they can call their situation unjust or wrong. The impact of Christianity is to give the poor a foundation for their questions in the will and purpose of God; to affirm the poor in their sense of injustice and their desire and hope for change; to give them a new identity - not initially in a changed society but in a new relationship with God in Christ as his children and called equally to steward his creation.<sup>92</sup>

Such a position represents a strong challenge to any religious tradition, including Christianity itself and its ability to deliver help and hope to the poor. It connects religious belief and social action. This has a bearing on how evangelicals approach issues of justice. Samuel contrasts evangelicals with a “mystical emphasis” from those who stress the “prophetic.”<sup>93</sup> The former group stresses the pilgrim character of Christian life and the latter group gives priority to justice and the hope for change in the contemporary world. Samuel notes as well the tension between “church growth” models and “kingdom models”:

Where the emphasis is on making the local church a kingdom community, the church is encouraged to address larger community issues of justice. Where church growth is emphasized ... social action in the community that might compromise or jeopardise evangelism is avoided.<sup>94</sup>

In other words, there are evangelicals for whom the centrality of the growth of the church can promote a more cautious approach to justice because of the potential backlash against

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<sup>90</sup> V. Samuel and C. Sugden, “God’s Intention for the World – Tensions Between Eschatology and History,” in *Mission as Transformation*, eds. V. Samuel, and C. Sugden (Oxford: Regnum, 1999), 203.

<sup>91</sup> Samuel, Interview.

<sup>92</sup> V. Samuel, V and C. Sugden, “The Gospel Amid Other Faiths,” in *Lambeth: a View from the 2/3 World*, V. Samuel and C. Sugden (London: SPCK, 1997), 88.

<sup>93</sup> Samuel sees these two underlying attitudes as being magnified into approaches to mission that stress separate “creation” and “evangelism” mandates in the 1970s. V. Samuel, “Mission as Transformation,” In *Mission as Transformation*, eds. V. Samuel, and C. Sugden, (Oxford: Regnum, 1999), 228.

<sup>94</sup> V. Samuel, “A Theological Perspective,” in *Serving with the poor in Asia*, ed. T. Yamamori (Monrovia, CA: MARC, 1995), 152.

the church. Samuel insists that mission must promote justice that deals with problems of poverty and corruption, both at a personal and at a structural level.<sup>95</sup> He gave the example of a fish-farm project in a village near Bangalore, which is trying to empower local people in a mostly Islamic community. Such a project involved dealing with the police and landlords so that legal documents are in order, and so that justice can be appropriated by the local people.<sup>96</sup>

Samuel's work through such projects shows that Christian faith moves beyond the personal to embrace the social dimensions of everyday life. His community projects indicate that Christians in Asia take seriously the collective nature of Christian life and that the life of faith is not simply an individual matter. These projects also reflect a concern to take cognizance of global forces but to put a practical emphasis on their local ramifications and to try to help with poverty and injustice at a local level. Further evidence of this can be seen in Samuel's writing which deal with a range of issues connected to justice, including development, the place of the family, the safety of children and corruption in business and its impact on society.

The potential ethical contribution that can be made by the church is important for Ramachandra. He gives some examples of what it is possible for the church to do: the need to deal with human suffering;<sup>97</sup> the safeguarding of human rights;<sup>98</sup> and the need to promote social equality. He looks at the way in which Christians can make a contribution to the modern world<sup>99</sup> by taking seriously the consequences of a biblical view of humanity:

If ethics is the Achilles heel of late-modern secular society, then the ethical becomes the site of gospel proclamation. To champion human rights in global and local contexts, and to argue that such respect for human dignity only makes sense within a biblical world-view is to bring political action and evangelical proclamation into a powerful harmony.<sup>100</sup>

In terms of social equality, Ramachandra pursues this idea by seeing the dignity of work as allowing Christians to engage in different kinds of vocation such as science or the arts which

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<sup>95</sup> "Transformation: the Church in Response to Human need," in *Mission as Transformation*, eds. V. Samuel, and C. Sugden (Oxford: Regnum, 1999), 269.

<sup>96</sup> Samuel, Interview.

<sup>97</sup> H. Peskett, and V. Ramachandra, *The Message of Mission* (Leicester: IVP, 2003), 39-41. He gives examples of the emancipation of women through mission.

<sup>98</sup> Ramachandra sees the biblical concept of *imago dei* "has provided the ontological grounding of human rights which purely secular accounts lack." He recognizes that rights are a politically radical concept. Peskett and Ramachandra, *The Message of Mission*, 41- 42.

<sup>99</sup> Ramachandra looks at western critiques of Islamic human rights. Ramachandra, *Faiths in Conflict*, 30-34.

<sup>100</sup> Peskett and Ramachandra, *The Message of Mission*, 43-47.

respond to the needs of the creation.<sup>101</sup> As a former scientist, Ramachandra also notes the relationship of creation to environmental concerns and the apathy of many Christians in this area.

In Malaysia, Ng sees the place of human rights and social justice as “inalienable expressions of human dignity.”<sup>102</sup> The Christian community needs to be challenged to action on the grounds of God’s compassion for the world. The Islamic community needs to recognize that the values of others do not necessarily undermine shared community life. In the context of responding to the Vision 2020 policies of central government, Hwa sees the demonstration of Christian values as an important part of the Christian case to promote credibility.<sup>103</sup>

### **6.2.5 Concluding reflections on nation-building**

It is clear that there are evangelicals in Asia, who like evangelicals elsewhere in the world, are increasingly concerned with Christian participation in society, in the public square and in national life. They view this engagement with national life as part of the church’s responsibility in mission in Asia. They recognize that a wholistic approach to mission will involve social engagement.

In Malaysia, Christians enjoy the benefits of a modern industrialized society but they are marginalized in terms of their participation in the state. Ng stresses the importance of a wholistic perception of Christianity and a social vision that acts as a basis for social engagement, being well aware of the practical difficulties of Christians finding a voice in a society that restricts minorities. Ng sees the role of the Christian community as important in providing spiritual, psychological and practical resources for people so they can sustain their engagement in societies like Malaysia.

In the Philippines, Maggay wants to encourage the creation of communities which can resource Christians in their struggle for justice in society. She stresses the place of “radical hope” based on the biblical vision of the kingdom, balanced by “radical pessimism” based on the realities of sin and evil in the world with Christian communities called to make a difference and encouraged by the positive example of those who have gone before.

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid, 45- 47, 51.

<sup>102</sup> Ng, K. W., “Peoplehood, Hermeneutics and Political Hegemony in a Democratic Society,” (Occasional Paper No. 1), Unpublished paper. Kairos Research Centre, 1994,4, 7.

<sup>103</sup> Hwa, Yung. “The Role of the Church in Vision 2002,” in *Modernity in Malaysia: Christian Perspectives*, ed. Ng Kam Weng, (Kuala Lumpur: Kairos Research Centre, 1998), 62-64.

In the Indian context, Samuel engages more with the issue of the poor and the marginalized. He envisages the role of the kingdom community as giving people a new identity of belonging and the emotional and practical support that can help overcome issues of poverty and injustice when they are linked to problems of social perception as created by caste. Samuel's emphasis is more on small communities and how they can make a difference in a particular setting. He does recognize the need to engage with structures even at a local level if justice is to be sought and secured for the very poor. Samuel also recognizes the power of global forces for good and ill and encourages mechanisms whereby resources from the west can be channelled to help poor communities in India.

The selected writers show a willingness to adopt a number of theological models as they reflect on these issues, but they are conscious of the limitations on evangelicalism in terms of power, affluence and state restrictions. There are three features of these models that can be underlined. Firstly, the way they draw on the Christian scriptures for the Asian context. The theme that gives coherence to their theology of engagement is that of the kingdom of God. This is linked to the implications of Christian discipleship that derive from Christ's example and the theological significance of who he is as a result of his resurrection. The theology of the kingdom of God and Christian values draws on understandings of justice derived from both the New Testament and from the Old, in terms of its understanding of the demands of justice for the people of God in their social context.

Secondly, these models suggest that transformational missiology avoids some of the dichotomies associated with evangelical missiology which puts an excessive emphasis on evangelization and the individual. Whilst there is a concern for spirituality and the inner life, the selected writers stress the importance of the social challenges which face Christians in Asia, and the inward life of faith is not to exclude the place of the outward expression of Christian beliefs and values. The individual Christian plays a role within the wider context of the kingdom community and these collective dimensions are an important and integral part of Christian life. The individual cannot simply focus on salvation as a personal experience but must relate it to the wider world. Thirdly, Christians must seek to live out their faith at a local level whilst taking account of the impact of the global in terms of economics and justice on their societies.

The selected writers are conscious that they need to develop missiological models that help them to engage with the particularities of the Asian scene - with its emphasis on Asian values of community and family, Asian styles of democracy and so forth. This involves a

continuing willingness to shape evangelical missiological reflection to the needs of Asian societies.

### **6.3 Transformational missiology and Asia – religious themes**

In the context of Asia, the selected writers engage with different religious faiths.<sup>104</sup> Christians from outside Asia, including western evangelicals, have often focussed on negative elements in other religious and cultural traditions. There is a need for a greater openness to the major faiths from Asia and new avenues of engagement. The selected writers draw back from what they see as the demonizing of other religions, a trend which they feel occurs sometimes in evangelicalism. They are, however, ready to critique other world-views, especially when these world-views lead to problems of justice and indignity in Asian society.<sup>105</sup> There is a perception that global evangelicals need to learn from some of the more positive features of inter-religious encounter in Asian societies. A desire to interact positively with other religions, without sham and without playing down the distinctive character and qualities of the Christian position, is a positive feature of Asian evangelicalism. It is this balance of critique and appropriate self-awareness as evangelicals in Asia which offers a model to evangelicals in other parts of the world, especially in the west.

#### **6.3.1 Plural societies**

Recognizing the plural context

Of the selected writers, Samuel, Hwa and Ramachandra address particular issues of religious pluralism.<sup>106</sup> Samuel notes the tensions for evangelicals generally in the non-western world. A group of evangelicals responded to the position taken by the WCC on pluralism and the uniqueness of Christ and found that their position was labelled as being due to “ideological conditioning” or “theological naivety.”<sup>107</sup> The non-western evangelicals frankly resented

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<sup>104</sup> See Maggay, *Filipino Religious Consciousness*, 17-19, 20-27. Maggay explores the connection between Filipino religion, its “profound supernaturalism” and its interest in spiritual power.

<sup>105</sup> Samuel and Ramachandra emphasize this point.

<sup>106</sup> Ng’s responses to the reality of social pluralism come through in his writing on finding a Christian voice in the public square in Malaysia.

<sup>107</sup> V. Samuel and C. Sugden, “Lambeth, San Antonio and Manila – Three World Gatherings on Mission,” *EFAC Bulletin* Issue 39 (Advent 1989): 4.

such labels, and had simply wanted to express the view that they did not agree with the prevailing theological models used at the WCC.

Hwa and Ramachandra query whether religious faiths in Asia, like Hinduism, are as inclusive as is often assumed, pointing to the writings of Radhakrishna with an implicit sense of Hindu superiority.<sup>108</sup> They would like to hold on to the distinctive elements of Christianity, with its views of God as personal and its particular view of Christ, as starting-points for engagement in relation to other faiths.<sup>109</sup> The idea of the universality of Christian faith as relevant for the whole globe and all societies is important for Ramachandra. He links the universal dimensions of Christian faith to the incarnation of Jesus Christ.<sup>110</sup> This incarnation into Jewish culture has allowed for a continuing translatability of the gospel into other cultures. Ramachandra connects this to Christian conversion as a process that is about “radical reorientation” in a person’s own society into a community that has both local and global dimensions. The diversity of this community is seen from the “rich pluralism that the gospel engenders around the world.”<sup>111</sup> Ramachandra’s position appears to be that not only does Christianity have universal elements that are applicable to all societies but the dimension of translatability encourages it to take diverse forms that relate closely to different societies across the world.<sup>112</sup>

Hwa draws on biblical perspectives to set out contours for debate, but uses them creatively and flexibly. He stresses the need to draw on a theology of creation which locates all human beings and their religious beliefs in the context of general revelation and is sympathetic to the possibility of working with others for “the redemption of all creation.”<sup>113</sup> However, this does not take away from the need to recognize differences between Christianity and other faiths especially in the area of Jesus Christ and soteriology. Hwa sees the need for integrity in this area. On that basis, Christians can engage in responsible dialogue and witness, through renewed efforts in the area of apologetics. Hwa does stress that if there is to be a measure of social transformation in societies which are religiously *plural*, then the existence

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<sup>108</sup> Ramachandra, *Faiths in Conflict*, 72-75. Hwa, *Mangoes or Bananas*, 115-121. Such a view is echoed by Ng in relation to Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam. Ng, Interview.

<sup>109</sup> Ng says the same with regard to Islam in Malaysia. Ng, Interview.

<sup>110</sup> Ramachandra, *Faiths in Conflict*, 124-134.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid*, 138-139.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid*, 137-138. The sacred writings of Islam and Hinduism have made this more difficult with a lesser role for local languages implicit in the cultural transference of both religions.

<sup>113</sup> Hwa, Yung. “Towards an Evangelical Approach to Religions and Culture,” *Transformation* 17 No.3 (July 2000): 90.

of a Christian community which demonstrates the reality of the faith that promotes such change is paramount.

### Plurality and the public square

In the context of pluralism, Ramachandra looks at how Christians need to deal with the complex issue of public truth: hence his question about the possibility of Christians making “universal truth claims” whilst still respecting others in contexts of plurality.<sup>114</sup> He wants to encourage Christians to be involved in certain key areas of public life based on what he describes as creation mandates in the Old Testament.<sup>115</sup> Christians should feel free as citizens to push for a plural state at the level of politics, not claiming special privileges for the church but not surrendering the social and political dimensions of the gospel either.<sup>116</sup> Ramachandra feels that the social contribution of Christianity to India in the area of social justice and poverty is immense.<sup>117</sup> Ramachandra is not prepared to give up on the role of truth-claims either as a principle, or as a dimension of the debate on pluralism. This may be coloured by his scientific background, where truth-claims are part of the universal fabric of science, and are not expected to be dismissed on the grounds of cultural relativity. He critiques Samartha for his views that Christian faith can be lived at a liturgical level, meaning one thing, and in ordinary life, meaning something different.<sup>118</sup>

Ng suggests that there are two qualities required by Christianity, if it is to contribute successfully to the public square. It must have a genuinely rounded quality for the public arena – “an integrative character, and a public character” – in short a character which challenges a pluralistic society to reflect on its stance to public issues, and it must be supported by the presence of a community of Christians who can show that faith is meaningful in daily life.<sup>119</sup> It is important for Christians to relate this need for participation in the public square to specific religious critiques of their societies and social involvement. For example, in Malaysia there is an Islamic critique of Christianity which sees the latter as

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<sup>114</sup> Ramachandra, *Faiths in Conflict*, 119, 120-124, 132-140. See page 138 above.

<sup>115</sup> Genesis 1:26-31 & 2:15-20.

<sup>116</sup> Ramachandra, *Faiths in Conflict*, 163.

<sup>117</sup> Peskett and Ramachandra, *The Message of Mission*, 238-239. On this point of the potential of the Christian view-point to promote the interests of the poor in Ramachandra, see Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *An Introduction to the Theology of Religions: Biblical, Historical, and Contemporary Perspectives* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 340.

<sup>118</sup> V. Ramachandra, *Gods that Fail Modern Idolatry and Christian Mission* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster Press, 1996), 222-223.

<sup>119</sup> Ng, K.W., *Doing Responsive Theology in a Developing World* (Petaling Jaya, Mal: Pustaka SUFES, 1994), 29-30.

western and individualistic and having a character that does not embrace all of life. Situations like Malaysia have both limitations and freedoms for Christianity in terms of society and the legal system.<sup>120</sup> Despite this, Ng encourages Christians in Malaysia to see the necessity of responding to their distinctive setting with an appropriate agenda of a vision of all of life. This is important because Islamic groups see such a vision as a core element of Islam, one which they are trying to promote through think-tanks and similar organizations. They are often sceptical about the extent to which Christians have such a vision of the totality of life deriving from their Christian faith.<sup>121</sup> Christian involvement in the public square must be, in part, a counter to negative appraisals of Christianity.

### Christian humility

The proclamation and understanding of the gospel requires humility in the modern world. Ramachandra draws on Newbigin to suggest the limits that he would apply to issues of pluralism.<sup>122</sup> Seeing the debate as defined by the “twin poles of the amazing grace of God and the appalling sin of the world,” Ramachandra considers two implications of the Christian gospel. The doctrine of creation affirms the dignity of all human beings and their need to be approached with due respect, but the doctrine of grace implies due humility on the part of Christians:

This kind of theological position which seeks a biblical balance of confidence and humility, defies classification under the customary categories of exclusivist, pluralist and inclusivist where Christian views on the world religions are concerned. It is exclusivist in the sense that it affirms the unique truth of the revelation of Jesus Christ, but it is not exclusivist in the sense of denying the possibility of the salvation of the non-Christian. It is inclusivist in the sense that it refuses to limit the saving grace of God to members of the Christian church, but it rejects the inclusivism which regards the non-Christian religions as vehicles of salvation. It is pluralist in the sense of acknowledging the gracious work of God in the lives of all human beings, but it rejects a pluralism which denies the uniqueness and decisiveness of what God has done in Jesus Christ.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> Ng, through the Kairos Research Centre, has sponsored a project on this.

<sup>121</sup> See Ng, *Bridge-Building in a Pluralistic Society*, 43 and Ng, “From Political Action to Cultural Transformation,” 9.

<sup>122</sup> Ramachandra, *The Recovery of Mission*, 275.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid*, 275. Samuel looks approvingly at models like Newbigin’s whom he sees as maintaining the “historic understanding of the uniqueness of Christ” but who is open to the idea that it is “not incompatible with respect for and openness to other religious and faiths.” V. Samuel and C. Sugden. “Lambeth, San Antonio and Manila,” 4.

This notion of due humility combined with respect is important for Ramachandra and he distinguishes “genuine respect and easy tolerance.”<sup>124</sup> The realization that Christianity will face tensions in different societies is clear for Ramachandra. This should not discourage Christians from engagement; he is critical of approaches to tolerance that amount to little more than “apathy,”<sup>125</sup> seeing a need to balance the aims of dialogue with the place of truth.<sup>126</sup>

In terms of the frameworks set out in chapter 2, the selected writers seem to fit more closely with Knitter’s models of “partial replacement,” being open to the potential for good in other religions, and recognizing the need to live with social plurality, but they see Christianity as offering a distinctive understanding of salvation through Jesus Christ.

### **6.3.2 Dialogue**

The question of dealing with pluralism leads on to the issue of interacting and dialoguing with those of other faiths. Wickeri sketches the contours of dialogue in the modern world:

Dialogue helps people of different religious traditions to work together to probe the mystery of God. Through dialogue, we question one another help one another, criticize one another, and make suggestions for mutual flourishing and the common good.<sup>127</sup>

The goals of dialogue are to develop a new understanding of each religious tradition and the possibility of “mutual transformation.”<sup>128</sup> The Christian faith is seen to be part of this process of dialogue. Some Christians put a stress on interacting with others in the plural world in a way that “affirms plurality,” rather than simply emphasizing what is distinctive in the Christian communication itself.<sup>129</sup> “Dialogue does not imply the reduction of one’s faith and commitment but it situates our religious conviction in contexts which can affirm plurality.”<sup>130</sup> Others, like the Pakistani writer Nazir-Ali sees dialogue<sup>131</sup> as embracing more directly missional elements like proclamation, although it can mean sharing information and discussing the diversity of views on spirituality. An important aspect of the debate about

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<sup>124</sup> Ramachandra, *Gods That Fail*, 47.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid, 47-48.

<sup>126</sup> Ramachandra, *The Recovery of Mission*, 270.

<sup>127</sup> Wickeri, “Plurality, Power and Mission,” 32-34.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid, 20.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid, 20-22.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid, 32-34.

<sup>131</sup> M. Nazir-Ali, *Mission and Dialogue*. (London: SPCK, 1995), 34-39.

pluralism and dialogue has to do with the church's minority status in Asia.<sup>132</sup> The above positions represent what could be termed theoretical perspectives on dialogue. In the concrete reality of Asian societies it is not just a matter of Christians being open to dialogue, Batumalai in Malaysia querying if dialogue is even possible, suggesting that it does take place but in a very "low-profile" manner.<sup>133</sup> Situations of pluralism in Asia can lack goodwill towards Christians themselves.

#### Dialogue and religious pluralism

As far as Hwa is concerned, the religiously plural context of Malaysia is different from some western societies:

The issue in the Malaysian context will not be so much dialogue with Muslims in a western sense, but rather dialogue with the Muslims in the sense of entering into a situation with them where they can begin to take the rights of minorities seriously. So we are in a reverse situation to the west.<sup>134</sup>

In dealing with the ways in which Malaysians can engage constructively in dialogue, Ng focusses on issues of shared social life, rather than spiritual themes. He stresses the need to address practical problems in Malaysia: the perceived deficiencies in Christianity of its western character, blemished by imperial history and individualism, and the marginalization of minorities including Christians.<sup>135</sup> He recognizes several Islamic institutions of moderate perspectives with which dialogue could be possible. These include groups like Insitut Kefahaman Islam Malaysia, Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia (ABIM) and Sisters of Islam. Dialogue in such cases should promote discussion about a shared vision for a "common society," with all sides showing that they have the ethical capacity to build such a society.<sup>136</sup> The Vision 2020 programme also permits limited input from Christians. Ng sees the sharing of Christian perspectives for Malaysian society as an important contribution to dialogue at the present time.

Similar concerns are addressed by Maggay when she considers the pressures against greater dialogue that occur in relation to Muslims and Christians in the southern Philippines. In practical terms she suggests that dialogue involves resolving the disputes that focus on the

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<sup>132</sup> Ramachandra, Interview.

<sup>133</sup> Batumalai, *Islamic Resurgence*, 14.

<sup>134</sup> Hwa, Interview.

<sup>135</sup> Ng notes too that sometimes local Christians in Asia find that dialogue is conducted through the filter of outside western Christians with whom Malaysian Muslims may prefer to dialogue. Ng, K.W., "Dialogue and Constructive Social Engagement," (Occasional Paper No. 3,) Unpublished paper. Kairos Research Centre, 1995, 2.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid*, 2.

tension between Muslims and their “historic rights” to the land and the “political rights” of the more recent Christians who have settled there.<sup>137</sup> Maggay recognizes the need for a greater ability to live together if peace is to prevail. Peace will only be possible if the religious dimensions that lie behind the political tensions are fully recognized. She recognizes the influence of global religious resurgence with resources from the United States influencing evangelicalism and the Organization of Islamic Conference impacting Islamic associations.

Samuel advocates an agenda for mission in the context of other religions emphasizing the need for awareness of Christian strengths and weaknesses. Christian identity in Asia has been shaped by historic attitudes to other faiths which have included prejudice and arrogance. There can be open-ness to other religions whilst acknowledging differences. Christians can forge new relationships and benefit from other faiths although the reality of limitations should be recognized in the context of the religions.<sup>138</sup>

The debates of Tambaram 1938 IMC were important for allowing new understandings of mission in places like Asia. It took seriously the historical particularities of countries in Asia and allowed freedom for theological development in the area of understanding Christian revelation in relation to other religions.<sup>139</sup> For Samuel, dialogue in Asia includes both interaction with society and witness to Christian faith. The former includes participation in communities which address human need. There is the possibility of co-operating with others to build a better society. In terms of Indian society, Samuel focusses on two points. He sees the Christian tradition as offering solutions to the issues of justice and poverty which face the marginalized within Hindu society. He sees the need to challenge Hindu people to make value judgements, from a religious point of view, on situations that are oppressive to minorities in India.<sup>140</sup> The way in which caste is experienced as a form of oppression must be dealt with as it originates from within a religious conception of the world. “Any witness to the religious world view of Hinduism must not neglect the religious sanctioning of

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<sup>137</sup> Maggay views the Spanish form of Christianity from the formerly Muslim Iberian peninsula, and shaped by its historic experience with the Moorish peoples in Europe, as affecting the subsequent interaction with Islam. M. Maggay, “Facing the Muslim-Christian Conflict,” In *Raja Sulaiman was no Carabao*, ed. M. Maggay, (Manila: ISACC, 2001), 1-2.

<sup>138</sup> For example the issue of poverty and injustice within the context of Indian Hindu culture for low-caste people. V. Samuel and C. Sugden. “The Gospel Amid Other Faiths,” in *Lambeth: a View from the Two Thirds World*, V. Samuel and C. Sugden (London: SPCK, 1989), 88.

<sup>139</sup> V. Samuel and C. Sugden, “Dialogue with Other Religions – an Evangelical View,” in V. Samuel ed. *The Gospel among our Hindu Neighbours* (Bangalore: PIM- Asia, 1983), 177-178; 180.

<sup>140</sup> Samuel and Sugden, “Dialogue with Other Religions,” 207.

casteism.”<sup>141</sup> As an evangelical, Samuel also stresses that whilst witness certainly involves respect for others there is a necessity of sharing the central themes of the gospel and the salvation offered in Jesus Christ. Dialogue is seen not as “cheap proselytism” but “a medium of authentic witness.”<sup>142</sup> Like Hwa and Ng, Samuel is concerned that the Christian community engages with the religious contexts of Asia and their world-views and politics and offers a genuine and honest presentation of Christian faith. Like Ramachandra, Samuel is concerned that Christians in Asia adopt an appropriate stance and that they are not perceived to be overbearing. Such an approach acknowledges that in dialogue there is a concern for listening, a concern for truth and a concern that the Christian gospel is made clear for those of other faiths as part of the quest for mutual understanding. The desire to connect the concept of the gospel to deal with issues of social justice in Asian contexts comes through clearly.

### **6.3.3 Apologetics and witness**

The approach of some of the selected writers to interaction with other faiths goes quite explicitly beyond dialogue to apologetics and to witness. Apologetics can be defined as follows: “Apologetics in the history of Christian theology means the defence, by argument, of Christian belief against external criticism or against other worldviews.”<sup>143</sup> There is an interest among the selected writers in seeing a vibrant presentation of Christianity to the Asian contexts in terms of a renewed apologetic. Ng would like to see greater activity in the area of apologetics, both in the sense of engaging with the religions in Asia and how the church presents its message in the context of a wider society.<sup>144</sup> Hwa thinks that apologetics is an area that needs more attention in terms of the Asian Christian church and its outward witness. He points to the work of historical figures such as Ricci, de Nobili and Goreh, as examples of Christians in Asia who engaged with apologetic issues and reckons that this area merits renewed attention.<sup>145</sup>

The desire for a humble stance in dialogue does not rule out the proclamation of the Christian gospel. In fact, Samuel shares favourably the opinions of Nazir-Ali and Gitari that

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<sup>141</sup> Ibid, 206-207.

<sup>142</sup> V. Samuel, and Chris Sugden, “Christians in Asia,” in *Christianity a World Faith*, ed. P. Briereley, (Tring: Lion Handbook, 1985), 178.

<sup>143</sup> Hwa, *Mangoes or Bananas*, 225.

<sup>144</sup> Ng, Interview.

<sup>145</sup> Hwa, *Mangoes or Bananas*, 122-135.

“authentic witness to Jesus Christ involves ... a spirit of telling and ... listening...”<sup>146</sup> where the concept of listening is a significant part of the process. It suggests that “the proclamation of the gospel includes an invitation to recognize and accept in a personal decision the saving Lordship of Christ.”<sup>147</sup> In other words, dialogue for Samuel includes the possibility of sharing the gospel of Christ with others in evangelism.

Implicit in Maggay’s discussion of Filipino religious consciousness is the idea that Christians need to engage sensitively with local religions in such a way that the gospel not only makes sense to local sensibilities, but shows the merits and attractions of the Christian position. She tries to deal with the *zeitgeist* of the Filipino mind. Her ability to draw on religious images, such as the image of the cockerel which is slain in folk culture, describing how its spilt blood affected people at a deep level,<sup>148</sup> shows sensitivity to dimensions of Filipino religious culture and a willingness to interact with this society in relation to Christian faith.

In the context of their own settings, some of the selected writers use the language of proclamation or evangelism in relation to other religions. In terms of biblical themes, there is a stress on the New Testament categories of Jesus Christ and the gospel of the kingdom. This is at the heart of Christianity and must be honestly presented as such for all its challenges to those of other faiths. However, it must be presented not just as a message to be shared, but must again to be set in the context of a faith that is lived out and which has implications for social and ethical conduct. The Christian quest for justice and integrity brings a challenge to other worldviews.

Such a gospel must be shared by a community of faith and Samuel stresses the place of a worshipping Christian community which is accepted as a legitimate religious group as a prerequisite for evangelism. This community must have a commitment to sharing the gospel and must be ready to turn outwards with a clear sense of belonging in the community and ready to reach out to others. The other religious communities should be comfortable with this outward directed stance. Such an attitude from others will come where the Christian

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<sup>146</sup> V. Samuel and C. Sugden, “The Gospel Amid Other Faiths,” 87-88.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

<sup>148</sup> M. Maggay, *Communicating Cross-Culturally* (Quezon City: New Day publishers, 1989),25.

community is committed to the needs of the wider community and Christians share in its leadership.<sup>149</sup>

In situations where plurality is taken for granted, Samuel considers that what is important is the way in which the Christian community relates to and makes its presence felt among other members of the wider community and this is a crucial factor in deciding how well the wider community is affected by the gospel.<sup>150</sup> According to Samuel, the Indian social context allows for interaction of people from religious traditions. In the context of a social project, which was accompanied by overt activities for evangelism, Samuel explained that representatives from the local Hindu and Muslim communities would be present and part of the proceedings and that the communities would take that for granted.<sup>151</sup> Ramachandra is also concerned with this dimension of Christianity and the religions. His study of Islam and Hinduism is an attempt to show how Christian faith relates to other faiths in terms of today's societies.<sup>152</sup>

#### Concluding reflections on religion and spirituality

The selected writers function in environments which are shaped by two different sets of forces: on the one hand they inhabit an Asian world that is multi-religious and in which many of the different religious traditions are resurgent; on the other they find themselves functioning with theological models of religious interaction which have frequently been fashioned in the west and shaped by western Christianity's experience of religion from within the bounds of Christendom and latterly as a faith which is engaging with the complexities of a post-Christendom world.

There is a realization that evangelical theologians in Asia may well want to interact with other religions in a different way from western scholars and western evangelicals. They will be neither triumphalistic nor obsequious in their approach to others, but will attempt to deal fairly with both the realities of other faiths and their own, recognizing that the minority status of Christianity in Asia is not a reason for abandoning Christian identity, even in the face of challenges from other religions. Inter-religious encounter in the contemporary world demands a more gracious way of interacting with Asian religions. There is a need to study

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<sup>149</sup> V. Samuel, "India: Evangelism Among the Urban Poor," in *One Gospel – Many Clothes. Anglicans and the Decade of Evangelism*, ed. Chris Wright and C. Sugden (Oxford: EFAC and Regnum, 1990), 85.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid, 83-85.

<sup>151</sup> Samuel, Interview.

<sup>152</sup> Ramachandra, *Gods That Fail*, 23.

carefully what these signify, taking account of both theoretical dimensions and the practical expressions which may well include the maintenance or adoption of religious identity for political and secular ends by certain groups within Asian societies.

The selected writers recognize the need for approaches to mission which stress the Christian concern for justice and a willingness to challenge other religious belief systems where they appear to be lacking. Such challenges would include concerns about poverty, about the need for justice, about the high degree of corruption in some Asian societies, and about the place of participation in society, including that of women. There are many areas of contemporary Asian life where a concern for such improvements in society would be reasonable aspirations. Evangelical missiologists in Asia see such changes as necessitating, in part, a challenge to the cultural and religious world-views which shape Asian societies.

There appear to be signs of a real interest in engaging with other religions and in developing appropriate models of spirituality for the Asian world. A fully worked-out engagement is yet to come, despite the efforts of Ramachandra, Samuel and Maggay to move the debate forward. However, there is a better awareness of the way in which renewed understanding of Hinduism, Islam and traditional religions can promote the engagement of Christianity with the cultures of Asia. Working in Malaysia and feeling the pressure of Islamic and Chinese resurgence, Ng is mindful of the need to re-understand the religions. Hwa is reflecting on what the evangelization of Asian societies means and how to engage through apologetics and renewed witness.

There needs to be a constant re-engagement with the world-views and the ideologies which surround the church. This will lead to interaction that makes clear to others the claims of Christianity. This process which began in the gospels and the Acts of the Apostles, and continued through the early church, has been a feature of the church down through the ages. Asian evangelicals are sharing in this task at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### ***Conclusion***

This chapter has looked at ways in which transformational missiology has engaged with Asia particularly in terms of society and Asian religions. The selected writers see a key challenge for the Christian church in Asia is its capacity to form and to nurture communities of the kingdom, which live out the values of the gospel of Jesus Christ and his kingdom, bear witness to the message of the gospel and offer credible examples of what it means to be a Christian in Asia. It is this emphasis on nurturing communities of the kingdom as the

foundation for a genuine and credible witness to the power of God in Jesus Christ in Asia that constitutes a central core to transformational missiology. From this starting-point of communities of the kingdom, the gospel of Jesus Christ can shape lives, communities, societies and so can be proclaimed as good news for Asia. The biblical foundations of creation, the ethical framework of the Old Testament and the emphasis of the kingdom theme in relation to Jesus Christ are key centres for this model of missiology. These emphases allow for proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ to be accompanied by a concern for justice and the transformation of society. In the context of modern Asia, these communities of the kingdom need to be particularly aware of two dimensions of life: the interaction with societies in Asia and the interaction with religions in Asia. Being a Christian in societies in Asia is a challenge that must be addressed by a specific stance to mission as engagement. In terms of society this involves a model of mission that puts an emphasis on interacting with issues of public life by contributing to nation-building in terms of engaging in civil society, promoting justice and helping with issues like poverty. In terms of religion, this involves an attitude to other religions that recognizes the plurality of Asian societies, tries to make sense of Asian spiritual realities and finds forms of Christianity and responses which deal with the existential issues raised by these realities.

The place of global forces is an important dimension for some of the selected writers in terms of how it shapes the economic and religious contours of Asia. Evangelicals have also been part of global structures that have been formed since the end of World War II. As these structures continue to adapt to embrace two thirds world Christians, this new global context affords an opportunity for non-western evangelicals to add their distinctive flavour and character to Christianity.

Asian Christians need to have flexible models of missiology. These models include elements in addition to the “spiritual” or “existential” dimensions of the Christian message which are an integral part of the Christian faith. To say that Christianity in Asia needs to be socially connected is not to minimize the integral importance of the spiritual dimensions of faith. Transformational missiology is a model of missiology that shows the Christian faith can make a contribution to Asian societies and help establish the credibility of Christianity in societies like India, Malaysia and the Philippines. Such credibility will help to create “space for mission.” This is not just a stratagem but part of the reality of being the church in Asia.

**Part Three**  
**Transformational Missiology – an Assessment**

## CHAPTER 7

### A Review and Critique of Transformational Missiology

#### 7.1 Evangelical missiology in Asia

This study has pursued developments in evangelical missiology that have taken place since World War II and especially in the wake of the Lausanne 1974 congress. The use of a framework developed by Samuel Escobar reflects an interest in these changes particularly as they apply to the non-western world. This framework has allowed for a contrast between missiological developments in Asia and in the west. Escobar's category of a critical missiology from the periphery has allowed for a critique of missiological issues from "a biblical-theological paradigm."<sup>1</sup> He is right to suggest that there is a pressing requirement for "a missiology that corresponds to the missiological challenges of the day..."<sup>2</sup>

The need to address these matters is echoed by David Smith who urges a revision of evangelical missiology in the light of developments in the contemporary world and how they affect understandings of mission. He warns against the dangers of "Christians who continue to operate within a fading missionary paradigm..."<sup>3</sup> especially one which views evangelization as the only important dimension of mission. He argues the necessity of engaging in new ways with issues like pluralism, religion and the globalisation of the world. The implication of these reflections is that a new agenda for evangelical thinking about mission is required and this thesis looks at how such an agenda has been forged through the influence of non-western missiologists like the selected writers in Asia.

#### 7.1.1 Transformational missiology reviewed

This study has proposed a model of transformational missiology. It has sketched the contours of such a missiology and has shown how the selected writers as a group derive their missiological agenda from Asian settings and from the Christian scriptures. Key topics for evangelicals in Asia include the capacity to nurture communities of the kingdom, to show the values of Jesus Christ and his kingdom, to witness to the message of the gospel and to offer

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<sup>1</sup> S. Escobar, "Evangelical Missiology: Peering into the Future," in *Global Missiology for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: the Iguassu Dialogue*, ed W. Taylor (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 200), 112-113

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> D. Smith, *Mission after Christendom*. (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2003), 7.

credible examples of what it means to be Christians in Asia. This thesis with its themes of transformational missiology considers how the selected writers move beyond mission as evangelization and church-planting to a transformational missiology that is interested in how churches develop and are nurtured as communities that faithfully bear witness to the gospel of the kingdom in Asian settings.

The study offers a review of mission and missiological themes as viewed by evangelicals in Asia. The Christian scriptures and Asian settings influence and shape the evangelical missiology of the selected writers. A core element of this thesis is to show how themes like social engagement, nation-building and a re-appraisal of religion are addressed by all the selected writers.

### Transformational missiology as a concept

Transformational missiology is the author's term to deal with the emphases that are found in the work of the selected writers. It envisages the transformation of individuals of Christian communities and of societies as essential dimensions of mission in contemporary Asia. The term has been selected to emphasize the overlap between the missiological interest of the selected writers in certain themes and the issues addressed by the Mission as Transformation movement. It reflects the way in which the selected writers adopt "transformational language" in their discourse on theology.

Transformation<sup>4</sup> can be seen to operate at three levels. It starts with a transformation of the individual person; it includes the immediate transformation of the Christian community and it seeks the transformation of societies within which Christian communities are located. The nature of this transformation is toward the values of the kingdom of God which work within history but whose goal lies beyond this immediate transformation to a new creation.<sup>5</sup> This wider eschatological dimension offers both a sense of hope and looks beyond human agency to the power of God in changing and transforming human societies, both within the Christian community and beyond it.

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<sup>4</sup> There is some wider evidence that "transformation" is gaining ground as a category for understanding mission. Escobar has a chapter on "Mission as transforming service" in a recent survey of missiological themes. S. Escobar, *A Time for Mission*, (Leicester: IVP, 2003), 142-154.

<sup>5</sup> V. Samuel and C. Sugden, "God's Intention for the World – Tensions Between Eschatology and History," in *Mission as Transformation*, eds. V. Samuel, and C. Sugden (Oxford: Regnum, 1999), 181-183. Ramachandra on certain visions in Revelation. Peskett and Ramachandra, *The Message of Mission*, 263-268.

### A critique of “mission as transformation”

In a critique presented to the “mission as transformation” movement on the publication of their compendium, Haddon Willmer considers the roots and adequacy of the concept of transformation, especially in the way it is used in the mission as transformation movement.<sup>6</sup> He sees the term transformation being used to overcome a dichotomising of evangelism and social action, by arguing for the importance of human dignity in God’s creation, through a theology of the kingdom of God. However, he sees a danger in emphasizing transformation as a present reality. “Mission in faithful and obedient hope of the transformation which is not yet, is significantly different from the snappier ‘mission as transformation.’”<sup>7</sup> He concludes that mission cannot solely be defined in terms of transformation. The understanding of transformational missiology developed in this study seeks to avoid the ambiguity observed by Willmer by showing that transformational missiology relates to kingdom communities for whom mission takes place under the shadow of the cross and which look to the future eschatological dimensions of God’s purposes for their fulfilment.<sup>8</sup>

### A critique of “transformational development”

A different query has been expressed by the Micah Network. Although this network sees mission as embracing “holistic transformation” there is concern that it is not just envisaged in “developmental” terms.<sup>9</sup> Some missiology connected to the “mission as transformation” movement does emphasize these developmental dimensions.<sup>10</sup> Ramachandra has observed that too much emphasis on development at the expense of other aspects of mission is unhelpful for the formation of a balanced missiology. He notes the way in which the Micah Network have found the term “Integral Mission” a way of overcoming the uncertainties in other terminologies.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Mission as Transformation, reviewed by Haddon Willmer, at <[http://www.ocms.ac.uk/regnum/detail.php?book\\_id=9](http://www.ocms.ac.uk/regnum/detail.php?book_id=9)>, accessed 21<sup>st</sup> September 2006.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Willmer notes the importance of the roots and impact of this concept of transformation and similar themes within Evangelicalism in the past 50 years. This study has tried to take account of a wider evangelical critique of mission in its historical and geographical contexts in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>9</sup> The Micah Network is drawn from representatives of evangelical relief and development groups (and associated missiologists). Its origins date from a meeting in April 1999 in Malaysia. Micah Network, latest news, Vinoth Ramachandra, “What is Integral Mission?” at <<http://www.micahnetwork.org/eng/index.php/home>>, accessed 14<sup>th</sup> July 2006.

<sup>10</sup> See for example. B.L. Myers, *Walking with the Poor: Principles and Practices of Transformational Development*. (N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1999).

<sup>11</sup> The contribution of the Micah Network to missiology and the interaction between transformational missiology and integral mission would be areas of research to follow-up after this study.

## Transformational missiology – core concepts and contributions

The preceding critiques on the concept of transformation raise important issues. It is necessary to stress that the concept of transformational missiology has to do with the transformation of individuals and communities and is not just envisaged in developmental terms. This study looks at how transformational missiology goes beyond mission as transformation, noting where themes are shared and where there is development. It is a missiology that envisages mission as *mission in context in Asia* by taking account of social and religious matters and the impact of global forces. It is a missiology that draws on *biblical foundations*, in terms of the gospel of the kingdom and the wider understanding of God's purposes of mission. In terms of mission in context, there are three developments for evangelicals in Asia. There is a greater engagement with the multi-religious nature of Asian societies. The social context of mission is given greater clarity in terms of an engagement in the public square and its practical outworking. In the contemporary world, all mission takes place in relation to the global context, and there is a growing appreciation of the impact of the global on economics, diversity and justice. The global context also has implications for the balance of power and resources within evangelicalism and this forms part of the critique of transformational missiology.

### **7.1.2 Transformational missiology as mission in context**

The study shows that the selected writers are drawing on influences from contexts in Asia *and* the Christian scriptures as they try to develop and reformulate missiology in a way that fits with Asian settings and as they develop an Asian Christian identity as evangelicals. The approach of the selected writers, when viewed in terms of contextual theology, can be described as an issue-based approach to missiology where there is an attempt to focus on the key implications of the gospel in relation to Asian settings in the contemporary world. The selected writers address what the gospel has to say to those issues and how a kingdom community interacts with them. Their outlook reflects a dialogical approach, a conversation with issues, but one that keeps a firm rein on the biblical witness and its relevance for matters that emerge as important in Asia.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> See Bevans' models of contextual theology, especially his discussion of translation and synthetic models. S. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, (N.Y.: Orbis, 2001), 23-29, 30-46 & 81-96.

This methodology involves a focus on Asian situations and realities. It is an hermeneutical attempt to interpret the gospel in the light of Asian realities and a missiological desire to influence Asian society along the lines of the gospel and its vision for human life in God.<sup>13</sup> Viewed in this light, transformational missiology deals with many of the same topics that are raised by Asian theologians like Nacpil and it shares his interest in relating the core theological motif of the gospel of the kingdom to Asian settings.<sup>14</sup>

Transformational missiology leads to an engagement with social and religious themes. In terms of the public square, there is scope for Christians to be more involved in matters of poverty and justice in Asian societies, by engaging in nation-building and participating in civil society. These social issues need to be considered in relation to the impact of global forces. In terms of religion, there is an ongoing need to handle the complexities of pluralism, to enter into dialogue and to find new ways of engaging in apologetics and witness. The following section will deal with each of these issues in turn.

### Society

This study has tried to clarify the issues that relate to an engagement with societies in Asia in terms of missiology. In terms of the social settings of Asia the selected writers grapple with the way in which Christians can and should be involved in society more generally. The debate on values is important for contemporary Asia and allows space for Christians to make a contribution to different Asian countries. The necessity of Christian involvement in the public square permeates right through the work of all five writers. It is most developed in terms of a specific society in the work of Ng and Maggay. Ng's work would have relevance for Evangelicals beyond Asia in the area of civil society, particularly where participation of Christians is challenged; Maggay's contribution is useful for those who want to contemplate the different roles that the church can play in society.

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<sup>13</sup> See E. Nacpil, "The Critical Asian principle," in *What Asian Christians are Thinking. A Theological Sourcebook*, ed. Douglas Elwood, (Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1976), 5-6.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. Nacpil suggests that his critical principle "is a way of doing theological contextualization."

## Global forces

There has been reflection too in terms of globalisation and its impact on Asian societies. Both Samuel and Maggay have considered the impact of globalisation with its implications of western power and economic systems on Asian societies in terms of their identity and their capacity for self-determination. They see the gospel of the kingdom as offering a counter-narrative to globalisation where human diversity is affirmed biblically from creation onwards through the kingdom of God in the New Testament, its expressions of diversity at the time of Pentecost and prefigured in the book of Revelation. Maggay is particularly wary of global economic forces and their impact on the Philippines, clearly aware of the tension between global and local in all spheres of life. Ramachandra engages with the ethical implications of globalisation for Christians, talking of Christianity as an alternative “narrative” to economic globalisation.

For the church to practise this counter-narrative of globalisation would involve a break with the nationalist allegiances that have come to define us... It would mean ... Christians in Malaysia and Singapore questioning the fashionable practice of recruiting maids from poorer Asian countries who have to leave their children behind in taking up employment ...<sup>15</sup>

Ramachandra has also considered the impact of globalisation on religious faiths and their interaction with Christianity. He seeks to show that religious faiths are not monolithic and that Christians must seek to interact positively with those of other faiths where possible in the public square showing that Christian values protect religious freedoms for all.

## Religion

In terms of religion, the selected writers show an interest in the religious settings of Asia, influenced as they are by traditional religions and global faiths such as Islam and Hinduism. There is recognition of religious resurgence in recent times and the way in which it has politicized religion in some societies. There is an awareness that Asians perceive religious realities in ways that are not always shared by others, particularly by those in the western world where much contemporary theology has been developed. It is important for the contemporary church to recognize the alternative emphasis given to spiritual experience by those in the non-western world. The need for the global church to recognize this is brought

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<sup>15</sup> V. Ramachandra, “Global Society: Challenges for Christian Mission,” *Anvil* 21 No.1 (2004): 9-21. Ramachandra singled out Serbian aggression against Muslims. Ramachandra, Interview. See also Vinoth Ramachandra, “An Open Letter to American Students and the American Church.” E-mail, 19 September 2001, Colombo, Sri Lanka, (IFES Regional Secretary for South Asia.)

out strongly in Jenkins' critique<sup>16</sup> of the shifting character of Christianity in non-western contexts.<sup>17</sup>

David Smith has also elucidated the importance of religion in the contemporary world and of the need for evangelicalism to engage with the religions. "One of the most urgent requirements of the church at the new frontier of mission ... a biblical theology of religions which is both faithful and credible ..." This includes the need to deal "credibly and accurately with the phenomena of religions..."<sup>18</sup> This first step is exemplified in the work of selected writers like Maggay and Hwa who, as non-western writers, are less constrained by the "Constantinian frameworks" of the Christendom context and who seek fresh perspectives on religion.

### The selected writers and religion

Two of the selected writers, Ng and Maggay deal with their local scenarios in ways that offer insights for other parts of the world. Ng gives a credible critique of Islam in relation to the public square in Malaysia and the interaction between Christianity and Islam at a national level. He has explored this thoroughly in terms of the implications for Christian presence as witness. His work offers pointers for Christians in other contexts as to how to take seriously the social aspects of Islam as a system. Maggay offers a theology of religion in relation to the Philippines and picks up important contrasts between Christianity (in its various historical forms) and traditional Filipino beliefs. Her reflections on the perception of sin and guilt show differences between the religious outlook of traditional Protestant theology and the emphasis that Filipinos give to power.

Hwa Yung has made a start in terms of his analysis of spiritual realities and his responses to Asian religions from a biblical point of view. He considers spiritual realities<sup>19</sup> and the relationship between indigenous expressions of Christianity and Charismatic-Pentecostal churches. His study of Asian theology deals with what he sees as the influence of the Enlightenment on theological thinking with a sharp distinction between the physical and

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<sup>16</sup> Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: the Coming of Global Christianity*, (Oxford: OUP, 2002), 123-136. Jenkins deals with various aspects of spiritual realities in non-western societies and churches.

<sup>17</sup> Jenkins closes his discussion by drawing parallels between these new spiritual experiences and the interests of Pentecostalism. Jenkins, *The Next Christendom*, 136-139.

<sup>18</sup> Smith, *Mission after Christendom*, 63-64.

<sup>19</sup> Hwa, Yung, "A Systematic Theology that Recognises the Demonic," in *Deliver Us from Evil: An Uneasy Frontier in Christian Mission* ed. A. Scott Moreau et al., (Monrovia, CA: MARC, 2002), 3-27.

spiritual world, Yu having made a similar analysis in relation to the west. These studies raise issues but do not yet propose a way forward.<sup>20</sup> Hwa draws on Samuel's work in relation to dialogue for his critique of Asian religions in relation to biblical issues in dialogue.<sup>21</sup> He has also flagged the need for evangelicals in Asia to continue the work of apologetics, begun in the 19<sup>th</sup> century encounter with other religions, and to engage in fresh analyzes of the encounter of Christianity with the Asian religions. As yet, neither Hwa, nor Ng (who has a similar interest), have fully developed their responses in the area of apologetics - it remains a worthwhile but incomplete project.

It would seem that in terms of the kind of framework of religious pluralism adopted by Knitter, the evangelicals in Asia are more representative of his concept of "partial replacement."<sup>22</sup> This can be seen in the way in which they seek to look for evidence of revelation with the religious settings of Asia, and see the possibility and indeed inevitability of dialogue in these settings. In the Asian settings, the selected writers would point out that often for Christians with their minority status in Asia, even being heard or existing is a struggle and that Knitter's category of "competitive dialogue" implies a scope for Christianity in Asia which it scarcely possesses.<sup>23</sup>

These reflections show the selected writers engage with religion at least at the level of "phenomena." In terms of an evangelical contribution to a theology of religions in Asia there is still a lack of a comprehensive treatment. It is too early to say that evangelicals in Asia have contributed to religion in the way that evangelicals in Latin America have in the area of social action. However, there are signs of a growing willingness to engage in fresh ways, to look at issues from the standpoint of what is really happening and to dialogue again with the Christian scriptures, questioning whether global evangelicalism's reading of such issues has been over-influenced by its more religiously monolithic settings.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> C. Yu, *Being and Relation: a Theological Critique of Western Dualism and Individualism* (Scottish Academic Press: Edinburgh, 1987), 102-107. Solomon's work on possession looks at Asian cosmology and western cosmology together in relation to one specific area and offers a discussion of ways forward in relation to this more limited topic. R. Solomon, *Living in Two Worlds: Pastoral Responses to Possession in Singapore* (Peter Lang: Frankfurt, 1992), 252-277.

<sup>21</sup> Hwa, Yung. "Towards an Evangelical Approach to Religions and Culture." *Transformation* 17 No.3 (July 2000): 86-91. This fits with David Smith's concept that in terms of religion there is a need to move between the biblical testimony and the realities of faiths in different global settings. Smith, *Mission after Christendom*, 66.

<sup>22</sup> P. Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions*, (NY:Orbis, 2002), 34-40.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 40

<sup>24</sup> Allowing that traditional religions have often been present in Christendom contexts.

Moonjang Lee has pointed out that the shift of the centre of gravity of Christianity to the non-western world “is not complete...” and that Christianity “... has to be rediscovered or reborn in its encounter with the Asian thought world.”<sup>25</sup> The discussion of Christianity as a non-western religion or Christianity as an Asian religion has received less attention from the selected writers than from other parts of the non-western world.<sup>26</sup> The perspective of viewing Christianity as a non-western religion and trying to consider what this implies could be a way of helping develop a more Asian form of evangelical interaction with religions in Asia.

### **7.1.3 The biblical-theological foundations of transformational missiology**

This thesis tries to indicate ways in which the selected writers view the gospel of the kingdom as the essence of the biblical testimony and world-view and to relate this to settings of Asia. The reading of the gospel of the kingdom in the New Testament is set against its Old Testament context. This would seem to be a framework that gives coherence to the work of the selected writers. Such a perspective relates to what Vanhoozer calls the “evangelical imagination” which is shaped “by the biblical narratives that display the world as it really is: created, fallen, redeemed.”<sup>27</sup> The perspective of the selected writers is moulded by their interest in the way in which the Christian scriptures and the gospel of the kingdom relate to Asian settings in terms of society and religion, and this indicates that the evangelical world-view is “general” and concerned with the connection between faith and all of life and not just with “spiritual” matters.<sup>28</sup>

#### **Biblical foundations**

In terms of the biblical-theological framework for transformational missiology, the underlying concepts of engagement are based around an essential confidence in the biblical story as exemplified by the gospel of the kingdom as a story that engages with and makes

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<sup>25</sup> M. Lee, “Asianization of Theology and Theological Education,” in “Mission as Transformation in 21<sup>st</sup> Century Asia,” Asian Missions Congress, 6-10<sup>th</sup> December 2003, unpublished proceedings, held at Trinity Theological College, Singapore, 1-3.

<sup>26</sup> See the writings of Bediako relating to an African context.

<sup>27</sup> K. Vanhoozer, “Evangelicalism and the Church. The Company of the Gospel,” In *The Futures of Evangelicalism. Issues and Prospects*, ed. C. Bartholomew, R. Parry and A. West (Leicester: IVP, 2003), 51-52.

<sup>28</sup> The structure of the thesis which looked at the way in which the selected writers dealt with Settings (in ch4) before the discussion of their use of the Christian Scriptures (in ch5) emphasized their interest in Asian settings.

sense of the human condition. Mission is conceived quite widely in terms of themes from the whole bible and not just a few selected parts. To do justice to the testimony of the whole bible, the selected writers emphasize certain themes within the Old Testament – these include creation, history, and God’s purposes for the world: such a vision has ethical implications for individuals and communities as part of the people of God. These themes are given sharper focus from the New Testament in terms of the person of Jesus Christ and the gospel of the kingdom. In relation to the kingdom of God, the theme of community is important.

### Theological overview

In their survey of models of mission that predominate in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Bevans and Schroeder note three emphases in particular – “participation in the mission of the triune God”; “liberating service of the reign of God”; and “the proclamation of Jesus Christ as universal savior.”<sup>29</sup> The tendency of the selected writers to deal with elements of each of these three major emphases is an indication of the way in which their approach to mission is a multi-faceted approach deriving from their setting and an engagement with the gospel of the kingdom. It is less obviously derived from a conciliar agenda<sup>30</sup> or a single motif, even one as significant as, for example, Christology.<sup>31</sup> Several themes merit further discussion: these are the kingdom, Christology, the concept of salvation and community.

### Kingdom

The kingdom of God is a critical concept for the selected writers. The kingdom is seen as the shaping force for the Christian community. The kingdom is a concept that allows for Christians to lead lives that have both an inward (spiritual focus) and an outward (social focus) in the world. By making connections between the kingdom of God and “kingdom values,” the selected writers use the kingdom as a concept through which they can interact with Asian societies. The community of the kingdom models these values and the selected writers see these values as capable of speaking into Asian settings in relation to issues such as justice and economic disparity. They offer a framework for individual action and for a

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<sup>29</sup> Bevans and Schroeder, *Constants in Context: a Theology of Mission for Today*, (N.Y.: Orbis, 2004), 283-285.

<sup>30</sup> The impact of this agenda can be seen, for example, in Bosch’s ecumenical missionary paradigm with its explicit mention of “ecumenical” and categories like mission as common witness, and themes such as ministry by the whole people of God. Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, xi.

<sup>31</sup> There is less direct emphasis on the theme of the Holy Spirit in the selected writers, although Vinay Samuel makes the point that many who deal with “mission as transformation” emphasize this.

critique of Asian societies. In this way, through the theology of the kingdom of God, the selected writers exemplify what Escobar says about a critical missiology from the periphery that it shows the “social significance of the basic Christian truths in the midst of poverty and ... the pain of social transitions.”<sup>32</sup>

Given the importance the selected writers attach to kingdom values, especially in relation to Asian values, they have not given adequate attention to grounding the discussion of kingdom values in relation to its biblical underpinnings. Such a foundation would be a helpful contribution to evangelical understandings of the kingdom and would help Christian communities in Asia to be clearer about the biblical understandings of kingdom values as they engage in the debate on Asian values.<sup>33</sup>

### Christology

The gospel of the kingdom is seen as a uniquely transforming concept with implications for Christology. Ramachandra in particular points out that the historical figure of Jesus Christ and his resurrections are of paramount importance in theological terms. Jesus Christ links God’s purposes in the Old and New Testaments and is seen to be a key interpretative person in terms of biblical theology.<sup>34</sup> There is a general confidence on the part of the selected writers that the biblical story as epitomized by the gospel of the kingdom can speak into the Asian contexts and address these with perspectives that are both Asian and biblical. Their work identifies with the comment that mission “cannot be reduced to the promotion of the values of the kingdom of God, with little emphasis on the proclamation of Jesus Christ and the call to enter the community of the church.”<sup>35</sup> This is the theological starting-point of the selected writers.

### Salvation

There is scope for greater reflection on the theme of salvation by the selected writers. Although they argue for traditional evangelical understandings of salvation, given the salvific character of the Asian religions, the contrasting Christian view of salvation deserves more attention in the context of competing soteriologies and a focus on this could open the

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<sup>32</sup> Escobar, *Evangelical Missiology*, 113.

<sup>33</sup> Hwa Yung comes closest to developing this but even his analyzes are more limited at present.

<sup>34</sup> Ng also uses Christology as a starting-point for social action. He has done this on the basis of a Christological critique of several German theologians. Ng, K.W, *From Christ to Social Practice*, (Hong Kong: Alliance Bible Seminary, 1996).

<sup>35</sup> S. Bevans, and R. P. Schroeder. *Constants in Context. A Theology of Mission for Today*. (N.Y.:Orbis, 2004), 334.

way for apologetic discussions with other religions. This is of particular relevance as writers like Ramachandra and Samuel offer a creative perspective in their emphasis of both creation and redemption in their theology, seeing these themes as complementary aspects of God's dealing with the world rather than as dichotomous categories.

## Community

The selected writers see communities of the kingdom in Asia as playing a vital role in the nurture of Christian faith. These communities are places where a spiritual and social vision is nurtured for the people of God; these communities need nurturing as they are often beleaguered in the Asian context. Given this interest in community, the selected writers could give greater focus in their writing to the area of ecclesiology. A clarification of the concepts of community and church (in relation to the New Testament as a whole) would help to show the biblical context of their work and what its practical implications are. The selected writers could try to show how their thinking on the kingdom, the kingdom community and nurturing the kingdom community relates to churches and individuals in the Asian setting. This would also help to bridge the gap between the theoretical character of their work and its accessibility in the Asian church. This is particularly important since some Asian evangelicals have a very pragmatic concept of church and in contexts like Singapore, Malaysia and Korea stress church-planting because of the influence of managerial modes of theology. Kevin Vanhoozer's recent treatment of the church as "a theological community" that needs to be described in "theological categories" is helpful in this regard.<sup>36</sup>

It is true that the selected writers offer essentially theoretical reflections on mission. However, in Asian contexts where churches stress the kind of themes found in managerial missiology, a lack of practical focus will affect how missiology is appropriated by the local church. Bevans has noted one important issue in relation to contextual theology.

There is no doubt that when a theologian takes culture and cultural change seriously, he or she can fall into the danger of taking these realities more seriously than the Jewish and Christian traditions as expressed in scripture

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<sup>36</sup> Vanhoozer's categories of the church as the embodiment of the gospel as well as the church as the agent of the gospel reflects the need to balance, as discussed in this study, the importance of nurturing the church as well as planting the church. This is similar to the kind of emphasis found in Ramachandra. Vanhoozer quotes Van Gelder about the importance of the nature of the church and what it is. "The church is. The church does what it is. The church organizes what it does" Vanhoozer, "Evangelicalism and the church," 71.

and church tradition. But even more dangerous is a theology that speaks to no one, that has no power because it has no real audience.<sup>37</sup>

Such a comment reminds the selected writers of the need to clarify their audience and to relate their work to evangelical communities in Asia, who often have a pragmatic interest in missiology, so that the latter's understanding of mission can be more theologically grounded.

## 7.2 A critique of the selected writers

### 7.2.1 Individual writers

The selected writers share commitments to the Christian scriptures as a key resource for theology and to engage with pressing issues in their contexts. The selected writers want to show that Christianity demonstrates integrity and credibility in Asian contexts. The missiology of the selected writers appears to be missiology for the church in general. They write from the standpoint of Christians who are part of communities in Asia whose mission is to reach out to Asia through diverse communities and through its witness to Christ. In terms of mission in context, Ng and Maggay are closely tied to their national contexts. Hwa and Samuel look at their national contexts in terms of a wider Asian context. Ramachandra is intrigued by the impact of global forces on local settings. He considers how missiology affects specific issues on a wider global canvas and then relates these back to local contexts.

#### Ng Kam Weng

The focus of Ng's work is his Malaysian setting and how the church in Malaysia should present its message, order its life and address wider issues of Malaysian society. In this context, Christianity needs to be seen to have a relevance to nation-building. Ng stresses the importance of building the Christian community as the character of this community influences all aspects of mission and this takes priority for him even over the contribution to nation-building. Ng uses the language of transformation primarily in relation to society. This emerges for example, in his book on social practice. He talks at several points of social transformation<sup>38</sup> and transforming social practice.<sup>39</sup> He looks at political and social involvement in the context of contributing to "cultural transformation."<sup>40</sup> At the AMC Conference on Mission as Transformation, Ng considered the nature of transformation in

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<sup>37</sup> Bevens, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 19.

<sup>38</sup> Ng, K.W., *From Christ to Social Practice* (Hong Kong: Alliance Bible Seminary, 1996), 55, 205.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid*, 210.

<sup>40</sup> Ng, K.W., "From Political Action to Cultural Transformation," *Kairos* (Feb 2002): 9-11.

relation to political theology and society.<sup>41</sup> Part of Ng's aim in using the language of social transformation is to help the Christian community in Malaysia<sup>42</sup> avoid the dangers of losing touch with its society.<sup>43</sup> In addition to social transformation, he refers to "transforming spirituality."<sup>44</sup> This language of "transforming spirituality" encourages the church to adopt a spirituality of engagement and not to "retreat into the ghetto."<sup>45</sup>

Ng draws on theological resources as in his responsive theology, his book on Christ and social practice and his emphasis on covenantal politics. Ng recognizes the historical process that shapes theology in its contexts, but feels theologians should benefit from that process rather than be restricted by it. Ng's approach to contextual theology is flexible in looking for models that help with social engagement in the religious context of Islam in Malaysia. The agenda set by such an encounter of Islam and Christianity acts as the framework within which Ng engages in theological reflection.

Ng's approach is driven by his interest in social issues, as seen in his engagement of Christology and social practice. There is less focus on the biblical basis of his missiological reflection and this area could be developed more clearly. He is more convincing on the themes of civil society and the public square, and he draws on reformed models such as "covenant politics" and "sphere sovereignty" as well as insights from writers from other church traditions such as Yoder.<sup>46</sup> His critique of these issues would be relevant to Christians in other parts of the world either in contexts of a dominant religious faith or in the context of secularism as a dominant ideology.

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<sup>41</sup> Ng, K. W., "A Christian Social Vision for Asia- Asian/ Western or Christian Values, Social Transformation, Political Change, Nation-Building, Economic Growth, Impact of Technology," in "Mission as Transformation in 21<sup>st</sup> Century Asia," Asian Missions Congress. 6-10<sup>th</sup> December 2003. Unpublished proceedings, Held at Trinity Theological College, Singapore, 25. This paper on politics ends with a description of transformation.

<sup>42</sup> Ng, *From Christ to social practice*, 172-180; 205-211.

<sup>43</sup> Ng, Interview.

<sup>44</sup> Ng, K.W., *Bridge-Building in a Pluralistic Society: a Christian Contribution* (PJ: Pustaka SUFES, 1994), 38-40. In the same volume discussing transforming spirituality Ng looks at the more general concept of "transformation" in relation to political theology.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid*, 31.

<sup>46</sup> Ng, K.W. "A Christian Social Vision for Asia"

## Melba Maggay

Maggay is strongly focussed on the Philippines. Her theology has clear biblical underpinnings from themes in the Old Testament and from Christ and his gospel of the kingdom. Maggay seeks to prepare the church (both at an individual and corporate level) to live in the Filipino context. The church needs to take account of this context in its cultural, religious and social dimensions. The church is to give a clear biblical witness to the gospel and the implications of the kingdom of God and this has to be lived out amongst people. To do this the church needs to witness in a contextual and wholistic way; to impact the Filipino cultural context and to facilitate the Philippine's social transformation.<sup>47</sup>

The theme of transformation, usually in a social context, receives increasing emphasis from Maggay as she deals with Christian models of engagement with society, linked closely, though not exclusively, to the Philippines. This theme appears repeatedly both explicitly and implicitly.<sup>48</sup> It can be seen in Maggay's choice of title *Transforming society* for her study of politics and Christianity.<sup>49</sup> She talks about "social transformation under the cross" and considers transformation in the context of suffering and an obedience that can lead to death itself.<sup>50</sup> Maggay connects the language of transformation to the development of a "sense of the possible" for the Christian community who wants to be involved in social engagement.<sup>51</sup> She links this idea of social transformation to the idea of "developing a strategic minority and a nurturing community to sustain the vision,"<sup>52</sup> concluding that the Christian community needs to have a deep sense of purpose and a strong inner life, for "social transformation demands a long obedience" and can be a lonely experience. Christians need to be wise about how they struggle, and recognize God's role, not just theirs, in social change: "Ultimately, transforming society is really the work of God."<sup>53</sup>

The ideas of "radical hope" and "radical pessimism" are stark categories in Maggay's writings which indicate the need to have an outlook and stance which is prepared for a serious engagement in this world. This stems from a community which can nurture and sustain such a belief and which is committed to doing so. The theme of the kingdom

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<sup>47</sup> The gospel and the kingdom are theological categories through which Maggay explores the implications of her ideas.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, 58, 61, 64, 71-75.

<sup>49</sup> M. Maggay, *Transforming Society*, (Oxford: Regnum books, 1994).

<sup>50</sup> Ibid, 81-84; 94-95.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, 85, 94. She also uses the language of the kingdom.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, 90-94.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid, 94; 106-108; compare 74-75 and 78-100. There is quite a strong political backdrop to the text and themes of these sections. The kingdom theme returns frequently in this book.

community pervades her work. She uses the Bible mainly as it relates to justice, to the kingdom of God. Biblical metaphors offer resources to affirm ethnicity.<sup>54</sup> The biblical basis of Maggay's work is well-developed and integrated with her Filipino context. Maggay sees Christianity as offering the potential of locally based responses to social issues. She is also interested in the way in which Filipino religious belief shapes people's thinking and the way they respond to Christianity. There is less emphasis on the dimension of evangelization in her writing and she sees some issues of power still unresolved in global evangelicalism.

Maggay's interest in Filipino themes comes partly through from her connection with ISACC. Her writings include work on Filipino religion, cross-cultural issues for Christianity in the Philippines, a short apologetic work on the gospel in the Philippines and a critique of American foreign policy. In that sense, the Filipino localities which inform Maggay's study of the kingdom and religion do give a convincing impression of how she seeks to contextualize her theology to her setting. At a more theoretical level, Maggay explores the idea of contextualization as a turning away from western ideas. To some extent, Maggay represents the strand in Asian evangelicalism which wants to disassociate Asian Christianity with its western roots and instead ground it more strongly in Asia and Asian themes.

Maggay's discussion of this tends to focus on theological ground-clearing and re-orienting the theological agenda so that it deals with Asian issues and questions, rather than western historical issues and ideas in relation to Asia.<sup>55</sup> There are some difficulties however, with developing models of Asian missiology in relation to responses to the western character of the church and of western-influenced missiology.<sup>56</sup> In an article looking at Asian theology, Kwan is wary of the binarism implicit in the anti-colonialism and anti-missionary stance of the Asian theological movement. Kwan asserts that the place of the west is far too strong in such critiques<sup>57</sup> for what starts as a useful foil for Asianization can become a snare, with Asian theology defined by default in relation to western characteristics rather than on its own terms.

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<sup>54</sup> M. Maggay, *Jew to the Jew and Greek to the Greek. Reflections on Culture and Globalization* (Manila: ISACC, 2001)

<sup>55</sup> M. Maggay, *Filipino Religious Consciousness* (Manila: ISACC, 1999), 8-11. Dhanaballan, a Christian politician in Singapore, looks at the need to de-westernize, he focusses on the church and its western associations. S. Dhanaballan, "The Church in Singapore – Time to Distance from the West?" *GCF Bulletin* (Nov 2003):1-4.

<sup>56</sup> Even when this process is being done "away from" western theology.

<sup>57</sup> S. Kwan, "A Discursive History of the Asian Theological Movement - a Critique of it Binarism." *Journal of Theology and Cultures of Asia* 1 (2002): 99-104, 116-122.

## Hwa Yung

Hwa's role has shifted in recent years from that of research into societies in Asia, based at the CSCA, Singapore, to a more pastoral role as Methodist bishop in West Malaysia. The influence of these two countries and Hwa's interest in Asian theology push him beyond a narrow national focus. Hwa's main interest is the whole question of how mission is conceived and how mission can be defined in a wholistic manner.<sup>58</sup> He would like to develop strategies about how mission can be carried out in an increasingly globalised world where cultures are going back to indigenization. Hwa's concern that Asian theologies are theologies of mission reflects the idea that the agenda of theology in Asia needs to have a missional character.

Hwa has noted that the concept of transformation is widely supported in Asia and he himself positively endorses this emphasis in mission.<sup>59</sup> Hwa uses transformational language in an article on the Malaysian situation, where he talks about the place of "social transformation" for Christians who are slow to engage with society:

... many of us lack a theology which helps us relate the gospel to the world and which informs and guides us in positive Christian ethical and sociopolitical action in a sinful world. Put in another way we tend to be pietistic and personal, focussing on personal holiness in private lives and an inward spirituality without a corresponding emphasis on social holiness in public life and righteousness in society.<sup>60</sup>

This emphasis on transformation is linked by Hwa<sup>61</sup> to discussion of the values of the kingdom and to the way in which a proper understanding by Christians of the theology of the kingdom of God promotes involvement in Asian society.<sup>62</sup> Another facet enabling the gospel truly to embrace the social dimensions of life is the combining of evangelism and social action in wholistic mission.<sup>63</sup> Hwa makes this explicit, writing that an important point is that Christians are not to be "dualistic but fundamentally holistic," relating this to the

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<sup>58</sup> Hwa uses wholism in the sense of a practical way of avoiding a split between the social and the spiritual spheres: "wholistic mission" is used as a synonym for "mission as social action" or "mission as transformation." For a fuller discussion of wholism's relation to the latter concept see C. Sugden, *Seeking the Asian Face of Jesus* (Oxford: Regnum, 1997), 338-341.

<sup>59</sup> Hwa Yung, "Strategic Issues in Missions – an Asian Perspective," *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 40 No.1 (Jan 2004): 31-32.

<sup>60</sup> Hwa, Yung, "The Role of the Church in Vision 2020," in *Modernity in Malaysia: Christian Perspectives*, ed. Ng Kam Weng, (Kuala Lumpur: Kairos Research Centre, 1998), 62.

<sup>61</sup> Hwa Yung, "Challenges Facing the Asian Church."

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.* Note in this connection, Hwa's strong and broad defence of the kingdom of God as a key motif in evangelical thinking for mission.

<sup>63</sup> Hwa, "The Role of the Church in Vision 2020," 64.

Malaysian church, the world of economics, to politics and to social change.<sup>64</sup> Hwa's idea of a missiology that is not dualistic, but rather wholistic, finds expression in his recent article on the need for an Asian missiology in Asia.<sup>65</sup> Hwa links the theology of the kingdom of God to identity and speaks of "kingdom identity." The dual identity of Christians is formed by their Christian and socio-cultural backgrounds.

Hwa writes for an audience within the Chinese diaspora, in Singapore and Malaysia, but he is aware that his work is read in English speaking theological circles in Asia and in the west. Hwa's theoretical writing on missiology does not interact particularly with Malaysia in terms of contextual application, despite the fact that his aim is *expressedly* local. However, when he deals with ethics and Christian vocation he relates more closely to Malaysian issues,<sup>66</sup> being keen to stem the trend of the Europeanising of Christianity that has once again taken place in some circles in the church.<sup>67</sup> In the Malaysian context, in which he has a hierarchical and institutional role, Hwa is anxious that the Malaysian evangelical churches, with mainly ethnically Chinese members, connect carefully to Malaysian social realities. This is an especial problem for some Pentecostal-Charismatic churches whose cultural style derives from non-Asian sources exacerbated by the fact that many Chinese Malaysians are educated at university level in Australia, Singapore, the UK and the USA. This can raise questions about the identity of these church members and their commitment to Malaysia. Hwa's discussion of evangelical faithfulness and "kingdom identity" deals clearly with Chinese diaspora issues. Hwa uses the concept of the kingdom of God to discuss the need for Christian communities in Asia to build their identity around the values of the Kingdom of God as well as the values that are derived from their own nation and culture.

Hwa is interested in the way that a contextualization of the Christian faith needs to be negotiated. In his advocacy of contextualization, Hwa points to the need for a Christian community in places like China and Malaysia to move beyond the western theological framework which it has inherited as part of the process of transmission. Hwa is adamant that the church in Asia needs to move beyond its western heritage and to be careful how it interacts with the west. He is interested in the dimensions of contextualization that relate to

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid, 63.

<sup>65</sup> Hwa, "Strategic Issues in Missions," 31-32. See also Hwa on Samuel. Hwa, *Yung Mangoes or Bananas. The Quest for an Authentic Asian Christian Theology* (Oxford: Regnum Books, 1997), 196-205.

<sup>66</sup> Hwa, Yung, *Beyond AD 2000. A Call to Evangelical Faithfulness*, (Kuala Lumpur: Kairos Research Centre, 1999).

<sup>67</sup> Rajendran and Hwa both emphasized this. Rajendran, Interview. Hwa, Interview.

Asian churches as well as Asian societies and is working towards developing contextual approaches to pastoral issues that relate to Asian people's interest in spiritual realities like charms and Chinese astrology, and to events such as funerals, ancestral practices and Asian festivals. The interest in Asian Christians as Asian resources and Asian Christian biography represent part of Hwa's search for resources that can help with mission in Asian settings.

As yet, Hwa has not fully developed his own theology as a theology of mission. Tantalizing glimpses of what is important come in the final section of his book *Mangoes or Bananas*: themes include biblical exegesis, Christian apologetics, ethics, systematic theology in relation to Asian religions, spiritual realities and cultures. It remains for these to be developed in the Chinese Malaysian and wider Asian context.

### Vinay Samuel

Like Hwa, Samuel looks at mission in its more general Asian context with a special interest in the major cultures of Asia such as India and China.<sup>68</sup> He has had a long association with church and social projects in India, including incarnational ministry in the slums in Bangalore. He sees the gospel as a means of allowing the poor to improve their situation:

It is usually the poor communities who have used the gospel to empower themselves ... that is why I spent at least of good deal of time still in India and I'm still very much part of the programme that continues to do that.<sup>69</sup>

Samuel's move to Oxford, in the UK and later Washington, D.C., U.S.A. has limited his contact with India, but he visits regularly.<sup>70</sup> He has focussed on the needs of the poor by considering the implications of economic issues and by keeping close links with development agencies and their strategies. This has led to a continuing interest in issues like micro-enterprise development.<sup>71</sup>

There is certainly an interest in mission in context as it affects India, but that is not the sole focus of his work and activity. This interest in the wider world means that there is greater interest in the impact of global forces on missiology. Samuel's main interest is trying to understand Asian contexts and cultures and to bring the gospel to those cultures. Samuel sees mission as making clear the necessity of the gospel, the good news, of the kingdom, as it is expressed in the life and ministry of Jesus and the early church. This gospel is a resource to interpret issues in the world and a resource to energize human communities for

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<sup>68</sup> Samuel, Interview.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Samuel still has involvement in social projects there.

<sup>71</sup> D. Bussau and V. Samuel, *How Then Should We Lend?* (Oxford: Opportunity International, 1998).

transformation. Samuel sees the gospel of the kingdom as a narrative which explains all of life, creation, history and the future.<sup>72</sup>

Of all the selected writers, Samuel is evidently closest to the movement of mission as transformation in its general form and he has made a significant contribution to this stretching well beyond Asia. In a recent lecture, Samuel re-affirmed his preference for kingdom and wholistic, transformational language, confirming that he prefers these emphases to that of mission as conversion.<sup>73</sup> Samuel's methodology is to consider the gospel in relation to Asian cultures in their many dimensions; the gospel of the kingdom is a resource which can energize communities towards transformation. Samuel is particularly interested in addressing the question and challenge of how Asian cultures respond to the gospel in terms of religion and in terms of how they are shaped by global forces. These responses can be viewed in terms of the opportunities and barriers that they create for the gospel. Through his international contacts, he is especially mindful that the Asian context has been shaped by more global forces. From his perspective as a Christian, his interest is in how these cultures and religions create opportunities and barriers for the gospel in Asian contexts.<sup>74</sup> He wants contemporary approaches to mission take adequate account of local contexts, especially where mission is influenced by more international factors. He is equally determined that mission should be worked out in all local contexts and does not just represent global packages being applied with adjustments to Asia.

Samuel has written for an Asian audience and more recently a western one, but his Western residency raises issues of authenticity in terms of a missiology for contexts in Asia. His work has focussed on clusters of themes which he has developed over the years rather than a fully coherent theological analysis of mission. These have included the nature of discipleship; mission as transformation; economics and its implications for Christianity; the impact of globalisation. The treatments to date have been of a somewhat fragmentary character and a full appreciation of his work would be enhanced by a more developed treatment of key themes, set in the theological context of Asia.<sup>75</sup> A collection of case studies linking Samuel's work to the Indian context and showing the integration between theory and

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<sup>72</sup> Samuel, Interview.

<sup>73</sup> V. Samuel, "Biblical Reflections for Mission in the New Millenium," Unpublished paper from Oxford Centre for Mission Studies, 2002, 4.

<sup>74</sup> Samuel, Interview.

<sup>75</sup> To some extent Sugden's critique of Samuel's work affords this from an "outsider's" perspective. Samuel himself recognizes that Asian Christians focus on the activity of leading first and scholarship takes second place. Samuel, Interview.

practice - mission as transformation and mission in context<sup>76</sup> - would help clarify the full extent of Samuel's contribution to missiology in Asia.

### Vinoth Ramachandra

Ramachandra's work is the least specific in terms of a national context. He still connects with issues that relate to neighbouring India and to social and economic themes that are relevant in Sri Lanka as well as beyond, yet the emphases found in his work indicate that he deals more with India and the global world (including Asia) than with Sri Lanka in his published writings.<sup>77</sup> Ramachandra might best be considered in terms of the description - "mission in context as shaped by global realities". He looks at specific issues on a wider global canvas: mission is not just to be viewed in geographical terms; rather all of life needs to be viewed missiologically.<sup>78</sup> He considers that missiology at the frontiers of knowledge is as important as missiology dealing with geographical frontiers. He sees the need to grapple with issues that impact world-view and lifestyle such as globalisation, new technologies like the internet and medical ethics, and to equip Christians to deal with these matters.

In Ramachandra's work, there is an awareness of the importance of social change and he is concerned with the kind of classifications of society that are found in managerial missiology.<sup>79</sup> Ramachandra's methodology is to see how a biblical world-view addresses themes that surface in everyday life in today's global context. He has a specific interest in world-view and the way in which the global context and its issues shape all of life.<sup>80</sup> He talks elsewhere of mission being essentially a matter of the "adequacy and faithfulness of the church's witness to Christ" rather than about projects whether of a social or an evangelistic kind.<sup>81</sup> Ramachandra is writing for a global audience, partly in the west and partly in Asia. His focus on the broad picture and his inter-disciplinary approach means that his ideas can be harder to put into practice. His approach of writing about theology in relation to science, global events and ideologies makes his work difficult for some audiences to appreciate.

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<sup>76</sup> See T. McAlpine, *By Word, Work and Wonder*, (Monrovia: Marc, 1995). McAlpine's book and the journal *Transformation* do give general case studies but do not focus uniquely on Samuel's work.

<sup>77</sup> Ramachandra does stress in his writing the universal dimensions of Christianity and he does engage with neighbouring Indian writers like Samartha and Panikkar, and with Pieris who is Sri Lanakan.

<sup>78</sup> Ramachandra, Interview. Ramachandra does often treat issues which impact Asia in his writings.

<sup>79</sup> He does recognize the validity of classifications based on language and ethnicity. Ramachandra, "Integral Mission."

<sup>80</sup> Ramachandra, Interview

<sup>81</sup> V. Ramachandra, "Integral mission."

There are recurring references to the concept of transformation in his writings. In the Indian context, in relation to Protestant Christians, he talks of the “transformation of the social order,”<sup>82</sup> quoting M.M. Thomas on the same theme of Christianity “acting as a transforming ferment in the larger society...”<sup>83</sup> This is in the context of considering whether the “transforming” vision of Christianity offers a spiritual vision beyond caste in the Indian situation. Discussing the theme of Christian discipleship in society, Ramachandra states “we do not fundamentally transform the world with our ideas or our principles ... but it is the risen Christ who transforms men and women...”<sup>84</sup> He connects this to the theme of incarnation saying that:

Human beings can become truly human because God became truly human. This is why we cannot accomplish our own transformation, but it is rather God who takes our human form so that we may become, not God, but in the eyes of God, human.<sup>85</sup>

Ramachandra talks of Christianity as “a movement that had at its centre a crucified man as the hope of human and cosmic transformation ...”<sup>86</sup> This theme of incarnation and sacrificial lifestyle following on from the example of Jesus Christ is a continuing emphasis.

Ramachandra adopts a somewhat eclectic approach to contextualization,<sup>87</sup> his discussion of conversion, for example, indicating that he does not see the integration of Christian believers into Asian cultures as following a set of rules or theory, nor is it simply about applying the Bible in Asia.<sup>88</sup> Rather it is a dynamic open-ended process where individuals and communities wrestle with the implications of their faith and their social setting and seek to find credible ways of integrating these two things. Another very significant missional element is found with his description of Jesus’ model of mission as the example of “loving and dying.”<sup>89</sup> Ramachandra sees Christianity as essentially a personally and socially transforming experience, describing the “formation of a multi-cultural community” as part of

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<sup>82</sup> V. Ramachandra, *Faiths in Conflict: Christian Integrity in a Multi-Cultural World* (Leicester: IVP, 1999), 79. He gives examples of the ‘transformation’ that took place: on Hindu concepts of representations of deities; changes in religious practices such as ‘sati, temple prostitution and the exclusion of Dalits from temple premises.’

<sup>83</sup> Ibid, 85.

<sup>84</sup> V. Ramachandra, *Gods That Fail. Modern Idolatry and Christian Mission* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster Press, 1996), 210. Ramachandra is using Bonhoeffer’s model of spirituality here.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid, 210.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid, 214.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid, 12. Hwa is certainly sympathetic to Schreier’s framework of translation, adaptation and contextual approaches.

<sup>88</sup> Ramachandra, *Faiths in Conflict*, 119-140.

<sup>89</sup> V. Ramachandra, *The Recovery of Mission: Beyond the Pluralist Paradigm* (ISPCK: Delhi, 1996), 275-279.

God's plan for humanity and sees the community's role as being true to its calling of representing the gospel and Jesus Christ in the world.<sup>90</sup>

### **7.2.2 The selected writers and Evangelical Missiology in Asia**

In a survey of evangelical missiology in Asia, Philip Wickeri and colleagues noted three areas that needed more attention in terms of evangelical missiology in Asia: a greater understanding of globalisation; more emphasis on "issues associated with dialogue and religious pluralism...;"<sup>91</sup> the need for development in terms of constructing local theologies and ministry in multi-cultural contexts.<sup>92</sup> This study would affirm that transformational missiology does indeed address these matters and similar ones raised by writers like Honig.

In terms of contextualization, the selected writers show more interest in exploring themes and issues which relate to specific countries or Asia more generally than in the development of theoretical models. There is an interest in balancing the distinctive Christian elements of faith with the demands of the social and cultural milieu. In this regard, the views of the selected writers and other Asian Christians mentioned above can be contrasted with those of the African writer Lamin Sanneh. Sanneh points out that there is an inevitable tension between the implications of the sovereignty of the God revealed in the Christian scriptures and the ideas of the multi-cultural and religious environments of non-western cultures.<sup>93</sup> He stresses the importance for Christians of trying to hold these in balance and not to give in to the tension by simply conforming to non-western cultures. Some Asian Christians, in responding to the extreme pressure of bringing the Christian message to bear in Asian societies which reject both the message and its bearers, are struggling not to capitulate on core issues of identity.

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<sup>90</sup> V.M. Kärkkäinen, *An Introduction to the Theology of Religions: Biblical, Historical, and Contemporary Perspectives* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 333-341. Karkainen describes Ramachandra's theology as ecclesio-centric.

<sup>91</sup> P. L. Wickeri, Al Tizon and Hee Mo Yim, "A Survey of Evangelical Missiological Concerns with Particular Reference to Asia," in *The People of God among all God's Peoples: Frontiers in Christian Mission*, ed. Philip L. Wickeri, (Hong Kong: CCA, 1999), 318-320.

<sup>92</sup> In a survey of Asian theology, Honig commented on what he saw as a lack of contextual theology in evangelical circles: "... Asian theology done by evangelicals ... strongly rejects the movement towards links with the national religious and cultural inheritance." A.G. Honig, "Asia: the Search for Identity as a Source of Renewal," in *Missiology: an Ecumenical Introduction: Texts and Contexts of Global Christianity*, eds. F.J. Verstraelen, A. Camps, L.A. Hoedemaker and M.R. Spindler (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 332.

<sup>93</sup> L. Sanneh, "Gospel and Culture. Ramifying Effects of Scriptural Translation," in *Bible Translation and The Spread of The Church: The last 200 Years*, ed. P.C. Stine (Leiden: Brill, 1992), 13-16.

## Towards Asian and Christian identity

In order to deal with this problem of identity, both Hwa and Ramachandra have found concepts developed by Walls useful in pointing to the problems Asians face in trying to relate their faith to Asian cultures. In his discussion of the interactions of Christianity and culture, Walls talks of the tensions between what he terms the indigenizing and pilgrim dimensions of Christian faith.<sup>94</sup> The indigenizing principle refers to the need to relate Christianity to a society so that it is part of the culture. Although Walls uses the older term “indigenize,” its connotation is that of “inculturate,” as outlined above, and has to do with embedding Christianity positively in a given social and cultural context. The pilgrim dimension refers to the fact that embracing Christianity whole-heartedly brings a challenge in any society or culture that leaves Christian feelings like strangers. Such a concept indicates both the need for contextualization and the boundaries of contextualization. The notion that Christian faith is shaped universally by the gospel message and the Christian tradition underlies such an understanding. It leaves a degree of freedom as Christians in Asia seek to bring the Christian faith into a profound interaction with Asian cultures, recognizing that there are *elements* which will never be fully at home in these cultures.<sup>95</sup> This is true in Asian cultures, as elsewhere, and Asian evangelicals must learn to live with the consequences of this fact without succumbing to the pressures of the Asian context. The selected writers are striving to keep a balance between the different elements of their Asian and Christian identity.

### 7.3 Asian Christian identity

#### 7.3.1 Identity in Asia

The issue of Asian Christian identity is central for discussion of the Asian character of theology and missiology. This topic emerged with the selected writers in interview, particularly in relation to Samuel<sup>96</sup>, Hwa<sup>97</sup> and Ng. The emphasis on identity from these

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<sup>94</sup> A. Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Modern History* (New York: Orbis, 1996), 7-9.

<sup>95</sup> This would have points of contact with de Mesa's thinking on the poles of context and the Judaeo-Christian tradition. J. de Mesa, “Doing Theology as Inculturation in the Asian Context,” in *New Directions in Mission and Evangelisation. Vol 3. Faith and Culture*, eds. J.A. Scherer, and S. B. Bevans, (NY: Orbis, 1999), 128-133.

<sup>96</sup> Samuel, Interview.

<sup>97</sup> Hwa relates the colour of the fruits to the character of Asian theology - the banana is yellow on the outside but white inside; the mango is yellow through and through, as should be the life and identity of the Asian Christian. Hwa, *Mangoes or Bananas*, 240.

particular theologians reflects the pressures on Christianity in India and Malaysia with the impact of resurgent Hinduism and Islam. There is a pressing need to move the church's character away from the European influences of missionary movements. Many of the core elements of this debate about identity range around areas denoted by Walls in his historical survey of Christianity as core dimensions of Christian faith: the centrality of the Christian scriptures, the significance of Jesus of Nazareth and the connection of Christians as the people of God with the history of Israel.<sup>98</sup>

### History and identity

The selected writers recognize that a large part of Christian and evangelical identity has a western element which needs to be addressed, recognizing this tension both in the transmission of the faith and the modern situation. Ng accepts this historically embedded character of Christianity and Christian theology but sees his task in contemporary Malaysia as establishing an identity for the church by taking that historical heritage and applying it to current realities rather than simply abandoning it and starting from scratch. Samuel considers that Asian Christian identity is shaped both by Asian components - both contemporary and historical - and a biblical component that connects modern-day Asians to the people of God in the Old Testament and the history of Israel through the events of the gospel in Jesus Christ. He talks of the possibility of a dual identity which is partly Asian and partly Christian, with continuity between their new identity and their Asian history.

No matter what nationality we may be, the Old Testament does not say to us "this is akin to how God acted in your history" but rather "this is your history." Old Testament history is a formative part of all Christian history and so we might say that all Christians participate in two histories – both Judeo-Christian and ethnic.<sup>99</sup>

Samuel prefers to see continuity between their new identity and their former Asian history and is clear that Asian identity is not subordinate, but rather that there is an integration of the two identities in Jesus Christ and the kingdom "which fulfils God's promise to the nations mediated through the history of his people."<sup>100</sup> Such a position is rejected by Asians like Song and Amaladoss.<sup>101</sup> They see a disjunction between the histories of Asia and the

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<sup>98</sup> A. Walls, "Christianity," in *The New Penguin Handbook of Living Religions*, ed. J. R. Hinnells (London: Penguin books, 1997), 106-115.

<sup>99</sup> V. Samuel, "God's Intention for the World," 174.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid*, 174.

<sup>101</sup> C.S. Song, "From Israel to Asia – an Historical Leap," in *Third World Theologies* eds. G.H. Anderson and T. Stransky (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 212-217. M. Amaladoss, "Contextual Theology and Integration." *East Asian Pastoral Review* 40 (3) 2003: 269.

biblical history of the people of God. They recognize the problems that the latter raises for Asians who lived prior to the reception of the gospel in Asia and the way in which Asian cultures have been fashioned largely apart from Christian input. This causes Song to suggest that Asians should see a discontinuity between the experience of the people of God in the Old Testament and their own experience. He uses the term “historical leap” to describe this.

Ramachandra agrees with Ng and Samuel that the historical continuity of the Christian faith starts from the Genesis account and ends in Revelation as a summation of a historical process that embraces all the nations and that allows for history to be viewed as a meaningful process:

The biblical story begins with a picture of a couple in a garden. It ends with that marvellous vision of a city, the New Jerusalem, a place of multicultural cohabitation, where the peoples of the earth “will bring into it the glory and the honour of the nations” (Revelation 21:22ff).<sup>102</sup>

He sees the process of turning to faith in Jesus Christ as one that transcends individuals and even communities. “The transformation of the individual carries with it an injunction of the word of Christ into that world of shared history and tradition, thought-forms and practices that make up our national identities.”<sup>103</sup>

The history of transmission of Christian faith means that all societies receive the gospel at different times and the gospel can speak into a variety of cultures in diverse ways. The selected writers recognize that this process has brought the gospel to Asia at various vary different periods of history. They affirm the idea of a dual identity where Asian Christians are shaped by their own history but also by their participation in the history of the people of God.

### The Christian scriptures and identity

The selected writers are not inclined to give up on the possibility of shaping “Christian” identity from the Christian scriptures. They differ in this from authors such as Sugitharajah, Archie Lee and Ariarajah who deal with the Christian scriptures as though they were an alien, troublesome text in the Asian context. Mindful of the differences between the world of the Bible and contemporary Asia, they note the issues of the cultural and religious heritage of Asia and have concerns about the relationship of Asian ancestors to Christian understandings of faith and the faith community.

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<sup>102</sup> Ramachandra, *Faiths In Conflict*, 130.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid*, 135. He quotes Walls about the possibility of conversion leading to “distinctive discipleship, as diverse and variegated as human life itself” not “a bland universal citizenship.”

It is true that the biblical world has many points of difference from Asian cultures, as indeed from European, but its Middle Eastern origin and the largely Hebrew Old Testament makes the notion that the Bible is a completely alien text in Asia much harder to sustain.

Sugitharajah makes a telling observation about his academic study in the west in relation to this point:

We learned that in switching temporarily to the Hebrew scriptures for a mess of academic pottage, we had sold our rich religious and cultural birthright. Our scholarly purity defiled, we decided to go home and become servants and apprentices of the people.<sup>104</sup>

Adopting such a perspective is to rule out the place of a distinctive Christian identity formed from the important resource of the Christian scriptures. It is difficult to imagine that were such a stance adopted in relation to Hindu writings by Hindus or to the Koran by Muslims, it would be taken to represent a widely accepted position on Hindu or Islamic identity. Such a scepticism about or rejection of the Christian scriptures makes it hard to maintain Christian identity in the face of the competing claims of Asian societies and religions. The scriptures form a core part of the formation of Christian identity and to relinquish them to this extent is to diminish the possibility of establishing a Christian identity. It is hard not to feel that the Christian dimension of identity is in danger of being diluted in some of the above-mentioned authors, however positively their attempts to maintain an Asian identity are viewed.

There is a tension to be maintained between Asian and Christian identity. The selected writers are striving to hold on to both elements without jettisoning the place of the Christian scriptures, however complicated and difficult its message may appear to be in relation to aspects of Asian society. Resolving this tension by simply capitulating on the place of the Christian scriptures will not result in satisfactory outcomes in relation to the establishment of Christian identity.

### **7.3.2 Identity and Christology**

The area of Christology is also important for Christian identity in Asia. Walls points to “the significance of Jesus Christ” as a critical and abiding dimension of Christianity.<sup>105</sup> The selected writers display a strong interest in the place of Christ in the formulation of theology

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<sup>104</sup> R.S. Sugirtharajah, R.S. “Introduction,” *Frontiers in Asian Christian Theology. Emerging Trends*, ed. R.S. Sugirtharajah (N.Y.: Orbis, 1994.), 1.

<sup>105</sup> A. Walls, “Christianity,” in *The New Penguin Handbook of Living Religions*, ed. J. R. Hinnells (London: Penguin books, 1997), 107-111.

and in the proclamation of the gospel message. However, some Asian theologians struggle to deal with the complex interaction between Christianity and Asian culture. They do not want to write off the past heritage of their cultures, given the way they have been shaped by religions in various ways. Yet they find it difficult to maintain core Christian elements, especially where these elements challenge aspects of Asian religious and cultural heritage.

For some in Asia, mission and theology of mission have been emphatically much too christocentric. There is a reaction away from christocentrism in some Asian circles as in the work of C.S. Song and Thangaraj and in international groups active in Asia such as the Council for World Mission (CWM). Considering the way in which mission has been done from the west, Song complains that: "The basic Christian presupposition has not changed. The christocentric foundation that has underlined the theological understanding of the world and the missionary approach to people of other religions and cultures is unquestioned."<sup>106</sup>

Song would like to make Christology less prominent, being worried about the implications of Christology for Asian cultures and heritage. His analysis is based on mission from the west to Asia and he considers that the need is to get closer to Asian people and the "sources" where they can be found. Song makes a break between the activity of God in Asia and the activity of God in the Christian scriptures. Others like Thangaraj are dubious about the ability of Christianity to negotiate with other religions if it puts Christology too firmly at the centre of its theological agenda.

It can be seen how different attitudes towards this issue lead to methodological choices. Song pushes biblical theology to a creational foundation rather than a soteriological one, in a sense moving theology to Old Testament foundations to find a point of connection with ordinary humanity. However, with his theology of transposition, he ultimately moves beyond even salvation history and Old Testament links to a theology that is not historically rooted. In his theologizing with categories of *missio humanitatis*, Thangaraj is also moving the theological agenda away from biblical foundations to theological categories which are neutral enough for a wider inter-religious debate.<sup>107</sup> Inevitably, this allows the nature of mission to be defined independently from the Christian scriptures, though for Thangaraj and Song with no separation from the Asian cultural and historical context. The selected writers, with their emphasis on the scriptures as a resource for theology and the central place of the

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<sup>106</sup> C.S. Song, "Christian Theology: an Asian Way," in *Doing Theology with God's Purpose in Asia*. No.10. ed. J.C.England (ATESEA: Singapore, 1991), 29.

<sup>107</sup> M.T. Thangaraj, "Toward a Dialogical Theology of Mission," in *Theology at the End of Modernity: Essays in Honor of Gordon D. Kaufman*, ed. S.G. Davaney (Philadelphia, PA: Trinity Press International, 1991), 164-170.

kingdom, find this a difficult methodological shift to accept because of its consequences of marginalizing New Testament themes such as the kingdom and Christology: they reject any pushing aside of the soteriological dimensions of Christianity.

### Christology and the selected writers

As befits their evangelical profession, the selected writers all reject the idea that Christology is to be side-lined and that christocentrism is misguided in mission. The historicity of Jesus Christ's experience is important for Ramachandra. In his analysis of Asian theologians, Ramachandra critiques Panikkar's view of Christ,<sup>108</sup> saying that "Panikkar has drained the word of Christ of its historic significance and its continuing personal significance for Christian believers."<sup>109</sup> He seeks to maintain the historicity and the universal implications of Jesus Christ's life, death and resurrection in the light of his claims and his lifestyle, and as a central part of the challenge of Christianity in the world, finding that the Christological themes found in the Christian scriptures still challenge the peoples of Asia. As he reviews the transmission of Christianity in Asia, he finds issues that are unresolved but some achievements that offer promise for the future and a Christian message that still offers hope and salvation to people in Asia as it challenges their systems of belief.<sup>110</sup>

There is a similar concern in the work of Samuel to stress the importance of Christology. He is worried by tendencies to push "the church from a christocentric view of reality to a theocentric one."<sup>111</sup> Recognizing that finding appropriate ways of expressing this is still a challenge, for the Christian message originated in the Middle East and has been formed in relation to centuries of exposure to western culture, Samuel feels that the experiential dimension of Eastern cultures (in contrast to western analytical emphases) needs to be recovered. He ponders ways to cross this divide:

What Christological understanding enables us to be truly biblical to bridge this gap, to communicate both to the unitive experiential East and the analytical west? John records Jesus as the way, the truth and the life. What understanding of "truth-experience" would enable us to develop a Christology for dialogue?<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Ramachandra, *Recovery of Mission*, 78-87.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid*, 83.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid*, 276-279.

<sup>111</sup> V. Samuel, "Mission in the Context of World Religions," *AD 2000 and Beyond: a Mission Agenda*, eds. V. Samuel and C. Sugden (Oxford: Regnum, 1994), 149, 156-157.

<sup>112</sup> V. Samuel and C. Sugden, "Dialogue with Other Religions – an Evangelical View," in *Sharing Jesus in the Two Thirds World*, ed. V. Samuel and Chris Sugden (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 203.

In their different ways, writers like Samuel and Ramachandra wish to maintain a balance, retaining flexibility in relating the central themes of the New Testament to Asian societies and religions without ceding the critical importance of Christology for establishing Christian identity in Asia.

### **7.3.3 Kingdom communities in Asia and Asian peoples of God**

#### The kingdom and identity

The idea that communities of the kingdom can be nurtured in Asian society is emphasised in the writings of all the selected writers. Such a perspective implies a universal view of the “kingdom” in which Christ can relate to all and every society but this is the kind of perspective and expectation to which the selected writers are committed.<sup>113</sup>

The discourse of “the peoples of Asia” as “people of God” is a recent theme in the work of Asian theologians as a way of dealing with how Asian peoples relate to the Christian community as the people of God. Kim Yong Bock’s key note address to a CCA conference stated:

The most basic theological affirmation is that the peoples of Asia are the children of God. ... God the creator is the God of the suffering and struggling peoples of Asia, no matter who they are in terms of religion, political ideology or cultural differences. ... In Asia, however, the Christian churches have constricted Jesus Christ to exclude peoples from the category of the people of God.<sup>114</sup>

Ramachandra takes issue with Kim Yong Bock. He points out that the early church was often a church drawn from the poor and oriented towards the poor. Ramachandra, however, distinguishes such a view of the kingdom community of God from a theology that recognizes “the poor, oppressed, women and the ethnically and culturally alienated in Asia are the very people of God.”<sup>115</sup> Ramachandra queries what this makes of the message of the cross.

The radical vision of sin that the cross gives has now been diluted and domesticated into a purely secular concept of being wronged by others; there is no need anymore for “grace and truth” to liberate us from the ideological

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<sup>113</sup> The questions of the kingdom of God and its religiously plural character is not generally addressed by the selected writers. See Tan, Kang San, “Clash of the Kingdoms: a Kingdom Oriented Theology for Interfaith Encounter,” Unpublished Paper. Delivered at the WEF Missions Consultation, May 2-4, 2002, Port Dickson, Malaysia.

<sup>114</sup> Kim, Yong Bock, ‘The Mission of God in the Context of the Suffering and Struggling Peoples of Asia,’ in *Peoples of Asia, Peoples of God* (Osaka: CCA, 1989), 12-13.

<sup>115</sup> Ramachandra, *Gods That Fail*, 207.

distortions of all forms of power, only the transfer of power from one social group to another.<sup>116</sup>

Ramachandra is taking issue with an emerging strand of theology within Asia, which identifies Asian peoples with God's people simply on the grounds of marginalization. He sees such a view as soteriologically naïve. Christian identity is to be found in a decisive identification with the kingdom community not an incidental identification with marginalization.

The transformation of lives, communities and societies is a significant part of what Christian faith is all about but it needs to be tied to understandings of the kingdom that genuinely empower people by offering the possibility of change at an individual and social level. The selected writers recognize the way in which Asia shapes their theological agenda. The Christian scriptures are seen to have a coherent message which is centred around God's purposes in his kingdom and through Jesus Christ and the gospel. This message can be adopted by Asians who seek to relate it to their social settings, and at different stages in history Asian Christians have found this possible though with many different emphases. The central issue in Asian Christian identity is the acceptance of the normative character of the Christian scriptures, their links with history and the nature of Jesus Christ as a pivotal figure in the Christian revelation. All realize that identity is a pressing and complicated issue and that Asian Christian identity cannot simply be adopted as a product from the Christian past, but needs to be positively constructed in today's context. They construct identity *around* the Christian scriptures and try to deal with the difficult task of being Christian in Asian societies without sacrificing the significance of Jesus of Nazareth or the links to the people of God in the past history of the church and the Old Testament.

The selected writers continue to wrestle with discovering the "Asian face of Jesus"<sup>117</sup> – as are other Asian Christians – but assert their own right to be considered as authentic Asian voices. They see their own struggle in this debate as an important Asian contribution.

## **7.4 Evangelical identity**

### **7.4.1 A critique of power and global evangelicalism**

Evangelical movements are still shaped by the realities of resources and power. These factors still shape how the global church and how global networks function and they do not

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid, 208.

<sup>117</sup> Sugden's phrase is used first in relation to Samuel and the Indonesian theologian Wayan Mastra.

always facilitate participation for non-western peoples. This issue is also a concern for the selected writers.

Samuel reckons that mission as social involvement is poorly understood by those whose perspective is limited by the wealth and the more settled political culture of the United States. Relative affluence may make certain forms of social involvement less urgent in the west, but Samuel wonders if the perspectives on mission adopted by evangelicals who are nurtured in this social context, distort the understanding of mission in other places.

Recognizing the differences of the church in the west and non-west, he stresses the need for evangelicals in the west to appreciate the realities of the contexts of poverty.<sup>118</sup> In the early 1980s and 1990s, Samuel was critical of the way in which evangelical organizations from the west drew on their power and resources in a way that was detrimental to the church in Asia.<sup>119</sup>

The structures of global mission, as represented by the Lausanne congress and other similar networks, also tend to shape the way in which evangelicalism relates to the outside world in terms of mission. There are some anxieties about the way in which these structures, financed by the church in wealthy nations, have an impact on the agenda of evangelicalism and of evangelical mission.<sup>120</sup> Hwa is worried about the majority representation of western evangelicals. "This gives the impression that westerners are the key players, when in reality the recent growth of non-Western churches has come largely through national initiatives and leadership. Thus the old paternalism is perpetuated in another guise."<sup>121</sup> The same misgiving is shared by Ramachandra, specifically in terms of how mission is conducted by those with money and resources:

... as long as American and East Asian Christians are blind to the way their economic and political power distorts their presentation of the gospel, all their well-meaning efforts in "global mission" will only backfire on the churches of the Third World. Once again the poor are exposed to a Constantinian Christ rather than the Christ of the cross. The alliance of "big

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<sup>118</sup> V. Samuel, "Biblical Reflections for Mission in the New Millenium," Unpublished paper from the Oxford Centre for Mission Studies, 2002. Samuel realizes that Christians in the west can be tempted to retreat in the conditions of affluence to "affirm spiritual realities alone" an attitude which he deplores.

<sup>119</sup> V. Samuel and C. Sugden, "Mission Agencies as Multinational Corporations," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 7 No.3 (Oct 1983): 152-153.

<sup>120</sup> V. Ramachandra, "The Honor of Listening: Indispensable for Mission. One-sided Nationalistic Vision Hinders Global Perspective and Partnership in Mission," *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 30 (Oct 1994): 404-409.

<sup>121</sup> Hwa Yung, "Strategic Issues in Missions," 33.

business” expertise with missionary enterprise will prove disastrous, as it always has in the history of the church.<sup>122</sup>

Ramachandra does recognize this is not purely a western issue, and his point is to encourage evangelicals to use wealth wisely in terms of global mission and to be aware of the corrupting dimensions of power.

Maggay’s experience of poverty in the Philippines leads to impatience with other sections of the evangelical world. As she reflects on the international face of evangelicalism as typified by its global or international congresses, she is critical of the ethos of the Lausanne movement as shown by the style of the Lausanne II congress held at Manila. She was critical that evangelicals had made the concept of being more sympathetic to the poor “a platitude that grated more and more...”<sup>123</sup> Maggay appreciates the contribution of Latin American theologians like Samuel Escobar who have advocated with consistency and emphasis the role of Christian compassion in dealing with the poor.<sup>124</sup> She argues that an affluent western evangelical church is not ready for the kinds of issues which will surface for the minority churches of the two-thirds world and so they are too “neutral”:

It is conventional for us evangelicals to talk of biblical balance. We tend to judge those who rant and bellow and annoy us with their social passions as somewhat unstable. Yet the experience of injustice is such that it does make people rise to fever pitch. It is only those who do not feel enough indignation over people’s victimization, or who have not suffered injury from first-hand experience of powerlessness and cruel oppression who can afford to talk about balance.<sup>125</sup>

Evangelicals in the west have not generally experienced marginalization enough to really identify with the experience of the church in many other parts of the world. The possibility of a greater marginalization of the western church in western society in the future is both possible and credible in the post-Christendom era.<sup>126</sup>

Honest dialogue and open partnership needs to continue between western and Asians in evangelical networks, western groups needing to promote participation and partnership and be sensitive to power of resources, power of co-operation, and the power of history as well

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<sup>122</sup> Ramachandra, *Gods That Fail*, 220. A similar perspective is found in the CWM view of mission. It is important to note the connections between politics and the religions in Asia.

<sup>123</sup> M. Maggay, “Lausanne II: in Remembrance of Things Past.” *Isip Isak* 2 No.3 (3<sup>rd</sup> quarter 1989).

<sup>124</sup> Maggay, “Lausanne II,” 7. Maggay sees some evangelical groups with western roots, like IFES, as more positive in this respect.

<sup>125</sup> Maggay, *Jew to the Jew*, 46-47.

<sup>126</sup> D. Smith, *Mission after Christendom* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2003), 31. Smith notes that some Jewish apologists have pointed out that Christians in the west may yet experience something of the isolation which Jewish people have previously experienced.

as other forms of power. On the other hand, the selected writers have welcomed the opportunity to be part of a larger community of global participants<sup>127</sup> where Asian voices can shape the missiological and theological debate. These anxieties about power in relation to international organizations and how they share resources and share opportunities for participation need to be addressed. This is an important dimension of the critique of the selected writers.

#### **7.4.2 A critique of strategy**

A focus on strategy is an important part of missiology in global evangelical circles, particularly those connected with Pasadena in the USA. This emphasis is producing a negative reaction in Asian circles. There is a perception that global evangelicals may be over-stating the importance of strategy in situations like Asia.<sup>128</sup>

The Lausanne movement has been criticized, particularly by evangelicals in Africa and Asia<sup>129</sup> for its re-emphasis on evangelization at the frontiers from 1980 onwards at the expense of other aspects of mission.<sup>130</sup> It is felt that this agenda is driven by western evangelicals.<sup>131</sup> The thinking representing “managerial missiology” and the earlier church growth school is critiqued by Samuel in the Indian context, as he sees an excessive pragmatism at work in church growth models. The idea of encouraging the growth of the church through homogenous groups does not adequately deal with the problems of “casteism” and undermines the experience of discipleship in the Asian church.<sup>132</sup>

Samuel would suggest that *mission as transformation* is the real advance<sup>133</sup> and not people-group<sup>134</sup> thinking.<sup>135</sup> The main criticism of the strategic outlook is that it can become a way

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<sup>127</sup> Maggay, “Lausanne II,” 7.

<sup>128</sup> Hwa has commented on this in his lectures at CSCA. Hwa, Yung, “Challenges Facing the Asian Church.” A course given at Trinity Theological College, Singapore, 2001-2002.

<sup>129</sup> K. Bediako, “World Evangelisation, Institutional Evangelicalism and the Future of Christian world mission,” in *Proclaiming Christ in God’s Way*, ed. V. Samuel and A. Hauser (Oxford: Regnum, 1989), 52-60.

<sup>130</sup> V. Samuel and C. Sugden, “Dialogue with Other Religions,” 186-190.

<sup>131</sup> It would appear that the WEA focus in Asia is still towards evangelization.

<sup>132</sup> V. Samuel, *The Meaning and Cost of Discipleship* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1983), 52-54.

<sup>133</sup> V. Samuel, “Rethinking Unreached People Groups,” *Journal of Asian Missions* 5 No.1 (2003):3-7.

<sup>134</sup> Peskett and V. Ramachandra, *The Message of Mission*, 205. Ramachandra is critical of too much focus on people groups and their analysis.

<sup>135</sup> This would be in contrast to western analysts like Shenk who describe people group theory as an important advance in missiology in recent decades. W. R. Shenk, “Mission Strategies,” in *Toward the Twenty-first Century in Christian Mission: Essays in Honour of Gerald H. Anderson*, ed., J. H. Philips and R.T.Coote (Grand Rapids. Eerdmans, 1993), 218-234.

of looking at peoples which objectifies them and diminishes their nature as individual people with diverse needs and aspirations. Samuel is also critical of an emphasis on strategy by those who live outside Asian countries and who bypass the resources of the national churches. He is primarily referring to India, but similar concerns have been expressed by Hwa in relation to the Asian scene more generally, and Song Min Ho, a Korean Canadian who has worked in the Philippines.<sup>136</sup> There are certainly evangelicals in the west who also view evangelical missiology as paying too much attention to strategy at the expense of other themes: Engel and Dyrness share this sense of misgiving as does Coote.

What is generally agreed is this: it is not helpful for western evangelicals to construct strategic frameworks and analysis in the west and then apply them, from the outside, to Asia. Such strategic frameworks can end up being inappropriately matched to local realities. This results in concepts of mission which are remote from the real needs of people in Asia, turning mission into a relentless search for the new, rather than encouraging a focus on transforming communities that already exist. Such perspectives are at odds with what is seen to be the incarnational dimension of mission. This turns evangelization into a shallow transitory process rather than a transformatory one.

#### **7.4.3 A critique of global mission**

Ramachandra has reservations about evangelical approaches to the global which do not connect to local people in all parts of the world. He critiques westerners and fellow-Asians in this regard. He prefers to stress the place of mission in the local and national over the international, reflecting a genuine concern that evangelicals do not overstretch themselves when it comes to the mission of the church and evangelization. David Lee and K Rajendran as representatives of the WEA, tend to take a more favourable view of the place of strategy and the concepts of global mission. David Lee wants to leave space for evangelical missiology to adopt a more global perspective. Many evangelical in Asia like Wang do identify with the *AD2000* movement and others are positive about the *DAWN* movement and more favourable to strategic perspectives.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> Song Min-Ho has raised similar reservations about an over-emphasis on strategy. M.H. Song, Personal Conversation, 22<sup>nd</sup> August, 2004.

<sup>137</sup> This may reflect the fact that many Christians in Asian management circles are influenced by quantitative models and this impacts the church. There is also the issue of support and funding from the West.

## Evangelization reconsidered

There are differences of emphasis between some of the selected writers and global evangelical emphases in regard to the focus of mission. This critique of strategy and global mission by Asian evangelicals does raise the question of what happens to non-Christian communities who are not part of the church in Asia and those who have had no meaningful contact with the Christian gospel. The response of Asian evangelicals seems to be that their priority is to deal first with the Christian communities which do exist and to pursue other issues from the basis of robust, flourishing kingdom communities in Asia. Asians are to be the principal protagonists in evangelizing Asia and bringing the gospel to bear on Asian societies. Ramachandra is keen to stress is that the evangelization of Asia will require greater participation from Asians themselves. He remarks that in some senses the evangelization of Asia has just begun and that it will really advance once Asian Christians become more involved.<sup>138</sup> The selected writers recognize and accept responsibility for the task of evangelizing and sharing the gospel in Asia. Global networks can lead to a synergistic participation that allows for change *provided* that they are organized in such a way as to encourage participation and to encourage space for non-western voices.

## 7.5 Nurturing communities of the kingdom in Asia

### 7.5.1 *Issues of integrity and credibility*

Nurturing credible Asian communities of the kingdom in Asia

A kingdom community in Asia, as envisaged by the selected writers, relates Christian faith to the Asian world through the nurture of a spiritual community which takes account of the spiritual realities and the social needs of Asia. It seeks to emphasize the Asian character of Christianity and not to allow global realities to overwhelm the Asian church with western influences. Such communities in Asia live out the universal values of the kingdom of God which are seen as relevant to and not incompatible with Asian societies. These values reveal idolatries in society and in the wider world, and this challenge to evil is part of the ongoing and universal challenge of the kingdom of God from the time of Jesus onwards.<sup>139</sup> A kingdom community sees following Christ and doing mission in Christ's way as the way of the cross and suffering as a crucial aspect of mission.<sup>140</sup> A kingdom community recognizes

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<sup>138</sup> Ramachandra, *Recovery of Mission*, 278.

<sup>139</sup> Ramachandra, *Gods That Fail*, 36-37.

<sup>140</sup> See Ramachandra on "loving and dying." Ramachandra, *The Recovery of Mission*, 275-279.

the personal and communal aspects of discipleship as a way of engaging with Asian realities in local communities, in society and in the wider world.

These emphases on discipleship are compatible with involvement in the public square and contributing to nation-building in Asian societies.<sup>141</sup> They include appropriate involvement in civil society as indicated by the examples of ISACC in the Philippines and Kairos in Malaysia. A kingdom community teaches the importance of being hopeful and yet realistic in a fallen world.<sup>142</sup> It looks to incarnational models of service which follow Jesus' example and avoid arrogance by striving for humility and compassion. A kingdom community recognizes that such missional activity takes place in the midst of plural societies and that there needs to be continued dialogue and interaction with peoples of other faiths at a social level. It acknowledges the place of witness to Christ as part of the calling of Christians in Asia. Christians will witness in ways and there will be an interest in reaching out to different parts of Asia – though this is a consequence of Christian compassion and is not an emphasis in transformational missiology. Such a community recognizes its links to other parts of the Christian community in the wider world. It seeks to share with that wider global community recognizing its own voice and the possibility of both sharing with and drawing on the resources of the global community.

#### Christian community and transformational missiology reviewed

The selected writers deal with their Christian identity in Asian society. Recognizing the special challenges of being minorities in Asia heightens the demands made on the Asian churches both to nurture one another and to show credible outward expressions of their faith in full view of other faiths in Asia. The selected writers adopt models of transformational missiology which stress the place of credible Christian communities in facilitating Christian contributions to the public square through nation-building and civil society.

Mission is not restricted simply to a proclamation of certain truths or realities: it sees the announcement of the good news of the kingdom of God as an activity of both word and deed. Asian Christians announce the kingdom and live out its values in community with others in the midst of a watching world. The idea of the Christian community having to be a more robust missional community, both in its inner life and its outward contribution to

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<sup>141</sup> Samuel has considered the struggles of discipleship in the Indian context. Samuel, *The Meaning of Discipleship*, 60-67. Maggay talks of the challenges in the Philippines context, Maggay, *Transforming Society*, 78-84.

<sup>142</sup> Maggay uses the twin categories of “radical hope” and “radical pessimism.” Maggay, *Transforming Society*, 96-103.

society, though not a new idea or uniquely Asian idea, is expressed with some vigour and enthusiasm by the selected writers. The emphasis on the lived-out reality of Christian faith is essentially a healthy development. It allows Christian energy in mission to be expressed in a variety of ways. Important amongst these are the way in which kingdom values are to be shared through vocation, discipleship and the church in everyday life. This emphasis is a real contribution from Asia to global evangelicalism.

### **7.5.2 Disciples of Jesus Christ in Asia**

The selected writers are convinced that Christians can and should make a difference to the wider society in the contemporary world. True discipleship is costly. This is a concept that stretches back to New Testament times, but resonates with the experience of Christians in Asia. This is why Maggay talks of discipleship as the “dance of death.” The selected writers point Christians back to models of the Christian community and discipleship which make the values of the kingdom clear and visible and which make an impact in the ethnically diverse societies of Asia. Such a model of mission emphasizes community as opposed to individualism. Other global faiths in Asia, like Islam, and to some extent Buddhism and Hindu movements, are seen as offering a wholistic way of life; in environments where these faiths are strongly and socially held, Christianity also has to be seen to be offering a total way of life, as well as being simply an individual faith choice.

In Asian societies, such a participation in society does not come necessarily by influencing legislators to a Christian view of society.<sup>143</sup> It comes rather from the example and integrity of the Christian community living out the values of the kingdom and seeking to model these values to those around them.<sup>144</sup> Discipleship offers a way of integrating faith and spirituality in all of life and personalizes Christian faith. It makes mission an individual responsibility and choice: an individual commitment, lived communally.

The selected writers take traditional elements from the agenda of mission – mission as God’s mission *missio dei*, the kingdom of God and being followers of Jesus Christ – but orient them towards Asia. They emphasize the idea of church as a community that needs to be

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<sup>143</sup> As in, for example, the Reformed model – see Maggay on this. Maggay, *Transforming Society*, 53-57.

<sup>144</sup> Ramachandra talks about the need for the church “to be truly the body of Christ ... present in every local assembly...” V. Ramachandra, “Globalisation: Towards a Theological Perspective and Critique” at <<http://www.micahnetwork.org/events/documents63.doc>>, accessed Friday 6th December 2003, 21.

nurtured as well as re-planted in different places. In shaping this new approach to missiology, described in this study as transformational missiology, they do take for granted the right to go and proclaim, but start with showing concern for others and making space for mission by building communities which can nurture spirituality and kingdom values.<sup>145</sup>

Although the selected writers stress the importance of Christian community and give more emphasis to “integrity” than to “proclamation,” there are situations where Asian Christians are ready to be more involved in proclamation.<sup>146</sup>

The Asian evangelical church is used to having to fight and struggle to make its contribution in the social arena. Given the limited Christian heritage and the vested interests in the public square, Christian communities have no social voice unless they create one, they cannot take social space for granted, but must show that they are willing to share in the life of the nation as well as nurture their own spirituality.<sup>147</sup> The selected writers recognize the importance of showing that the Christian community has a credible social vision and that it deals with social issues in ways that display integrity and that make a difference in the lives of those in local communities. In this way they are contributing to a strengthening of evangelical missiology in Asia.

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<sup>145</sup> The selected writers are prepared to affirm western missionary efforts when they have contributed to the building up of society

<sup>146</sup> There are particularly strong movements in India, (including Mizoram) and South Korea.

<sup>147</sup> The example of Malaysian Care, a group committed to ministries of compassion has shown that Christians can make an impact in societies that do not always easily grant a role to Christianity. Malaysian Care, “Malaysian Care,” at <<http://www.malaysiancare.org/>>, accessed 14<sup>th</sup> July 2006.

## CONCLUSION

This thesis has argued that there are a number of evangelicals in Asia whose collective emphases in mission can be described as transformational missiology, and has related this approach to missiology to a framework developed by Escobar. It shows the way in which his category of “a critical missiology from the periphery” has been shaped by influences from the “mission as transformation” movement, suggesting that this emphasis is a response to the needs for mission in Asian settings and is also derived from the way in which evangelicals in Asia handle the Christian scriptures and use them to shape their approach to missiology. This study suggests that Asian evangelical identity is constructed in relation to both the wider evangelical world and issues that are seen to be important in Asia, particularly the need to relate the gospel and the Christian community to Asian societies, and indicates that there are evangelicals in Asia who are interested in concepts of mission that go beyond the confines of mission defined exclusively in terms of “mission as evangelization.”

Transformational missiology is not narrowly based on themes in the gospels or even the New Testament, but draws on many parts of the Christian scriptures. It looks at humanity as viewed in its relation to creation and to the demands of justice and ethical living that were part of the concern of the people of God in the Old Testament. The kingdom of God, Jesus Christ and the Christian community are central themes that are emphasized from the New Testament. Transformational missiology highlights the place of Christian communities. Such communities derive their identity from the community of the kingdom of God as envisaged in the gospels: they are to be nurtured and be a source of encouragement and support so that Christians can engage in mission in Asian societies and contribute to the processes of nation-building. There is a particular concern for the demands of justice, the alleviation of poverty and the importance of showing compassion in Asian societies through the activities of the Christian community. This emphasis on community constitutes an important element of engagement in mission in Asian contexts and provides a model from within Asia of how the wider evangelical church can enhance its approach to mission. Another important element of transformational missiology is the desire to engage more fully with the multi-religious settings of Asia. There is a desire for greater understanding and empathy with Asian religions and an attempt to interact in terms of dialogue leading to renewed efforts at apologetics and witness, carried out in a spirit of Christian humility.

Transformational missiology seeks to be a contextual missiology not so much in terms of theoretical approaches to contextualization, but rather in taking due account of the Asian and

Christian *texts* in relation to which mission takes place and re-engaging with Asian *contexts* in the light of those texts. Transformational missiology is sensitive to the changing global context. What is innovative in this new missiology emerging from Asia, is its appreciation of the contemporary pressures of global forces and their impact on Asian societies and religions. Transformational missiology represents an attempt by Asians, as part of a larger non-western movement, to develop forms of missiology beyond the traditional heartlands of evangelicalism. The selected writers who adopt this missiology recognize the historical continuities with western theology and missiology but affirm the need to customize those to Asian contexts. Part of this process involves the critique of evangelical missiology in its western and global forms. Transformational missiology is thus a missiology that helps Asian Christian communities as they engage in mission in Asia and seek to develop an authentic Asian Christian identity.

The five writers were chosen to illustrate that the emphasis on transformational missiology comes from across a wide spectrum within evangelicalism in Asia. The writers include not just those who are working closely with issues of development, justice and poverty like Samuel, but also others like Ng, Maggay and Hwa connected to research projects for the church in specific countries in Asia and those like Ramachandra whose work leads to an interest in the wider implications of Christian faith for social life in the wider Asian region.

### ***Transformational missiology in relation to other forms of evangelical missiology***

One of the positive dimensions of Escobar's framework is that it highlights diverse emphases within evangelicalism. In this study, the focus has been on the proponents of transformational missiology within the context of Escobar's category of "a critical missiology from the periphery" in relation to Asia. One area of future study would be an analysis of those who want to give greater priority to evangelization and to consider how their emphases overlap and differ with the kind of thinking found in "managerial missiology." It has been observed that David Lee, for example, is particularly interested in the way in which new and emerging global networks can facilitate the place of two thirds world people in mission and in missiology and he is particularly interested in the task of evangelization.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> S. Moon and D.T. W. Lee, "Globalization, World Evangelization and Global Missiology," in *One World or Many*, ed. R. Tiplady (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2003), 260-265.

This study has explored how Escobar's framework provides a structure within a particular set of beliefs in Asia. Given Escobar's Latin American identity, his framework raises questions about its application to regions of the world beyond Asia. There is now a need to understand the extent to which the emphases of transformational missiology are shared with those who identify with "a critical missiology from the periphery" in other parts of the world. Latin Americans have played an important role within Evangelicalism, in the post-World War II period, in influencing the way in which approaches to mission have taken social context more seriously.

The way in which the concept of transformation has been developing and how it relates to transformational missiology is another area which merits scrutiny. This study has shown that the language of transformation is not just used in relation to development and is a way of dealing with a broader missiological agenda, that includes issues like the interaction with religious realities and global forces.

The use of concepts of transformation in relation to mission are widespread in the selected writers and the significance of this phenomenon was underlined in the conference in December 2003 in Singapore, devoted to this subject. The conference, entitled "Mission as Transformation in 21<sup>st</sup> century Asia," represented one pan-Asian network (PIM-Asia) and two Singapore institutions.<sup>2</sup> This conference dealt with a range of themes under the rubric of transformation and envisaged mission in a very broad and wholistic way.<sup>3</sup> The papers went beyond the narrower understanding of mission as transformation as found at the Wheaton consultation in 1983 moving the concept to the point where "transformation" can be seen as a key theme in mission. It represents significant evidence of the interest in transformation that is taking place right across the Asian church. Later in 2006, a further conference will be held on the theme of transformation in Hyderabad in India.<sup>4</sup> These conferences suggest that Hwa is right to see "a vogue" for transformation concepts within Asia. However, judging from the materials prepared for this latter conference there is a possibility that such events will produce understandings of transformation that are once again derived from the west rather than understandings that are fashioned by the Asian

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<sup>2</sup> "Mission as Transformation in 21<sup>st</sup> Century Asia," Asian Missions Congress, 6-10<sup>th</sup> December 2003, Unpublished proceedings, held at Trinity Theological College, Singapore.

<sup>3</sup> This was indicated by the sub-title – "on the theology and practice of holistic mission." The conference included themes connected with traditional missionary agencies such as church-planting, cross-cultural missions, unreached peoples, and the development of mission partnerships.

<sup>4</sup> See Transform World, "Home page," at <<http://www.transform-world.net/>>, accessed 14<sup>th</sup> July 2006.

context. This continues to be an important issue for Asians and for global evangelical structures as they relate to Asia. The model of transformational missiology proposed here, with its combination of biblical and theological emphases, takes account of global and religious elements as it looks at the way in which different religious and social contexts shape missiology. In this way, a model of transformational missiology, being less tied to perceptions of development, may allow for more flexibility in terms of mission in other contexts of Asia.

### ***Developing Asian identity - Asian resources for missiology***

This study has indicated that Asian Christian identity is formed both by interpreting the Christian, with its history connecting to the people of God and the coming of Jesus Christ, and interpreting the context of Asian societies with their distinctive histories and cultures. The selected writers affirm the need for Asian Christians to draw on both of these identities as they seek to shape Asian Christian identity for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

With regard to the latter aspect of Asian societies, the use of Asian resources is a familiar theme in circles such as the Programme of Theology and Cultures in Asia. Such resources include an interest in the story-telling of Asia, the use of other scriptures and similar Asian resources. Kwan indicates the depth of involvement in Asian life this movement has generated.<sup>5</sup>

An alternative way of engaging with Asian spiritual realities is advocated by Hwa Yung. He encourages Asian Christians to consider believers who are positive models of spirituality and who are firmly rooted in the Asian context.<sup>6</sup> Hwa has promoted the example and the spiritual writings of a diverse group of people like John Sung from China, “Sadhu” Sundar Singh from India and Petrus Octavianus from Indonesia, feeling that the experience of these Christians helps Asians to view spirituality through Asian eyes. This would give alternatives to evangelical perspectives which are often filtered through the west, particularly in countries where English is a common language. The emphasis of these Asian spiritual writers is on “holiness of character and sacrificial living” in the Asian context serving as possible models

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<sup>5</sup> Song displays a richness of emotion that comes from his use of Asian stories. See Song’s account of China in C.S. Song, “The Power of God’s Grace in the World of Religions,” in *Doing Theology with Religions of Asia*. No.4. Ed. Yeow, Choo Lak (ATESEA: Singapore, 1987), 17-19. Koyama is strong at drawing out the particularity of Asian societies and has a humorous way of looking at Asian realities. See for example, K. Koyama, *Three Mile an Hour God: Biblical Reflections* (N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1980).

<sup>6</sup> See Hwa Yung, “Sundar Singh, John Sung and the Future of Asian Christianity,” *Methodist Message* (October 2003): 7-9. Bibliography is found in Hwa, *Beyond AD 2000*, 27-28.

for Asian forms of spirituality and offering “a well-spring of largely untapped spiritual resources” for the Asian church.<sup>7</sup>

Asian Christians, as resources of and for the gospel, represent one of the ways in which the Asian character of Christianity is expressed by an evangelical writer in Asia. The *Dictionary of Asian Christianity* has acted as a catalyst to spur on greater efforts to investigate Asian Christian biography and such projects could well provide new perspectives on Christianity in Asia. In the areas of missiology and identity, the selected writers have made a contribution to the growing body of non-western evangelicalism and show that evangelicals in the two thirds world are contributing to theology and the ministry of the church. This study has confirmed the idea that non-western forms of mission are not simply deriving their agenda from the west<sup>8</sup> but rather that evangelicals in Asia are shaping their agenda of mission from factors that are part and parcel of the Asian settings.

### Concluding remarks

It remains vital for the global church that there is theological and missiological creativity in the two thirds world church, that this is recognised and fully acknowledged both within Asia and in the west, and that there is a genuine dialogue, based on the recognition of intellectual and theological equality, between the church in these places and the western church. This study has been part of that dialogue and seeks to encourage the debate to continue and to shape the nature of the church’s task of mission and our understanding of it.

In the wake of changes in the global church, evangelicals continue to grow and to participate in churches, missionary movements and networks in Asia, as in other parts of the world. Movements like Lausanne have encouraged an emerging Asian church to give voice to their concerns, to reflect on the agenda of mission in their own contexts and to reflect on the missiological task that faces them in Asia. Evangelicalism, for all its western roots, which still tend to be somewhat intrusive, is becoming a polycentric phenomenon. The peripheries, as much as the former centres of theology, are contributing to the debate on mission and bring their own nuances and energy to the debate. This should enrich evangelicalism and this study gives some indication of ways in which Asian evangelicals can contribute to the world church.

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<sup>7</sup> Hwa, “Endued with power,” 15.

<sup>8</sup> P. Freston, “Globalisation, Religion and Evangelical Christianity: a Sociological Meditation from the Third World,” Unpublished paper, delivered in Brazil, 2001, 1-7.

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