

## The Journey of the Gospel and Being a World Christian

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One day while walking along a canal in Princeton, New Jersey, I saw a beautiful sunset that evoked appreciation for God's creation. One particular text from the Psalms sprung to mind:

The heavens are telling of the glory of God; and their expanse is declaring the work of His hands. . . . In them He [God] has placed a tent for the sun, which is as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber; it rejoices as a strong man to run his course. Its rising is from one end of the heavens, and its circuit to the other end of them; and there is nothing hidden from its heat.<sup>1</sup>

While pondering the course of the sun during the daytime, my appreciation of God's grandeur stimulated some reflections on history. I began to ponder, "What is the meaning of world history in conjunction with the gospel?"

In a spirit of playfulness, I replaced the word "sun" in the text (Ps 19:1-6) with the words, "the gospel." If I make this passage somewhat figurative with the sun as a metaphor for the gospel, it reads like this:

The witness of creation to the glory of God has gone out through all the earth, and the word of God to the end of the world. God has placed human history to reveal the gospel, which is as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber; the gospel rejoices as a strong man to run the course of history. The rising of the gospel is from one end of the heavens, and *the journey of the gospel* to the other end of them; and there is nothing hidden from God's truth and his love.<sup>2</sup>

Here, I described the movement of the sun in the sky as the metaphorical image with my own term, "the journey of the gospel." By this rendering, the journey of the gospel refers to the global history of Christianity where the gospel journeyed not only geographically but also cross-

1. Ps 19:1-6; NASB.

2. My own paraphrase of Ps 19:1-6.

culturally. How, then, has the gospel been culturally appropriated as it spread to different cultures and ethnicities? This question necessitates a brief historical overview of the process of appropriation in Christian history. What is the nature of the gospel in that process and how can we conceptualize the worldwide phenomenon of Christianity, the so-called World Christianity?

With these questions in mind, the title of this paper, "The Journey of the Gospel and Being a World Christian," intends to provide missiological implications for today's Christians: how to be a "World Christian." I define the term "World Christian" as a Christian who is able to understand the global dimension of the gospel with local sensitivity, living out his or her Christian identity more sensitively in this global age and multicultural world.

### The Journey of the Gospel in World History

A pioneering historian, Kenneth Scott Latourette (1884-1968), rightly indicated that the Western recognition of current world history as a "post-Christian era" is nonsense and a misnomer.<sup>3</sup> He criticized the view based on purely Western context and historical evidence did not support such views. According to Latourette, outside of a distinct period in Western European history, it is more accurate to state that there never was a Christian era in world history. In fact, he further states, "Never has Jesus had so wide and so profound an effect upon humanity as in the past three or four generations."<sup>4</sup> Latourette, in his essay "Historical Perspectives," concludes, "We must remind ourselves that, from the perspective of the long course of history, Christianity is still young."<sup>5</sup>

Interestingly, from the standpoint of the Western hemisphere, a sunset is a more appropriate image than a sunrise in describing the global picture of Christianity. One historian observes: "At present it seems that Europe and North America are the only continents where Christian faith and commitment is statistically receding. Everywhere else it is expanding."<sup>6</sup> Christianity in the Western world is declining. After two millennia of Christian history, Christianity is now found in most of the non-Western world and has become a worldwide phenomenon. Beyond

3. Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of Christianity* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1953), xviii.

4. Kenneth Scott Latourette, *Anno Domini: Jesus, History, and God* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1940), 227.

5. Kenneth Scott Latourette, "Historical Perspective," in *Outlook for Christianity*, ed. L. G. Champion (London: Lutterworth, 1967), 23.

6. Andrew F. Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1996), 257.

the sunset and over the horizon, there emerges another sunrise on the other half of the earth. Now, scholars and historians are beginning to recognize this fact. But many Western Christians seem to be unaware of this global situation. Philip Jenkins, the author of *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity*, laments that the mental map of Western Christians still remains within the framework of a century ago.<sup>7</sup> What has been the course of Christian history in terms of the spread of the gospel into different parts of the world?

Judaism remained within the wall of Jewish community, calling others Gentiles, the people without a covenant. It was Christian witnesses that brought a breakthrough in these ethnic, religious, and cultural barriers. After the death of Stephen and the ensuing persecution of the Jerusalem church, the gospel began to spread to the Greek-speaking Gentiles in Antioch (Acts 11). The first council in Jerusalem accepted the Gentile believers into the full blessings of the gospel without imposing the Jewish practice of circumcision (Acts 15). Apostle Paul gave the vision of “being built together” in his epistle (Eph 2:13-22). This is the great chapter on the interracial and intercultural nature of the church with its global and cosmic dimensions. A notable mission historian, Andrew Walls, calls it “the Ephesian moment.” This moment is “the social coming together of people of two cultures to experience Christ.”<sup>8</sup>

By the collapse of the Jerusalem wall in AD 70, the gospel had crossed over ethnic barriers. During the first three centuries, before the conversion of Constantine, Christianity grew empire-wide within the boundary of Rome and also outside the Roman Empire. Proud Romans called themselves civilians, but called others barbarians. Soon a new community was emerging, Christians. When the western part of Rome collapsed, the so-called barbarians migrated and fluxed into the heartland of the Roman Empire. The barbarian rulers sought to marry noble ladies who were Christians, and these queens and princesses of the old territory influenced the conversions of their husbands.<sup>9</sup> Soon, they also adopted Christianity. Moreover, anonymous Christians and monks carried the gospel to the Britain and the mainland of Europe in their missionary efforts. Eventually, all of Europe became a Christian territory. The gospel once again crossed over ethnic barriers and spread into new territories.

7. Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). See also his “The Next Christianity,” *Atlantic Monthly*, October 2002, 53-68.

8. Andrew F. Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2002), 78.

9. For example, the story of Clovis, king of the Franks. See Gregory of Tours, *The History of the Franks*, trans. Lewis Thorpe (London: Penguin, 1974).

When a new land was discovered, journey of the gospel continued. Christianity was transplanted. Various spiritual renewals and revivals entered old Europe and new America and the spread of the gospel was carried out with the zeal of missions.<sup>10</sup> Christian history in the modern period was marked with a special label. Latourette, a mission historian, called the nineteenth century particularly “the Great Century of Mission.” For many church historians (especially Protestant), it was the sixteenth century Reformation was the culmination of Christian history. For Latourette, the most important chapter of Christian history shifted into the nineteenth century, the great century of Christian expansion.<sup>11</sup>

Along with these views of geographical and territorial expansion, Walls sheds an insightful light on Christian history from cross-cultural perspective. According to Walls, Christian history from the Pentecost to the twentieth century is divided into six cultural phases.<sup>12</sup> Each phase shows the transition, translation, and the transformation of Christianity.

The first age is the Jewish phase (AD 30–70). This phase was distinctively Jewish. Most Christians were Jews, and they recognized Jesus as “the Messiah, the Savior of Israel.” Eventually, this Messiah was introduced to the Gentiles in Antioch as “the Lord, Savior of souls” (Acts 11:20).<sup>13</sup> This phase marks an important translational phase in Christian expansion. Lamin Sanneh mentions, “Christianity in time expanded from Europe into Asia and Africa . . . repeating the process by which the church’s missionary center shifted from Jerusalem to Antioch.”<sup>14</sup>

The second age is the Hellenistic-Roman phase (70–500) where Christianity encountered Greek philosophy. Jesus was rendered into the concept of *logos*, “the divine reason, the controlling principle of the

10. The Pietistic movement in Germany, the Evangelical revivals in England and Scotland, and the Great Awakenings in America brought spiritual renewals and ensuing missionary movement.

11. Latourette’s monumental seven-volume work, *A History of the Expansion of Christianity* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1937-1945) appeared as an unprecedented challenge to traditional church history because of its comprehensiveness, which was both geographical and ecumenical. Indeed, with its massive volumes describing the entire span and space of Christian expansion, Latourette introduced a new framework for telling Christian history as a whole. Three volumes of the seven were devoted to this period (1800-1914).

12. Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History*, 16-25. See also his “Christianity,” in *A New Handbook of Living Religions*, ed. John R. Hinnells (London: Penguin, 1997), 59-92.

13. Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History*, 16.

14. Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1989), 83.

universe.”<sup>15</sup> The emphasis of the message moved from the suffering Jesus to the risen Christ. During this period, Christianity developed into a form of orthodoxy, a codified system of belief that is distinctively Hellenistic-Roman.<sup>16</sup>

The third age is the Barbarian phase (500–1100). During this period, Christianity developed into a form of national, territorial Christendom. Christianity was identified with a communal custom: “The feature of barbarian Christianity was a communal decision and mass response.”<sup>17</sup> The security of a community demanded common values and collectivism. Christ was represented as a ruler and a judge.

The fourth age is the Western phase (1100–1600). While Barbarian Christianity was characterized by communal decision-making and mass response, Western Christianity became a matter of individual decision. This was based upon Western thought which developed “a particular consciousness of the *individual* as a monad, independent of kin-related identity.”<sup>18</sup>

The fifth age is the Maritime phase (1500–1920). This is “the age of expanding Europe.”<sup>19</sup> Along with the geographical expansion of the Western imperialism, Christianity was transplanted to the continents outside of Europe. In this period, Christianity was often represented as and identified with Western civilizations.

The sixth is the Southern phase (since 1920). This is the period of cross-cultural transmission of Christianity. Christianity, with its geographical spread, crossed cultural frontiers, which resulted in a shift of gravity. Western and Northern Christianity receded. The gravity of Christianity shifted to the Southern and non-Western continents.<sup>20</sup>

Walls emphasizes that Christian expansion is not characterized by “a steady line of progress” as seen in the case of Islam, but by “a pattern of advance and recession.”<sup>21</sup> The center of gravity has been moving in a serial process from Jerusalem, to the Hellenistic world, to the Barbarians, and to Western and Southern continents (sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America, some parts of Asia, and the Pacific Islands). This movement is cross-cultural as well as trans-regional. From this observation, Walls’s compelling argument is that “the very continuance of Christianity as a major force in the world has resulted from its moving across a cultural

15. Sanneh, *Translating the Message*, 61.

16. Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History*, 18-19.

17. Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History*, 21.

18. Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History*, 21.

19. Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History*, 21.

20. Walls, “Christianity,” 55. See also his *The Missionary Movement in Christian History*, 22-25.

21. Walls, “Christianity,” 59.

frontier. Christian expansion has been not progressive, but serial.”<sup>22</sup> How did the journey of the gospel change the shape of Christianity?

### The Emergence of World Christianity

We have crossed the threshold into the twenty-first century. The significant change that took place in the twentieth century was the demographic shift in Christianity’s center of gravity. In 1900, 83% of Christians lived in Europe and North America. In the late 1980s, more than half of the Christian population lived in Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Pacific and the Caribbeans. In 1900, there were 10 million Christians in Africa. According to the statistics by David B. Barrett’s *World Christian Encyclopedia*, there were more than 300 million African Christians in the year 2000. Currently, the total sum of the African and Latin American Christian population outnumbers the total sum of Christians in Europe and North America. The overall number of Christians in the West is declining, while the number of Christians in the non-Western world is increasing. This trend is expected to continue. The worldwide expansion of Christianity has greatly changed the contemporary scene of Christianity. The center of gravity of Christianity is no longer in the West, but has shifted to the non-Western world and Southern Hemisphere.

This shift calls for our attention. Jenkins says that the shift in Christianity’s gravitational center signifies another epoch-making historical turning point after the Reformation.<sup>23</sup> Walls emphasizes, “the most remarkable century in the history of the expansion of Christianity has been the twentieth” century.<sup>24</sup> If the nineteenth century was the “Great Century of Mission,” the twentieth century must be called the “Great Century of Transformation.”<sup>25</sup>

Immigration is also a significant factor contributing to the demographic change of the religious map. Jenkins labels Europe, for example, as a hybrid society.<sup>26</sup> As for the missionary and migratory effects, Jenkins says, “While traditional Christianity is weakening in large sections of

22. Walls, “Christianity,” 59. About the serial nature of Christian expansion, see Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History*, 27-48; and “Christianity in the Non-Western World: A Study in the Serial Nature of Christian Expansion,” *Studies in World Christianity* 1/1 (1995): 1-25.

23. Jenkins, “The Next Christianity,” 53-68.

24. Andrew F. Walls, “From Christendom to World Christianity: Missions and the Demographic Transformation of the Church,” *The Princeton Seminary Bulletin* 22/3 (2001): 323.

25. Andrew Walls, “Eusebius Tries Again: Reconceiving the Study of Christian History,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 24/3 (2000): 105.

26. Jenkins, *The Next Christendom*, 97.

the North, it is indeed being reinforced and reinvigorated by Southern churches, by means of immigration and evangelization.”<sup>27</sup> In addition to missions, migration is another significant factor in the expansion of Christianity. In an important sense, the history of Christianity is the history of migration.

Now the demographic shift not only introduced changes in the religious map, but also a transition in the conception of Christianity; namely, the end of Christendom and the emergence of “World Christianity.”<sup>28</sup> In a sense, the notion of Christendom was a theological bulwark of the old framework, technically distinguished from today’s scholarly terms that describe contemporary Christianity as a worldwide phenomenon. Todd Johnson explains the new reality of Christianity:

What is certain is that Christianity can no longer draw on a dominant Northern cultural, linguistic, or political framework for direction. Neither can the future be seen exclusively through the lenses of Southern Christianity. Global Christianity today is a phenomenon, not of uniformity, but of ever-increasing diversity.<sup>29</sup>

Sensitive Christian thinkers in the West welcomed the end of Christendom. As for its collapse, Douglas John Hall, in his book *The End of Christendom and The Future of Christianity*,<sup>30</sup> mentions that the end does not mean a sudden death, but a decline. The old Christendom mentality not only persists in the West, but also it can be found even in the non-Western world. For Hall, the church needs intentional disestablishment from the cultural establishment of Christendom mentality.<sup>31</sup> Malcolm Muggerridge’s *The End of Christendom* is also a critical response to the age old Western Christendom. Christendom, quite different from Christ’s

27. Jenkins, *The Next Christendom*, 192.

28. For more details, see Walls, “From Christendom to World Christianity.”

29. Todd M. Johnson and Sun Young Chung, “Tracking Global Christianity’s Statistical Centre of Gravity, AD 33 - AD 2100,” *International Review of Mission* 93 (April 2004): 177.

30. Douglas John Hall, *The End of Christendom and the Future of Christianity*, Christian Mission and Modern Culture (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1997).

31. Hall, *The End of Christendom and the Future of Christianity*, 35-49. By this, he means that we must finally stop clinging stubbornly to the old framework (e.g., comfortable relationship with governments or ruling classes, conformation to accepted social values, silent acceptance of various injustices, etc.). Hall emphasizes that this effort of disestablishment is a process of disengagement that is required before Christ’s disciples can authentically reengage the dominant culture.

Kingdom, is human-created and subject to decay. It decomposes in time and finally disappears, just like other human-invented legacies.<sup>32</sup>

Recognizing World War II as the signpost of the end of Christendom, Walls states:

In the years that followed the Second World War, those empires melted away. But the most fundamental assumption of all, that there were fully missionized lands which would continue to form the base for the evangelization of those not yet missionized proved fallible. Christendom itself crumbled.<sup>33</sup>

The last half of the twentieth century brought the disintegration of Colonialism and the rise of indigenous church movements. The enormous church growth in the non-Western world in spite of the hindered Western missionary work contrasted with the decline of church membership and the secularization of Western Christendom.

The exponentially growing churches in Africa are no longer mission-established churches. The so-called African Independent Churches are largely charismatic, prophetic, and spiritual churches. Visions, prophecies, and healings are important aspects of these churches. The once Catholic Latin America is now witnessing the massive burgeoning of the Pentecostal movement. Latin-American Pentecostalism is a unique cultural phenomenon arising from the particular situation of Latin America. The authority of faith is no longer based on ecclesiastical hierarchy and tradition, but on the Holy Spirit and personal experience.<sup>34</sup> This shift in authority is to the Latin American churches what the Protestant Reformation was to Europe in the sixteenth century. Some historians have described it as a new reformation.<sup>35</sup> The House Church movement

32. Malcolm Muggeridge, *The End of Christendom* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 13-52.

33. Walls, "From Christendom to World Christianity," 321.

34. Jenkins, "The Next Christianity," 60.

35. Scholars such as Stephen Neill and Philip Jenkins have acknowledged the impact of Pentecostalism and its historical significance in terms of a new reformation. Discussing the Anglican legacies in history, Neill mentions, "What is there left for anyone to do today? The answer may be that we have never yet taken seriously the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. Here and there in the Anglican world there have been manifestations of a new Pentecostal enthusiasm . . . these Anglicans, in perhaps eccentric ways, are pointing the way to the new Reformation that could set the whole Church ablaze even in the rather unpromising circumstances of the last third of the twentieth century." See Stephen Neill, "Does Our Church need a New Reformation?: An Anglican Reply," in *Post-Ecumenical Christianity*, ed. Hans Küng (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970), 79-80. A generation after, Jenkins remarks, "Meanwhile, a full-scale Reformation is taking

in China is a spectacular phenomenon, never dreamt of by the Western missionaries, especially considering that missionaries were expelled from China in the 1950s when Chinese Christians refused to join the Three-Self Patriotic Movement.<sup>36</sup>

Now we live in the era of World Christianity. This means that Christianity cannot be referred to as a faith of the West. Christianity has become the faith of many non-Westerners. What is the significance of this? In contrast to Western Christianity, Jenkins points out that the general characteristics of non-Western and Southern Christianity are more biblical, conservative, and experience-oriented than its counterpart.<sup>37</sup> For example, African Independent Churches and Latin-American Pentecostal churches—uninfluenced by the Enlightenment—understand and interpret the New Testament more literally. They are spiritually more open to the supernatural phenomena that the West has discarded.

During the last half of the century, studies in missions and non-Western Christianity have brought forth not only a new dimension to the understanding of Christian expansion, but also an emerging awareness of and a new concept for “World Christianity.” Christian history does not simply reveal geographical diffusion of the Christian faith. Rather, as Christianity reaches the non-Western world, it seriously engages with the indigenous religions and cultures in the process of receiving the gospel. Through this process of engagement, non-Westerners have formulated their own Christianity, just as the West had once done in its process of receiving the gospel. World Christianity is not the sum total of peripheral regions’ church stories. Rather it is the particular story which represents the very nature of the Christian story as a whole. In this sense, the history of World Christianity is not merely a global and geographical diffusion or a story of missionary activities, but a cross-cultural dimen-

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place among Pentecostal Christians—whose ideas are shared by many Catholics. Pentecostal believers reject tradition and hierarchy, but they also rely on direct spiritual revelation to supplement or replace biblical authority. And it is Pentecostals who stand in the vanguard of the Southern Counter-Reformation.” “The Next Christianity,” 59-60.

36. According to the World Christian Database (WCD), the highest annual conversion among world religions happens in Chinese Christianity. Around 5 million Chinese became Christians (Independents) annually between 2000 and 2005. See the query result of “Religions with most Annual Conversions” at the World Christian Database (WCD); available from <http://worldchristiandatabase.org/wcd/> (accessed 28 February 2008).

37. Of course, Jenkins’s description is an oversimplification: Not every Western church is liberal; not every non-Western church is conservative. Yet, he rightly points out that the vitality of Christianity is most evident in the non-Western world.

sion of Christian expansion. This concept not only heightened the vantage point of looking at the history of Christianity but also deepened the understanding of the nature of Christianity as a dynamic process of interaction between the divine gospel and human culture. The gospel, as the book of Acts demonstrates, has made a journey through various racial, ethnic, linguistic, cultural, and geographical breakthroughs.<sup>38</sup>

### Being a World Christian

The journey of the gospel in history has brought forth the emergence of World Christianity. How does a history of World Christianity conceptualize the nature and the spread of the gospel? Answering this question provides meaningful and missiological implications for today's Christians. We are indeed living in a global age. The global situation will add a new dimension to a Christian's identity as a World Christian. As I mentioned at the beginning of this paper, being a World Christian means having a global perspective with local and cultural awareness.

The gospel according to the history of World Christianity reveals the gospel's scope, depth, and power more potently when its cultural and global dimensions are taken into proper account. The true nature of the gospel is more lucidly portrayed on a global scale and in diverse local expressions of Christianity. The history of Christianity demonstrates how the gospel actually moves, where it goes, and what it finally accomplishes cross-culturally. I will explain this in terms of the agency of the gospel, the encounter with the gospel, and the dynamic of the gospel.

### Agency of the Gospel

The word "gospel" in the New Testament is always associated with the word "proclaim." Jesus himself is constantly on the move in preaching the gospel and demonstrating its power. The gospel must go out and move on toward the *eschaton* of history (Matt. 24:14). The gospel is carried through "agents." It started from Jesus, the very first agent in the New Testament, and journeys throughout history through someone, usually believers.

The history of the expansion of Christianity reveals that the carriers of the gospel, i.e., gospel agents, were not merely missionaries. In fact, indigenous Christians played a more critical role in the spread of the gospel. The historian Bengt Sundkler puts heavy emphasis on indigenous agents of the gospel in his writings.<sup>39</sup> The role of African prophets,

38. Acts 1:8; 11:20; 15; 17:26-27.

39. For example, Bengt G. M. Sundkler, *Bantu Prophets in South Africa* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1948); and Bengt Sundkler and Christopher Steed,

martyrs, and revivalists as the agents of the gospel was more critical than that of foreign missionaries. In the framework of World Christianity, the concept of gospel agent is broadened from missionary agency to indigenous agency.

As mentioned, migration becomes a new factor that helps us account for Christian expansion in the history of World Christianity; of this, Walls reminds us that migration is a biblical motif.<sup>40</sup> Immigrants as well as emigrants played significant roles as agents for Christianity. God used the Jewish Diaspora for the spread of the gospel at the outset; Greeks and Romans during the early age; Europeans during the medieval times; Americans during the modern period; and Asians, Africans, and Latin Americans during today's era.

We see the enormous church growth movement in the non-Western world. Although support for missions has declined in the West, the missionary movement is increasing in the non-Western churches. The churches in Africa, Asia, and Latin America are no longer the mission-established churches. They are missionary-sending churches, sending even to the Western world. Often, we see the students and missionaries from non-Western countries very active in the Western world.

The West has entered a post-Christian era. People in the old Christendom are seeking other religions and spirituality as alternatives. Lesslie Newbigin (1909-1998) asserted that the modern Western countries are now mission fields and need Christian impact from the non-Western world.<sup>41</sup> Can non-Western Christianity provide a remedy to the Western church?

Today's global situation also creates a different environment for missions. According to the report by the UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan in 2006, around 3% of the whole population on the earth constitutes "Diasporas," i.e., the people living outside of their homelands.

The report finds that migration has become a major feature of international life. People living outside their home countries numbered 191 million in 2005—115 million in developed countries, 75 million in the developing world. One-third of all current immigrants in the world have moved from one developing country to another, while about the same number have moved from the developing world to the developed. In other words, "South-South" migration is roughly as common as "South-North." But migration to countries designated as "high-income"—a cat-

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*History of the Church in Africa* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

40. Andrew F. Walls, "Mission and Migration: The Diaspora Factor in Christian History," *Journal of African Christian Thought* 5 (December 2002): 3.

41. Lesslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986).

egory which includes some developing countries, such as the Republic of Korea, Singapore, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates—has grown much faster than to the rest of the world.<sup>42</sup>

In this age of global migration, this fact is significant to Christian ministry. Christians do not have to be overseas missionaries (in a traditional sense) in order to reach non-Christians in different countries. Christians are already surrounded and embedded in many national groups. In this sense, the traditional sense of missions as going-out (centrifugal) shifts to the missions to coming-in (centripetal).

### *Encounter with the Gospel*

Being a World Christian means having a missional perspective both on Christian life and on church ministry. The Christian faith is essentially missional. The meaning of the word “mission,” is “to send.” The post-resurrection appearance of Jesus to his disciples (John 20:19ff) suggests a significant Christian identity. Jesus came to the fearful disciples, saying, “Peace be with you.” He did not come merely to greet people or to comfort them, but to command Christians. He had something more important on his mind. He said, “as the Father has sent me, I also send you.” He breathed on them and said “Receive the Holy Spirit.” God is not working on settling his people, but on sending them out. The Great Commission of Christ has been determinative for the course of the Christian movement and the direction of Western history thereafter. Mission is essential to the church. Unfortunately, however, there exists a dichotomy between church and mission, even today as well as in history. As Newbigin mentions: “The most obvious evidence is the fact that, in the thinking of the vast majority of Christians, the words ‘Church’ and ‘Mission’ connote two different kinds of society.”<sup>43</sup> Gaining a mis-

42. This report is described as “an early road map for this new era of mobility.” See the press release on international migration and development in June 6, 2006; available from [http://www.un.org/esa/population/migration/hld/Text/Migration\\_press%20release.pdf](http://www.un.org/esa/population/migration/hld/Text/Migration_press%20release.pdf) (accessed 27 March 2010). Korean Diaspora makes up 10% of the nation’s total population. Presently, Korea is one of the major countries that not only send emigrants but also receive immigrants: “It should be no surprise that countries once associated exclusively with emigration—such as Ireland, the Republic of Korea, Spain, and many others—now boast thriving economies which themselves attract large numbers of migrants.” See the excerpts from the report; available from [http://www.un.org/esa/population/migration/hld/Text/Migration\\_Excerpt\\_from\\_Foreword.pdf](http://www.un.org/esa/population/migration/hld/Text/Migration_Excerpt_from_Foreword.pdf) (accessed 27 March 2010).

43. It was especially Lesslie Newbigin who pinpointed this problem and emphasized the missionary nature of the church. See *The Household of God* (New

sional perspective is an important step toward authentic Christian life and ministry. It should be central in our Christian identity.

Mission involves people encountering the gospel. When we look closely at Scripture, experience of the gospel is best explained as “encounter.” The paramount model of the gospel encounter in the Bible is exemplified in the experience of Peter in Caesarea (Acts 10).<sup>44</sup> It sheds light on understanding God’s work at least in three ways. First, in this incident, God *prepared both parties*, the carrier (Peter) and the receiver (Cornelius) of the gospel. Here, God first takes the initiative; then Cornelius, while Peter scarcely shows any initiative at all. In the process of transmitting the gospel, we often observe this order. In the Korean case, the roles of indigenous agents were crucial. In the case of Protestantism, the Korean Bible preceded the official entry of Western missionaries. In the case of Catholicism, the Korean Church preceded the first appointed priest from China. Both cases demonstrate the initiatives of indigenous people for God’s work. The history of World Christianity must not lose sight of this insight; namely, God prepares both sides.

Secondly, in this incident God *transformed both parties*, not only Cornelius (the receiver) but also Peter (the carrier). Realizing who God is and whom the gospel is for, Peter gave witness not only to the gospel message, but also experienced his own transformation in the process.<sup>45</sup> As Dale Irvin explains, “Mission by definition is a communicative practice. It involves the sending and receiving of the message of Christian faith, and thus entails an encounter across historical boundaries of time and space.”<sup>46</sup> Such a statement focuses attention on mission as an interactive process that results in transformation of both senders and recipients. In this sense, mission studies investigate both sides, the sending and receiving parties. Irvin adds, “An authentic experience of mission brings about the transformation of both parties involved in the relationship. True Christian mission can never be a one-way street.”<sup>47</sup> Borrowing Irvin’s terms, the authentic gospel experience is “not only to missionize, but also to be missionized, to be transformed.”<sup>48</sup>

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York: Friendship Press, 1954), 164.

44. For further explanation of my discussion here regarding Peter and Cornelius see Charles Amjad-Ali, “A Tale of Two Conversions: The Mighty Are Brought Down and the Lowly Are Reluctant,” in *Border Crossings: Cross-Cultural Hermeneutics*, ed. D. N. Premnath (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2007), 55-67.

45. See Acts 10:34-35; Acts 10:45.

46. Dale T. Irvin, “Border Crossings in World Christianity: Mission and Deterritorialization,” (n.p.: New York Theological Seminary, New York, n.d.), 4.

47. Irvin, “Border Crossings in World Christianity,” 4.

48. Irvin, “Border Crossings in World Christianity,” 17.

Thirdly, in the story of Peter and Cornelius, God *generates a new community* of God's people as the gospel journeys through ethnic, cultural, and ideological boundaries.<sup>49</sup> Through the journey of the gospel, God not only brings blessings to the receivers, but also to the carriers uniting people across racial and ethnic lines in a new identity. In this sense, the gospel not only has a soteriological dimension but also an ecclesiastical one. When the walls tumbled down, Jews, Samaritans, and Gentiles were joined together in the body of Christ. The gospel journeyed through the *oikoumene* and brought the expansion of global consciousness, contributing to the breakdown of ethno-racial barriers.<sup>50</sup>

### *Dynamic of the Gospel*

Being a World Christian means having a tension-filled, yet balanced, view in our Christian living. Walls explains the twin forces within the gospel as "indigenizing" and "pilgrim" principles. The "indigenizing" principle is the desire "to live as a Christian and yet as a member of one's own society," which "associates Christians with the *particulars* of their culture and group."<sup>51</sup> On the contrary, the "pilgrim" principle is "a *universalizing* factor."<sup>52</sup> By this principle, a Christian is "linked to the people of God in all generations."<sup>53</sup> These two principles, deeply rooted in the gospel itself, are in "tension," but not in "opposition," and work as the twin forces in culture to localize and universalize the Christianity.<sup>54</sup> One anonymous letter, written in the second century, describes the Christian identity:

For the Christians are distinguished from other people neither by land, nor language, nor customs; for they do not inhabit cities of their own, nor use a particular language, nor lead a life that is unusual. . . . But inhabiting Greek as well as barbarian cities, according to each person's lot . . . they display to us their wonderful and admittedly paradoxical way of life.

49. After the martyrdom of Stephen, for example, the first account of evangelistic work was Philip's ministry in Samaria (Acts 8:4ff). It is a well-known fact that there was a deep barrier between Samaritans and Jews.

50. The concluding remark of Charles Amjad-Ali's "A Tale of Two Conversions" is to this point: "All the impregnable borders have not only been crossed and destroyed, but the full implication of the gospel and the Pentecost for World Christianity has powerfully worked itself out." See Amjad-Ali, "A Tale of Two Conversions," 67.

51. Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History*, 7-9.

52. Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History*, 9.

53. Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History*, 9.

54. Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History*, 54.

They inhabit their homelands, but as strangers. . . . Every foreign land is their homeland, and every homeland a foreign land.<sup>55</sup>

Journey of the gospel demonstrates the dynamic nature of the gospel. The gospel exercises its force as a captivating and corrective power. As Walls says, the gospel has played a dual role in its relationship with culture—it is both the “prisoner” and the “liberator” of culture.<sup>56</sup> The gospel demands that a Christian live as a pilgrim to heaven and an ambassador to this earth as well. The gospel not only has transforming power to make its message understandable across cultures (the “indigenizing” principle), it also has the power to transform cultures (the “pilgrim” principle); thus, the gospel has both particularizing and universalizing factors.

### Concluding Reflections

In this paper, a history of World Christianity was briefly discussed in terms of the journey of the gospel along with its global and local characteristics. Understanding the process and the nature of the gospel in history suggests missiological implications, namely, what it means to be a World Christian as explained in the above.

The journey of the gospel in world history gives us a candlelight image of missions. In this image, the evangelizing process is seen not as a work of lightning and thunder from the sky, but more like a passing of the candlelight. God gave us the candlelight of the gospel. It was not passed directly from heaven to all humanity all at once. Instead, as Newbigin observed about the biblical pattern, God chose a particular person and people for his global blessings.<sup>57</sup> Understanding that God acts by “choosing,” “calling,” and “sending” is “the clue to the understanding of the role of mission in world history.”<sup>58</sup>

The candlelight of the gospel has been lit by passing it on to the next person. Blessings are given ultimately by God, but it is passed by a human agent. Newbigin explains a human being as the “being-in-relatedness.” He states further: “Interpersonal relatedness belongs to the very being of God. Therefore, there can be no salvation for human

55. *Epistle to Diognetus* 5, *Ancient Christian Writers*, 6:139 quoted in Dale T. Irvin and Scott W. Sunquist, *History of the World Christian Movement, Earliest Christianity to 1453* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2001), 96.

56. Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History*, 3-15.

57. Lesslie Newbigin, *The Open Secret: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission*, revised edition (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 71.

58. Newbigin, *The Open Secret*, 81.

beings except in relatedness.”<sup>59</sup> Every Christian is God’s choice, agent, and pathway in God’s missional work. God is working in the human network, and we are embedded in connection. In conclusion, we are not merely the objects of God’s salvation and blessings; we are rather *participants* of God’s glorious work.

59. Newbigin, *The Open Secret*, 70.