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'May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.'

[Romans 15:13.](#)

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The Cross as Evangel in Mission

Chun Chae-Ok

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Seen in the light of the modern Korean missionary movement and against the background of Jewish/gentile approaches, this article is a typical Asian way of looking at the central element of the Christian message: The Cross. The writer's challenge, evolved out of her context, is convincing—namely, Only a Cross-bearing Christian can preach the Cross of Christ.

(Editors)

INTRODUCTION

The Korean church has been recently more on world Christian news for its rapid expansion. There may be varied approaches for attempting to understand the Korean church growth. This article is one of the attempts to understand it from a mission strategy point of view. It points to suffering as a means of church growth.

Understanding and interpretation of the meaning of suffering and pain are vitally related to the depths of one's own world view, with the basic components of his faith, and with his experience of God with the backgrounds of his theology. As it is one of the central themes and questions throughout history, there have been efforts at defining its meaning and providing possible answers to it. Firstly, many have taken the position of fatalism, especially in the subcontinent of Asia where Hinduism and Islam prevail. They see suffering as something inevitable and accept it with total submission. They live with it, through it, and almost for it. They do not see that there is something which points beyond suffering. It is a completely negative attitude toward suffering. This school of thought is so predominant in the life of Asia that it has affected all realms of thinking which depict the Asian philosophies. It is not looking forward and far-sightedly towards the future, but, rather, lives in the past. Secondly, some have interpreted the law of cause and effect. All suffering comes because of sins which are committed through human desires. One deserves suffering because he sins. This concept is present in the Jewish world view. Thirdly, another school of thought which one can more readily accept is that of suffering for the sake of training and education. Suffering teaches something which nothing else can teach. It is a necessary ingredient for growing toward a mature and wholesome personality. It is almost like a compost for producing a beautiful creation whatever [p. 40](#) it may be as near to an ideal person whom the Creator intended to produce. It seems to be a reasonable solution, but its interpretation has its problems. Fourthly, there is

suffering in atonement', suffering with positive participation in the light of Christ's suffering and his mission which he has set for completion and consummation until the time in the eschatological sense. It is true to say that one's own interpretation of the meaning of suffering is taking the most important place in living out one's faith.

The paradoxical truth in Christianity is that the cross is the very centre of the Gospel, i.e. the good news for the world which is suffocated with suffering and pain is represented by the symbol of the cross. Couldn't there be an easier way for bringing the message of the Gospel to the world? Was it the only way that God could think of—the way of the Cross?! In Islam Mahomet killed others, but in Christianity Jesus led his followers to die. This is the way! Therefore, all the possible questions and problems do find solutions ONLY when we understand the meaning of suffering in the light of the Gospel and interpret the cross as the highest glory. The meaning of the cross as the Evangel is the ultimate answer and the key to the solution of suffering. In understanding the meaning of the cross, we can find meaning in everything. Why did Christ die for His mission? 'Death was inherent in his mission as the bearer of the forgiveness of God to men. The encounter of the divine grace and human sin has the nature of collision, and as such it necessarily involves suffering. The cross marks the climax of this suffering' (Leon Morris: *The Cross in the New Testament*, p.376).

Therefore, in this paper the following three aspects of the meaning of the cross as the Evangel in mission are dealt with:

(1) The meaning of the cross for the Jewish concept; (2) The meaning of the cross for the gentile concept; and (3) The meaning of the cross for the Christian's missionary mandate. With this background material, an effort for a conclusion is made.

II THE MEANING OF THE CROSS FOR THE JEW

(a) The Jewish Expectation of the Coming Messiah

The Jewish people as a nation had a great longing for the coming of the Messiah but they put him to death on the cross. It was due to their different understanding of the Messiahship from that of Jesus. Their image of the Messiah was the combination of the perfect prophet, the perfect priest, and the perfect king who are depicted in the Old Testament. They expected a period of the ideal reign, reign of peace [p.41](#) and prosperity which they had a glimpse of through the Davidic reign. Even the disciples of Jesus were not free from this concept of the Messiahship. No wonder that it was a great disappointment for them when Jesus decided to take the way of the cross. Therefore, they had to lament, saying, 'But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel' ([Luke 24:21](#)) after the event of the Jesus crucifixion. Even before the ascension, the disciples did not get over that idea as is clearly revealed in the following verse: 'Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?' ([Acts 1:6](#)) They wanted the Messiah as the deliverer who would bring the political freedom from the Roman authority and oppression and as one who would reign in glory and authority as their national leader. After the three-year school of Jesus' training, they were not free from the grip of their own image of the Messiah. The Jews expected the Messiah who would restore the nation and it was unthinkable that the Messiah could take the cross as the means of restoration. Jesus spoke repeatedly of the necessity of suffering in being the Messiah: 'Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?' ([Luke 24:26](#))

He broadened the meaning of the Messiahship. It is not for the Jews only, but also for the whole world. He is not the mere immediate deliverer from the present situation of the world, but the eternal Messiah who will reign over both the material and the spiritual

world. But this Messiahship could only be fulfilled by means of suffering—the way of the cross.

(b) The Old Testament Concept of Suffering

(1) There is suffering which is caused by a natural phenomenon. It does not come through any personal moral involvement and responsibility. This suffering has nothing to do with personal guilt or sins. Man is not directly morally responsible for it. Disasters, famines, and natural catastrophes are examples. This is suffering which man cannot account for and which is beyond the human realm. Nevertheless, it is a fact.

(2) On the other hand, God did bring suffering to the people of Israel because they did not obey according to the law of God. This brought the guilt and the result of certain sins on them. God's punishment was a reality in the history of Israel. For example, the exiles of the Israelites. 'Hear this word that the Lord has spoken against you, O people of Israel, against the whole family which I brought up out of the land of Egypt: You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore, I will punish you for all your iniquities.' ([Amos 3:1-2](#)) It is a fearful p. 42 thing to be forgotten by-God; being rejected by Him and given up by Him brought a curse on them.

(3) There is a more positive aspect of suffering. Job suffered as a righteous man. It is a mystery why suffering is allowed for the righteous in unexplainable ways, but it comes to dedicated believers—God-fearing people. The kind of suffering Job had to confront was physically and spiritually painful. His own family and his close friends no longer stood by him. He became completely alone in his struggle to be loyal and faithful to God, the Truth. It is amazing to note how Job came to grips with himself through his suffering: 'Then, Job answered the Lord: I know that thou canst do all things, and that no purpose of thine can be thwarted. Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge: Therefore, have uttered what did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know.' ([Job 42:1-3](#))

(4) Substitutional suffering should be included. It is seen through the lives of the O. T. prophets. The eighth century prophets were certainly the ideal examples for this. They identified themselves with the people of the nation in their plight and destiny; they struggled with them for them to convey to the people. Whether in the homeland or in the lands of exile, they willingly suffered in order that the people might open themselves to the instructions by which they could live. Here, a kind of prototype of an ideal missionary is depicted. Of course, they were not concerned directly for other nations, but rather exclusively for the Israelites. Nevertheless many from other neighbouring nations were attracted to their message. We see a type of missionary mandate in their ministry in that they attempted to lead their own people, the Israelites, to the way which God intends them to take for life—for true life.

(5) The suffering servant ([Is. 42:1-7](#), [Is. 49:1-7](#), [Is. 50:5-6](#), and [Is. 52:13-53:1-12](#)) is one of the highlights in the Old Testament in glorifying suffering for the purpose of redeeming work. 'Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted.' The servant is seen by man as despised and rejected. Then, the servant is seen by God as the Redeemer. What a contrast! His death is regarded by man as a tragic failure, and yet it is lifted up high by God as a glorious success. It is a reality both in the Old Testament and the present time that a man—a true servant of the Lord—is bound to be seen in a paradoxical way: man sees him as despised and rejected and yet God accepts him completely. p. 43

(c) The cross as the stumbling block

The cross was a symbol of utter failure, weakness, and curse according to the Jewish concept. 'But we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, ...'. ([1 Cor. 1:23](#)) The Jewish disappointment in Jesus as the Christ was based on their own understanding of what the cross was to them as something of weakness. It was not according to the signs which they were seeking after and the Greeks also found that it was not within their understanding of wisdom. But, in reality, the cross was the power and the wisdom of God. It was a stumbling block to them because they did not know the mysterious power to be released through the cross which is the climax in the Scriptures for revealing the power of God. As was the custom in their days, they regarded the Cross of Jesus as the total expression of the curse on Jesus and failure as the Messiah. Therefore, they joined in readily for rejecting and despising him who was hung on a cross along with the Roman authority.

(d) The cross and understanding of the Early Church

The centrality of the message which the Early Church spread around from Jerusalem was the cross: the apostles took pain to explain the meaning of the cross, its power, and its glory to the Jews first and to the Gentiles, too. They explained the life of Jesus Christ within the framework of the cross and in the light of resurrection. This kerygma was the common preaching material of the early missionaries and recognized by them in the Early Church. In *The Apostolic Preaching and Its Developments*, 1936, Michael Green makes a point of the fact that there is over-emphasis on kerygma which is as if it were a bunch of fixed preaching material. Rather, he takes kerygma as one of the great N.T. words—to proclaim, to tell good news, and to bear witness—which he expounds in his chapter on the Evangel (Michael Green: 1970, *Evangelism In The Early Church*, p.48). In Mark, the cross and the resurrection are central. The cross does not mean that Jesus had to be weak or was weak. It was the other way around. It was the climax of God's expression of powerful acts in Jesus. It was 'according to the Scriptures': in [1 Cor. 15:1-8](#), it is mentioned that the event was according to the Scriptures, i.e. referring to the O.T. covenant and promise. Peter, the apostle, said in Acts in his pentecostal sermon that the Jews crucified and killed Jesus by the hands of lawless men. However, it was necessary for their sake for the work of atonement. The Book of Hebrews speaks of the cross as the means of the eternal heavenly sacrifice of Christ ([Hebrews 9:12f.](#)). Christ as a high priest entered into the Holy place taking his own blood [p.44](#) to secure the eternal redemption for all men. The perfect and ideal priest became his own sacrificial material. The Early Church had no shadow of doubt that the cross was essential according to the Scriptures, for the life of witness, and as the method of communicating the Evangel.

III. THE MEANING OF THE CROSS FOR THE GENTILES

(a) Universalism

The missionary theme of universalism affirms that the people of God bear witness that Yahweh is their God, but at the same time he is God and King of the whole world. It is true, too, in the New Testament, especially in the books of Mark and Luke in which the word Jesus uses meaning *to save* is used more than the term, Messiah. Although it does appear that Jesus was exclusively concerned for the Jews and hostile toward the Gentiles in his mission task, ([Matt. 10:16ff.](#)) the cross and suffering of Jesus Christ have far-reaching effects for all men, for all ages, and once and for all.

Adolf von Harnack stresses that that mission to the Gentiles, which is only possible through the work of the cross, was outside of Jesus' concern. Max Meinertx points out that

although Jesus confined his ministry to Israel, he had envisaged a future inclusion of the Gentiles. This came out clearly after his resurrection, i.e. universalism in mission through the work of the cross. The work of the cross was not limited to Israel. Ferdinand Hahn takes the view that even though Jesus directed his work toward Israel in the beginning, his emphasis was to God's people as a whole. 'Jesus was concerned with a great new promise of salvation. He did not turn back to the idea of gathering the holy remnant, as was the widespread tendency in the Judaism of the time, but took up again the Old Testament concept of God's people' (Ferdinand Hahn: *Mission in the New Testament*, p.30).

In [Matthew 8:5-10](#), a non-Jew comes for help. In [Mark 7:24-30](#), the Syrophenician woman receives help and has confidence in Jesus. Jesus does give a solution to the woman who has hope in him and will not give in readily to his refusal. His miraculous acts of help are also related with his high praise for the faith of the Gentiles. The Gospels highlight Jesus' marvel at these Gentiles who came to him.

(b) Gospel of freedom

The gospel of Mark was speaking to an age (the Early Church period) when there was an expectation by the Jewish nation of vengeance on the Gentile nations, especially the Romans. They believed the final **p. 45** destruction of the Gentiles was that 'No Gentile will have a part in the world to come', the ancient teaching of the nation. The ultimate destiny for the Gentiles was thought to be hell. 'There is no ransom for the Gentiles ... since the Holy One has given the nations of the world as Israel's substitute, as an atonement for their life ([Is. 43:3ff.](#)). Jesus is not the Messiah of Israel's expectation but rather, he shows that he is interested in bringing the Kingdom of God.

'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord' ([Is. 61:1-2](#)).

The freedom which is mentioned in the above passage did not come without the cross which Jesus had to take up as the highest price for such freedom. This is the witness of the four gospels. This salvation is freedom from sin, death, Satan, the Law, and the wrath of God.

(c) Forgiveness and Reconciliation

Jesus does not exclude the Gentiles from sharing in forgiveness and reconciliation—salvation through Him. Since it is offered to all people, they all are responsible to him in the last times. He says that all nations without any exception will stand before the throne of the Son of Man ([Matt. 25:31ff.](#)). Although Jesus does make differentiation between Israel and the other nations in God's redemptive purpose, he points to the fact that in the last day, there will not be any distinction between Israel and the Gentiles.

Jesus had the authority as revealed in his title—the Son of Man—for his redemptive activity and Lordship over all peoples including the Gentiles. The Son of Man in [Daniel 7:13-14](#) has power, kingdom, and authority, and all peoples and nations shall serve him. As the term is drawn from the above reference, 'there came one like a son of man, and to him was given dominion and glory and kingdom that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion,' it supports the concept of forgiveness and reconciliation for the Gentiles as it draws all people together to serve Him. He denies himself as Christ equating with the son of David, but rather thought of himself as the servant of Yahweh who would bring truth to the nations as mentioned in Isaiah.

The attributes of his sovereignty imply that the Gentiles are equally privileged in experiencing forgiveness and reconciliation. His death on the cross was for many and Gentiles are not excluded from his purpose. 'For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by [p. 46](#) the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life' ([Rom. 5:10ff.](#)). This means that there is a complete answer in the cross of Christ for reconciliation among social, religious, and national differences. 'All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself ...' ([2 Cor. 5:18](#)).

(d) New Self-Evaluation and New Self-Discovery

The cross of Christ provides a new self-evaluation and new self-discovery. 'And he died for all, that those who live might live no longer for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised' ([2 Cor. 5:15](#)). Christ came to give a new value for man. When we participate in this death on the cross with our confession of faith in him, he leads us to find new meaning, new values as a new creation.

IV. THE MEANING OF THE CROSS FOR THE MISSIONARY MANDATE

(a) Taking Up One's Cross for Christ's Sake

There are several levels in taking up a daily cross. One of them is bearing pain of body or mind (William N. Kerr: *Suffering as an Element in the Strategy of Missions*, p.7). There is a constant conflict within one's own inner self. Paul in [Romans 7](#) speaks of something of the pain and agony. 'I delight in the law of God, in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin which dwells in my members' ([Rom. 7:22-23](#)). Paul in [Galatians 2](#) writes that he has been crucified with Christ. 'It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.' The same person cries out that he dies every day ([1 Cor. 15:31](#)).

This is the most basic attitude and experience in missions. It is one of the paradoxes taught by Christ. We have died with him and yet we need daily dying. The early missionaries took this path; there was no life and growth of that life without daily dying for Christ's sake.

This involves doing one's best to be approved as a workman of God. This kind of dying is not automatic, but is possible and rewarding through vigorous self-discipline in the power of the cross.

(b) The Cross and Obedience

There is human wisdom which controls the body and mind of the people of the world. Their purpose of life, their goals, and their standards are directed by the common wisdom. That depicts those [p. 47](#) outside the experience of the Cross. Then, there are those who have already known the whole counsel of Christ and the purpose of His coming into the world. They know the purpose of their daily living and the purpose of their whole existence, and yet they are not yet conscious of the fact of using their own means and methods in trying to achieve that purpose. They want to devote themselves to the expansion of the Kingdom but seem to be intoxicated by the fact of their consciousness of their dedication and obedience to the cause of the Mission. Here, Christ can offer comfort as he would to those in suffering in pain of body and mind.

It is a salient feature among the Old Testament prophets that they knew suffering in every part of their being because of their calling and ministry as the prophets of the time. Paul also speaks constantly of suffering which leads one to take the path of self-denial

within the context of his missionary vocation. 'The story told in Acts speaks for itself. We are told that it was an integral part of missionary preaching to the first churches that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God' (Michael Taylor: *The Mystery of Suffering and Death*, p.47). His long list of suffering of various kinds deals with the mission. It was far more than merely physical hardship, but rather there was an agony of something like travail for the establishment and the growth of churches in Asia Minor. Suffering is inescapable and inevitable for the apostles.

Utter obedience to the cause of the mission and dedication to the person of Christ make it possible to rejoice in sufferings and pains. Suffering is almost a mark of those who are truly called out by God for His assignment and approved by Him for the task. Think of anyone in the Scriptures and in the history of the Church who did not know this experience. Before a person comes to this stage in his experience, it is meant still for the Christian in general to suffer. When suffering is without rejoicing, then it is not truly within the Christian experience. 'This implies a koinonia in suffering which both links together the sufferings of the individual Christian with those of Christ and binds the sufferings of the whole body together. St. Paul shares that he suffers in Christ's suffering during his mission' (Michael Taylor: p.54). In [2 Cor. 1:5-7](#), he writes:

If we are afflicted it is for your comfort and salvation: and if we are comforted it is for your comfort, which you experience when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we suffer. Our hope for you is unshaken: for we know that as you share in our sufferings, you will also share in our comfort. [p. 48](#)

(c) The Cross and Cultural Background

God does work within the framework of the existing structures and modes of living in different parts of the world. This does not apply only to a group of people or a nation, but He is always willing to work out His purposes even in an individual's life in harmony with his physical and psychological make-up. Sometimes, however, there is overemphasis on the message and the messengers rather than on the reception of the message. The history of missions testifies to the fact that missionaries were so completely taken up by the divine task and the content of the message that they did not always see the importance of the receptor's cultural backgrounds.

The cross which Jesus accepted is a supreme example in his bringing himself down to where he could make God's love known in the very best way for all men. The means of the communication seemed to be shocking because it took the form of death and yet it left an eternal effect on those who came to participate in it.

Then followed his disciples, not taking their crosses in a physical sense, but in spiritual depth. It is only by understanding the meaning of the cross that missionaries overcome their own cultural environment in order to identify with their receptors. True identification with the people who have totally different world views is painful and humanly speaking implausible. It is not possible without daily dying to one's ideas, customs, and values. The cross of Christ is the basis for this painful procedure.

(d) The Cross and the Fulfilling of the Task of the Mission

'Our age calls for cross-bearing Christians who have not only a faith for which to live but one for which to die as well. There must be a reassessment of the place of suffering in the labour of the Gospel' (William Kerr: *Suffering as an Element in the Strategy of Missions*, p.4). In general, missions today give an image of comfortableness and privilege. It does not matter primarily how much missionaries have given up, but what their receptors think of them. There is a need for coming together at the foot of the cross where cross-

bearers can experience oneness as the body of Christ. It appears that at present the body is disjointed.

William Kerr speaks of suffering in passion for the perfection of the church and the accomplishment of its mission. But, this is not a solitary suffering, but rather it is sharing of the fellowship with Christ. In the two-fold task for 'discipling and perfecting' it is inevitable for members of the Church who are called for witness to go through agony of pains which Paul speaks as 'in travail' ([Gal. 4:19](#)). The One who did [p. 49](#) come for the redemption of man had to take this way: Love means pain. He suffered for his task even unto death. Without this deep involvement, there is no genuine transformation for man. 'The "kerygmatic" responsibility of the church is inseparable from its "koinoniatic" character. Only a Church of cross-bearing Christians can preach the cross of Christ' (William Kerr: p.8).

In the short history of the Korean Church, the element of suffering physically and spiritually is experienced. Although the Korean Church's suffering is not comparable to the Early Church, it is a painful experience.

V. CONCLUSION

The redemptive work through suffering which Christ had undertaken is complete. No one else can add to it or be a part of it. That is once for all for all people and for all ages. Yet, there is suffering which Christians can take part in for mission in order to be a part in the mission of Christ.

The cross of Christ was the total expression of God's love for man. He got involved Himself in that painful process of bearing the cross; it was the manifestation of His love for the world. It is significant that He came down where people are and took the form of a most humiliating death—death on the cross. 'It is willingness to serve and sacrifice, to forgive and make allowances, to share and sympathize, to lift up the fallen and restore the erring ([Gal. 5:25ff.](#), [Rom. 12:9ff.](#), [1 Cor. 13:4ff.](#)) in a community which owes its whole existence to the mercy of God and the sacrificial death of Christ' ([Phil. 2:1ff.](#), [1 Cor. 8:11](#)) (William Kerr: p.9). The model for missions is the mission of Christ. Through the cross, there is also a need of suffering for the missionary involvement today.

Looking back Over a century of mission history in Korea, genuine growth of the Church was possible through the suffering of individual cross-bearing Christians whether nationals or missionaries. In a way it can be said that, 'Suffering is the element of mission strategy' (A. R. Glasser).

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Secularization and Secularism Some Christians Considerations

Klaus Bockmuehl