

In the Making of the Name of Jesus as a Fetish, God Stops: Towards a Critical Enquiry of the History of Missions

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“Half of [Manila’s] 1.5 million population of street children inhale glue. Street life is tough; opportunities for earning are extremely limited; and in the street, survival is the name of the game. Household glue, locally known as ‘rugby’ emerged as a survival drug in the street, because rugby is the best available solution to the most pertinent problem that the children face in the street, namely hunger. One of the effects of rugby is to suppress the sensation of hunger.”¹

Stories of street children, deprived farmers, and women are often narrated in mission debates to catalogue and prioritize mission agenda in the 21st century. But no serious attempts have been made to locate the links between the great missionary movement and the present reality of deprivation. Indeed, the relationship between mission enterprise and deprivation could be merely accidental in several cases. The fact remains that these stories of deprivation are heard largely from the former mission fields of the great missionary adventures.

The story from the streets of Manila is not an isolated event. There are similar situations in a majority of the old mission fields. According to the report published in December 2008 by the Crime Record Bureau of the Government of India, “46 farmers committed suicide every 24 hours; nearly one farmer in every thirty minutes. 16,632 farmers committed suicide in 2007.”² The economic space of farmers is robbed by agro-business companies belonging to the nations of former mission agencies and as a result, farmers are deprived of their ability to have any productive relationship with their land. In the period between 1994 and 2000, around 2.7 million peasants in the Philippines lost their relationship with agricultural economy and they migrated to cities and other nations as unskilled labourers.

It is not sufficient to say that these are the emerging mission questions. The reality of children who are forced to inhale glue to suppress hunger and the reality of mass suicides of farmers, artisans, and victims of rape and violence around the world are indicative of a collective and total rejection of God as the presiding principle of life by the prevailing economic and political systems. God is displaced from having any influence in the organized lives of the present societies. Hence, this challenge brought by the reality of ‘de-deification’ of the Divine should be the most cardinal question to be addressed in mission debates.

¹ This report appeared in the title page of *The Sunday Times Magazine* published in Manila on February 8, 2009.

² *Mathrubhumi*, December 15, 2008. Women are seldom counted in the reports released by the governments on farmer’s suicide, though in majority of the cases, not only the male farmer, but his entire family took their lives. Yet only male members are counted, since women and children are not counted as economic variables anyway.

To initiate a relevant practice to address prevailing human tragedies, it becomes imperative to negate the process of de-deification by locating how these forces were and are rampant in past and present societies. Analysis of mission history should not be free from this inquiry. Studies of the occurrence of famine in many nations reveal that human deprivation was at its highest during the time of missionary enterprises.³

Mission and Empire

There are two assumptions accepted rather as rational explanations in mission studies. First is the generally held view among students of missiology that the cohabitation of missionary enterprise with colonial domination among Asian, African, and Latin American nations was offered as a mutually beneficial relationship. Sociological understanding regarding the relationship between the establishment of power and the construction of an ideology to legitimize power is the reason for embarking on such an assumption. It was often considered that the search to locate a legitimizing ideology was a widely prevalent reality among all dominating powers. Centres of hegemonic powers require a convincing justification to explain why they have the right to exercise domination. Power centres in the past crumbled not only because it was defeated by outside powers but also when it lost its legitimization. Thus it is imperative for hegemonic powers to be in search of a theory to justify their special position in a given context. That is why patriarchy promoted a socially constructed reading of the biological specificities of humans to formulate social theories of gender with the aim of legitimizing male domination over women and children. Race and caste dominations are not different. Benefactors of these dominant systems are engaged in converting myths as rational explanations of social anthropology and ancient history.

Fifteenth century Europe confronted a similar challenge to answer why they had the right to occupy and enslave people and resources in the distant lands. Apart from the theory of civilization [that greater civilization takes over responsibilities to civilize the lesser civilizations, and colonialism was such type of a natural process in history] the concept and practice of mission activities offered the needed legitimation to this moral question of the hegemonic powers.

To some extent mission movements did offer the necessary ideological justification to colonialism. Papers presented at the World Missionary Conference 1910 at Edinburgh points towards such an observation. Publications from the conference indicate a common view prevalent among missionaries that colonialism is a providence of God. Some argued that colonialism is the result of a direct intervention of God to create a favourable environment to fulfil the commandments in Matthew 28:19.

The linkages between British monarchy and the mission enterprise were well-documented in a resolution adopted unanimously by the conference to express the unflinching loyalty to the King as a response to his greetings. The resolution reads: "Almighty God who in

³ B.M. Bhatia, *Famines in India: A Study in Some Aspects of the Economic History of India with Special Reference to Food Problem* (Delhi: Konark Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 1985).

His providence has called your majesty to rule over so great an Empire"⁴. John R Mott, the conference chairperson, made the implication more lucid: "The marvellous ordering of providence during this century assisted the whole world to be open to the church."⁵

Such rationalization was offered not only towards colonialism and imperial expansion, but also towards specific practices of slavery and genocide viciously practiced as a strategy to establish domination. While visiting a sugar mill in Bahia, Brazil, in 1633, Jesuit Provincial Antonio Vieira hailed the importance of slavery in the plan of salvation offered by God through Jesus Christ. Sugar plantations and mills were solely operated by using African slave labour that created the wealth of the European nations. Vieira confronted the slaves:

Oh, if only the blacks taken from their Ethiopian deserts and brought to Brazil would realize how much they owe to God and their most holy mother through that which could seem to be banning, captivity and unhappiness but is in reality a miracle, a great miracle! Tell me, your parents who were born, will live and die in heathen darkness, without the light of faith or knowledge of God - where will they go when they die? They will all...go to hell and they are burning right now and will burn there for ever and ever.⁶

The cohabitation of empire and religion is not just a historical story but a current reality. The empire remains as a defining reality of the present time. Change of colour is not a signal for the reshaping of the fundamental objectives and character of the empire. This is because the empire is not represented by a person, but is a corporate reality of the hegemonic powers involving the "almighty trinities, namely the international financial regulators such as World Bank and International Monetary Fund, the World Trade Organization; and the Multi-National Corporations. They control and regulate the international finance (casino) market. Since all economic activities are subsumed under the global casino market, the control over finance market signals a total control over economy. The change of colour, on the other hand, demonstrates the ingenuity of the empire. It was in the time of Constantinian empire where it was learned that the best strategy to kill a resistance is not by destroying it physically but by incorporating it in the realms of power. Recent history shows that this old strategy of the empire has been

⁴ World Missionary Conference, 1910 *The History and Records of the Conference together with Addresses delivered at the evening meetings* (Edinburgh and London: Oliphant, Anderson & Ferrier, 1910), 87.

⁵ Quoted by Kenneth Scott Latourette, "Ecumenical Bearings of the Missionary Movement and the International Missionary Council," in Ruth Rouse and Stephen C. Neill eds., *A History of the Ecumenical Movement: 1517-1948* (London: SPCK, 1967). This feeling was expressed by Commission I of the World Missionary Conference: The report reads: "One of the most significant and hopeful facts with reference to world evangelization is that the vast majority of the people of the non-Christian nations and races are under the sway, either of Christian governments or of those not antagonistic to Christian missions. This should greatly facilitate the carrying out of a comprehensive campaign to make Christ known." World Missionary Conference, 1910, Report of Commission I, *Carrying the Gospel to All the Non-Christian World* (Edinburgh: Oliphant, Anderson & Ferrier), 6.

⁶ Antonio Vierira, "Sermao decimo quarto (1655)," as quoted by Paulo Suess in "Missio Dei and the Project of Jesus: The Poor and the 'Other' as Mediators of the Kingdom of God and Protagonists of the Churches," in *International Review of Mission*, Vol. XCII, No. 367 (October 2003).

successfully re-enacted, while religion continues to play a subservient role to the powers of the empire.

An inquiry into the history of mission therefore is important. First, to identify the ramifications of the cohabitation of empire and religion and make the church vigilant against the imperialist strategy of using religion to justify exploitative expansion. Religions have converted themselves as political formations as a result of domestication. Political Judaism, political Islam, political Hinduism, political Christianity, and even political Buddhism are not just proposals anymore but are manipulative constructs of power. Second, to discern the differences between the faith orientation of monarchic religions and the faith that seeks the inhabitation of the life giving divine forces in the inner core of the individual and collective lives of the people.

Ecumenical Foundations in Missionary Movements

The second assumption hailed in mission studies is the claim that ecumenical movements originated from traditional missionary activities. According to this understanding, mission societies in general and the World Missionary Conference of 1910 in particular prompted the formation of ecumenical movements.

Ecumenism itself doesn't indicate a break from the monarchic ideologies and framework. Unity historically is a political demand of the empire. In a penetrating analysis of the epistemology of the term ecumenism, Barbara R. Rossing suggests that unlike the Septuagint parallelism of *Oikoumene* to earth or whole world, the New Testament literature gave a restricted meaning of *oikoumene* as the 'administrative world of the empire'⁷ *Oikoumene* is essentially imperialist since the administrative world is constantly in search of a military strategy to conquer other land and people. This essentially means *oikoumene* is in opposition to "earth" created and belonging to God. Jesus was persecuted and killed by the *oikoumene* of Rome and it functions as a counter force to God's promise of the fullness of creation.

Irrespective of these epistemological foundations, Asian ecumenism has emerged as an anti-colonial formation. The first impulse of ecumenism in Asia had its origin in Asian nationalism and it arose as a protest movement against missionary paternalism and western domination. Nationalism expressed in the solidarity of the Bandung Conference of Asian and African nations functioned as a catalyst for ecumenical formations in both Asia and Africa. Thus, an enquiry of missionary movements needs to be informed by the interest to strengthen the foundational imperatives formulated by Asian ecumenism.

Reconstruction of the history of missionary movements needs to take serious account of the two assumptions described above. These assumptions shall also serve to determine the priorities and orientation of the future course of mission activities.

⁷ Barbara R. Rossing, "(Re)claiming Oikoumene" in Shelly Matthews, Melanie Johnson-Debaufre, and Cynthia Briggs Kittredge, eds. *Walk in the Ways of Wisdom: Essays in Honor of Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 2003), 74-87.

Ideological Construction of History

Historical narration of mission, however, is an ideological function and majority of the mission histories subscribe to the political and economic interest of their former colonial masters. These historical articulations largely fall into two categories. The first category of narratives stresses a triumphalist view expressing the heroism and dedication of the individual missionaries who “sacrificed their bodies in the dark heathen land”. And indeed there were missionaries who were committed to the challenges of the liberative potentials of the gospel. Any attempt to belittle the dedication of a section of missionaries and their contribution to express the love and concern of the Divine was a gross negation of the historical truth. These missionaries maintained a different orientation from the established lot and were challenged by a different set of social and moral principles. Bartolome de Casas, who observed that “God has the freshest and keenest memory of the least and most forgotten”⁸ was challenged by this faith and decided to be on the side of God by being on the side of the poor and the marginalized Amerindians. His actions were counter to the wishes of the organized church.

Some of the missionaries, including William Carey, were informed by the concept of freedom proposed by the leaders of French revolution. Cohabitation of the evangelical appeal to spread the good news with the concepts and practice of freedom and self-determination has shaped them as agents for justice and social change. They attempted to craft a faith responsibility to address questions of ignorance and other social evils. In the case of India for example, the translation of the Bible into vernacular languages was equivalent to spearheading a social revolution. Caste rules prevented Dalits from the right to education – indeed, Dalits and other lower classes were barred from even entering schools – while bizarre forms of punishment awaited those who dared to seek knowledge. Missionaries not only promoted the concept of universal education, but built schools where Dalits have easy access and protection. Missionaries also encouraged adults to learn reading and writing to equip themselves to read and familiarize themselves with the biblical message. Within the context of rigid caste discrimination, encouragement to read the Bible initiated a social process towards radical transformation of the socio-cultural structures. Schools, hospitals, relief centres and institutes, and organizations for social learning have emerged as a result of their determination to find an immediate answer to these issues. The spirit of freedom that these missionaries propounded, goaded, at least to a limited extent, nationalist movements in Asian and African nations. But unfortunately they were few in number.

The second category of historical narration intended a self-critical evaluation of mission activities, aimed at locating the limitations of western churches and mission agencies in evangelizing the “other” with an objective to strengthen their given pursuit. David Bosch, for example, falls in this category and he comprehensively traced the challenges confronted by the western mission. However, his concerns were informed by the priorities of the western churches and were certainly not the view of the people from the victimized nations and communities.

⁸ Quoted by Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation* (New York: Orbis, 1988), 15th Anniversary edition with a new introduction by the author), xxvii.

Reiteration of these narratives is largely insignificant in a context in which children are forced to inhale glue to suppress the feeling of hunger. Hence, it is a challenge for the churches in the former colonized land to embark on a new enquiry to locate mission history. Unlike the traditional reading of mission, narrated with complex paradigm changes⁹, third world churches seek to contain the history of mission into two or three phases. The first phase coincided with the mercantilist expansion of colonial powers; second with the development of industrial capital; and the third with the emergence of resistance movements in the colonized land.

Voyage of Christ in Merchants' Ship

Christian presence in Asian and African nations predates the dawn of missionary initiatives of the fifteenth century. Studies by John C. England revealed that Christianity had become part of the religious beliefs of people in Asia starting from the second century, was found in at least dozen countries east of Persia by the eighth century and throughout all Asian regions by the 16th century: from Afghanistan eastward to Turkestan, Tibet, China, Mongolia, Korea and Japan and southwards to India, Sri Lanka, Burma, Siam, Indochina and East Indies.¹⁰ These early Christian formations were informed by "holistic, human-centred, world-oriented, cross-cultural, and interfaith perspective. During this period churches were involved in courageous missionary endeavours, monastic movements, long traditions of state service, educational and medical care, a mutually beneficial co-existence with neighbours of other faiths and creative biblical interpretations."¹¹

The advent of the 15th century missionary enterprise marked the beginning of new paradigms for mission. The first epoch of this new period coincided with the mercantile expansion and conquest of European powers in the East and the West. To counter the concept of universality established by Muslim traders, European traders found that the Christian gospel could be employed as an alternate understanding of truth.¹² During this time the Islamic world possessed a wide ranging character of universality compared to the other models of religions and cultures. Although Christianity and Buddhism were widespread, and in places stronger than Islamic faith, they expressed a relatively contextual character; while the Islamic faith propagated unified traditions of worship, rituals, and interpretations of faith offering them a character of universality. From Morocco and Libya to Indonesia and Mindanao the Islamic faith spread as a unifying force, also signalling the economic influence of Arab traders.

⁹ David Bosch, in his book, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (New York: Orbis, 1996) popularized the term paradigm shifts in mission debates. However, his paradigm changes have not accounted the political and imperialist agenda behind the different models that emerged in missionary enterprise.

¹⁰ John C. England, "Historical Notes on Mission and Ecumenism in Asia: Some Signposts to 'Creative Moments: 2nd – 18th centuries," in Wati Longchar, Josef Widyatmadja and M.P. Joseph, eds., *They Left by Another Road: Rerouting Mission and Ecumenism in Asia* (Chiang Mai: Christian Conference of Asia, 2007), 42-43. For more detailed discussion see John C. England, *The Hidden History of Christianity in Asia* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2002).

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 43.

¹² The preceding discussion was based on the information provided by Enrique Dussel in "The expansion of Christendom, Its Crisis and the Present Moment," in Virgil Elizando and Norbert Greinacher, eds., *Tensions between the Churches of the First World and the Third World, Concilium*, 1991.

European traders confronted this universality and one may suspect that the Papal Bill of 1418 was issued under the cloud of this challenge. Through the papal document, Pope Martin V invited European Christians to unite with Portugal in their crusade against the Muslims. Christianity compared to Islamic faith was composed of and manifested as different regional formations. Thus Portugal acquired the right of control over the church and at the same time the duty to propagate Christian faith.¹³ Spain later followed suit.

In 1492 when Columbus “discovered” America¹⁴, he equated his discovery of the “New World” with the apocalypse of new creation described in the book of Revelation. Columbus wrote, “Lord made me the messenger of the new heaven and the new earth and showed me where to go.”¹⁵ This messianic claim functioned as a theory [even during the invasion of the so-called puritans in the later period] to justify exploitation, plunder and genocide of the natives in biblical proportions.

Colonial expansion became an ecclesial project when Pope Alexander the VI in 1494 handed over forever to Portugal and Spain all the lands to the East and to the West respectively based on an imaginary line in the Atlantic, together with all their natural and cultural wealth and people to be disposed of as they should judge fit.¹⁶

Colonialism progressed through two corresponding dynamics under the ecclesiastical patronage: conversion of the natives into Christian faith and the massive transfer of resources, including gold, and silver from the conquered land to Europe. In the case of Latin America between 1550 and 1591, thirty to forty million people were baptized¹⁷ and “between 1503 and 1660 alone 185,000 kilos of gold and 16 million kilos of silver were shipped to San Lucar de Barrameda from Latin America.”¹⁸ These processes were interlinked and remained as a unitary project in mission history. In 1681, the King of Spain declared that “through his infinite mercy and goodness God our Lord has deigned us such a large part of the lordship of this world... we have happily succeeded in bringing to the holy Roman Catholic Church the innumerable peoples and nations who dwell in and subject to our domination.”¹⁹

In this mercantile model of mission, the church as an institution was united with the state and functioned as complimentary units of a single whole. After the natives’ lands were conquered and occupied by European merchants and soldiers, Church hierarchies were placed to pacify the locals, to convince them that their domination is part of God’s design

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Gavin Menzies has convincingly challenged the traditional claim of discovery by Columbus and demonstrated that the voyage conducted by the Chinese traveler, Zheng Ho, to Caribbean Island was at least seventy years before the European expedition. See his book, *1421 The Year China Discovered the World* (London: Bantam Books, 2002).

¹⁵ Quoted by Catherine Keller, “The Attraction of Apocalypse and the Evil of the End,” in *Concilium* 1998/1. Menzies observed that Columbus who originally set his travel to the trading centers in India reached the shores of Caribbean Island because of a mistake in reading the Chinese marital map that Columbus used for his voyage.

¹⁶ Samuel Rayan S.J., “Decolonization of Theology,” in *Jnanadeepa*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (July 1998).

¹⁷ Dussel, 45.

¹⁸ “The real foreign debt,” in *Third World Resurgence*, No. 90/91, Feb/Mar 1998.

¹⁹ Dussel, 46.

for salvation. Soon after the conquest, churches established their administrative structures: the first American diocese was founded in 1504, the Diocese of Goa in India in 1534, and in Manila in 1581.

Laissez Faire Missions

The second phase started along with the capitalist expansion initiated by Holland.²⁰ The Dutch East India Company set up in 1602 employed missionaries even though the sole aim of the company was purely commercial. Unlike the earlier phase of working with the hierarchical church, the company-led evangelism prompted the creation of “private enterprises” for missionary task. The hold of *laissez faire* ideology in business and commerce led to the new experiments of laissez faire initiatives in mission. Faithfully following the essential *laissez faire* doctrine, that is, for abetting the pursuit of success the interference from any organized social or political agencies should be prevented, official churches were either kept outside or seen as a hindrance to the expansion of Christian faith during this second phase.

This trend was reversed and the primacy of the churches was affirmed in mission only through the revolt spearheaded by the churches in the colonized land. They identified that the *laissez faire* approach in mission, as in economics, was based on marginalization of the natives. While churches in the colonized land offered relative participation to local Christians, mission societies were accountable only to their shareholders in Europe and not to the Christians among whom they served. During the World Missionary Conference at Edinburgh 1910, Bishop Azariah observed that the “official relationship generally prevalent at present between the missionary and the Indian (church) worker is that between a master and servant.” Azariah’s plea was to reverse the *laissez faire* model of mission to ensure the participation of the native Christians in the affairs of mission.

Missio-Dei against the freedom of Churches

The primacy of believing communities in mission earned through the persistent demands of churches in the colonized nations received a serious reprieve when *missio-Dei* was presented as the central missiological understanding. *Missio-Dei* was thought to be closer to the biblical narratives. If mission is about doing the will of God, then *missio-Dei* explains everything this should involve – essentially a movement from God to the world, where the church is perceived as one of the instruments. During the Willingen Conference of the International Missionary Council (1952) ‘mission’ was defined as the movement of God and derived from the very nature of God. David Bosch observed that the idea of *missio Dei* was first reflected in the writing of Karl Barth when he stressed that mission is but an activity of God him/herself.²¹ However, the conceptual phrase *missio Dei* has its origin in Karl Hartenstein’s report of Willingen where he defined mission “as participation in the sending of the son, in the *missio Dei*, with an inclusive aim of establishing the lordship of Christ over the whole redeemed creation.”²²

²⁰ Dussel, 46.

²¹ Bosch, 389.

²² Rodger C. Bassham, “Seeking a Deeper Theological Meaning for Mission” in *International Review of Mission* (July 1978), 332.

Tom Stransky reports about Willingen's observation:

The church is not the true centre of gravity towards which one should direct missionary thinking; rather it should be the self-revelation of the Triune God in Jesus Christ. Out of the depth of God's love for us, the Father has sent forth his own beloved Son to reconcile all things to himself, that we and all men might, through the Holy Spirit, be made one in him with the Father in that perfect love which is the very nature of God.²³

A change from Church-centredness to *missio Dei* is mediated by the challenges of the post-colonial structures.²⁴ Two issues were pertinent during the early Fifties around the world. First was the new-found meaning in the concept of universalism. The success of the Chinese revolution and the formation of the agencies such as United Nations, Non-Alignment movement, and Pan African Conference ushered a new faith in universalism.²⁵ The second impetus was the anti-institutionalism, anti-raj sentiment that evolved in the latter part of the 40's. The concept of the 'Kingdom of God' and *missio Dei* doubtlessly find a partnership in the new found enthusiasm of universalism and anti-institutionalism.

Alluding to the observation of Stephen Neill, David Bosch commented that *missio Dei* in singular marks the end of the age of missions; the age of mission has begun. "Mission, singular remains primary, missions in the plural, constitute a derivative."²⁶ The primary objective of our missionary activity is to turn towards God's world with humility and participate in the conflict between the reign of righteousness and the powers of death and evil.

The conceptual change to *missio Dei* was welcomed by Roman Catholics and the churches from the Orthodox fraternity for several reasons. For them the *missio Dei* reinforces the Trinitarian concept and certainly has the potential to offset the christo-monism advocated by certain Protestant mission agencies and churches. Trinity being a statement of faith, the orthodox members in the fraternity are always sensitive to the collective expressions of the ecumenical bodies on these issues. Being a liturgical eucharistic family, Orthodox theology iterates the cosmic dimension of the Church as cardinal to its understanding of mission. "When eucharistic family experiences the truth" of the knowledge of Christ, "the necessity to share the joy of the resurrection with all is a natural consequence." That means the foundational principle of mission within the Orthodox tradition is to build reconciliation between the Church and the Triune God, so that the truth of Christ shall lead the members to the witness of freedom in the world. The Church's 'aim is to embrace and to renew the whole world, to transfigure it into God's kingdom.' Responsibility towards the world

²³ Tom Stransky, "Missio Dei," in *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement*, eds. Nicholas Lossky, et. al. (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1991), 688.

²⁴ The term post-colonial definitely is a misnomer. The emerging globalization has unequivocally proved that colonialism has never ended.

²⁵ The Raj also practiced a truncated universalism. Empire, which was successful in defeating sun from its attempt to take rest of course, represented a universalism; Africans were taken to the new land, Indians were transported to the Caribbean, South Africa and to other distant lands, textile made in Manchester was available in the villages of Andhra Pradesh, and many other visible forms of universalism. But the universalism of the empire however was offered the opposite of what represented unity and freedom.

²⁶ Bosch, 391.

invites proximity with the world 'in order to draw the world near and to sanctify and to renew the world, to give new content to old ways of life."²⁷

Trinitarianism, as the Orthodox position argues, is a nuanced explanation of the christological formulations, expressed in the Christian traditions. At Melbourne, Metropolitan Osthathios related trinitarianism for a Christian as a social doctrine which represents the concerns for unity and freedom in our divided world. It is a warning against the homogenizing dominance of a culture, perspective or system. It also warns against the attempts to absolutize and construct normative models out of dominant forms of race, sex, class or nationality. Trinitarianism remains as a humble reminder of the equality and love within the corporate existence of people and nations.

Feminist discourse further expanded the Trinitarian concept. Trinitarianism is a movement from individual to community, authoritarian power relation to democratic decentralization challenging all dominating principalities and powers.

These debates enabled missionaries to realize that mission is more than the planting of churches or saving souls, but rather part of a divine plan to bring history into perfection, and, through divine will, bringing reconciliation between estranged world orders.

Although the concept of *missio-Dei* theoretically placed the primacy of the will of God in mission activities, in practice, this new found concept deprived third world churches of having any participation in the planning of mission. Since *missio-Dei* argued that mission is an attribute of God, claims of having better or true knowledge of God offered the power to dictate the agenda of mission. "Younger churches" therefore had no ability to claim knowledge of God that surpasses the claim of the "parent churches". In effect, western mission agencies regained their dominance in the mission strategy when *missio-Dei* replaced other paradigms of mission.

However, the primary orientation of the missionary strategy during the second phase was informed by private initiatives; and the growth of mission societies coincided with the replacement of Spanish and Dutch powers by the British Empire. In 1608 the British were in Surat, by 1620 in North America, and by 1639 in Madras. It was perhaps not entirely coincidental then that the first missionary society SPCK (Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge) was set up in 1698 and SPG (Society for the Propagation of the Gospel) in 1701. Edinburgh 1910 was the gathering of these privately run Laissez Faire Mission enterprises.²⁸

Development, market and mission

Laissez faire model in mission found new favour when development was identified as mission by churches and ecumenical organizations in the 1960s. This new awareness was induced after the world economic powers declared that poverty is the result of

²⁷ Gennadios Limouris, ed. *Orthodox Visions of Ecumenism: Statements, Messages and Reports of the Ecumenical Movement, 1902-1992* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1994), 141.

²⁸ Ecclesiastical hierarchy in England and Scotland were not very enthusiastic of the conference initially. See T.V. Philip, *Edinburgh to Salvador* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1999), 7.

“underdevelopment” and underdevelopment is defined as the relative low living standards in which people of the former colonized nations live. The list of factors contributing to a low standard of living is endless; among them are lack of skills, absence of advanced technology, primitive modes of production relationship, and obviously the scarcity of investment capital. “The developed nations have discovered for themselves a new mission – to help the Third World advance along the road to development.”²⁹ The historic task of development was to enable these nations by importing capital, technology and skills from the developed nations.

Within a short span of time, the development ideology turned into the best empirical explanation of the utopia. This was not accidental. A public consciousness in favour of development ideology was in operation in the colonized land since the introduction of western science and rationality informed by the ideals of enlightenment. Missionary movements also played a significant role in establishing this rational basis as the most desirable method for organizing individual and collective life.

As Commission V of the Edinburgh Conference observed, mission societies have undertaken with zeal the promotion of Western rationality informed by European enlightenment. Such a campaign of the new rationality against the traditional wisdom of the natives was conceived as a civilizational imperative. Immediate expression of this approach was seen in the prominence given to English education. An equal effort was made to allow a hospital-centred and cure-oriented Western healthcare system to steam roll a relatively democratic and comprehensive primal knowledge of health care that people in the colonies practiced.

Asian and African nations failed to break the enslavement to western rationality and regimented mathematical knowledge systems. Asian nationalism during the Bandung Conference of 1955, which also reflected in the formation of EACC in Parapat, attempted to construct alternate economic arrangements to revamp national life. But these initiatives were not too successful because they compromised in essence to the logic of western rationality in economics and social life and accepted the language of ‘development and modernity’ without any reservations. Their development model merely served to reinforce the colonial economic models.

What was unfortunate was that the churches and the ecumenical movements offered themselves as agents to the new colonial ideology of development. Since the 1960s, mission is identified as development; the ecumenical-evangelical division too became blurred in their commitment to development. Development agencies mushroomed almost in the same manner in which mission societies emerged in the early colonial times, and they fought each other to ensure that people in all corners of the earth will believe in, and be linked to, the soteriological principles drafted by the market ecclesia of developmentalism. Production for market, not sustaining life, is the secret for salvation in this development faith.

²⁹ Statement by Francois Partant, quoted by Edward Goldsmith, “Development as Colonialism,” in Jerry Mander and E. Goldsmith, eds. *The Case Against the Global Economy* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1982), 253.

Asian ecumenical debates often attempted to offer different nuances to the development ideology by raising issues of justice, participation, and people-centred development. Unfortunately, these debates did not appear to question the basic assumptions of development and modernity informed by technological and mathematical rationality of western science. Because of the acceptance of development as an invariable of truth, the ecumenical discourse on development remained as simple propositions for cosmetic changes. A radical break from the empirical orientation of the economics of development was not on the agenda of ecumenism. As a result, Mission, reconstructed as development, eventually goaded the market to invade the inner core of communities and people.

Victory of Christendom over Heathendom

Although there were significant differences regarding the choice of the responsible agency for engaging in mission during the first two phases of missionary expansion, there appeared to be convergence in their theological approach. Both these phases were led by a bi-polar worldview which assumed the existence of two mutually exclusive worlds: the Christian world and the non-Christian world, commonly described as “Christendom” and “heathendom.” Different shades of this bi-polar view existed throughout mission history. This missionary geography proposes that human salvation is possible only through Jesus Christ; and other religions, great or small, are obstacles to the total redemption and salvation offered by the Divine.³⁰ A statement by Alexander Duff, an educational missionary from Scotland who was considered a true representative of the dominant view of mission at his time, observed that although ‘Asian religions possessed very lofty terms of its vocabulary, what they conveyed are vain, foolish, and wicked conceptions.’ ‘These religions’, he said, ‘are spread out before us like a universe, where all life dies and death lives. The Christian task, therefore, was to do everything possible to demolish this gigantic fabric of idolatry and superstition’.³¹

This Christian totalitarianism was strengthened through the influence of neo-orthodoxy in mission debates. Hendrik Kraemer, the most vocal propagandist of neo-orthodoxy in mission discourse, and a person who profoundly influenced Asian debates found that the “fundamental problem for the people is the complete lack of absolutes in their lives. In the absence of absolutes, they surrender to relativism, and that leads them to a fundamental and radical uncertainty about the meaning of life.” Therefore, providing an absolute is a mandate of mission, and Kraemer argued that this religious absolute is given only through the Christian gospel, because it [alone] is the “work of God.”³²

Like all other totalitarian absolutes, Christian totalitarianism was a political construct informed by the demands of hegemonic powers. One of the means through which the missionary approach to totalitarianism was expressed was in the construction of absolutes and demonic in objective levels. A mere conceptual understanding of absolute and demonic

³⁰ Kosuke Koyama, unpublished lecture given at New College, University of Edinburgh in relation to the celebration of “Towards 2010” on April 2002, accessed at www.towards2010.org.uk

³¹ Alexander Duff’s speech at the General assembly in Scotland in 1835, quoted by T.V. Philip in *Edinburgh to Salvador* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1999), 170.

³² H. Kraemer, *The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World* (London: Edinburgh House Press, 1938), 6.

alone is not sufficient to encourage conversion of the colonized people. Conceptual categories should have visible expressions; thus Christian tradition and whatever goes along with it was qualified as absolute while all non-Christian traditions, their culture traditions and social behaviour patterns, were condemned and catalogued as demonic.³³

Immediate ramification of this missionary geography was twofold: (a) Creation of a polarized social existence, and (b) political construction of the knowledge of Jesus to satisfy the interest of colonial Christianity.

A. Creation of Absolutes

The claims of absolute influenced the Christian mission and social life of the people in the colonies. One significant consequence was the change of the plural characteristic of Asian reality into mutually conflicting social units. The effects of this phenomenon have not waned, but instead converted itself into a means of political manoeuvring.

As the essential dynamics of all absolutes, it encouraged the emergence of a superiority-inferiority complex among the people, replacing mutual respect and appreciation. In the case of Christian absolute, it appeared that the feeling of superiority was an intentional construct to ascertain absolutes. Julius Richter, Professor of Missions at Berlin University, in his inaugural address at the Jerusalem mission conference in 1928 said, "The Christian missionary needs to be convinced of the superiority of his/her religion over all others"³⁴. That is the function of absolutes that Kraemer argued for. Absolutes provide the sense of superiority. Richter adds that even though the faith and its explanations appeared to be relative and fragile at the time, a surrender of the conviction of superiority will unfavourably affect the effectiveness of mission.

The Christian triumphalism of the mission societies failed to perceive the dangers inherent in the cohabitation of the superiority syndrome with the claims of absolutism. Central to this approach is the conversion of gospel into a means for judgment over others – other religions, cultures, civilizations and systems. This judgment has led the missionary movement to measure the distance from the other and the world as a way of establishing one's own credentials. The other remained as a problem because the prevailing notion within the movement was that: He or She is that which I am not; he/she is heathen, demonic, whereas I am the absolute. This notion was extended to include the civilized and the uncivilized. This claim of absoluteness and the notion of uniqueness are rudimentary features of missionary enterprise. But unfortunately, one's absoluteness could be established only by demonizing the other. We identify the other as demon; therefore conquering and defeating the demons is an essential process in establishing absoluteness. Social exteriority of the other is fundamental to the claims of this religious absolutism.

³³ In the ideological level, colonialism created the myth that "white is right" and used this myth to create a new consciousness around the world. Western rationality goes along with this constructed myth. Therefore the religion of the white is right, as well as the culture, aesthetics, economic organization, objective of life and others. It also implies that the non-whites are wrong. This racial injunction on truth was the ideological power through which colonialism thrived.

³⁴ *International Review of Mission*, Vol. 3, No. 7, quoted by T.V. Philip in *Edinburgh to Salvador* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1999), 180.

Historically there were many categories for identifying the demons and absolutes, including Christians and pagans, 'civilized' and the 'primitive' and lately believers and non-believers. Religious communalism that shows its ugly face in countries like India, Indonesia and many other places finds an operational principle in the conflict between absolutes and the demon. Missionary movements for a long time considered all traditional religions as demonic. Demonization of the other is undoubtedly a hindrance to making the saving grace of God known. However, Edinburgh, Jerusalem and Willingen extend this list of problems and had included emerging political systems and concepts in that inventory. Thus socialism, secularism, science and technology and early humanist discourse find a berth in the growing list of problems.

The menace of the bizarre form of ethnic and communal tensions that the people in Asian nations are experiencing these days are remnants of the ideological construct of absolute-demonic under the patronage of the missionary theology.

Pilgrim Model for Mission: An Alternative to Totalitarian Christianity

An alternative proposed by Asian ecumenical discourse to counter the theological construct and its societal manifestation of absolute-demonic polarization was inter-religious dialogue. Urgency for such an approach was present in the Asian churches even during the heyday of mission movements. In the inaugural issue of the *International Review of Mission* (1912) Tasuku Harada of Japan observed that "it is inconceivable that anyone who has impartially studied the history of religions can fail to admit the universality of the activity of spirit of God and the consequent embodiment of a decree of faith in all religions."³⁵ Harada's observation was not a lone voice in the wilderness; this view was shared by people from other nations. For example, the Christo Samaj of India, in a statement in 1921, argued that the Christian Church ought to be ready to accept the evidence of the diffused energy of the divine logos in Hindu religion and philosophy, and they accepted the Bhakti tradition of Hinduism as a way of seeking the Divine.

Asian Christians affirmed a continuity of God's revelation and therefore rejected any proposal to delink the traditional religions and cultures from the Divine. As a response to Kraemer, T.C. Chao of China observed during the Tambaram conference that "All nations with their various religions have seen God more or less clearly; although the forms in which their visions have been clothed are incomplete, insufficient, and unsatisfactory. In them and in Jesus Christ, God has been revealing Himself [/Herself] and the same self to [hu]mankind."³⁶

This position was not unique to Asian theological discussion alone. Theological discourse in Africa asserted that continuity of God's revelation, and not the discontinuity that the neo-orthodoxy professes, is the reality of the faith experience of the people. Though he appeared to be in sympathy with Kraemer on many of the neo-orthodox positions, P. D. Devanandan, in a penetrating interpretation argued that "if religious faith is to be regarded also in terms of responses it would be difficult for Christians to deny that these deep, inner

³⁵ *International Review of Mission*, Vol. 1 (1912), 91.

³⁶ International Missionary Council, *The Authority of Faith: International Missionary Council Meeting at Tambaram, Madras- December 12th to 29th, 1938* (London: Oxford University Press, 1939), 40.

stirrings of the human spirit are in response to the creative activity of the Holy Spirit."³⁷ At the New Delhi Assembly of the World Council of Churches, Devanandan argued that we only need to blame our blindness for the inability to believe and understand God's equal concern of redemption for people of all religions and cultures.³⁸

Initiatives for dialogue were also influenced by the nationalist tradition in politics that emerged through the freedom struggles in Asia. At the opening meeting of the Asia-Africa Conference at Bandung on April 18, 1955, President Sukarno of Indonesia remarked that the Bandung meeting itself is to demonstrate to the world that diversity is the strength and not the weakness of the Asian tradition. Our meeting "is to impress on the world that it is possible to live together, meet together, speak to each other, without losing one's individual identity; and yet to contribute to the general understanding of matters of common concern, and to develop a true consciousness of the interdependence of men (sic) and nations for their wellbeing and survival on earth."³⁹ "Live and Let Live" is the principle that unifies the spirit that brings humanity together to seek a world that celebrates peace and justice by overcoming forces of colonialism and domination.

Thus, the dialogue model was thought to have offered the possibility to demolish the misconceptions and prejudiced view of the 'other' and to create space to know the depth of one another's faith. Further, one's own faith is tested, refined, and sharpened in dialogue. The social exteriority that constitutes the "otherness" was shaken by the possibility of being in dialogue. Recognition and acceptance of the legitimate place of the other invites everyone to be in communion, in dialogue with the other.

Dialogue is a guarantee against religions turning into totalitarian absolutes. Through dialogue people of different religious systems are reminded of the depth of the unreachable riches, and also of the weakness while confronting the other. The very fact that society today is or has become religiously and ideologically pluralistic, demonstrates the existence of parallel and competing interpretations of life and reality. As Hans Ucko argues, "religion does not end with a relation between an I and a Thou."⁴⁰ It requires a community, a humanity, and a cosmic reality in order to experience the presence of God.

After the inter-religious dialogue of 1970 at Ajaltoun, S. J. Samartha, who was one of the architects of the dialogue program of the WCC, observed that our calling today is "less to be the bearers of a particular mission and more to be participants in the total life of all multi-religious communities, to be a pilgrim people contentedly together in motion, responding to the initiatives of God."⁴¹

Yet, neither the dialogue nor the pilgrimage model invoked the imagination of the

³⁷ *Ecumenical Review*, Vol. 14, No.2 (1962), 160.

³⁸ Quoted by T.V. Philip, *Edinburgh to Salvador* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1999), 200.

³⁹ *Collected Documents of the Asian-African Conference: April 18-24, 1955* (Jakarta: Agency for Research and Development, The Department of Foreign Affairs, 1983), 3-12.

⁴⁰ Hans Ucko, "Interfaith Dialogue - Ethical Consideration Towards Building New Communities," in Daniel Chetti and M.P. Joseph, eds., *Ethical Issues in the Struggles for Justice* (Tiruvalla: CSS, 1998), 17.

⁴¹ S.J. Samartha, ed., *Living Faiths and the Ecumenical Movement* (Geneva: WCC, 1971) quoted by T.V. Philip, *Edinburgh to Salvador: Twentieth Century Ecumenical Missiology, A Historical Study of the Ecumenical Discussions on Mission* (Delhi: CSS & ISPCK, 1999), 206.

marginalized communities, Dalits, women, indigenous people, and others in Asia. There may be several reasons for this limitation:

- a) Dialogue reduced the act of faith as a belief in a set of *a-priori* assumptions; as a belief of the past and an attempt to construct 'eternal yesterdays' [Max Weber]. The failure to perceive faith as a dynamic process, as a living response to the continuous incarnations of the living divine in history, is a major weakness of the dialogue model.
- b) The Dialogue model also failed to break the 'ghettoized' existence of Asian people and communities. By reaffirming the specificity of religious identities, the ghettoized existence of the participants of dialogue were justified and reinforced. A safety net to avoid ghettoized existence in dialogue was the experiment of the Ashram movements. Ashrams created the necessary space for people to interact by transcending their religious boundaries. But with the disappearance of Ashram movements, dialogue model is no longer armed to create an empirical expression for the unity of different faith systems.
- c) A rational legitimization of the 'other' as 'other' is an unacknowledged objective of the dialogue model. Participants in dialogue should therefore maintain a nuanced sensitivity towards the social locations of the 'other' and not to question the specificity of the social conditions in which the other operate his/her life. That means critical questions regarding the caste hierarchy and discriminatory practices, treatment of women in the partner religions are an anathema in dialogue. That is one reason for the failure of dialogue model to gain the courage and dynamism required to reverse the perversions inbuilt within each religious tradition. Patriarchy and caste domination was left unchallenged because of the apparent fear of destabilizing the perceived peace within the ghettos.
- d) Legitimization is the need of the dominant class, not the poor. The poor seek a right to life, not legitimization of their social location. That may be the reason why the dialogue model remained a cliché of the upper-caste, or more precisely the upper-class male intellectuals, who sought to locate a common ground for their privileged existence. Since dialogue remained in practice an act of confirming the existence of the other as other, social change becomes an increasingly remote possibility. The task is not to provide conformity of existence, but the radical transformation of the life-negating systems rationalized by religions and cultures.

B. Constructed Knowledge of Jesus

The second impact of missionary geography is the construction of a knowledge of Jesus mediated through the structures of power of the church and mission society. The reality that Jesus was killed as a political convict on the cross was conveniently hidden in the missionary theology. Instead, the concept of a Saviour king was created.

However, the death on the cross was an empirical outcome of announcing *Basileia tou Theou* as a counter project to the Roman Empire. Preman Niles observed that the closest

translation of *Basileia tou Theou*, is “Empire of God” rather than ‘Kingdom of God’.⁴² The least and the marginalized occupies a respectable space in the Empire of God, where the poor come to a new realization that they are not alienated from God, but on the contrary, are blessed; prisoners under the weight of economic and political power experience freedom and liberation; peacemakers are honoured. In the Empire of God, the prevalent understanding that wealth and power are concrete manifestations of divine blessing while poverty and marginalization are the results of sin is reversed. Because of the incompatibility between the pursuit of mammon and the pursuit of the love of God, in the new Empire of God the proximity to wealth is considered the epitome of one’s distance from God. Change of the social location of the poor involves a radical remapping of the social distribution of power relations of the given order, and that threat led Jesus to the cross. A radical renunciation of power for the free gift of the Love of God shattered the prevailing power structures who claimed legitimacy for their position by using the name of God. *Basileia tou Theou* is a celebration of the powerless - women, lepers, blind, and persecuted - and the assurance of the fullness of life rather than the fear, slavery, and cruelty perpetrated by the Roman Empire.

These pronouncements were not merely ideological rhetoric in the gospels, instead, they assumed empirical explanations in the “table fellowship” that Jesus had with the tax collectors, sinners, and the vulnerable in Roman and Jewish social structure. The Empire of God reifies a reconciled society where hierarchies based on power, wealth, gender, social class, or religious and spiritual authority have no place. Table fellowship was a counter-cultural concept to the purity-pollution system that the Jewish establishment had devised to accelerate economic exploitation and social marginalization. Table fellowship symbolizes an open invitation to all, from East and West, North and South to the feast of life. Feast of life coincided with the imagination of the people for a new social system free of all forms of discrimination, marginalization, and oppression. Its sharp edges were not only pointed as the political system of oppression but formed the very root of a religious philosophy constructed on the concept of purity and holiness. A concept of ‘holy’ based on purity was totally negated through the open invitation to the feast of life by Jesus. Through this new model of table fellowship, Jesus was demonstrating that the political and religious soteriologies of the Roman Empire and Jewish traditions that rationalized wealth, power, and social marginalization were contrary to the values of the Empire of God of which Jesus had become a living witness.

In the Cross of Calvary, the Roman Empire and its cohorts, including Herod and the Jewish religious establishment, were defeated. Rome failed to contain the subversive character of the Empire of God transforming into a radical hope among the poor and the wretched of the earth. Empire of Love remained in direct conflict with empires of power.

The [great] commission in Matthew [Mt. 28: 16-20], given at the “mountain” of Galilee, was a determined call to use these revolutionary values of the Empire of God against all empires of power, wealth, and religious hypocrisy. The fact that Chapter 5 and Chapter

⁴² Preman Niles, “Conformity and Contestation: An Asian Theological Appraisal of Edinburgh,” in *Theologies and Cultures*, Vol. V, No. 2 (December 2008), 15. The preceding section is adopted from the editorial by the same author in *Theologies and Cultures* (December 2008) issue.

28 are both given on the mountain may not be accidental, but a conscious reminder to the listeners about the continuity of what Jesus inaugurated through the Sermon on the Mount.⁴³

However, this vision of Jesus and the early church was defeated when Constantine claimed leadership of the church and declared Christianity a state religion. The defeat that Herod and the Roman Empire suffered at the cross of Calvary was reversed through the so-called conversion of Constantine into Christianity. Christianity thus was redefined as “Constantinianism”. Since then, the Church hierarchy has found that cohabitation with the Empire is an empirical necessity for the establishment of Church. The concept of mission in the church was solely defined within this newfound wisdom of “Constantinianism”.

The fact that the mission movements allied closely with the colonial project made it impossible for them to become a living witness to the Empire of Love and Liberation that Jesus had inaugurated. Thus, the construction of a new image of Jesus to satisfy the political and economic demands of the colonial empire and at the same time to hide the inability to preach the Empire of Love appeared as an existential imperative for the missionary movements. For less militant supporters of the British Empire, the new geography provided the solace to justify their silence towards the blatant exploitation of the natives by the powers of the Empire.

To counter the subversive character of the Empire of Love, missionary theology converted the name of “Jesus Christ as a fetish”. What Jesus stood for was removed in the construction of the new fetish. Further missionary theology argued that salvation is fixated in the name of Jesus, and thus made the “Christian fetish” the most important symbol of the religious world.

Mission as Critical Solidarity

Radical attempts were made in ecumenical discourse to reiterate the values of the Empire of Love against the use of Jesus as a fetish. The late seventies and early eighties witnessed the upsurge of social movements including the Minjung, the Women, Dalits, and labourers. They brought new dynamism along with a new meaning to faith and its practice. Feliciano V. Carino quotes from a URM (Urban Rural Mission) Consultation report, which succinctly illustrates the nature of faith and commitment:

We opt for people because we see in their suffering and struggle, and in their aspiration for an alternative social order the logic of the Gospel itself, the Good News of God ‘who brings down the mighty from their thrones, and exalt the lowly.’ We opt for people because God opted for people, because God in Jesus Christ was among the people as their pastor, companion, comforter and advocate, and as the bearer of the good news of their liberation. We think, in other words, that in opting for the people, we are touching in its depth the meaning of God’s work in the world, Christ’s ministry and our calling, and the roots of renewal for the life and mission of the church.⁴⁴

⁴³ Niles, 16.

⁴⁴ Feliciano V. Carino, “The Theological and Ecumenical Significance of Urban Rural Mission: Some Suggestive Notes”, in *Thinking Ahead* (Hong Kong: Christian Conference of Asia, 1992), 17-18.

M.M. Thomas voiced this emerging concern in his Duff Missionary Lectures in Edinburgh in 1965. He stated that “Participation in the struggles of the Asian peoples for a fuller human life in state, society, and culture, in a real partnership with people of other faiths and no faith, is the only context for realizing the true being of the Church and exercising the Church’s ministry and mission.”⁴⁵

At the Asia Mission Conference in 1990, Kim Yong Bock called this engagement as critical solidarity. He observed that the God in Christ is the one with the people, the suffering and struggling peoples of Asia, no matter who they are in terms of religion, political ideology, or cultural differences. This oneness with people should be called as solidarity... God is in solidarity with the struggling and suffering people for their liberation.⁴⁶

At the WCC meeting in Nairobi in 1975, M.M. Thomas introduced the concept of “Spirituality of Combat” as an expression of the search for faith among the poor and the marginalized. Spirituality, according to him, is a way to approach the awareness of selfhood. The struggle to overcome poverty and oppression is an expression of the awakened dignity and personhood.⁴⁷ These reminders reiterated that the participation of people in struggles for realizing a fuller life forces a redefinition of the concept of church and its mission.

Struggles for the protection of life by environmental movements and the movements of the poor create a common space for the critical engagement of all people irrespective of the different religious and cultural identities and persuasions. Religious and political language intersects in this common search. They invite people to celebrate the presence of the other in a common religious space and that act rejects any claims of absolutism. Proximity of the other becomes a reason for celebration and opens up the possibility for an encounter with the Ultimate through the immediate other.

In the history of mission debates, experiments of social action groups, though important, were by and large a rarity. They were a minority group, and often marginalized from the dominant space of mission discourse and church. When their influence wanes, traditional missionary theology reigns in mission debates.

“God Stopped” in Missionary Theology

There are two immediate ramifications for the traditional mission theory based on the bi-polar geography. First is the radical rejection of the values of the Empire of Love. The early church witnessed the values of the Empire of Love by rejecting the soteriology of wealth and power (Acts. 3.6) and by creating “communities of equals” (Acts 2:44-47). The notion of a community of equals has become a heresy in the missionary geography.

⁴⁵ M.M. Thomas, *The Christian Response to the Asian Revolution* (London: SCM Press, 1966), 104.

⁴⁶ “The Mission of God in the Context of the Suffering and Struggling Peoples of Asia,” a lecture at the Asia Mission Conference of the Christian Conference of Asia, 1989. Quoted by Michael Kinnamon and Brian E. Cope (eds.), *The Ecumenical Movement: An Anthology of Key Texts and Voices* (Geneva: WCC, 1997), 247.

⁴⁷ Quoted by K.C. Abraham and M.P. Joseph, “Politics of the Reign of God; Missiology of Social Action Groups in India,” in Philip Wickeri, ed., *The People of God Among All God’s Peoples: Frontiers in Christian Mission* (Hong Kong: CCA, 2000), 348.

Second, the conversion of the name of Jesus as a fetish for salvation rejected the mystery of the living reality of God unfolding or reincarnating in the objective and living reality of history. In the fetish constructed by mission theology, the knowledge of God is said to be complete; meaning that in the church's appropriation of Jesus, God's mystery ceases.

The concept of *missio Dei* remains as a sceptical construct due to the appropriation of the person Jesus by the centres of power. The Mission of God is about the presence of God in history. Gospel writer John asserts that no one except Jesus has seen God. Knowledge of God is locked in the person Jesus. Jesus alone mediates the tension between God's transcendence and God's presence in history. The church's exclusive control of constructing the knowledge of Jesus implies that the church controls the mystery of God. In other words, "In Jesus, God stopped."⁴⁸

In the biblical literature God's mystery is an ongoing revelation in response to the empirical reality of the pain and suffering of the people. In the mystery of *pathos*, God offered subversive surprises. However, for any seat of power, the subversive character of God's unfolding mystery is a threat; thus, the claim for absolute knowledge of God is more appealing. That is the crisis of mission. The essence of mission is the participation in the unfolding of the mystery of the Empire of God in history. In reality, mission ceases when the mystery of God stopped.

Is a Redefinition of Mission Possible?

One of the cardinal contributions of missionary enterprise was to create a critical consciousness regarding the futile act of worshipping the un-god. During the Jerusalem Conference of International Missionary Council in 1928 the concept of un-god was elaborated by R. Jones. He observed that the greatest rival for Christianity and its mission activities is not Islam, Buddhism, or Hinduism, but the secular interpretation of realities.⁴⁹ Secularism and the technological reasoning assumes itself as the framework and language of a religion, and this emerging secular religion, according to Jones, poses the greatest threat to mission.

Jones' observation was raised at a time when Western Christianity was informed by, and committed to uphold, abounding optimism. Political domination of Western powers was extending to the unknown corners of the world. Political domination assisted Europe to accumulate abundant wealth from the colonial nations. Appropriation of the untold amount of wealth and the dynamic interaction with the productive systems of the colonies helped Europe to "take off" into an industrial society, and the growth of industrial production further augmented surplus generation. The physical reality of the growth of resources and the ability of increased production helped create a sense of confidence in their ability to shape human life. Moreover, introduction of the steam engine for transport was perceived as a conquest over distance. Distance was conquered; thus the whole globe had access to the Gospel and Western commodities. Wealth found or created anywhere

⁴⁸ Rev. M.J. Joseph, "Christmas message," 2008.

⁴⁹ *Report of the Jerusalem Meeting*, Vol. 1, p. 273; quoted by T.V. Philip, *Edinburgh to Salvador: Twentieth Century Ecumenical Missiology, A Historical Study of the Ecumenical Discussions on Mission* (Delhi: CSS & ISPCK, 1999), 182.

in the world could be accessed and transferred to Europe. The famous declaration of John R Mott – “Evangelize the world in this generation” – was an expression of this abounding confidence.

This was a time when mathematical logic appeared to be the legitimate explanation of truth. It was expected that the aim of infinite progress, through an alliance of technology, capital, and the market, may capture people’s imagination. This was the context of Jones’ critique. Jones was not alone in this critique. A missionary in Indonesia who later became a renowned ecumenical leader, J.C. Hoekendijk, observed that in the New Testament the word heathen stands for those who live in a sense of “utter self-confidence.”⁵⁰ Because of their utter self-confidence, they stand in opposition to the Gospel; they are not in need of a Good News. Technological rationality and the growth of industrial production along with the control over the geo-political structures of the world created a similar sense of confidence in the nineteenth century when mission movements were spreading, and that was the case-reference for Hoekendijk.

Ungod of “Casino Capitalism”

The advent of globalization recreated the sense of utter self-confidence and a resounding optimism which is unmatched in history. As a mark of this resounding optimism, the ontological pivot of globalization, the Market, was offered as a perfect empirical explanation of the utopia, and declared its absolute and total soteriological principle: “outside market there is no salvation”. When religion speaks about the need for the transcendence of the present to the ‘beyond’, the market confidently aims to create the beyond in the present.

Such claims, however, are reinforced by the establishment of the absolute domination of capital over all sectors of life; an expansion that includes both geographic and substantive space. That is what the logic of growth has achieved. When growth was accepted as normative as well as the goal of production and consumption, capital or money took over the control of life. All relations, human nature, and commodities are interiorized into the logic of money. While totalitarian Christianity travelled to the exteriors to conquer and subdue others, the new deity of market, the capital or money, interiorized the outside.

The total domination of capital re-structured faith and spirituality. A comprehensive and structured materialism in human consciousness assumed the place of spirituality in the realm of the market. Such materialism professes that all truth shall assume an empirical explanation.

⁵⁰ Quoted by T.V. Philip, *Edinburgh to Salvador: Twentieth Century Ecumenical Missiology, A Historical Study of the Ecumenical Discussions on Mission* (Delhi: CSS & ISPCK, 1999), 47. During the Edinburgh Conference of 1910, the Rev. W.P. Paterson, Principal of Edinburgh University, offered a different interpretation of heathenism. At the evening address to the Conference on 15 June 1910 he observed that there are three meanings to heathenism. “The first is the purely heathen answer that what man (*sic*) gets through religion is material blessing. He looks to his religion to protect him from sickness, from disease, and from death. He looks to his religion to give him... such things as rain, an abundant harvest, a sufficiency of wives and children, and victory over his enemies. The purely heathen conception simply is that religion is a valuable commercial and military asset.” World Missionary Conference, 1910, *The History and Records of the Conference together with Addresses Delivered at the Evening Meetings* (Edinburgh: Oliphant, Anderson, & Ferrier, 1910), 157-58.

The so-called crisis of “casino capitalism” since the middle of 2008 has not altered the faith in ‘money’ as the presiding deity of the economic and social systems. On the contrary, nations were challenged to reaffirm their faith in the system of capital as a means of dealing with the crisis.

The un-god of the market is the context in which the concepts of mission need to be reconstructed. The creative power of the earth and the potential of people are converted as commodities for sale under the logic of market. No realities escape of the process of being commoditized. The God of life is not an exception in the power of the un-god of market. Mission becomes real when the un-god of the market is dethroned and God is invited to inhabit the inner core of people’s lives.

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