

# Evangelical Review of Theology

GENERAL EDITOR: THOMAS SCHIRRMACHER

Volume 35 · Number 3 · July 2011

Articles and book reviews reflecting global evangelical  
theology for the purpose of discerning the obedience of faith

Published by



for  
WORLD EVANGELICAL  
ALLIANCE  
Theological Commission

# The Work of God as holistic mission: An Asian Perspective

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**KEYWORDS:** *Edinburgh 1910, caste, Dornakal Mission, Dalits, poverty, evangelical, awakening, Gandhi, education, prosperity theology, signs and wonders*

## I Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to describe the work of God as holistic mission as carried out by the church in Asia. During the last hundred years, the church in Asian countries has grown in quality as well as in quantity. Asian churches have contributed to a great extent in developing indigenous leaders, articulating wholesome theologies, and in establishing various types of missions and ministries as well as training institutions.

The impact of the modern missionary movement was so pervasive that its impact continued through the first half of the twentieth century. Some of the eminent leaders such as V.S. Azariah played an important role in shaping the mission of the church. The next half of

the century witnessed a tremendous growth of cross-cultural missions, congregations, organizations for relief and rehabilitation and seminaries. Christians in Asia got involved in various types of new forms of ministries as the situations demanded. In a number of ways churches contributed to nation building, correcting injustice and opposing social oppression.

To illustrate the holistic mission since Edinburgh 1910, as understood and practised by the Asian church, I have drawn lessons, first, from the Dornakal mission—a single great movement of this era among the Dalits headed by V.S. Azariah; and secondly, I have made references to two remarkable evangelical movements of this century, namely Friends Missionary Prayer Band (FMPB) and Evangelical Church of India (ECI) being singularly influenced by the teaching of D. A. McGavran who was a missionary in India for about thirty years. Finally I describe the contribution of Pentecostals to holism.

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## II Holistic Mission—A Christian heritage that overflows

The gospel of Christ has always been *holistic* and never been un-holistic. The four gospels present a holistic transformation of individuals, families and communities. The command of Jesus was to *preach the gospel, heal the sick and drive the demons (social evils)*. The early apostles and their followers were committed to *holistic transformation* in the contexts they served. The early church was sympathetic towards the slaves and prisoners and often worked for their deliverance by paying their ransom. The early Christians took care of the poor, the destitute, orphans and widows. During medieval times, the monks offered a dedicated service to common people, especially to the poor peasants and the victims of the barbarians.

As Ralph Winter has pointed out, the European and American Evangelical Awakenings of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were characterized by a broad dual social/personal, earthly and heavenly spectrum of concern, ranging from foreign missions to changing the legal structure of society and even war. This period was significantly characterized by evangelicals in a position of civil leadership. For the most part the nineteenth century missionaries were committed to combining evangelism and social concerns. They worked within the window of awareness which made the transformation of society feasible—something which was within their grasp. They could readily believe not only in a profound transformation of individuals, but also in a wide range of different

aspects of social transformation and God-glorification.<sup>1</sup>

However, from the turn of twentieth century there has been growing an undue polarization over the meaning of Christian mission. Since the Edinburgh Missionary Conference of 1910, the traditional models of missions have come under severe criticism, especially through the latter half of the century. Also from Edinburgh came two major streams of the modern missionary movement: the first was evangelical and the second ecumenical. After Edinburgh theological changes quickly swept the whole world, weakening evangelistic fervour, especially among young people. Furthermore, the two world-wars caused further hindrances and discouragements to the world-wide church.

Yet there was a brighter side, with challenges for the gospel engagement. Asians, including national leaders like M.K. Gandhi, were ready to accept Christian humanitarian services in the fields of education and healthcare as well as Jesus' teachings on ethics, but they were not willing to confess that Jesus Christ is the Lord. However, the 'good works' carried out by missionaries and Christians have always been understood to be an expression of their love and obedience to the Lord Jesus Christ. 'The underlying motivation, of course, was their obligation to proclaim the salvation of God through faith in Jesus Christ.' Asians have by and large been willing to receive the

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1 Ralph Winter, 'The Future of Evangelicals in Mission', *Mission Frontiers* (Sept-Oct, 2007), 5-7.

former, but many have rejected the need for the latter as the upper castes in particular, would say that 'we have our own saviours'.<sup>2</sup>

As Graham Houghton maintains, the Christian community has still felt that they have contributed to the building of the nation. This is because for those who have decided to follow Jesus, any encounter with him has precipitated a personal and social transformation. The outcomes have been an effective cause of upward social mobility which has changed lives, benefited families, neighbourhoods, villages and entire ethnic/caste communities. It needs to be added that this is particularly the case among the poor and the disenfranchised, namely, those who today are classified as backward classes and *dalits*, i.e., the oppressed.<sup>3</sup>

Although Gandhi was a convert to modernity in terms of the education he acquired and his exposure to western ideas, he did not cultivate cultural openness, whereas his contemporary, V.S. Azariah, more positively recognized Christian faith not as a cultural contradiction but as a fulfilling of the imperfect native culture. He was of the opinion that the Christian gospel was a refinement of the culture of natives to enable them to live a civilized life, free from the negative and oppressive aspects of their culture such as ignorance, illiteracy, spirit worship,

immorality and other traditional practices.<sup>4</sup>

The gospel of Christ confronts the culture of poverty to bring about transformation. India is known the world over for its ancient culture and belief systems as well as for its poverty. All these elements are quite inter-related—so much so that poverty is very much linked with culture and religion. Traditionally, Indian belief systems have always determined Indians' lifestyles. For the majority of Indians life has been one of negation rather than affirmation.

Rightly or wrongly, Indian sages chose to renounce the world and run away from all the goodness of life rather than face the challenges of it. These ascetics lived off alms in abject poverty and want. Although modernity and western culture have affected our Indian belief systems and cultures, poverty is still regarded as the outward sign of 'spirituality' for the *swamijis* and *mahatmas*.

While these *swamijis* and *mahatmas* adopt this type of 'austere and simple life', theirs and the message of the priestly class to the masses, the poor and the oppressed is a little different. They say that they are poor, untouchable and handicapped because of their karma—retribution of the sins they have carried with them into this life! The belief in '*karma janmanthra*' destroys the spirit of enterprise and the inner urge for development and

2 Graham Houghton, 'The Foundation Laid by Christian Missionaries', Bishop M. Ezra Sargunam (ed) *Christian Contribution to Nation Building* (Chennai, Mission Educational Books, 2006), 2.

3 Houghton, *The Foundation Laid by Christian Missionaries*, 2.

4 V.S. Azariah, 'The Bishop's letter', *DDM*, (1934), 4. S. Harper, *Azariah and Indian Christianity During the Late Years of Raj*, Unpublished D.Phil Thesis, University of Oxford, 1991, 249f.

growth. Any belief system that does not liberate the people from the shackles of poverty and misery, but rather compels them to accept the sufferings as their fate, needs to be jettisoned.<sup>5</sup>

Even so, at the turn of the twentieth century, Christian mission among the poor and outcaste communities in Asian countries such as India still envisioned a new society. This was humanly speaking very odd for the Indian church. In reality the Indian Christians were hoping against hope, because still the church had to work in a society that was deeply religious, deeply caste-ridden, the lower castes of which were terribly oppressed. The Christian task was still a battle against *sati* (burning of widows), untouchability, child marriage, temple prostitution, infanticide, slavery, illiteracy, and the oppression of women and children. Nevertheless a new society was taking shape before their very eyes as the church worked towards it.

From the inception of the modern missionary movement, Christian mission and social transformation of the poor and oppressed were always inseparable. The Asian Christian leaders believed that the gospel of Christ was not only the power of God for salvation but also the power of God for socio-economic and political liberation.<sup>6</sup> They saw conversion to Christ as related also to 'the prospect (or envisioning) of India's regeneration'.<sup>7</sup> Against this

background let us examine the kind of mission carried out by the Asian national leaders such as V.S. Azariah and his successors.

### III The Dornakal Mission—holistic mission among the Dalits

V.S. Azariah (1874-1945), the first Indian bishop of the Anglican Church in India, was a champion of ecumenism among the younger churches of South India. Along with a few other Indian Christians he founded the first indigenous missionary society, the Indian Missionary Society (IMS) of Tirunelveli, in 1903, and the National Missionary Society (NMS) in 1905. Azariah had great zeal for missionary activities combining evangelism and social concerns.

He was modern India's most successful leader of the Dalits and of non-Brahmin conversion movements to the gospel of Christ during early twentieth century. His evangelistic work among the Telugus resulted in enormous growth of Christian congregations. He contended that churches had to become missionary churches.

He was consecrated Bishop of Dornakal in 1912. By the year 1928 his diocese contained 158,000 Christians. All the pastoral work was organized under a system of pastorates and these were grouped into district church councils. While the Indian clergymen were directly responsible to the bishop, the Indian lay workers were responsible to their own clergy. Accordingly each of the out-caste villages had its own corporate church life with independent activities: village schools,

5 M.Ezra Sargunam, 'Culture as an element of development', Unpublished Paper, Oct 13-14, 1999.

6 V.S. Azariah, *DDM*, Vol.XIII, No.4, (April, 1936), 3-4.

7 R.D. Paul, *Chosen Vessels* (Madras: CLS, 1961), 145ff.

morning and evening prayer in each village, Bible study and classes for catechumens.

The work in Dornakal had general and liberal support from foreign money. Year after year Azariah and his associates wrote numerous letters and travelled to many countries to promote the work they were carrying out among the oppressed classes. He evolved an elaborate network through which parishes in England were linked to Christian villages in Dornakal. Azariah insisted that older churches around the world whom God had blessed with wealth must give, must give with abandon, and must give cheerfully for the work of God among the poor and the oppressed communities.

From the beginning Azariah had the conviction that the gospel of Jesus Christ was meant for the poor and the oppressed, and when it was preached to them it evoked their response. As he loved the rural poor and rural congregations, he understood their problems and needs so that he could serve them effectively in many ways.

The Church in India, therefore, is essentially a village church. Its problems are village problems, its education needs to be adapted to the conditions of village life and its leaders must be men and women able and willing to live and work among village folk. And it is the church of the poor. This fact has often been cast in its teeth as a reproach.<sup>8</sup>

The Dalits were struggling hard with Christian discipline and character

formation. As the first generation of the converts were from illiterate and poverty stricken groups, their understanding and knowledge were very limited. They often had to endure persecution from the Brahmins and caste Hindus. Even so among them spiritual and moral achievement was imperfect. However, Christian teachings had been accepted as a challenge by the Dalits so that they were continually helped with their all round advancement.

He, like his missionary predecessors, regarded the gospel of Christ as a social religion and Christian conversion as an instrument of social change. He showed a harmony between evangelism and social action. He understood the church as not only an agent of evangelism but also the bearer of civilization. He wrote, '[W]here Christianity goes, education, civilization, and habits of cleanliness in body, dress, and food, in speech and conduct, are the concomitant results.'<sup>9</sup>

Azariah and his co-workers accepted social change as 'the very essence of the gospel of Christ and therefore an integral part of the Christian message'. They asserted that, 'its sure sanction was Jesus Christ himself'.<sup>10</sup>

Azariah maintained that rural uplift and awakening of outcaste villagers was effected through Christian education. He wrote,

Through Christianity too illiteracy is being chased out of rural India. It was well known that the first thing

8 V.S. Azariah and H. Whitehead, *Christ in the Indian Villages* (London: SCM, 1930), 18.

9 V.S. Azariah, 'The Church in Rural India', *DDM*, Vol.5, No.10, (Oct 1928), 3-4.

10 V.S. Azariah, 'Rural Reconstruction', *DDM*, Vol.VII, No.8, (Aug, 1930), 6.

done for a village which desires to join the Christian Church is to send a resident teacher there to instruct the village in the Christian Faith and open a school for their children. The teacher and his wife—if he has one—are truly the introducers of Light and Learning.<sup>11</sup>

He often asserted that 'to teach, teach, teach'—is one of the needs of the hour.<sup>12</sup> According to Azariah the education of a single girl means the uplifting of the whole family. He rightly understood that in India among the poor and the oppressed the success of male education depended on women's education. Azariah encouraged the education of girls and women. He made elaborate arrangements to promote adult literacy and education among the illiterate women.<sup>13</sup>

The purpose of education among the outcaste Christians of Dornakal was to empower as well as enlighten the Dalit converts so that they might be restored to personal awareness. Moreover, he wanted the education given to them to prepare them for life, believing that thus trained, Christians would become centres of light wherever they were. Hence he maintained,

Any education given to such people must, we believe, include education to prepare them for life. Our aim then is to produce through this school a new generation of men—

men who will not be ashamed of manual labour, men who will be willing to go back to the village with knowledge of some handicraft, and settle down there to earn an honest livelihood and to become centres of light, in their turn, creating a sturdy, self-respecting rural Christian manhood.<sup>14</sup>

Christian education greatly awakened the Dalits' consciousness of the injustice and deceit caused by the caste Hindus. Azariah's co-workers reported that the young adults who learnt to read and write, generally at night schools, in due course began to question their Hindu masters about their 'debts' and became aware in many cases of how they had been deceived.<sup>15</sup> Azariah observed that Dalit Christians 'on account of integrity, command higher field wages; that Christian labourers are in demand for transplantation and harvesting because they do not require close supervision'.<sup>16</sup>

Azariah understood education as something that belongs to the Judeo-Christian tradition. Furthermore, Azariah's concept of education was very much value based. It was offered as an instrument to correct, to direct, to change and to transform the lives of the Dalits. Education offered by the mission was useful to them in their day to day living. It prepared them to take up jobs and earn their livelihood. It pro-

11 V.S. Azariah, 'Church in Rural India', *DDM*, Vol.5, No.10, (Oct 1928), 4.

12 V.S. Azariah, 'A Charge Delivered to the Clergy of the Diocese of Dornakal', (Nov, 14, 1923), 9-10.

13 V.S. Azariah, 'The Bishop's Letter', *DDM*, Vol.VI, No.1, (Jan, 1932), 12f

14 V.S. Azariah, *Society for the Propagation of the Gospel Dornakal Letters*, India II, (Feb 27, 1930), 2.

15 A.F.R. Bird, *Telugu Mission*, Society for the Propagation of the Gospel Report, 1922, 7.

16 V.S. Azariah, 'The Church in Rural India', *DDM*, Vol.5, No.10, (Oct, 1928), 5.

vided them with strong self-awareness which in turn established their sense of individuality. It assisted them to be careful with their wages and to maintain their health and hygiene.<sup>17</sup>

The first generation Dalit Christians of South India confessed that,

Christianity has brought us fellowship and brotherhood. It has treated us with respect, and it has given us self-respect. It has never despised us because of our lowly origin, but on the contrary has held us as individuals who are as valuable before God and man as any man of any origin.<sup>18</sup>

The need then of Dalits was not a false hope or even a positive feeling, but faith and confidence in a tangible personal God, the Saviour who removes guilt, both real and false, such as karma. Proclamation of the gospel provided the poor and the oppressed with a general confidence that life is meaningful and that it was possible to change one's quality of life by one's efforts. Bishop Picket came up with a similar conclusion after undertaking a thorough study of Dalit conversion movements.

The depressed classes in India are desperately poor. But their chief economic need is not financial; it is an antidote to the poisonous ideas that have made them incapable of struggling successfully with their environment. As severe as is the physical oppression to which they

are continuously subjected, the depressed classes could not have been reduced by its operation alone to the low state in which they have lived for centuries. Much more devastating than physical oppression has been the psychological oppression inflicted by the Hindu doctrines of karma and rebirth, which have taught them that they are a degraded, worthless people suffering just retribution for sins committed in earlier lives. It is, then, a true instinct that makes the depressed classes respond more eagerly to the preaching of the Christian Gospel than to any direct ministry to their social and economic ills. The concepts that the Christian Gospel gives them of themselves and of God in relation to their sufferings and sins are worth incomparably more to them than any direct social or economic service the church could offer.<sup>19</sup>

The experiences of Indian leaders who are involved in community development among the poor concur with this view. V. Mangalwadi wrote,

Perhaps the most devastating effect of the centuries of poverty and oppression is total loss of self-respect, self-confidence, trust in others and hope for any change.... Poverty is not their main problem. The lack of hope (for a better future), lack of faith (in man, government or God) and lack of initiative (born out of dehumanizing oppression and loss of self-confi-

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17 V.S. Azariah, 'The Bishop's Letter', *DDM*, Vol.VII, No.6, (June, 1930), 2-3.

18 V.S. Azariah, 'Open Letter to Our Country Men...', *Indian Witness*, (Sept 17, 1936), 598.

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19 J.W. Picket, *Christ's Way to India's Heart* (Lucknow: Lucknow Pub Co.,1938), 173.



dence) are paralyzing mental/cultural factors which prevent them from any action towards freedom and development.<sup>20</sup>

#### IV Holistic mission in evangelism and church growth

The foreign mission in the Indian sub-continent (including Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Burma, Nepal, etc) began to end following the exit of the British in 1947. By the early 1960s all missionaries who required visas had been withdrawn. However, the native Christians for the most part continued the legacy of the missionaries, combining evangelism and social concern; churches continued with medical, educational and other philanthropic enterprises. But the primary motivation for mission in India was the spread of the gospel and the growth of churches.

In the 1950s and 1960s, although Christian mission for evangelicals was the mission of saving the souls, it never lost sight of human misery. Missions and ministries that are started with soul winning and church planting could not ignore social concerns such as community development; they involved themselves in health care, poverty alleviation programmes, providing drinking water, opening up of schools and orphanages, and other rehabilitation activities. For example, the Evangelical Church of India (ECI),

Friends Missionary Prayer Band (FMPB), the Indian Evangelical Mission (IEM), the Indian Missionary Society (IMS), and the National Missionary Society (NMS) as well as many other missions and ministries, speak of evangelism as their priority. However, in practice they were holistic, engaging in mission that combines evangelism and social concern.

Here we may refer to two outstanding missionary statesmen of the twentieth century, J.R. Mott and D.A. McGavran, who made a great impact on the minds of the Asian Christian lay leaders, especially in India. Mott's ideas of mission originally come from the Enlightenment,<sup>21</sup> being influenced by the popular evangelist D.L. Moody, whereas McGavran's ideas emerged from his three decades of missionary work in India. Both persons insisted on implementing the Great Commission.

Mott wrote about implementing the Commission in this generation and created a sense of urgency among evangelical Christians. He maintained that,

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<sup>21</sup> Being affected by the liberalism of Enlightenment and the Victorian discourse of social development the missionaries were anxious to see a visible Christian social order. In Britain evangelical belief was that the regenerative power of the Gospel would drive a society along basically the same path of socio-economic and political progress. This is perhaps one of the reasons why Mott wanted to see the evangelization of the world in this generation. Cf. For details see Brian Stanley, *The Bible and the Flag: Protestant Missions and British Imperialism in the 19th and 20th centuries* (Leicester: Apollos, 1990), 173. David Hempton, 'Evangelicalism and Reform', in J. Wolffe (ed), *Evangelical Faith and Public Zeal* (London: SPCK, 1995), 17ff.

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<sup>20</sup> V. Mangalwadi, 'A Theology of Power in the Context of Social Development', *TRACI Journal*, (April, 1981), 15.

If the Gospel is to be preached to all...it obviously must be done while they are living. The evangelization of the world in this generation, therefore, means the preaching of the Gospel to those who are now living. To us who are responsible for preaching the gospel it means in our lifetime; to those to whom it is to be preached it means in their lifetime. The unevangelized for whom we as Christians are responsible live in this generation; and the Christians whose duty it is to present Christ to them live in this generation. The phrase 'in this generation', therefore, strictly speaking has a different meaning for each person. In the last analysis, if the world is to be evangelized in this or any generation it will be because a sufficient number of individual Christians recognize and assume their personal obligation to the undertaking.<sup>22</sup>

After about fifty years, in the 1960s and 1970s, Mott's slogan, the *Evangelization of the world in this generation* came alive in some circles in South India. The slogan created urgency, especially among the Tamil Christians, and paved the way to a further thinking of what will happen to the people who are unevangelized. Indian lay Christian leaders and evangelists began to preach categorically that the unevangelized are lost. Indian missions such as the Friends Missionary Prayer Band

were founded on this premise.<sup>23</sup> The lay leaders were very successful in recruiting hundreds of young men and women as well as forming prayer groups for prayerful support for cross-cultural missions in the northern parts of India. Indeed mission was understood in terms of *rescuing* the people who would be otherwise lost.

The same idea of the 'loss of the unevangelized' was introduced among the seminary students. For instance, the Hindustan Bible Institute (HBI) founded in the city of Madras (now Chennai) by an upper caste Hindu convert by the name of Paul Gupta instilled this doctrine into the minds of young boys and girls and prepared them for cross-cultural missions. During the 1960s and 1970s almost all the graduates of HBI went to northern parts of India as missionaries.<sup>24</sup>

Many Bible Schools like HBI were founded, especially in the city of Madras, professing to train young people for cross-cultural missions in North India. These seminaries were established exclusively for equipping the people of God to fulfil the Great Commission. They did not train 'parish priests'<sup>25</sup>—they were committed only to training 'harvesters' for harvesting.

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<sup>22</sup> John R. Mott, *The Evangelization of the World in This Generation*, (New York: SVM, 1900), 3, 6-7, 15-16, 105, 109, 115, 116-117.

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<sup>23</sup> The FMPB is indigenous both in its finance and personnel. It is a non-denominational, a trans-denominational and a non-sectarian society aiming at saturation evangelism among 300 people groups.

<sup>24</sup> Files maintained by the Student Missionary Secretaries provide this information.

<sup>25</sup> The tradition of the Bible school movement is related to the modern missionary movement.. See B. Ott, 'Mission Oriented Theological Education', *Transformation*, Vol.18, No.2, (April, 2001), 75f.

Consequently, these schools did not see theological education in India as primarily for the ministry of the church. For them the urgency of the evangelistic task should determine the nature and purpose of seminary training and not the ministerial needs of the church.<sup>26</sup>

The revival<sup>27</sup> that was going on in Tamil Nadu was further fuelled by the ideas of McGavran who spent much of his life trying to overcome social barriers to Christian conversion. He promoted aggressive evangelism among the responsive people groups. Asian Evangelicals were challenged by his slogan 'win the winnable while they are winnable'. He often critiqued World Council of Churches for its omission of a clear statement on the priority of the Great Commission as the heart of its theology of missions. During the late 1960s and early 1970s McGavran wrote in a response to Uppsala's draft document on mission, 'Do not Betray the Two Billion'. He insisted on the importance of the evangelization of non-Christians, baptizing them and making them disciples.

This is a time to emphasize disci-

pling, not to turn from it. This is not a time to betray the two billion but to reconcile as many as possible of them to God in the Church of Jesus Christ. For the peace of the world, for justice between (peoples) and nations, for advance in learning, for breaking down hostilities between peoples, for the spiritual health of countless individuals and the corporate welfare of (humankind) *this is a time to disciple nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit and teaching them whatsoever our Lord has commanded us.*<sup>28</sup>

It is noteworthy that the ideas of Mott and McGavran spread in India in the early 1960s and 1970s when secular theologies were popular in the West. The whole idea of that period was that the world will be secular. At the same time in South India there was much revival among the lay Christian leaders.<sup>29</sup> Consequently they reacted very strongly to secular and liberal theologies; instead they appropriated any teaching that was conservative and orthodox.

McGavran's thinking greatly influenced the evangelical churches especially. Many evangelical missions and ministries adopted the church planting approach to mission and still cherish this singular aim. Their mission is nothing but pioneer evangelism and planting churches. This is the way most of the missionaries understand and practise mission. Consequently

26 This is still one of the weakness of this type of seminary. For details see Gnana Robinson, 'Theological Education in India Today', *NCC Review* Vol.CXV, No.4, (April, 1995), 292-293.

27 In the recent decades Christians in some parts of India in particular and in the South Asian countries such as Singapore, Indonesia and Nepal in general have been experiencing a new vitality, life and vision. S.P. Athayal, 'Southern Asia', in J.M. Philips, and R.T. Coote (ed), *Toward the 21st Century in Christian Mission*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 61-62.

28 A. Glasser and D.A. McGavran, *The Conciliar Evangelical Debate*, (Waco: Word, 1972), 233-234.

29 Most of the indigenous missions were founded during this period.

they continue to carry on their work of preaching the gospel and conversion of people to Christ.

Some of these missions were very successful and led thousands of people to Christ and formed hundreds of new congregations. For instance the Evangelical Church of India (ECI) within the span of the last forty years planted over 2500 churches across the country and paved the way for three new dioceses and consecration of two additional bishops.<sup>30</sup> The ECI has established a large number of schools, children's homes, and relief and rehabilitation structures. In a unique manner it address social injustice through its body, the Social Justice Movement of India. ECI Bishops, particularly Ezra Sargunam have easy access to top leadership of the Indian state and central governments to address social evils. Sargunam was the chairman of the State Minority Commission and several other positions while being a bishop.

Similarly the Friends Missionary Prayer Band (FMPB) has seen a phenomenal growth of congregations especially in North India and has laid the foundation of three new dioceses in the Church of North India. The FMPB grew out of the evangelistic concern in 1958 of a group of young people belonging to the diocese of Tirunelveli, South India. Bands of concerned Christians were formed to pray for the unevangelized.

The field work of the mission began in 1967 when the first missionary was sent to one of the hill tribes in South

India. In 1972 the vision was enlarged to include the eleven states of North India. A target was set to send 440 missionaries to the 220 districts of these eleven states by 1982. The goal was steadily realized. At present FMPB has over 1100 cross-cultural missionaries serving all over India. It has won 4,000,000 people for Christ, founded 60 homes for children, erected 900 church buildings, prepared 1,100 local evangelists, translated Bible into 13 languages, and reached 240 people groups.

Further, the mission has established about 5,500 worshipping communities/congregations and still hundreds of smaller congregations are emerging among the tribals. Evangelism, church planting, Bible translation and social uplift are the main ministries of the organization. It works in 23 Indian states based in 260 mission fields. FMPB is a missionary movement of Christian Indians to present the Gospel of Jesus Christ personally to all the people of India particularly to those who have never heard the gospel.<sup>31</sup>

For the most part Asian indigenous missions and ministries adopted holistic mission practice. For example, both FMPB and ECI partnered with NGOs such as EFICOR, World Vision, CASA, and Compassion to minister to their poor and oppressed believers.

Roger Hedlund reports on partnerships like this for uplifting the tribal communities in the case of Malto.

The experience of the Malto people in Jharkand is an impressive story

<sup>30</sup> Recently two Dioceses (Delhi and Chennai) have been formed with more to follow.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Vinay Samuel and Chris Sugden (ed), *Mission as Transformation*, (Oxford: Regnum, 1999), xv1.

of social and spiritual redemption. Decimated by malnutrition, tuberculosis, goitre, jaundice, cholera, malaria and various water-borne diseases, the Malto people were also exploited by rapacious money lenders. Addiction to alcohol and other substances was a further degrading influence. This dehumanized tribe had declined from one million to less than 70,000 during the past 40 years and was moving toward extinction... Into this context of human despair, missionaries of the Friends Missionary Prayer Band and other social development workers came to live and serve. Despite opposition by vested interests, community development is underway, and the Malto people are no longer a population in decline. From the work of the FMPB among the Malto people of North Bihar has arisen an entire new diocese. Previously illiterate, oppressed and exploited, and decimated by rampant diseases today the downward trend has ended. The Malto people are receiving rudimentary education, learning basic norms of health and hygiene, resulting in a new sense of human dignity. Today the Malto people find their self-identity in Christianity...<sup>32</sup>

Pentecostal and charismatic leaders had been using the *rescue model* in many parts of Asia in the same way that evangelicals did. Great crowds followed leaders who offered salvation for their souls. Their slogans were,

'Believe the gospel of Jesus Christ, you can be saved today. You shall be saved today.' They vowed 'to plunder hell, to populate heaven.'<sup>33</sup> However, many Charismatic and Pentecostal leaders who were known for 'winning souls' also opened orphanages and old-age homes in the Asian countries.<sup>34</sup>

Among the Pentecostals in Asia, as we shall see below, the use of the *rescue model* has given birth to prosperity and blessing theologies (or health and wealth gospel). Jesus saves people from sin, sickness and Satan. Blessings and prosperity are available through Jesus Christ who has triumphed over Satan. The messianic signs that 'the blind see, the deaf hear, the cripple walk, the dead are raised' are once again repeated now in front of their eyes. Jesus *rescues* people from all sorts of sorrows and troubles.<sup>35</sup>

## V The Pentecostals and Holism

In Asia Pentecostals are challenging the mission practitioners to under-

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<sup>33</sup> See 'Plundering Hell to Populate Heaven', *Missionaries*, (London: BBC Books, 1990), 100ff.

<sup>34</sup> In India a number of orphanages, children's homes, and old age homes are run by evangelical and Pentecostal missions and ministries. See Rebecca Samuel Shah (ed), *HandBook on Christian Missions and Ministries* (Oxford: OCMS, 1998).

<sup>35</sup> The rescue model seems to be based on compassion. For details see Michael Bergunder, 'Ministry of Compassion: D.G.S. Dhinakaran Christian Healer-Prophet from Tamil Nadu', in Roger Hedlund (ed), *Christianity is Indian: The Emergence of an Indigenous Christianity* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2000), 158-174.

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<sup>32</sup> Roger E. Hedlund, 'The Witness of New Christian Movements in India', paper presented at the IAMS assembly, Malaysia 2004.

stand holism not only in terms of evangelism and social concern, but also in terms of signs and wonders as well. Peter Kuzmic writes, 'The whole gospel... is in word, deed, and sign.'<sup>36</sup> In his book, *By Word, Work and Wonder*, McAlpine defines holism in this way: 'The Christian community is to be a sign of the kingdom, in which evangelism, social action and the Spirit are present and inseparably related.' For the most part, it is because of the contributions of Pentecostals that definitions for holism are increasingly reflecting the work of the God in terms of signs and wonders.<sup>37</sup>

An OCMS alumnae, Ida Samuel, who is a development worker active among the villages of Erode district, South India, says that

[N]on-Christians are coming to know Christ only when they experience miracles in their lives. People accept the gospel in order to get rid of their problems, sufferings, incurable diseases, etc. When someone is miraculously healed in a family, then the whole family embraces Christ.

She adds,

[W]e carry on our ministry through preaching the Word, by doing social Work, and expecting miracles—Wonders from God.

Samuel concludes,

*The Jesus Miracle Ministry* combines all these three [ie, evangelism, social concern, and signs and wonders]. We are committed to the whole gospel which is in word, deed, and sign.<sup>38</sup>

An emerging trend in the Asian church growth is the rise of mega churches in cities. In fact the whole world is witnessing a mega-church movement.

Mega-churches are changing the global makeup of Christianity to the extent that some scholars are characterizing them as the harbingers of 'The Next Christendom' and the 'African Century of Christianity'.<sup>39</sup>

As we know, Asia has the largest mega-church in the world—in South Korea (the Yoido Full Gospel Church), and many other mega-churches have sprung up in China, Malaysia, India, Indonesia and Singapore. The Asian mega-church movement is largely Pentecostal, growing mainly in secularized and urbanized societies that allow religious freedom.

According to Bryant Myers, at present about seventy per cent of evangelical Christian live in non-Christian world. During recent years there has been a phenomenal increase of independent, non-denominational Christians from ten per cent up to about twenty per cent, mostly in the global south.

These Christians of the global south, including the mega-church

<sup>36</sup> Peter Kuzmic, 'Pentecostals Respond to Marxism', in Murray W. Dempster, Byron D. Klaus, and Douglas Petersen (ed), *Called and Empowered: Global Mission in Pentecostal Perspective* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991), 160.

<sup>37</sup> Thomas H. McAlpine, *By Word, Work and Wonder* (Monrovia: MARC, 1995), 2.

<sup>38</sup> Ida Samuel, *Jesus Miracle Ministry News Letter* (April, 2010), 2.

<sup>39</sup> S. Gramby-Sobukwe and Tim Hoiland, 'The Rise of Mega Church...', *Transformation* Vol.26, No.2 (April, 2009), 105-106.

movement, are changing the face of Christianity with local insights and interpretations, sending missionaries abroad themselves and challenging Christians of the world to reconsider old paradigms.<sup>40</sup>

In the past compared to the present, the missionaries who worked among the poor and marginalised communities for the most part considered themselves as God's agents to rescue/deliver the people from the dominion of sin and Satan. They envisaged the Christian mission as a great liberating force, commissioned by God to save men and women from the bondage of ignorance, false religion and oppressive social customs and practices.<sup>41</sup> This led them to crusade against native belief systems, particularly idolatry. The missionaries did not see the Indians or the Africans as religious people, but simply considered them idolaters.

But now the approach is different. The church is seen as an agent of spiritual and social transformation—transforming all of life for all of the people of God. Also, because of the two factors mentioned above, independent congregations, including mega-churches, are showing interest in advocacy, dealing with poverty and other social evils.<sup>42</sup>

In South India mega-churches are becoming a phenomena in cities such

as Chennai and Bangalore where the underclasses, the Dalits, live in large numbers. For the most part mega-churches are neo-Pentecostal, led by activist theologians who focus on preaching God's blessings. As they exegete and interpret Scripture according to the conditions around them, these independent preachers are consciously developing a new hermeneutic that is contextual and relevant to the situations of extreme poverty and oppression.

The poor and the oppressed, especially the Dalits, treat the Bible as an *Answer Book* for the day-to-day need such as deliverance from poverty, sickness, financial debts, and other problems. For them the Bible is a *Success Book*. They believe that if you want to be successful then you have to find your success from the Bible. The Bible is also considered as the new covenant—a will or testament or agreement or contract given to believers.

Sermons are preached under topics such as, Who you are in Christ? Who are you and what do you have? You are born to reign; you are justified; you are righteous; you are free from sin; God is on your side; the laws or principles of increase; living under open heaven; you are more than conquerors, and many others.

For the Asian poor the key question today is not: 'Does God exist?', but, 'Does God care?' The core concern of Pentecostal theology is to witness to this caring God in the day to day praxis of faith.<sup>43</sup>

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40 Quoted by Gramby-Sobukwe and Hoiland, 'The Rise of Mega Church...', 106.

41 S. Jayakumar, *Dalit Consciousness and Christian Conversion* (Delhi, ISPCK, 1999), 170-171.

42 Gramby-Sobukwe and Hoiland, 'The Rise of Mega Church...', 106.

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43 For Prosperity Theology, Philip Jenkins, *The New Faces of Christianity: Believing the Bible in the Global South* (New York, OUP, 2006), 95, 97.

## VI Conclusion

There is no doubt that at present many of the Asian missions and ministries are holistic in their practice, although some of the native missionaries of Indian missions who are involved in cross-cultural evangelism and church planting continue to see mission as *rescuing souls* for heaven. They often try to provide a Scriptural basis for what they are doing. Mission is seen as a matter of winning the lost souls, reaching the unreached, evangelizing the unevangelized.

The *rescue model* often works well with those who understand salvation in terms of personal and individualistic terms. But those who use it do not get the maximum out of it because their

interests limit the power of the gospel of Christ. It can never affect the situations in which people live and the forces that control them. So the *rescue model* is not complete in itself, because it does not lead to holistic mission practice. However, at present, for the most part, Asian missions are partnering with NGOS so that their practice becomes holistic.

The chief purpose of the Edinburgh 1910 was to prepare the church for the final onslaught on the powers of darkness—poverty, social evils, violence and injustice—that reigned supreme in the non-western world. The Asian church has done well to some extent, but has not yet realised the full expectation.

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