

MINISTRY DIRECTION AND ISSUES IN THE MISSION TRANSITION PERIOD: FROM MISSIO AD GENTES (Mission Focused on Tribes) TO MISSIO INTER GENTES (Mission Centered on the Locals)

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MISSION TRANSITION

In the 20th century, as we went through the missions of “Manifest Destiny” led by Western Christianity in North America and the “Mission Moratorium” declared in Africa at the same time, I had some scepticism that the world church would not be possible to do the mission that the way we used to do for the past century.

The nation, which began under God's absolute protection of the Puritans who settled in the United States in the 19th century, came to establish basic values to justify all actions based on the three Manifest Destiny. The first is the legitimacy of Americans and their institutions, the second is to imprint the image of the United States in the world by spreading this system, and the third is to follow the God-given destiny to achieve this. Evangelical missions in North America also jumped on these values to some extent, especially in Africa, despite their devoted contributions, resulting in no less side effects, and so-called Moratorium, which demanded the expulsion of missionaries from outside Africa, was declared in Kenya in 1972. Francis Anekwe Oborji, a Catholic priest who studied the history of missions, describes it in his book *Concepts of Mission*:

“This theory is still today the object of discussion in some circles... the young churches were expected to discover their own identities and develop their own specific character without the control or interference of foreign missionaries. ... He (missionary) must avoid a paternalistic attitude and the temptation to impose his own culture. New missionaries must have an attitude of service, of openness and respect and acceptance of the local populace, their cultures, and institutions.”¹

After this moratorium declaration, various voices of self-reflection came out from within Africa, and at the Catholic Bishops' Conference in 1974, the factor that prevented the growth of young churches was not just the problem of external missionaries, but in promoting evangelization the common responsibility of the internal community in how to cooperate for the incarnation of the gospel through sharing together.

The path of Protestant missions in the 20th century was formed along the traces of the leadership of the Western Church based on tangible results, and this kind of missions can be said to have originated from the so-called ‘Mission for Targeting tribes (Missio Ad Gentes).’ This mission was the basic missionary direction of Protestant missions, led by the Moravians,

1. Oborji, F., A., *Concepts of Mission: The Evolution of Contemporary Missiology*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York, 2006. p. 27 – 28.

in obedience to the command of Mark 16:15, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all peoples.”

Protestant missions with this tribal evangelization has been originated from Western-driven missions for the past centuries. Christendom, which was formed after the 16th century when the so-called Great European Migration began, was led by the United States in the 20th century along with the church growth in North America. Their ideology was no different from the re-interpretation of the oracle, which was the founding ideology of the past. Jonathan Ingleby quoted in his book, *Beyond Empire: Post-colonialism & Mission in a Global Context* (2010) about US imperialism.

“Our preeminent position of power is itself the evidence that we are ‘destined’ to be world leaders. Given that this is our destiny, we have the right to make it happen in all circumstances. Those who threaten our interests in the long run threaten their own. Attack is the best form of defence. ‘God who made us mighty, make us mightier yet.’”²

An example in the 20th century when they acted on this value was the occupation of the Philippines. The then president, McKinley, stayed up all night in prayer at the White House, saying, “God does not want to give it back to Spain, nor to France or Germany, nor to leave it to the Filipinos but to convert them to Protestantism and become Christians.”³ He rose the next day and ordered the Philippines to be incorporated into the map of the United States. Protestant scholars in the Philippines clearly pointed out that the Philippine Protestant leaders in the colony showed a certain attitude of sympathy and cooperation with this decision, and the occupied country used the church as a means of colonial rule and plunder.

However, while entering the 21st century, along with the decline of the Western church, global churches began to grow, especially in Asia, South America, and Africa. Lamin Sanneh offers some analyses⁴ of this growth.

First and most important, expansion occurred after colonialism ended. Perhaps colonialism has become a major stumbling block.

Second, it is the result of the translation of the Bible into African mother tongues. This is because the native language Bible increases

2. Ingleby, Jonathan, *Beyond Empire: Postcolonialism & Mission in a Global Context*, Authorhouse UK Ltd, Milton Keynes, 2010. p.35.

3. Aguilan, Victor, *The Other side of Our Heritage: Protestant Mission and American Imperialism*, presented at the conference of the Protestant Centennial in Philippines.

4. Sanneh, Lamin, *Whose Religion is Christianity? The Gospel Beyond the West*, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. Cambridge, 2003. p. 18.

accessibility to local people and tends to be culturally reviving.

Third is the initiative of African churches. This means that there is no longer any disadvantage in compromising with external institutions.

Fourth, theological issues can be cited. For example, if the indigenous view on the concept of God and the name of God in Christianity tends to be compatible with each other after being colonized, and this compatibility of Christianity and indigenous beliefs increased. In particular, areas with a strong African traditional religion tend to respond better than areas with a weak one.

According to the above analysis, it is true that the African churches are transformed into self-conscious churches only after foreign, especially Western, forms of mission are eliminated. Through this phenomenon, it can be eventually concluded that the strategy of Western missions in the 20th century, which took ethnic peoples as objects of evangelization, has to be altered because the diaspora phenomenon caused by the growth of global churches and human migration that entered the post-colonial era after the 1960s has turned our societies into a global village where almost all tribes can access the Gospel due to refugee crisis that hit Europe, Asia, and North America.

The strategy and concept of 'Mission for targeting tribes (Missio Ad Gentes)', which has been taken for granted for the modern mission, should be converted into 'Mission focused on the locals (Missio Inter Gentes)', which is faithful to the essence of missions in which the locals become the center of evangelism and discipleship. This will also focus on developing the ability of the locals to carry the gospel on their own. We will look further at the comparison of these two missions in the next paragraph.

"MISSIO AD GENTES" Mission Focused on TRIBES

Mission focused on tribes (peoples) essentially result in disciple-making of Christ, and all Christians have a calling to carry out His Great Commission. This traditional mission was first adopted as the main theme of the church's mission at the Second Vatican Council of the Catholic Church, and it was clear that the evangelization of all peoples was the church's missionary banner. Pope Paul VI opened the door to frontier mission and dialogue with other religions and beliefs by proposing an edict called 'to tribes (Ad Gentes)'. It is beyond the fence of the existing doctrine of sharing that salvation only exists in the church, and of the exclusive grace of God's redemption. Furthermore, it was also an opportunity to improve better relations with other Christians (Protestants) and religious communities. However, despite the declaration of *Nostra Aetate* (meaning 'Our Age')⁵,

5. This Declaration was passed on October 28, 1965 with 2,221 of the bishops in favor and 88 against as an improvement in the relationship between the Church and non-Christians. It is a

these viewpoints were unfortunately not extended to the perspective of the 'universal church', which is the body of Christ, from the point of view of practical application.

In many ways, the positive concept of mission focused on tribes were highlighted. For example, respect and love for people of different races as equal human beings, sharing culture and social life, awareness of God's presence in other traditions and living according to their conscience. However, the limitation of the mission is that missionaries can fall into the trap of the so-called 'Gap-eul(assymetirical) relationship' in which they are right, and the target of mission is insufficient. In his article, 'Towards a Mission that Evolves from Ad Gentes to Inter Gentes'⁶, M. D. Thomas, president of the Institute of Harmony and Peace Studies (IHPS) in New Delhi, India, said, "The most important misconception [of missionaries] is an act of forgetting that God is already at the mission field before they arrive," he said, reciting Ray Laan's article, and pointed out the danger of tribal target centrality in missions.

In addition, Yonathan Y. Tan, a mission theologian at the Catholic University of Sydney, Australia, who created a theoretical framework for local-centered missions in the nations, said that *Missio Ad Gentes* is 'a framework that does not fit the current era of religious pluralism. It was claimed that it was missionary work that should be abandoned.'⁷ Looking at Christ's missionary work, Jesus escaped the so-called 'Jerusalem' (church), a culture familiar to his disciples and Jews, and took the lead in expanding the gospel of Samaria (de-Church) through a woman living in that area. He did not stay there but passed through Galilee and went into the culture of the Gentiles to the non-church, which was seen as the end of the world at the time, and preached the gospel, symbolically revealing that He is omnipresent in all worlds as equal to God. (See chart below)



FIGURE 1 Expansion of the Gospel and Christ's Ministry

Today's Protestant missions are still immersed in Christian imperialism to convert 'pagans' by mobilizing Christian slogans such as 'mission to unreached tribes', or 'unreached tribes' adoption', and so on. Bishop Desmond TuTu, the leader of South Africa, once pointed out the fallacy of Protestant mission in Africa, saying that when the missionaries arrived, they had the Bible in their hands, and we had

declaration to form a relationship.

6. Thomas, M., D., Towards A Mission that Evolves from Ad Gentes to Inter Gentes, excerpted at Academia.edu on 5th July 2021. Re-quoted from Laan, Ray, Vander, Early Church Discovery Guide: Becoming a Light in the Darkness, Michigan, 2008, p.153.

7. Tan, Yonathan Y., Missio Inter Gentes: Towards a New Paradigm in the Mission Theology of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conference, Mission Studies 21.1, Koninklijke Brill NV, 2004. p.88.

the land. They asked us to pray, so when we closed our eyes and opened them again, we had the Bible in our hands, and they had the land.”

At the WEA (then WEF) World Mission Leaders Conference held in Iguazu, Brazil in October 1999, while discussing reflection on the Protestant evangelical missions and future prospects, the three-self principle of self-governing, self-supporting, and self-propagation was not enough. And by adding two self-reliance principles namely: self-theologizing and self-missilogizing, “we can expect a surprising diversity of culture and church changes within a community of faith which is faithful to the Bible. The results will be fundamentally different from the present.”⁸ However, the results after that have yet to be proven.

Andrew Walls, who has an excellent insight into the history of modern missions, wrote on the topic of 'Christian Mission in a Five-hundred-year Context',⁹ that at the Edinburgh Conference in 1910, the history of dramatic Christian expansion in Korea, the Himalayas, and China, especially in sub-Saharan Africa, was unexpected. And that the worldwide universality of Christianity, which had been developed in the early days of Christian history, was being restored. And he also observed that theology and history, which had been led by the West, have now handed over the initiative to global Christianity. True theology comes from field missions, and the subject and agenda of the theology must be culturally defined by the local active Christian life.

Walls also said that if the local theology develops, the church and mission as an organism cannot but be subordinated to the indigenous culture, so all our religious expressions can only be perfected in Christ. As solidarity and unity among Jewish converts and gentiles from different Greek backgrounds in Ephesus church are seen not as a mere union of two races, but as a living union of two functional members with Christ as the head. He argued that ultimately the mission accomplished during the Great Europe Migration now give the Great Reverse Migration an opportunity to cooperate in building the body of Christ.

MISSIO INTER GENTES (Mission Centered on the LOCALS)

After the second half of 2019, as the Covid-19 virus began to shrink all human activities, we realized that the visible and quantitative missions we have, no longer worked. And the world mission began to ponder the post-Covid era. In particular, the Protestant missions, which have been led by the West, broke the myth of advanced countries, which have been the

8. Edited by William Taylor, Donghwa Kim, Sangcheol Moon, Hyunmo Lee, Hyungkeun Choi, 21st Century Global Missiology, Christian Documentation Society, Seoul 2004. p. 30.

9. Walls, Andrew, *Christian Mission in a Five-hundred-year Context*, in *Mission In the 21st Century: Exploring the Five Marks of Global Mission*, edited by Andrew Walls and Cathy Ross, Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd., 2008, p. 200 – 204.

quantitative and strategic basis of missions due to this Covid crisis. While the international order is being reorganized into a new structure, global churches is becoming more accountable agent for world mission. As for the church in the lockdown era, Jason Mandryk of Operation World makes the following predictions.

“CoVid-19 is demonstrating all around the world that the essence of the Church is not in the physical structures, but in the people who abide by His word and are filled with His Spirit. In a post-Christian West, there are lessons for us, that our ears have to hear. Increasing antipathy toward organized religion, dwindling finances, a disinclined younger generation, and congregations too frequently disconnected from local community all may require the Church to make a quicker transition to being a relational network rather than a calcified institution.

In the face of pandemics, societal dissolution, economic crises, and even sustained persecution, such grassroots models have proven themselves time and time again. It may feel macabre even to make such comparisons, but the best-equipped churches in the days to come will likely resemble how people follow Jesus in Iran or Vietnam rather than the USA or Australia.”¹⁰

He also predicted that the traditional Western missionary dispatch model would disappear because of high cost, regional restrictions, and reduction in mission donations. So, in the future, it was expected that the church would have more and more things to respond to after the Covid crisis, such as: the existence of mission organizations, missionary placement issues, missionary withdrawal, short-term mission trips, and thorough calculation of mission expenses. In this situation, the existing West-led missions with vested interests will no longer have a place to stand, and future missions will appear in the form of indigenous people centered on locals residing in the missionfield. In the end, it seems that in the future, missionary work will require more initiative from the locals rather than help from outsiders.

Where should our direction go in this fluctuating missionary environment? Like many missiologists and strategists, missions led by outsiders seem to have already revealed their limitations. Eventually it is important to let locals take the lead and get help from outsiders as facilitators. Therefore, I think the *Missio Inter Gentes*, (mission centered on the locals) should be introduced next as an important direction that Protestant missions should consider in the future.

The original meaning of this word, 'Inter Gentes', is 'mission between tribes', which is 'mission of the tribes, by the tribes, for the tribes and with the tribes'. This concept first appeared in 2001 by William R. Burrows, a professor of missiology who was in charge of the World Christian Program at a seminary in New York and it was Yonathan Yun-Ka Tan,¹¹ Professor

10. Mandryk, Jason, *Global Transmission, Global Mission: The Impact and Implications of the Covid-19 Pandemic*, 2020. p. 22-23.

11. Professor Tan compiled the material from 1974 to 2000 at the FABC meeting and published it in 2004 as FABC material

of Missiology at Catholic University of Sydney, Australia, who organized this concept.

This concept aroused great sympathy at the Nairobi meeting, 2013, and at the International Theological Conference led by the University of Münster, Germany in 2014. In 2015 the first journal titled 'Missio Inter Gentes' was published by the Divine Word Mission Institute in Manila, Philippines. The term 'Inter Gentes' affects not only the religious realm but also the general academic realm.

The 'mission centered on the locals' is quite in line with the insider movement pursued by Protestant missions. Its most characteristic is the life of Christ, the human Jesus, and his teachings. The values set forth by Christ are perfection without discrimination, seeking perfection as a spiritual goal, loving one another and loving enemies, unconditional forgiveness, washing the feet of others, serving others, welcoming others as friends, caring for the weak, being the gospel to all, considering all better than oneself, being brothers and sisters to all, through which all are united in the Father. The important thing about these values is that they are universal and can be sympathized with because Christ wanted to reveal His life through Himself, transcending religion.

Jay Matenga, an Aboriginal New Zealander who is in charge of the WEA Missions Division, had a presentation at the Wycliffe Global Alliance and SIL conference held in January 2021 entitled "Together in Christ 2021". He argued the following three points of view that should be kept in mind when the global mission community cooperates in enhancing the capacity of local people in his article, 'Centering the Local: The Indigenous Future of Mission',¹² about missions in the post-pandemic era.

First, **Indigeneity**: is no longer the concept with negative and foreign-dependent, uncivilized, and primitive connotation as we thought in the past. But an implication of local innovation, local guardianship to transform and cultivate own autonomous ability. This can be said to have a similar meaning to the Asabiyya or Umma communities of Islam. This indigeneity should be seen as opposed to contextualization, which began to grow with the so-called "impositional missiology" rooted in enlightenment and colonialism. Therefore, what indigeneness must aim for is that insiders must share their own beliefs with outsiders by cultivating the ability to express themselves in a way that they can be easily understood by outsiders.

Second, **Influence**: speaking of insider-centered missions, the influence of outsiders should no longer be exercised. In Africa, Asia, and Native American regions it is a common practice that locals play the role of guardians for the safety of the community. In this sense, in the case of the gospel as well, I believe

No. 109 with the approval of the 'Federation of Asian Bishops' Conference. The name of the material is 'Missio Inter Gentes: Towards a New Paradigm of the Mission Theology of the Federation of the Asian Bishops' Conference.

12. Matenga, Jay, Centring the Local: The Indigenous Future of Mission, presented at the Wycliffe Global Alliance/SIL "Together in Christ 2021" conference.

that local leaders should lead the stewardship of the community.

Third, **Integration**: One of Donald McGavran's effective missionary principles, the 'homogeneous unit principle', overlooked the biblical fact that even in the single community of the Early Church, they did not achieve unity (It is true in the book of James). Homogeneous groups are not important, but how diverse groups can be faithful to the call of Christ in John 17:18-25 towards unity. Therefore, our ultimate goal should be how to unite in the community of God as one rather than missionary achievements.

The 'local led mission' that Matenga claims is ultimately a new direction of mission that we slowly realize through long reflection after Covid, which is the mission centered on the local. In particular, when we think of the world of pluralism, we see that it has a premise that it is born in 'all traditions and cultures given through one creator'. Therefore, in the end, it can be called 'mission in a way that reveals a harmonious human culture that transcends the barriers of all man-made beliefs and ideologies'.¹³

The most dynamic perspective of mission centered on the locals is the dialogue between different beliefs and religions. Until now, the most closed factor of Protestant missions could be the lack of understanding and hostility towards other religions. In particular, considering that the remaining tasks are concentrated on major religions such as Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and indigenous religions, it is necessary to strengthen research for understanding or dialogue with other religions. Moreover, considering that the diaspora phenomenon is accelerating, and the cities of Europe are the most active mission fields where people from many different backgrounds live together due to the influx of refugees, we should not force the locals with the gospel wrapped in our own language and cultural baggage.

CONCLUSION

I have tried to share the perspective of new missions that will be developed after Covid through two contrasting missionary engagements. At this point, such considerations and discussions are reflectively necessary, and whether you have just entered missionary work or you are a veteran minister of 30-40 years, we are standing in front of the same question as to where to go in this time of transition.

Recently, in the non-face-to-face seminar held regularly by ARILAC Research Center in Korea, many insights were presented about the need for regional research and the role change between local-centered missions and external missionaries as missionary alternatives. Inspired by this, I focused on the change in the perspective of missions that has accelerated since the declaration of the Second Vatican Council.

13. Thomas, M., D., Towards A Mission that Evolves from Ad Gentes to Inter Gentes, excerpted at Academia.edu on 5th July, 2021. p.18.

Through Missio Inter Gentes: Towards a New Paradigm in the Mission Theology, I tried to further develop the thoughts I had personally in the refugee learning community (Equip7: Learning Community) operated in Germany. In fact, I started thinking about this topic after listening to a presentation by an Indian Catholic priest at the 2016 International Society for Missionary Society (IAMS) held at Presbyterian University and Theological Seminary, Korea.

Particularly, in urban areas and pluralistic environments where human migration is unprecedented, multicultural and multireligious, situations are developing more and more dynamically. Missions do not seem possible in the same way as 'the homogeneous unit principle' movement.

As can be seen in the history of missions in Korea, converts have already formed a community of faith through the distribution of the Bible before missionaries even came in. Even today, these similar tribes, especially being captured in the field of Asian missions, minimize external influence and I think it is right to change to missions in which missionaries play the role of a helper so that locals can eventually discover the Creator through their own indigenous ability, influence and potential.

In the area of Protestantism, various missionary alternatives are emerging but we should look back on the fundamental mission issues. The concept of 'mission centered on the locals (Missio Inter Gentes)' seems to give us many challenges and reflections both theologically and from the practical point of view of the mission field.

I hope that through active discussions, a new breakthrough will be made in Protestant missions. Samuel Escobar said, Mission comes from below. "It is a mystery that the dynamism of missions does not come from the privileged and powerful, but from the little ones who have nothing."

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