

The Missionary War Between Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions

By Dr. Ho-Jin Jun¹

The Christian churches in general and missiologists in particular in Asia today face a strong challenge from the non-Christian religions in the wake of their renewed awareness of the significance of revival movement and of missionary commitment to their religions. The non-Christian religions began to realize that they have been in a long “spiritual” slumber and silence overshadowed by a minority religion of Christianity. It seemed to them that Christianity swept over their country through all kinds of missionary works under the protection of colonialism. However, the failures of Christian missions in Asia inevitably result in counter-actions from the non-Christian religions. In a word, non-Christian religions and cults openly scorn Christianity and Christian missions by appealing to their own missionary strategies and missionary messages. Moreover, the Christian missions are faced with sharp criticism from the theologians of religious pluralism for their exclusivistic message of absolute truth-claims and their wrong missionary methods and strategies. During the nineteenth century, which K. S. Latourette termed as “the great century” of Christian mission, western Christianity dominated the mission movements directly or indirectly with the help of colonialism. The western domination was visible in many other areas, such as science, technology, politics, economy and education. However, these days the situation has been changed so drastically that Christianity is not in the offensive but in the defensive position towards other religions. The modern religious world takes a very negative view of proselytism and conversion, and even liberal Christianity shares the same view. The evangelical missions movement in the nineteenth century has the vision of “the evangelization of the world in this generation,” but it is now viewed as the epitome of imperialistic arrogance.

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THE REASONS FOR CONFRONTATION IN MISSIONS

In addition to this, the mission movements of evangelical Christianity and those of the non-Christian religions can inevitably lead to conflict due to the radical differences between value systems and the concepts of religion. In this regard, our century can be characterized by the age of “clashes of civilization,” as Samuel Huntington claims. For him, civilization means a cultural entity such as villages, regions, ethnic groups, nationalities, and religions.² The evangelical Protestant missions “spurned all consideration for the communal understanding of all religion in the Orient.”³ This means that Christian missions tend to consider religion as a choice or a persuasion of an individual, while the Oriental world sees religion as a communal aspect in which political, cultural and social structures are very complicatedly intertwined, making it almost impossible or very difficult for an individual to change religion. In other words, this different concept and understanding of religion cause clashes among the religions because “religious individualism” in Christianity is incompatible with “religious communalism” in the non-Christian religions. The sensitive reaction from Islam to Christian missions is a typical example of the conflict of value systems between two religions. Hendrik Kraemer well explained this by saying,

A pertinent way to define Islam would be to call it a medieval and radically religious form of that nationalism-socialism which we know at present in Europe in its pseudo-religious form. As with all militant creeds of group solidarity Islam evinces therefore a bitter and stubborn resistance to any effort that might involve change of religion, or, put it more adequately, to any break in the group solidarity.⁴

Vicedom already expressed the same view on this matter:

In the non-Christian religions, community of religion and

²Samuel Huntington, “The Clash of Civilization,” *Foreign Affairs* (Summer 1993): 22-23.

³Hendrik Kraemer, *The Missionary Message in a non-Christian World* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1976), 54.

⁴*Ibid.*, 353.

community of birth coincide. In them no question of faith is asked, no decision is demanded. One comes into the religion by birth, and not by conversion. Each member of folk-group is carried by the tradition of the religion.⁵

The religious individualism in Christianity is ideal and desirable as far as it is concerned with the individual's religious or spiritual experience of God or gods. However, it has the weakness of disrupting the traditional value system in the Orient. Individualism, which is generally understood as a western value system, is not biblically justified. It would be more biblical to say that the Scripture commends spiritual communalism, meaning that an individual regenerated by the Holy Spirit is to be united to the Church as the body of Christ so that he can enjoy his salvation through the corporate life, as John Bennett advocates. Thus, Gustav Warneck and Donald MacGavran insisted that conversion and baptism of the whole community rather than of an individual should be made. But their suggestions are only partly accepted and practiced in the mission fields today, because many missiologists and missionaries do not agree with this.⁶ Strangely enough, it should be noted that Indian churches do not pay much respect to MacGavran, even though he has served in India for a long time as a missionary who initiated the mass conversion movement. Many people in the Indian Christian circle today think that his principle did not do much good for Indian churches. On the other hand, the communalism (fundamentalism) of Hinduism has also the danger of another kind of totalitarianism, denying cultural and religious plurality.

Due to such a competing value system between Christianity and the non-Christian religions, religious conflicts and clashes between two religions seem to be inevitable. For example, the 1976 Chambesy Consultation on Christian Mission and Islamic Da'wah, which seems to be suggested and sponsored by the WCC's Inter-religious dialogue

⁵*The Challenge of the World Religions*, trans. Barbara and Karl Hertz (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1963), 49.

⁶For example, Newbiggin severely criticizes Dr. MacGavran's people movement as follows: "It is beyond question that missions conducted on these principles have led to the formation of strong, stable, and growing churches. But the dangers are obvious. Gutmann's basic created forms are easily recognizable as Hitler's 'blood and soil,' and theologians like Karl Barth have denounced such doctrines. To ascribe absolute value to the forms of social organization at any time and place is both historically naive and theologically intolerable." Lesslie Newbiggin, *Open Secret* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 158.

program, well demonstrates this fact. Its purpose was to reduce the tension between Christianity and Islam in specific areas where competitive and clashing mission movements of two religions are obvious.⁷ Nevertheless, only evangelical missions become the main target of criticism and charges. Their criticisms leveled against the evangelical missions can be summarized as follows: (1) Christian mission movements are being condemned as religious imperialism, arguing that it is a by-product of western colonialism and superiority. (2) Conversion theology is being overshadowed by social action, dialogue theology, and theology of religious pluralism in the Christian churches; or it is being denied among some Christian circles. Instead, theologians of religious pluralism suggest that mission is to help the adherents of other religions to become better followers of their religion. In this regard, William Hocking's advocates are being revived in the post-modern world. (3) The Christian mission movements greatly stimulate other religions to awaken their missions, and the mission movements of other religions enjoy full freedom in the West and in many places of Asia, but they are not being criticized and condemned in spite of some undesirable methods and mission strategies involved. Some Asian mystic religions encourage irrationality and immorality among young people through literature, mass media, and movies. (4) In Asia, other religions are protected by the political power in return for sanctioning political power or government by religious leaders. And even in some cases their missions are supported by the government with the investment of large amounts of financial resources in the temple constructions, education and literature for their propagation and social works in other countries. This is not confined to the non-Christian nations in Asia. For example, the Russian Orthodox Church has made great effort to ban the missionary activities of Protestant churches or some cultic groups in Russian territory, claiming that Russia is the parish of the Russian Orthodox Church. (5) The mission movements of the non-Christian religions are basically based on the firm conviction of the absolute truth-claims. Accordingly, it leads to religious confrontations in many parts of the world. In those areas, even constructive competitors of missions are not accepted because the leaders of the majority religion think that that majority religion should

⁷Concerning this, refer to Proceedings of the Chambesy Dialogues Consultation, *Christian Mission and Islamic Da'wah* (London: The Islamic Foundation, 1982).

dominate their country or community as their religious territory. Thus, they prohibit Christianity or other minority religions from propagating their religion. On the one hand, the eastward movements of Christianity are being deterred by other Asian religions; and, on the other hand, other Asian religions are freely expanding their religious power in the West with the benefit of western civilization and financial resources they acquired there. They enjoy all the advantages of the religiously and culturally pluralistic society of the West for their missionary purpose. But they deny practice of religious pluralism in their home in Asia. These points will be discussed in detail.

THE CRITICISMS AGAINST EVANGELICAL MISSIONS FROM OTHER RELIGIONS AND THEOLOGY OF RELIGIOUS PLURALISM

At present, the evangelical mission movements are facing serious challenges theologically and practically around the world, because theological pluralism condemns conversion pursued by the evangelical missions as religious imperialism. The assumption of the anti-conversion movement is that the attempt to convert the adherents of other religions to Christianity is an arrogant religious zeal and idea resulting from a kind of religious imperialism, and at the same time can destroy indigenous cultures. As a matter of fact, as mentioned above, other Asian religions are enjoying their mission activities in some Asian countries and in the West, while Christian missions are generally deterred and hindered by dominant religions who refuse to practice pluralism in their community. The overall attitude of the liberal Christian churches and theologians, including religious pluralists, toward the evangelical missions are extremely negative. The reasons for such a negativism can be summarized as follows: (1) The Christian mission movements are the by-products of Western colonialism; and, accordingly, Christianity has benefited from the Western superiority in politics, economy, education, and science. (2) It destroys the indigenous culture, which should be carefully preserved in the mission fields. Other religions and cultures view Christian missionaries as “unwelcome intruder,” whose presence served only to prevent indigenous religionists. (3) It contains symbols of arrogance and dogmatism based on the absolute truth claim of Christianity; and, accordingly, the paradigm must be shifted from conversion to dialogue.

The critics even deny the value of religious conviction by saying that: “finality of conviction easily degenerates into the spirit of fanaticism, autocratic, over-positive, and blood thirsty.”⁸

Against these criticism and charges, evangelical missions insist on pursuing their mission work with the following responses.

Mission Work Is Not Colonial

Then, is Christian mission the by-product of the Western colonialism and superiority? It is just partially true, because not all the missions are colonial. John Hick is, in principle, not in agreement with any kind of missionary works attempted and undertaken by the major religions, because religious missions met with small success due to people’s holding to their traditional religious environments in which he was born. Especially, he regards Christian mission as “an anachronistic by-product of a past imperial age.”⁹

Nevertheless, the evangelical churches keep going on their missionary enterprises for the evangelization of the world. They argue that the weight of modern mission movement is shifting from the western churches to the non-western churches which have suffered from western colonialism. They agree that western colonialism is becoming a stumbling block to Christian missions in the non-western world. As Roger Mehl, a French sociologist, rightly comments, there has been a deep association between missions and colonialism. He says,

The missionary appeared in the wake of the colonialist, merchant, or soldier. He profited from the routes opened by the colonialist, from the zones of security created by him. He borrowed his boats. He established his posts in the proximity of administrative and commercial centres. Thus a de facto solidarity was established.¹⁰

However, it is necessary to note that “this solidarity was not consciously desired by mission. Indeed, there are numerous facts that attest to the existence of conflicts between colonialization and

⁸Vicedom, *The Challenge*, 55.

⁹*Problems of Religious Pluralism* (London: Macmilland Press, 1985), 101.

¹⁰*The Sociology of Protestantism*, trans., James H. Farley (London: SCM Press, 1970), 166.

mission.”¹¹

It is said that in the twenty-first century the non-western churches will be sending more missionaries than the western churches to the “unreached people” in their country or beyond their country. In this regard, Christian missions should not be criticized as a by-product of colonialism. The non-western missions are neither backed by colonial powers nor benefited from political and economic superiority. For example, Indian churches have approximately 10,000 cross-cultural evangelists serving for different ethnic groups in their geographical boundary; and the Korean churches are sending more than 6,000 missionaries to more than 140 countries. It is to be admitted frankly that there are many problems of disharmony among the missionaries, “money mission,” and undesirable competition with indigenous churches in the case of the Korean churches’ missions. It is to be noted that Korea has never experienced western colonialism; instead, she was occupied by Japan for 35 years. The churches of the non-western world are eager to liberate their people and culture from “spiritual and social bondage” of the indigenous religion, culture, and society in which they have already suffered much trouble and difficulties. In fact, many Korean missionaries are being engaged in social services and business projects by hiding their identity because of strict surveillance and vigil from police or indigenous religious workers in the mission fields.

But, unfortunately, most Asian countries keep the doors closed to Christian mission, because they do not yet understand religious plurality on the practical level. Evangelicals want constructive missionary competition in the mission fields because they are strongly convinced that only the Christian mission can help to solve all of the problems faced by Asia. They feel it is very unfortunate that Buddhism, Islam, Hinduism, and all kinds of Asian mysticism enjoy missions in the western countries; nevertheless, Christianity does not have that kind of freedom in Asia. However, as Max Weber rightly pointed out, Asia was actually the land of tolerance in which all religions enjoyed full freedom of religious competitions.¹² In many parts of Asia religions had learned to coexist in the past, but now the situation has changed much to the extent of intolerance in the matter of religion. Many Asian countries have passed legislation prohibiting missionary work of other

¹¹Roger Mehl, *The Sociology*, 101.

¹²Max Weber, *Hinduism and Buddhism*, trans. Yoon-Ki Hong (Seoul: Korea Theological Research Center, 1986), 469. The citation is from the Korean translation.

religions in their countries. Most Muslim countries belong to this category, but even Israel does the same. Thus, many Messianic Jews and evangelical Christians recently demonstrated in front of the Embassy of Israel in Washington to protest a proposed law that would restrict missionary work in Israel.¹³ The prohibition of Christian mission is not limited to Asia. It is sad to hear that Russia, the country of the Russian Orthodox Church, passed a law in which it makes all kinds of missionary activities of the unrecognized religions illegal. It is needless to say that even Protestant churches are illegal religions. Accordingly, if that law is put into effect from 1998, most Protestant missionaries will have to leave Russia. The Russian Orthodox Church played an important role in the legislation of the law, along with Communists. It is to be noted that the Greek Orthodox Church still regards Protestant churches as heresy, even though they are members of the WCC. A priest of the Greek Orthodox Church of Korea confessed that idea in a mission seminar sponsored by the Korean World Mission Association in 1992. Roman Catholic missions in Sri Lanka have met with strong Hindu opposition in the past, but right now opposition directs to evangelical Protestants.

Christian Missions Do Not Destroy But Liberate Indigenous Culture

The assumption that Christian mission eventually leads to the destruction of indigenous culture is a partly fair and objective judgment; but the relativistic philosophy of modern cultural anthropology, sociology, study of comparative religions, and theology of religious pluralism are making great impact on that assumption. For example, Roger Mehl points well to the problems caused by Christian missions in terms of culture and religious perspective.

Mission, in the very exercise of its activity, causes a certain number of sociological problems in the mission field, by reason of its profound and subtle ties with western civilization and with the colonialist movement which is the expressions of this civilization. It could be added that even short of these ties, it

¹³This refers to the photo and explanation by Ray West, *The National Christian Reporter*, May 30, 1997, 4.

would still give rise to sociological problems in the societies which it evangelizes. Indeed, whether it is a question of pagan fetishist or islamized societies, Christian mission finds itself confronted by groups in which religion and magic are intimately linked in the social structure which they partially define. In seeking to bring a new faith and to dethrone the indigenous religions, Christian mission will thus contribute to the destruction of social frameworks, of customs, and of tradition, at the risk of leaving the individual without social supports.¹⁴

As early as the end of the nineteenth century, Ernst Troeltsch, an advocate of theology of religious pluralism, also claimed that Christian mission would not attempt to convert the “heathen” and bring them to the Christian church but rather help indigenous culture and religion to enrich themselves through the contact with Christian mission. He comments,

Missionary enterprise has always been in part simply a concomitant of the political, military, and commercial expansion of a state or nation, but in part also an outcome of the religious enthusiast’s zeal for conversion. . . . The heathen races, on the other hand, are being morally and spiritually disintegrated by the contact with Europe civilization; hence they demand a substitute from the higher religion and culture. . . . But in relation to the great world religions we need to recognize that they are expressions of the religious consciousness corresponding to certain definite types of culture, and that it is their duty to increase in depth and purity by means of their own interior impulses, a task in which the contact with Christianity may prove helpful, to them as to us, in such processes of development from within.¹⁵

These negative viewpoints on Christian mission, which is being judged from the cultural perspective, are so persuasive among people

¹⁴Roger Mehl, 172.

¹⁵“The Place of Christianity Among the World Religions,” in *Classical and Contemporary Readings in the Philosophy of Religion*, ed. John Hick (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1990), 223.

that many Christian churches are hesitant to do mission work. Instead, they seem to be more devoted to social work and service, thinking that the good presence of the Christian community is better than verbal proclamation of the Christian gospel. Recently, an American intellectual who visited Mongolia reported very negative impressions of Christian missions. According to him, Christian missions are doing much harm to the Buddhist Mongol society, to the extent of disbanding the existing social organizations and destroying indigenous cultural heritages. In a word, he condemns American missionaries as cultural invaders. He says:

Mongolian Buddhism barely survived under decades of Stalinist repression. Now, more than five years after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Mongolia's religious traditions could be facing another threat: an invasion of Christian missionaries. . . . The background is that since the fall of the communist regime, there has been a very large influx of American Christian missionaries to Mongolia from various denominations. They are exerting tremendous pressure on the population, particularly the young people to convert to Christianity. This is disruptive to the process of trying to re-establish Mongolia's traditional culture and religion. They come and say that Mongolia's poverty and backwardness are due to Buddhism. This is simply preposterous when one looks at the development of Buddhist societies in Southeast Asia, Taiwan, South Korea, Japan and Hong Kong. . . . They give money, computers to universities, scholarships to children of influential officials. The Buddhist can't compete. The missionaries sincerely believe that they are saving the souls of these people and bringing them to heaven. In the long run, they could destroy Mongolian society.¹⁶

It is true that people tend to preserve and defend their traditional cultural heritage from the invasion of new ideas, religion, and culture. In Asia, the efforts of people to defend their culture and religions make Christian missions much more difficult. Latourette already made a clear objective analysis on the Christian missions in

¹⁶Interview, "Disrupting the Faith?" by Alexander Berzin, *Newsweek*, January 13, 1997, 56.

Asia. He asserted that Asia's persistence in holding to their cultural and religious heritages causes Christian mission to fail. He says,

It must be added that weakening of the cultures of Asia under the impact of the Occident and the adoption of some phases of Occidental civilization were not followed by the acceptance of Christianity. Asiatic people pay Occidental culture the sincere flattery of imitation, but it was the mechanical devices through which the Occident had achieved its mastery which won their grudging admiration and which they sought to acquire, together with the science and the type of education necessary to the creation and operation of the machine. They were inclined to hold their traditional religions and to view Christianity with scornful and hostile eyes as the faith of the aggressive and disliked Westerners.¹⁷

But we need to observe the other side of the reality in Asia. Most Asians did not adopt Christianity as their religion. However, the younger generation accepts secularism without much hesitancy which seems to be a by-product of western civilization. Furthermore, the Asian mysticism is flourishing in the West, while the western cults such as the New Age, Mormons, and the Children of God make their inroads into the Asian society in which there is freedom of religion. In this respect, cultural relativists and theorists of indigenization and contextual theology in the West who view culture as value-free seem to ignore the other sides of the reality that many people in Asia want to be liberated from their cultural and religious traditions, because they consider their religious and cultural heritage very negatively in terms of social, economic, and political development. For instance, many tribal groups in India feel neglected by the central government and dominant classes and want to be liberated from the spiritual bondage of Hinduism, since Hinduism is not their original religion. Mass conversion from Hinduism to Christianity or to Islam took place in such cultural and social circumstances.

Also, the American intellectual failed to take seriously the economic and political problems of Mongolia; and he did not carefully

¹⁷Kenneth S. Latourette, *The Great Century: North Africa and Asia* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1944), 4.

observe why in Mongolia many Mongolians come to Christian churches these days. It is true that many Mongolians attempt to revive Buddhism which had been forgotten for a long time by the Communist oppressions. During the early 1920s of the Communist regime, about 100,000 Buddhist priests and laymen among a population of 600,000 were killed; thus, they are eager to restore Buddhism to the original position. But many people appeal to new religions like Christianity hoping to seek for a good solution. He ignores that young generations are not much interested in Buddhism or communism, and he also wholly neglected that the Islamic countries of Turkey and Saudi Arabia give much money for the spreading of Islam in Mongolia by helping to construct mosques and by bringing young students to their countries to train them. His argument that Buddhism in Mongolia can have social and economic development by taking a concrete example from Korea and some Asian countries where Buddhism is a major religion is less persuasive, because Buddhism in these countries does not rule over the spiritual realm of people these days. The western academic world over-emphasizes the aspects of cultural conservation in Asia. In Asia this cultural conservatism, or the efforts to preserve their cultural heritage, so far has not led to social, economical, and political development. Many intellectuals are pessimistic about their cultural and religious heritages, as far as they are concerned with social, economic and political development. In many cases, the efforts to defend their culture have been done by the ruling classes who want to maintain their existing social privilege.¹⁸ The gradual pervasive phenomenon of secularization in Asia indicates that people begin to feel liberated from their cultural heritage. Recently, western culture has made inroads into Asian society. Therefore, it is not fair to say that Christianity is the only means for corrupting Asian culture.

It is to be noted that evangelicals have quite different ideas and viewpoints concerning culture also being under God's judgment. Thus, some aspects of indigenous culture need to be transformed and not simply have their religion and culture enriched through contact with the Christian mission. Especially, the evangelical churches in Asia challenge the argument for the unconditional conservation of cultural and religious heritages by claiming their liberation from unjust social, cultural, and religious structure from which they have suffered and still

¹⁸Max Weber, 484.

are suffering. The mass conversion occurring among the poor by the Christian missions in India and in some areas of Indonesia well reflects this reality. The conversion movement of the Christian mission during the nineteenth century and the early 1980s' mass conversion from Hinduism to Islam in India took place among the untouchables, who "were groaning under the heels of severe economic exploitation, social injustice, political oppression and the calculated process of expropriation designed and practiced by the Hindu Rajahs and Mahahans." They politically and economically deprived them and kept them in perpetual bondage for centuries.

Conversion Is the Fundamental Substance of Religion

Third, the term "conversion" has become a negative or aversive word with the rise of the relativistic mood of dialogue theology and theology of religious pluralism in the Christian churches. On the other hand, the leaders or adherents of other Asian religions are making much effort to expand their religion; but they are condemning the conversion of the Christian churches in their community. A professor of Buddhism in Sri Lanka told a university class in the United States that "conversion is a dirty word. Hindus and Buddhists will no longer accept the claims of any religion to be the sole path of righteousness or happiness." Many contemporary theologians such as Paul Tillich, Wilfred Cantwell Smith, and John Hick openly disavow conversion of Christian mission. For example, Paul Tillich argues,

Many Christians feel that it is a questionable thing, for instance, to try to convert Jews. They have lived and spoken with their Jewish friends for decades. They have not converted them, but they have created a community of conversation which has changed both sides of the dialogue. Some day this ought to happen also with people of Islamic faith. Most attempts to convert them have failed, but we may try to reach them on the basis of their growing insecurity in face of the secular world, and they may come to self-criticism in analogy to our own self-criticism. Finally, in relation to Hinduism, Buddhism, and Taoism, we should continue the dialogue which has already started and of which I tried to give an example in not

conversion, but dialogue.¹⁹

However, denial of conversion in Christian religion makes serious mistakes in many ways: first, conversion is the most important element of religion aiming at transforming human character and personality. If religion lacks the pursuit of moral perfection through transforming of character or personality, it may lose social value and contribution as religion. Generally, people in Asia are looking forward to seeing a high moral and ethical standard among Christians. Second, seen from the perspective of human rights, denial of conversion means the denial of freedom of religion, which is the most important and fundamental human rights. If any society does not allow one to change religion at his will, one cannot enjoy other essential freedoms of press, speech, education, and assembly. In many Asian countries, freedom of conversion has been deprived in the name of preserving traditional culture and religion. In this regard, many Asian countries seem to be moving in the direction of religious communalism or totalitarianism. It means that many Asian nations have no freedom of religion and even no freedom to change their religion. It is very important to notice that the U.S. criticizes countries for religious intolerance in Asia. The United States released a report on religious freedom worldwide, concluding that many are living in countries where religious freedom is limited.²⁰ Third, conversion is the fundamental teaching and commandment of both the Old and New Testament; therefore, the denial or negation of conversion is the betrayal of biblical Christianity. A western missiologist rightly stated on the significance of conversion as follows:

The primary human problem is neither social or physical, but spiritual and moral. Sin has separated, alienated, and estranged us from God, the creature from the Creator. In the conversion process sin is forgiven the gulf of separation bridged, a new relationship established, and life transformed. Christ has become Lord, the Controller. Alienation and isolation are ended. A new relationship has been established.²¹

¹⁹Christianity and the Encounter of the World Religions (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963), 95.

²⁰Yahoo News, "U. S. Criticizes Countries," Friday, September 10, 1999.

²¹Hans Kasdorf, *Christian Conversion in Context* (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1980), 181.

THE CHALLENGE OF THE MISSIONS OF OTHER RELIGIONS TO CHRISTIAN MISSIONS

The feature of the non-Christian religions today is their deep awareness of missionary obligation; and, accordingly, this can result in the increase of religious confrontation. The aggressive missions work, with the strong exclusivistic message, among the non-Christian religions is quite obvious. This is, of course, a great challenge to the practice of religious pluralism in Asia. In other words, the other religions began their world-wide missionary campaigns. Thus, it seems to be absurd to classify religions into missionary and non-missionary religions. Max Mueller divided religions into two categories of missionary and non-missionary in his lecture at Westminster Abbey in December 1873. According to him, Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam belong to missionary religions; and, on the other hand, Judaism, Hinduism, and Zoroastrianism fall in the category of non-missionary religions. And he defined missionary religion as follows:

The spreading of the truth and the conversion of unbelievers are raised to the rank of a sacred duty by the founder or his immediate successors. . . . It is the spirit of truth in the hearts of believers which cannot rest, unless it manifests itself in thought, word and deed, which is not satisfied till it has carried its message to every human soul till what is believed to be truth is accepted as the truth by all members of the human family.²²

In his definition he exercised his prophetic insight by saying that no religion will be satisfied until it pursues its own missionary obligation. The characteristics of modern religions are their deep awareness of missionary duty to their religion, and these days it inevitably leads them to missionary wars or religious wars among religions in Asia. In this respect, this classification is no longer valid because Hinduism is changing its strategy from non-missionary to missionary; and also Judaism is no longer a defensive religion. The

²²T. W. Arnold, *The Preaching of Islam: A History of the Propagation of the Muslim Faith* (London: Constable & Company Ltd., 1974), 1.

other religions which the West commonly termed “paganism” or “heathen” have now launched a major missionary campaign in the West and the East. For instance, in Britain there are 1,000 mosques and teaching centers; and Muslim missionary societies in Britain gain more converts than Christian ministry to Muslims. Many Westerners, disillusioned with Christianity, are now looking to the East for an answer. The rise of yoga is one example of this. So the Asian religions seem well established in the West and are propagating themselves more eagerly than the Christian Church at present. Vicedom already prophesied this a long time ago:

The religions of Asia have become aware of their worth. This is evident in the fact that they have broken out of the geographical bounds within which they were hitherto confined. They have themselves carried the battle over to the Christian parts of the world. Asia has begun a world-wide missionary campaign.²³

If all religions are fairly and justly pursuing their mission work in a spirit of constructive competition, it can result in reforming and contextualizing their religion through mutual interaction and stimulation; and then they will be more reasonable and acceptable to people in their society. Such an example can be found in some other Asian countries, such as Korea and Japan. For example, Korean Buddhism has adopted from Christianity some forms of worship, religious education, religious organization, and missionary methods. They had not worshipped on Sunday, but these days they have Sunday worship services similar to Christian worship, and they planted Buddhist temples in the midst of cities, whereas Buddhism has usually been called the “religion on mountain.” When the chaplains of Protestant churches in Korea developed mass baptismal ceremonies in the army equivalent to the mass conversion movement into Christian churches in India, Buddhism and Roman Catholic churches also adopted this to the degree of mission competition. But, except for a few cases, they maintain relatively peaceful coexistence in the army. No religion is able to dominate or enjoy privilege for exclusive mission activities in Korea. Goodwill and constructive competitions are

²³G. F. Vicedom, *The Challenge of the World Religion*, 7.

possible. Recently in South Africa some TV channels have been filled with Christian Sunday worship services and sermons, Jewish religious programs, and Muslim propagation programs on Sunday. South Africa really practices religious pluralism in missions. It indicates that Christian dominance or monopoly in religious propagation has disappeared in South Africa.

But, unfortunately, such constructive and goodwill missionary competition is very rare or almost impossible in many parts of Asia. In some Muslim countries Islam has full freedom to air TV programs. In Sri Lanka, for example, Buddhism has a monopoly on the TV programs, while minority religions are totally deprived of this freedom. As Muller pointed out in his lecture, Asian religions are not satisfied “until their messages are accepted as the truth by all members of the human family.” The following factors in the missionary activities of the non-Christian religions are very challenging and threatening to religious pluralism in Asia.

The Reasons for Missionary Consciousness of Other Religions

First, the universalism-oriented religions, new religions, and cults demonstrated their active mission programs, which consider them their most important duty. Even these religions have their own missionary messages and mandate, and they assume to possess only absolute truth and salvation providing solutions to the world's problems and human misery. In a word, expansion is the essence of religion. As Vicedom pointed out, if any religion assumes to serve only a people or a nation, that religion has no meaning for human kind.²⁴ The characteristics of modern religions are the renewed consciousness of the missionary duty of their religion. Unfortunately, new religions or cults are more aggressive in creating social troubles and problems. The degree of missionary zeal differs from religion to religion. Among traditional religions, Islam is most aggressively engaging in mission work. The aggressive Muslim missions can create great tensions and clashes in many parts of the world, such as Central Asia, Russia, Mongolia, and

²⁴George F. Vicedom, *Jesus Christus und die Religionen der Welt: Die Botschaft des Neuen Testaments in der Auseinandersetzung mit den Fragen der Religionen nach Wahrheit, Offenbarung und Erlösung* (Wuppertal: Aussaat Verlag GmbH, 1966), 133.

some African countries. The Qu'ran has commanded the Muslim: "Call men unto the path of your Lord by wisdom and goodly counsel. Present the cause to them through argument yet more sound" (Qu'ran 16:25). *Da'wah* is the fundamental and symbolic term for mission in Islam, through which the Muslim world has gained many converts to their religious community. An Islamic scholar argues that Islamic da'wah is an invitation to think, to debate, and argue. It cannot be met with indifference except by the cynic, nor with rejection except by the fool or the malevolent.²⁵ The Qu'ran urges to preach their gospel: "Summon thou to the way of thy Lord with wisdom and with kindly warning: dispute with them in the kindest manner" (Sura 26:126).

Buddhism also teaches missionary obligations to the world so that Buddhism has become a world-wide religion today. Buddha showed his example by taking a missionary journey alone, and he commanded his disciples to propagate what they learned. Buddha taught his disciples,

Bikkus, you have experienced the enlightenment as I have had it. Therefore, have a mercy upon men and do your best for their happiness and comfort. Don't two men walk together? Propagate the whole truth containing clear meaning and words, and teach and show yourself good deeds and walks. Even though there are men of lesser dirt, they will be perished if they do not hear truth.²⁶

A Buddhist leader in Korea said that "propagation is the life of human, as if bread is the life of human." By the Buddha's commandment, modern Buddhism strengthens their expansion work by sending their missionaries to the East as well as to the West. Especially, the missionary zeal of the new Buddhist sects, such as Nichiren, Sokkagakai in Japan, and Won Buddhism in Korea are so remarkable that these countries are emerging as the fields of missionary war.

Hinduism, which is known as a non-missionary religion, is expressing its missionary passion these days. For example, Maharishi Debendranath Tagore, who is well known in Korea due to his word that

²⁵Isma' il Al-Farqui, "On the Nature of Islamic Da'wah," in *Christian Mission and Islamic Da'wah*, 34

²⁶Jung Sup Han, ed., *The Propagation Theory of Buddhism* (Seoul: Buddhist University Textbook Publishing Committee, 1991), 21.

light is from the East, is quoted to have said the following: “When my intellect began to be daily illumined by the light of Truth I felt a strong desire to spread the true religion.”²⁷

Second, nationalism is deeply related to the missionary consciousness of the non-Christian religion; and, thus, it has the characteristics of anti-white and anti-Christianity. But the Buddhist revivals in Mongolia and Tibet are not anti-white but rather anti-Russian and anti-Chinese, respectively. Vicedom defined it as religious nationalism. He stated,

Nationalism among the younger nations is a fairly new occurrence. Usually it is dated from 1905 when Russia, the Europe power, was defeated by Japan. This act gave the hope of freedom to all the peoples of Asia. The impetus was already equally strong when in 1893 the Asian representatives to the World Congress of Religions in Chicago recognized that their religions were not inferior to Christianity. Thus Asian nationalism is also religiously determined. The religious nationalism was actually present before the political. . . .²⁸

It is significant for this nationalism that it did not free itself from religion. Religion and politics have so influenced each other that it is hard to say which gives the stronger stimulus. In any case, religions have received strong impetus from nationalism; and, on the other hand, nationalism today still has its basic support in the religions. It is openly “anti-white” and at the same time “anti-Christian.”²⁹

Third, the missionary spirit of some non-Christian religions is the effort to attempt to prevent their community or nation from being disrupted by sexualization or other ideology or religion. The missions movements of Neo-Hinduism represent this case. When the new Indian government after colonialism declared India a secular nation, radical Hindus mostly felt so harassed that they launched the campaigns to make Hinduism a state religion through which they attempted to keep national integration. Most nations who declared the dominant religion as their official or national religion wanted to keep national integration

²⁷C. V. Matthew, *Neo-Hinduism: A Missionary Religion* (Madras: Church Growth Research Centre, 1987), 3.

²⁸*The Challenge of the Religion*, 32.

²⁹*Ibid.*

and unity through the official adoption of one religion. This inevitably leads to the exclusion of minority religion from their territory.

The Characteristics of the Missions Movements of Non-Christian Religions

There are some differences between missions movements of evangelical Christianity and those of other religions; the former is individual and voluntary and works independent of government or political power, while the latter is communal and politics-oriented in character. The characteristics of other religions' missions are summarized as follows: first, the non-Christian religion's mission are supported and protected by the government, because there is no concept of the separation of state and religion. Vicedom rightly points out, "The religious awareness of mission and the political and social ambitions of other religions have placed Christianity today in a competitive situation which has no parallel in history."³⁰

Accordingly, minority religions are excluded or alienated from the territory of the dominant religion. In the past the government of communistic countries took responsibility for indoctrination or teaching of beliefs which girded the nation for action. Ideological propaganda can be conducted through education and information programs. The mass media can be skillfully utilized to influence national character. Journals, newspapers, books, leaflets, radio and television programs can be used for propagation of a system of belief and desirable attitudes. In many "religious nations" the governments are performing the same function for the expansion of their religion. For example, Saudi Arabia is known for financing a great communication satellite over the Middle East to further Islam.

Second, the non-Christian religions' mission did not aim at transforming an individual through conversion, which "means a change of religion from one faith to another with corresponding change in attitude, motivation, character and morality."³¹ Their main objective of missions is to place the community or nation under their religious control or dominance. Hinduism has no real mechanism for conversion. Thus, missionary work did not contribute much to the social

³⁰Ibid., 13.

³¹Brojendra Nath Banerjee, *Religious Conversions in India* (New Delhi: Harnam Publications, 1982), 17.

transformation in Asia. Rather, religious nations are filled with corruption, injustice, and immorality because those religions do not have individual transformation through which society can be changed.

Third, many Asian countries made new laws to prohibit conversion in their nation.³² It indicates that choice of religion is not an individual matter but a communal one. This is contradictory even to Mahatma Gandhi, who said, "To everyone religion is his own concern." In a word, the missions of the non-Christian religions are threatening and challenging religious pluralism in the Orient.

CONCLUSION

Jesus Christ commanded His disciples to preach the message of salvation to the end of the world. However, the Christian missions are seriously challenged and threatened by the rise of non-Christian religions. Even Christian liberalism, including the theology of religious pluralism, condemns Christian missions as colonialism and religious imperialism on the assumption that every religion is a valid path to the ultimate Reality. Of course, the Korean churches today are giving some serious thought to their work and strategies in the mission fields. The word "missions" does not justify any kind of mistake and error in the name of missions. The Korean churches ought to listen carefully to a piece of advice from a foreign mission student:

There is, however, a danger in the nationalist tendency in Korean Christianity and its missionary thought. . . . The notion of national election has grown into a national pride, a strong feeling of superiority over other nations and churches. Too many missionaries leave Korea to spread the success-story or the success-formula of Korean Christianity, instead of spreading the Gospel of the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The need for international, ecumenical cooperation in the theological education of Korean missionaries is, therefore,

³²Such cases are so numerous that we cannot discuss all here. One example can be seen in India in the Freedom of Religion Bill 1978 that sought to prohibit conversion from one religion to another by the use of force, fraud, or inducement. Refer to Banerjee, *Religious Conversions in India*, 44. Even the Israeli parliament is seriously studying legislation to prohibit even Jews from distributing religious literature with the purpose of converting their neighbors to his or her religion.

urgent.³³

Finally, our expressions of faith and practice of missions should be *fortiter in res, suaviter in modo* (strong in our faith, but humble and flexible in our method).

³³Leo Oosstrom, "Contemporary Missionary Thought in the Republic of Korea: Three Case-Studies on the Missionary Thought of Presbyterian Churches in Korea" (Th.M. thesis, University of Utrecht, 1990), 114-15.