

Paul's Theology of Mission and Missionary Methods

Abstracts:

The aim of this article not simply to relate to Paul's mission theology and missionary methods as 'theory and practice' in the sense that his missionary methods flow from his theology, but rather in the sense that his theology is a missionary theology in nature.¹ Understood in this mutual ways, I will begin where Paul himself begin—with the Damascus event of his conversion and call. I will next study the contents of his missionary theology and the forms of his missionary works among the Gentiles.

Keywords—Paul, missionary theology and methods, justification, participation, contextualization

Introduction

To study Paul's theology of mission and his missionary methods, "we should begin where Paul himself began—with the Damascus event of his conversion and call,"² said David Bosch. On the other hand, we should be aware that scholars are divided on the Damascus event, asking the question: "was Paul called or converted?"³ Krister Stendahl was one of the most remarkable scholars who famously argued, both in his article in *Harvard Theological Review* (1963)⁴ and in his book *Paul among the Jews and Gentiles* (1973),⁵ that Paul was not converted. For Stendahl, Paul was not converted because he did not change his religion. Serving one and the same God, Paul instead received a special call from Christ.⁶ Taking Stendahl's challenging arguments into consideration, how am I to understand Paul's Damascus event (Acts 9-1-19; 22:4-16; 26:9-20)?

¹ Arland J. Hulgren, *Paul's Gospel and Mission* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1983), 145.

² David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, 20th anniversary ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2011), 127.

³ Paul Barnett, *Paul Missionary of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 54.

⁴ Krister Stendahl, "The Apostle Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West," in *Harvard Theological Review*, Vol. 56. No. 3. (July 1963): 199-215.

⁵ Krister Stendahl, *Paul Among the Jews and Gentiles* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1973).

⁶ *Ibid.*, 7-23.

The aim of this paper is not simply to replace the word conversion with call. I will argue that “Paul was both converted and called.”⁷ In making my case, I will refer to Paul’s encounter with Christ as *psycho-behavioral conversion* rather than as *religious conversion*. Thus, this paper first looks at Paul’s call and examine how his encounter with Christ transformed him from being a persecutor of Jesus’ disciples to an apostle of Jesus.⁸ We will then explore his theology of mission and missionary methods. Paul’s mission is twofold: mission to Jews and to Gentiles (Rom. 1:16-17; Gal. 1:15-17). This paper will focus on the latter because Paul, as a Jewish Christian and his mission to Gentiles will be applied into the modern context where we Christians need to engage with other faiths. We will finally come to the point as to how we should imitate Paul’s mission methods.

Paul’s Call and Conversion: Paul as an Apostle

Jesus is a Jew, and His disciples are Jews, but “Paul is best remembered as a missionary to the Gentiles.”⁹ In other words, Paul is called and commissioned by Jesus as an apostle to the Gentiles.¹⁰ Thus, Bruce Corley standing with Stendahl contends that the Damascus event was about Paul’s new vocation to be God’s apostle to the Gentiles rather than about his conversion.¹¹ “Stendahl, Corley and others go too far by regarding what

⁷ For a contrary view against Stendahl, see Alan F. Segal, *Paul the Convert: Apostolate and Apostasy of Saul the Pharisee* (New Haven: CT: Yale University Press, 1990), 6. For Paul’s conversion and the consequences of his mission, see also Martin Hengel and Anna Schwemer, *Paul Between Damascus and Antioch: The Unknown Years* (Louisville, KY: John Knox, 1997): 24-61.

⁸ Eckhard J. Schnabel, “Paul the Missionary,” in *Paul’s Missionary Methods: In His Times and Ours*, eds. Robert L. Plummer and John Mark Terry (Downer Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2012): 29-43, p. 29. This book entitled *Paul’s Missionary Methods* was published (in 2012) in celebration of a centennial publication of Roland Allen’s classic book *Missionary Methods: St. Paul’s or Ours* (1912), 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1962). For references, this paper will use Allen’s 2nd edition.

⁹ Dana L. Robert, *Christian Mission: How Christianity Became a World Religion* (Chichester: Blackwell, 2009), 12.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 11. *Apostellein* in Greek is translated as sending, which is the same idea of missionary.

¹¹ Bruce C. Corley, “Paul’s Conversion—Then and Now,” in *The Road From Damascus: The Impact of Paul’s Conversion on His Life, Thought and Ministry*, ed. R.N. Longenecker (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997): 1-13. (here p. 3).

happened to Paul exclusively in terms of a call,”¹² said Bosch. I believe Bosch is right in saying this. We cannot simply replace the term conversion with call. In addition to Luke’s accounts of Paul’s dramatic encounter with Christ (Acts 19:1-19), “Paul in his letters also refers to this event three times (Gal. 1:11-17; Phil. 3:2-11; Rom. 7:13-25).”¹³

Yet, Paul does not describe explicitly his Damascus experience of Christ’s call as “conversion.”¹⁴ Thus, what we need to do here is to define the meaning of conversion and examine how it relates to Paul’s call. Beverly Gaventa helpfully distinguished between an “alternation (a relatively limited form of change that develops from one’s previous behavior); conversion (a radical change in which past affiliations are rejected for new commitment); and transformation (a radical change of new cognition, which reinterprets (but not rejects) past).”¹⁵ According to Bosch, “Stendahl sees what happens to Paul in terms of alternation.”¹⁶ Reading Gal. 1:11-17, Paul’s experience of divine call, however, is more than what an alternation suggests.¹⁷ In my view, Stendahl’s limitation is to limit conversion to a religious change. Conversion does not merely involve in a religious change, but it can involve in several aspects of psychological and behavioral changes.¹⁸

To take repentance (*metanoia* in Greek, “to change’s one mind and to repent”)¹⁹ seriously, I will refer to Paul’s encounter with Christ as psycho-behavioral conversion—conversion to Christ. Paul’s conversion begins with a renewal of his mind or heart. As

¹² Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 128.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 127.

¹⁴ Segal, *Paul the Convert*, 6.

¹⁵ Beverly R. Gaventa, *From Darkness to Light: Aspects of Conversion in the New Testament, Overtures to Biblical Theology* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1986), 10-14. See also Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 128.

¹⁶ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 128.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ For a psychological conversion, see Joel B. Green, *Conversion in Luke-Acts: Divine Action, Human Cognition, and the People of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2015). 10-13.

¹⁹ For a relation of repentance and conversion, see Green, *Conversion in Luke-Acts*, 38-39.

Paul himself expressed, “it is God who said, let light shine out of darkness, God has *shorn in our hearts* to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus,” (2Cor. 4:6). However, Paul’s conversion involves not only a change in his mind, but a holistic reorientation of his life committed to Christ’s call to mission to the Gentiles. Paul’s conversion and call were the result of God’s grace, which includes the forgiveness of Paul’s prior activities as a persecutor of Jesus’ disciples (Acts 8:3; Gal. 1:13-14) and transforms him into an apostle of Christ for the Gentiles (Gal. 1:15-16).²⁰

In light of this, I will propose to use conversion and transformation quite closely. If Paul’s psycho-behavioral conversion is primarily to do with turning to Christ with renewing his mind, Christ’s transformative power comes as a consequence of Paul’s conversion. This means that Paul’s conversion is not just an event, but it is a journey.²¹ A journey not in the sense of being converted in several times,²² but in the sense of being transformed pattern of life. This is what Joel Green calls a “transformation of *habitus*.”²³

Paul’s conversion was what Paul Barnett calls “a radical *end* to the old (old behavior of Pharisees and spiritually blind) and a radical *beginning* to the new (new sighted and commitment of apostleship giving light to the Gentiles).”²⁴ By using the phrase *a radical end*, we do not mean that Paul totally rejected his old religion—Judaism. Paul did not reject his religion when he was converted to Christ who called him to be an

²⁰ Schnabel, “Paul the Missionary,” 30.

²¹ Conversion as journey, see Green, *Conversion in Luke-Acts*, 62-76.

²² Being converted in several times remind me of my own people in Myanmar who are converted by the new messages of evangelists after another.

²³ Green, *Conversion in Luke-Acts*, 62.

²⁴ Barnett, *Paul Missionary of Jesus*, 30.

apostle to the Gentiles (Gal. 1:15-16). What he did was not to reject it, but to reinterpret and transform it with the grace.²⁵ As Pinchas Lapide and Peter Stuhlmacher said well:

As a consequence of his encounter with Christ, Paul proclaimed Christ as “the end of the law,” for everyone who has faith (Rom. 10:4), at the same time, as “the Lord of grace” who calls into the missionary service of the gospel of justification, and whose Torah corresponds eschatologically to Jewish Torah (Gal. 6:2).²⁶

This statement indicates that Jesus is the fulfiller of what God has promised in the Old Testament and Paul is the apostolic bridge of Judaism and Hellenism. Paul’s apostolic bridge of two faiths began at the Damascus event, which he called “an appearance of Christ” (1Cor. 9:1; 1Cor. 15:18. Luke described it a “light from heaven” (Acts 9:3; 22:6; 26:13). Theologically speaking, it is “Christophany”²⁷ which opened the way for Paul to turn to Christ with renewing his mind and to become an apostle to the Gentiles (Gal. 1:15-16). Paul’s apostleship comes from divine call that “this man is my chosen agent to carry my name before the Gentiles” (Acts 9:15).²⁸ Therefore, our aim is not to prioritize call over conversion or the latter over the former, but to hold both.

Paul’s Theology of Mission

The aim of this section is to explore Paul’s theology of mission from two perspectives—one is from a universal perspective and the other from an apocalyptic perspective. Both perspectives are crucial to Paul’s understanding of God’s mission.

²⁵ See David S. Morlan, *Conversion in Luke and Paul: An Exegetical and Theological Exploration* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 11-15.

²⁶ Pinchas Lapide and Peter Stuhlmacher, *Paul Rabbi and Apostle* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1984), 24.

²⁷ Arland J. Hultgren, “Christology and His Mission to Gentiles,” in *Paul As Missionary: Identity: Activity, Theology and Practice*, Library of New Testament Studies, eds. Trevor J. Burke and Brian S. Rosner (London: T&T Clark, 2011): 115-127 (here p. 118).

²⁸ Schnabel, “Paul the Missionary,” 31.

First, Paul's theology of God's mission is universal. In her article "The Mission of God in Paul's Letter to the Romans,"²⁹ Gaventa rightly argues that Paul's theology of mission is fundamentally grounded in God's redemption of the whole creation—the world and humanity. She states, "God's mission is the work of rescuing from the power of Sin and Death so that a newly created—Jew and Gentile—is released for the praise of God in community."³⁰ Although Gaventa's summary of Paul's theology of mission is based mainly on the Romans, it is right to affirm that the whole of Pauline concept of the mission of God is grounded in God's sending of the Son into the world to adopt humanity as His children (Gal. 4:5-6) and to restore the world to a communion (Col. 1:20-22).³¹

According to Michael Gorman, the God who created all things (entire cosmos and anthropos) is the "God who is on the mission to liberate,"³² to redeem and restore the sinful world and humans to a communion of love in the death and resurrection of Christ. Simply put, for Paul, the mission of God is universal in scope. The idea that God's mission act of redemption as universal in intent was advanced by a prominent scholar Ernst Kasemann. As Kasemann stated, "God's redemption is not to be seen simply as a divine gift for the individuals,³³ and as being exclusively to anthropology, but as a cosmic dimension."³⁴ In line with Kasemann, Gorman proposes to read Paul's theology of God's

²⁹ Beverly R. Gaventa, "The Mission of God in Paul's Letter to the Romans," in *Paul as Missionary: Identity, Activity, Theology and Practice*, ed. Trevor J. Burke and Brian S. Rosner, Library of New Testament Studies. (London: T&T Clark, 2011): 65-75

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 65-66.

³¹ Along these lines, see Michael J. Gorman, *Becoming the Gospel: Paul, Participation and Mission*, Gospel and Our Culture Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015), 24, 53.

³² *Ibid.*, 24.

³³ Ernst Kasemann's reaction to Rudolf Bultmann's proposal of God's righteousness or justification as a gift for the individuals, see Martinus C. de Boer, "Paul's Mythologizing Program in Romans 5-8," ed. Beverly R. Gaventa, *Apocalyptic Paul: Cosmos and Anthropos in Romans 5-8* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2013): 1-20 (here pp. 6-7).

³⁴ Ernst Kasemann, "The Righteousness of God in Paul," in *The New Testament Questions of Today* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1969), 176-180.

mission of redemption not with a Western individualistic lens, but with a cosmic lens, because God's redemption embraces the entire anthropos and cosmos (Rom. 8:18-25).³⁵

Second, Paul's theology of God's mission is apocalyptic in nature. New Testament scholars read Paul as an "apocalyptic theologian."³⁶ The meaning of apocalypticism is broad. The Greek word "apocalypses" (revelation) can best be described as the conviction that God in the death and resurrection of Christ, has supremely revealed and restored the new age in the triumph of God's over all His enemies and death (1Cor. 15:24).³⁷ The resurrected Christ is the beginning of new age or new creation (2Cor. 5:17). Borrowing Christiaan Beker's famous word of "God's triumph,"³⁸ Gaventa reads Pauline apocalyptic view of God's missional salvation as a "decisive triumph."³⁹ As Beker puts it, for Paul the "new age is dawning by the resurrection of Christ."⁴⁰ By the risen Christ, the day of salvation has already dawned and the life of future has become a present reality. This is "present eschatology."⁴¹

As Gaventa makes this point clear, Paul never thinks that God's apocalyptic view of missional salvation is "something that is anticipated in the distant future. God's salvation is already taking place in the present,"⁴² although it is not yet here in its fullness. Scholars refer to this "phenomena as the overlap of two ages."⁴³ According to

³⁵ Gorman, *Becoming the Gospel*, 24.

³⁶ See Beverly R. Gaventa, *Apocalyptic Paul: Cosmos and Anthropos in Romans 5-8* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2013). Beverly R. Gaventa, *Our Mother Saint Paul* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2007), 81. See also J. Christiaan Beker, *Paul's Apocalyptic Gospel: The Coming Triumph of God* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1982). Beker describes four basic structures of Paul's apocalyptic gospel: vindication, universalism, dualism and imminence, see, pp. 30-53.

³⁷ Gaventa, *Our Mother Saint Paul*, 80-81.

³⁸ Beker, *Paul's Apocalyptic Gospel*, 19, 29, 46.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 303-327.

⁴⁰ Beker, *Paul's Apocalyptic Gospel*, 29.

⁴¹ Boer, "Paul's Mythologizing Program in Romans 5-8;" 5-8.

⁴² Gaventa, *Our Mother Saint Paul*, 81.

⁴³ Gorman, *Becoming the Gospel*, 16. For Beker, this is dualism: "this evil age (Gal. 1:4) and the age to come," see Beker, *Paul's Apocalyptic Gospel*, 39.

N.T Wright, Paul's apocalyptic view of God's new creation is grounded in the idea of the joining of heaven and earth, of present and future.⁴⁴ Because the new age has begun, we are already in Christ. Those who are "in Christ" still experience pain, yet they have hope in God's final redemption, which will transform our present pain (Rom. 8:17-39).⁴⁵

Paul simplifies the whole process of the joining of present and future by saying "in hope we were saved" (Rom. 8:24).⁴⁶ Beker is right in reading "the content of Paul's apocalyptic gospel as the hope in the coming triumph of Christ."⁴⁷ Paul understands himself to be living between the already (faith in Christ) and the not yet (hope for the coming One). If faith is rooted in the resurrection of Christ (1Cor. 15:14-15), "hope of the Lord" (Rom. 15:13) empowers that faith as we live in the time between the already and the not yet. Living in the time between, Paul sees his mission as *participating* in God's transforming the present world and as *anticipation* in God's consuming the world.⁴⁸

Paul's understanding of mission as participation and anticipation can be combined in one phrase: "anticipatory participation."⁴⁹ According to Gorman, "anticipatory participation means that the new creation of reconciliation with God and one another will come to expression in the present age among those who live in the crucified and risen Christ by the power of the Spirit."⁵⁰ As Beker also notes, Pauline apocalyptic view of "God's imminent triumph in Christ is to be translated into the church's responsibility for

⁴⁴ N.T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*. Vol. 4 of Christian Origins and the Question of God (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2013), 1493-1944.

⁴⁵ Gaventa, *Our Mother Saint Paul*, 81-82. See also Beker, *Paul's Apocalyptic Gospel*, esp. p. 34.

⁴⁶ Gorman, *Becoming the Gospel*, 17.

⁴⁷ Beker, *Paul's Apocalyptic Gospel*, 10.

⁴⁸ Leander E. Keck, *Paul and His Letters* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1979), 77-78. See also, Gaventa, *Our Mother Saint Paul*, 89-90.

⁴⁹ Gorman, *Becoming the Gospel*, 16.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

the well-being of created order.”⁵¹ For Paul, salvation is not merely to be hoped for, but a present reality in which he participates by proclaiming the gospel and by embodying it.⁵²

Paul and Participation: Mission as Proclaiming The Gospel and Becoming the Gospel

Proclaiming the gospel⁵³ (2Cor. 9:16-17) and “becoming the gospel”⁵⁴ (2Cor. 5:21) lie at the heart of Paul’s participatory concept of mission. If proclaiming the gospel has more to do with Paul’s verbal vocation, becoming the gospel has more to do with his missional identity. These two are inseparable in Paul’s apostolic ministry. In 2Cor. 9:16-17, written twenty years after his call and conversion, Paul stressed, “If I proclaim the gospel, this gives me no ground for boasting, for an obligation is laid on me, woe to me if I do not proclaim the gospel! For if I do this of my own will, I have a reward, but if not of my own will, I am still entrusted with a commission” (2 Cor. 9:16-17). This means Paul’s missionary work is not a matter of his personal burden, but rather a compulsion of God’s love (2Cor. 5:14) that has been laid upon him as a joyful “sense of responsibility.”⁵⁵

First, what does it mean to speak of proclaiming the gospel in Paul as a voluntary participation? Interpreters of Pauline theology argue that “the languages of Baptism⁵⁶ and the Lord’s Supper”⁵⁷ helps us grasp the centrality of anticipatory participation to Paul’s apostolic call of proclaiming the gospel of salvation. According to Leander Keck, to be

⁵¹ Beker, *Paul’s Apocalyptic Gospel*, 101.

⁵² Gorman, *Becoming the Gospel*, 17.

⁵³ Allen observed that one of the main principles underlying Paul’s mission was his focus on the “gospel.” Allen went on to state that Paul uses some form of the word “gospel” (*evangelion*) or good news seventy-seven times in his letters, see Allen, *Missionary Methods*, 148.

⁵⁴ This phrase is Gorman’s book title.

⁵⁵ Schnabel, “Paul the Missionary,” 32. See also, Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 137.

⁵⁶ Gorman, *Becoming the Gospel*, 26. See also Kevin J. Vanhoozer, et al, “*In Christ*” in Paul: *Explorations in Paul’s Theology of Union and Participation*, WUNT 2 series (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014).

⁵⁷ Keck, *Paul and His Letters*, 75.

baptized (being immersed into water) and to celebrate the Lord's Supper (remembering the death and anticipating the coming of the Lord) lie at the heart of Paul's apostolic mission of proclaiming the gospel of salvation and imminent reign of the Lord.⁵⁸

Paul understands Baptism as an invitation to his dying with Christ (Gal. 2:20), rising with the new life of Christ (2Cor. 15: 24-28), and entering into Christ's mission in the world (5:18-20).⁵⁹ Robert Tannehill identified what is important about Paul's view of Baptism as participation: he said, "Christ's death and resurrection are not merely events, which produce benefits for believers, but also are events in which believers partake."⁶⁰ This means that for Paul, Christ-event does not remain transcendent in the past, nor does the gospel of salvation remain transcendent in the future. As Arland Hultgren stated, the "benefits of salvation and Christ's mission"⁶¹ are intimately effective in Paul's understanding mission as participation. His baptismal notion of dying and rising with Christ is a new experience of faith as participatory proclaiming the gospel.

On the other hand, Paul speaks of "the Lord's Supper as *koinonia* and union in Christ in His body and blood" (1Cor. 11:23-29).⁶² Paul does not reduce the Lord's Supper as union with Christ to ecclesiology without an external expression in society. Gorman is right when he interprets Paul's language of a sacramental *koinonia* as participation in Christ's mission by sharing the suffering love and the reconciling gospel of Christ in society.⁶³ Inspired by the power of God's salvation as a gift of universal reconciliation

⁵⁸ Ibid., 77.

⁵⁹ Gorman, *Becoming The Gospel*, 27.

⁶⁰ Robert Tannehill, *Dying and Rising with Christ: A Study in Pauline Theology*, reprint (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2006), 1.

⁶¹ Arland J. Hultgren, "Paul's Christology and His Mission to the Gentiles," in *Paul as Missionary: Identity, Activity, Theology, and Practice*, eds. Trevor J. Burke and Brian S. Rosner, Library of New Testament Studies (London: T & T Clark, 2011): 115-127.

⁶² Gorman, *Becoming the Gospel*, 30.

⁶³ Ibid., 31.

(Rom. 1:16-17; Gal. 2:16), Paul willingly proclaims the gospel of justification and reconciliation among Jews and Gentiles.⁶⁴ In light of this, Stanley Porter sums up Paul's mission as "proclaiming the gospel of reconciliation" (2Cor. 5:18-20).⁶⁵

Second, Paul's apostolic aim was not merely to "believe and proclaim the gospel of justification and reconciliation, but also to become the gospel" (2Cor. 5:21).⁶⁶ In order to deal with the latter, we need to define what Paul means by justification. Scholars interpret justification of God (*dikaiosyne theou* in Greek) into two related aspects. One is forensic and the other is transformative.⁶⁷ Reaching back to Paul's famous text (Rom. 1:16-17), the phrase "through faith to faith" (v. 17) suggests that God's justification is forensic. It is forensic because God justifies sinners and restores them to Himself not by their own merits, but by His gracious act through the faith of Christ (Rom. 3:20-25).⁶⁸ On the other hand, Paul's gospel of justification and righteousness is transformative in the sense that God's grace continues to transform us into the likeness of Christ (Gal. 5:5).⁶⁹

By virtue of connecting between being transformed into the likeness of Christ and becoming the gospel of justification, Gorman draws Paul's missional insights from a kenotic Christology (Phil. 2:1-8). Because the cross reveals the kenotic or self-emptying Christ, Paul's notion of becoming the gospel is grounded in what Gorman calls

⁶⁴ Bird, *Introducing Paul: The Man, His Mission and His Message* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 93.

⁶⁵ Stanley E. Porter, "Reconciliation as the Heart of Paul's Missionary Theology," in *Paul as Missionary: Identity, Activity, Theology, and Practice*, eds. Trevor J. Burke and Brian S. Rosner, Library of New Testament Studies (London: T & T Clark, 2011): 169-179.

⁶⁶ Gorman, *Becoming the Gospel*, 2.

⁶⁷ Bird, *Introducing Paul*, 95-96.

⁶⁸ Ibid. See also Hulgren, *Paul's Gospel and Mission*, 31.

⁶⁹ See Michael F. Bird, *The Saving Righteousness of God: Studies in Paul, Justification and the New Perspective* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2007), esp. pp. 6-39.

“cruciformity or cross-shaped existence.”⁷⁰ Paul’s transformative participation in God’s mission is shaped by the cross of Christ. In other words, the cross of Christ is not only the content of Paul’s kerygmatic proclamation, but also it is a model that shapes Paul’s apostolic life in the transformative process of reflecting the very nature and life of God.⁷¹

In short, Karl Sandnes is right to propose Paul’s concept of mission as “Imitatio Christi.”⁷² Paul imitated Christ not merely by proclaiming the gospel of salvation and of imminent Lordship in word, but by putting Christ’s self-giving love or cross-shaped life into practice or work. In other words, Paul imitated Christ not merely by proclaiming the gospel of what Christ *did*, but by embodying how Christ *lived*. Thus, for Paul, mission is what Gorman rightly said “a Christ-like participation now and forever.”⁷³

Paul’s Missionary Methods among the Gentiles

Most missiologists would agree that Paul used “concentration methods rather than diffusion methods.”⁷⁴ Within his concentration methods, two mission methods are further stated: indigenous missions and contextual missions. We find it difficult to differentiate between the two related concepts. According to John Terry, “the former focuses on the cross-cultural communication of church planting that result from the missionary works, while the latter emphasizes the accurate or intercultural communication of the gospel,”⁷⁵

⁷⁰ Gorman, *Becoming the Gospel*, 299. See also, Michael J. Gorman, *Inhabiting the Cruciform God: Kenosis, Justification, and Theosis in Paul’s Narrative Soteriology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009).

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 298-300. The cross as the content of Paul’s kerygma, see Allen, *Missionary Methods*, 67.

⁷² Karl Olav Sandnes, Paul’s Missionary Strategy in *Paul as Missionary: Identity, Activity, Theology, and Practice*, eds. Trevor J. Burke and Brian S. Rosner, Library of New Testament Studies (London: T & T Clark, 2011): 128-141 (here p. 130).

⁷³ Gorman, *Becoming the Gospel*, 132.

⁷⁴ John Mark Terry, “Paul and Indigenous Missions,” in *Paul’s Missionary Methods: In His Time and Ours*, eds. Robert L. Plummer and John Mark Terry (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012): 160-174 (here p. 162). See also, Allen, *Missionary Methods*, 12. See also, Michael Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 362.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 170.

or making sense of the gospel to the locals. As Dean Flemming clarifies the latter, “contextualization has more to do with a hermeneutical issue.”⁷⁶ If Terry and Flemming are right, it is fair to see Paul as a missionary, evangelist, church planter and interpreter or contextualizer. We will first examine Paul’s indigenous mission.

Using concentration methods, Paul focused on limited regions and particular peoples. As he chose to work among the Gentiles, “Paul shifted his attention from the east to the west of the Hellenistic major cities, such as Ephesus, Galatia, Philippi, Thessalonica and Corinth.”⁷⁷ The aim of Paul’s concentration methods on limited regions and particular peoples was not simply to preach the gospel of justification, reconciliation, and oneness in Christ without winning the locals to Christ, but mainly to “plant churches in certain cities from which the gospel will permeate the surrounding areas” (Acts 19:10).⁷⁸ As Allen said, “Paul’s concentration method of evangelism in particular places was to make the local congregations become the centers of light to the world.”⁷⁹

Herbert Kane’s description of the aim of Paul’s concentration methods is even striking. He asserted “The aim of Paul’s concentration method was not only to sow the seed of the gospel of salvation, but also to reap a harvest.”⁸⁰ To accomplish this, first, Paul served as an itinerant evangelist traveler, fervent gospel proclaimer and temporary church planter, rather than as a permanent church pastor. According to John Terry, Paul chose to “travel from city to city, making friends with the locals, proclaiming the gospel

⁷⁶ Dean Flemming, *Contextualization in the New Testament: Pattern for Theology and Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2005), 152.

⁷⁷ Bird, *Introducing Paul*, 17, 31, see also, Terry, “Paul and Indigenous Missions,” 162. For the Jewish audiences, Paul used the synagogues as the concentrated places for proclaiming the gospel.

⁷⁸ Terry, “Paul and Indigenous Missions,” 161. See Also Allen, *Missionary Methods*, 12.

⁷⁹ Allen, *Missionary Methods*, 12.

⁸⁰ J. Herbert Kane, *Christian Mission in Biblical Perspective* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1976), 75.

of salvation, and planting the local churches. In some cities, Paul stayed only few weeks or months, he never stayed more than three years in any city during his mission trips.”⁸¹

The second missionary method of Paul was appointing the converted local Christians to be elders of the churches he planted. In other words, Paul planted the churches, and let the locals lead. In Acts 14:23, Luke tells us that “Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each local church, and with prayer and fasting, committed to the Lord.” This does not mean that Paul entrusted elders with the task of leadership without visiting them. He went to visit them occasionally. Even if he was not able to visit them personally, he wrote them letters periodically. Paul maintained close contact with his local churches among the Gentiles (Acts 14:26-28). He intended his planted churches not to die, but to grow by the service of elders and by the power of the Holy Spirit.⁸²

The third missionary method Paul practiced was “employing a team ministry.”⁸³ Paul was unique in working with a team of missionaries who felt called by Christ. Paul did this because he expected his planted churches to be both faithful and fruitful by the teaming works of his colleagues. For example, on his first missionary journey to the Antiochene church, Paul worked with Barnabas (Acts 13:1-3).⁸⁴ On his second missionary journey to Asia Minor, Silas, Timothy and Luke accompanied Paul (18:22-23). For the third journey, Paul again set out to Jerusalem, and it is recorded that “when he returned to Jerusalem at the end of his third journey, he was accompanied by a number of representatives from the churches of several areas he planted (20:4).”⁸⁵

⁸¹ Terry, “Paul and Indigenous Missions,” 161.

⁸² Ibid., 160-161.

⁸³ Ibid., 164.

⁸⁴ Christoph W. Stenschke, “Paul’s Mission as the Mission of the Church,” in *Paul’s Missionary Methods: In His Time and Ours*, eds. Robert L. Plummer and John Mark Terry (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012): 74-94 (here pp. 76-77).

⁸⁵ Ibid., 77. See also “Paul and Indigenous Mission,” 164.

Fourth, our concern is to look at what Flemming calls “Paul’s constructive and corrective engagement”⁸⁶ method of contextual mission among the Gentiles in Athens (Acts. 17:22-34). Because he was concerned for the salvation of the Gentiles, Paul chose Athens as a targeted place for mission. Athens was where a major population of the Gentiles lived for their religiosity and education.⁸⁷ Greek was the international language of commerce. Thus, Paul as a Greek-speaking Jew (Acts 21:39) was well acquainted with Greek language and custom, which enabled him to engage effectively with the pagans.⁸⁸

We will look at the content of the gospel Paul proclaimed and the way he approached to the Athenians. In his speech before the Areopagus, Paul adopted a five-point approach in initiating contact between himself and the pagans: (1) God as creator of the universe (17:24a), (2) God as the sustainer of the mortal life (17:25), (3) God as the ruler of all nations (17:24b), (4) God as Father of all humans (17:28-29); (5) God as the judge of the world (17:31).⁸⁹ These five points reflect God’s general revelation. Paul proved God to be an immanent revealer to creation by saying: “God is near” (17:27).⁹⁰

Proclaiming the nearness of God is accompanied by his presenting of God as an “unknown God” (17:23). Realizing that the prevenient grace of the unknown God is at work among the Athenians ahead of his proclaiming the gospel, Paul entered discourse by praising, “Athenians, I see how extremely religious you are”⁹¹ (17:22). Here the way

⁸⁶ Flemming, *Contextualization in the New Testament*, 76.

⁸⁷ Schnabel, “Paul the Missionary,” 29-43.

⁸⁸ Allen, *Missionary Methods*, 10-37.

⁸⁹ See Flemming, *Contextualization in the New Testament*, 78. However, Flemming provides only three themes as the contents of Paul’s proclaiming the gospel: (1) “God as the maker and maintainer of the cosmos; (2) God’s providential care of all nations; (3) God’s immanent relationship to all humans.”

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ John J. Collins, *Between Athens and Jerusalem: Jewish Identity in the Hellenistic Diaspora*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 264. Collins noted that the term “religious or pious” is used to describe the Gentiles as the “God-fearers. The other examples of the pious Gentiles are Cornelius (Acts 10); Titius Justus (18:17), and Lydia (16:14).

Paul approached was constructive. Instead of condemning the worldviews of Athenians, Paul used them as the grounds for dialogue.⁹² Paul asserted that he did not introduce a foreign deity to the Athenians, rather he proclaimed the deity who is already honored at the altar with the inscription “to the unknown God.”⁹³ This unknown God is the God who needs not festivals (17: 24:26), is not only present in every part of the world (17:24-28), but also commands all people to repent as the Day of Judgment is coming and the judge is appointed as Jesus (17:30-31).⁹⁴ Here Paul’s corrective dialogue of proclaiming the gospel of resurrection, as Robert Tannehill observes, “is basically a call to repentance.”⁹⁵

One can say Tannehill is right, as Allen also asserted that the content of Paul’s preaching was the “gospel of the cross, repentance and faith.”⁹⁶ If Tannehill and Allen are right, Paul’s dialogical mission among the Athenians was not only constructive, but also corrective. By corrective approach, Paul exposed the error of idolatry (17:16) and called the Athenians for repentance. Although distressed about the idolatry of the Athenians, Paul refused to condemn them, instead he laced his message with words of passion.⁹⁷ Paul was motivated by his divine desire to win the Gentiles as well as Jews for Christ (1Cor. 9:20-23). But the latter is outside the scope of this study. Paul’s constructive way of proclaiming the gospel left some Athenians convinced and they became believers and followed Paul. The new converts included Dionysius, a member of the Areopagus Council and a woman named Damaris and other Athenians with them (17:32-34).⁹⁸

⁹² Flemming, *Contextualization in the New Testament*, 83.

⁹³ Schnabel, “Paul the Missionary,” 41.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 41.

⁹⁵ Robert C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts*. Vol.2. (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1986), 218.

⁹⁶ Allen, *Missionary Methods*, 67.

⁹⁷ Flemming, *Contextualization in the New Testament*, 82.

⁹⁸ Schnabel, “Paul the Missionary,” 41.

Let me conclude with two points of observation on Paul's indigenous and contextual missions. First, Paul's focus and the content of his the message was on God's providential care of all creation, Christ's salvation and God's coming judgment in Christ. Second, in proclaiming such gospel, Paul used a two-way or contextual form of communication. He did not use a one-way traffic of proclaiming the gospel nor did he use simply an initial evangelism. He not only made sense of the gospel he proclaimed by using the indigenous languages, but also equipped the new converts for a deeper knowledge of Christ. In other words, he was concerned about the "entire conversion of the people."⁹⁹ Paul continued to use the Greek worldviews for his writings. Paul believed that Gentile Christian developed in an ongoing dialogue with the local Gentiles.¹⁰⁰

Imitating Paul in the Contemporary Contexts

Expressed in his own words, Paul said, "be imitators of me, as I am of Christ" (1Cor. 11:1). As we join Jesus in His mission, we imitate Paul's missionary examples. But in what ways, should we imitate Paul? We should imitate Paul in several ways, "not because he traveled an estimated 10,000 miles for his mission,"¹⁰¹ but because his missionary methods and thoughts are foundational to our mission. I will highlight some important points related to mission by reflecting on what has been discussed.

First, Paul's dramatic encounter with Jesus and his response to Jesus' call needs to be imitated. We have to admit that our encounter with Jesus may not be as dramatic as

⁹⁹ David J. Hesselgrave, "Paul's Missions Strategy," in *Paul's Missionary Methods: In His Time and Ours*, eds. Robert L. Plummer and John Mark Terry (Downer Groves, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012):127-145 (here p. 142).

¹⁰⁰ Luke Timothy Johnson, *Among the Gentiles: Greco-Roman Religion and Christianity* (New Haven: CT: Yale University Press, 2009), 1. See also M. David Sills, "Paul and Contextualization," in *Paul's Missionary Methods: In His Time and Ours*, eds. Robert L. Plummer and John Mark Terry (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012): 196-215. (here p. 202).

¹⁰¹ Robert, *Christian Mission*, 12.

Paul's, yet his response to Jesus' call and his missional sense of motivation in God's mission should be imitated. Paul's missional sense of motivation comes from the inner compulsion of Jesus' love (2Cor. 5:14). It is love that compelled Jesus Himself to come into the world to be the witness of God until He died at the cross. It is love that compelled Paul as well to be the witness of Christ until he was martyred under the reign of Nero in AD 64.¹⁰² If this is so, love is the motivating power of our participation in God's mission. Persecution could also come as a result of our faithful participation in God's mission.

Second, Paul's missional concept of proclaiming the gospel and becoming the gospel should be imitated. Two things are made here. One is the way Paul proclaimed the gospel simply as good news. As Karl Barth famously said, the "Church is a proclaimed Word"¹⁰³ by its very nature, its vocation is to proclaim the gospel as good news. Sadly, in my own context, some evangelists proclaim the gospel as bad news among Buddhists by saying that if Buddhists are not converted to Christianity, they will go to hell. This kind of preaching is what N.T. Wright called "good advice."¹⁰⁴ What Wright tried to argue against is advising other faiths what to do, instead of preaching the gospel to them simply as good news. Like Paul, we must proclaim the gospel simply as good news of God's redeeming all sinners from Sin and Death and restoring them into a union with God.

The other is to become the gospel of justification in the sense that salvation is to be seen not just as the gift to receive, but also as the gift to transform our lives into the

¹⁰² Bird, *Introducing Paul*, 26-28, see also F.F. Bruce, *Paul: Apostle of the Free Spirit*, revised (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 1980), 5.

¹⁰³ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of the Word of God*, Vol. I.I. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1936), 88-97. Barth introduced his famous threefold form of the Word of God: "incarnate Word (Jesus), written Word (the Bible) and proclaimed/preached Word" (the Church), pp. 88-119.

¹⁰⁴ N.T. Wright, *Simply Good News: Why the Gospel is News and What Makes It Good* (New York: HarperCollins, 2015), 1-14.

likeness of Christ by doing good works. As Paul reflected a transformative justification, God saved us not just *from* something but *for* something good works (Eph. 2:10).

Third, Paul's interpretation of salvation as reconciliation and his mission of reconciliation among Jews and Gentiles (2Cor. 5:19) becomes the model for our mission of reconciliation among Christians and people of other faiths. As noted above, "the gospel of reconciliation lies at the heart of Paul's missionary theology."¹⁰⁵ In accepting God's reconciliation as a gift, our missionary vocation is to witness to this reconciliation to people of other faiths across the boundaries. Interpreting Paul's terms and examples, Robert Schrieter, for example advocates for calling Christians to "be bridge-builders of God's reconciliation"¹⁰⁶ in today's pluralistic world. It is right to say that reconciliation is preoccupied with our mission of interreligious interactions with people of other faiths.

Fourth, Paul's dialogical mission among the Greeks in Athens attracts our attention as we find his audiences to be similar to the recipients, Buddhists and spirit-worshippers in my case, of the gospel we proclaim in the interreligious context. Paul proved to be a contextual missionary by communicating the gospel comprehensibly to the Greeks. He did not introduce a foreign God to the Greeks, he just made the "unknown God" known to them by using their indigenous worldviews. Far from being a one-way communication, Paul proclaimed the gospel in an act of two-way communication with the locals. Paul proclaimed the gospel not only from the inside of the Greek cultures, but he also embraced their worldviews for his theological interpretations and writings.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ Porter, "Reconciliation as the Heart of Paul's Missionary Theology," 169.

¹⁰⁶ Robert Schrieter, *The Ministry of Reconciliation: Spirituality and Strategies* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1998), 129.

¹⁰⁷ Johnson, *Among the Gentiles*, 1.

Scholars¹⁰⁸ often read 1 Cor. 9:22-23 as a model text for the model of Paul's contextualization. In this text Paul said "I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. I do it for the sake of the gospel." Two important things are observed. The first sentence reveals the "purpose of Paul's contextual mission, while the latter reveals the limit of Paul's contextual mission."¹⁰⁹ Paul's use of the word, "I have become all things to all people" does not mean that he became a drunk to win a drunk. That would only bring dishonor to Christ.¹¹⁰ All what Paul did was to honor Christ. According to Flemming, Paul's use of the first sentence (9:22) implies the boundary-breaking act of his interaction with the locals in order that they may be saved.¹¹¹

Paul's two-way of communication can be employed as a model for our intercultural mission. Intercultural mission stresses the need of a two-way communication in terms of sharing insights between the "communicators and the recipients of the gospel."¹¹² The aim is to enrich one another. Thus, our missionary task is to see other faiths not simply as the objects of mission, but rather as the subject whose cultures not only pave the way for the gospel of Christ, but also enrich Christian theology.¹¹³

Finally, perhaps most importantly, we need to imitate Paul as the model of church planting and leader-equipping. As we have noted, he planted several churches and made

¹⁰⁸ For example, Kosuke Koyama, *Water Buffalo Theology*, 20th anniversary (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1999) xv. See also, Sills, "Paul and Contextualization," 207.

¹⁰⁹ Sills, "Paul and Contextual Mission," 207.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Flemming, *Contextualization*, 65. Flemming gives examples of Paul's association not only with Gentiles, but also with Jews.

¹¹² See Lalsangkima Pachuau, "Intercultural Hermeneutics: A Word of Introduction," in *Asbury Journal*, Vol. 70, No. 1 (Spring 2015): 8-16 (here pp. 9-10, 14). The author does not necessarily deal with Paul's particular way of intercultural model of mission in Athens, but his discussion echoes Paul's.

¹¹³ For example, my own Chin cultural practice of spirit-worship paves the way for the gospel of Jesus' sacrificial atonement and enriches an ecclesiology and ecology. I discussed this in David Thang Moe, "Nat-Worship and Paul Tillich: Contextualizing a Correlational Theology of Religion and Culture in Myanmar," *Toronto Journal of Theology*, Vol. 30, No. 1. (Spring 2015): 123-136 (here pp. 125-134).

new converts. As Eckhard Schnabel noted, Paul did not merely preach the gospel to the unbelievers and establish new churches. He continued to be concerned about following up and training new churches for their spiritual growth, for their doctrinal authenticity, for their ethical consistency (Acts 20:20-27).¹¹⁴ Paul sought to equip new believers as the gathered community of faith and love, as the body of Christ and as the mission-minded people. Allen was right in saying that “Paul’s leadership development begins at the start of one’s walk with Christ and one’s entrance into the church and mission.”¹¹⁵

In light of this, we may say that “Paul is perhaps best known for planting new churches and for equipping leaders.”¹¹⁶ In short, suffice to conclude with two points of observation on the picture of Paul as a church planter and disciple-maker. First, Paul held the interrelation between the mission of God and church. For Paul, the church exists by and for the mission of God. Related to this, Emil Brunner said, “The church exists by mission, just as the fire exists by burning.”¹¹⁷ Second, Paul described the mission of God as a long-term project. Participating in God’s long-term mission, it is imperative for us to proclaim the gospel of salvation and plant the new churches and equip the present generation of the leaders those who will equip the future generation of the leaders.

Conclusion

Paul’s theology of mission and his passion for missionary works began with his dramatic encounter with Jesus Christ who called him to be a missionary to the Gentiles

¹¹⁴ Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Paul the Missionary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 207, 236-248.

¹¹⁵ Allen, *Missionary Methods*, 87, see also Schnabel, *Paul the Missionary*, 98-99.

¹¹⁶ Full picture of Paul’s church planting and leadership development; see Chuck Lawless, “Paul and Leadership Development,” in *Paul’s Missionary Methods: In His Time and Ours*, eds. Robert L. Plummer and John Mark Terry (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012): 196-215. (here p. 202). See also, Allen, *Missionary Methods*, 81-94.

¹¹⁷ Emil Brunner, *The Word and the Work* (London: SCM Press, 1931), 108.

(Gal. 1:15-16). Hultgren rightly stated: “Paul’s theology and mission do not simply relate to each other as theory and practice in the sense that his missionary methods flow from his theology, but rather in the sense that his theology is a missionary theology.”¹¹⁸

Hultgren is right that Paul’s theology of mission and his missionary methods are inseparably linked and his methods are integrally related to his missional identity.

This way of discussing Paul’s theology of mission and his missionary methods will provide us with some missional insights of holding theology and practice together. As noted above, Paul is a great theologian as well as a practical missionary. His practical missionary methods, such as leading his hearers of the gospel to faith, drawing them into a deeper fellowship with Christ, and equipping new believers to reach out to the unbelievers needs to be applied in the non-Christian context. The content of the gospel—salvation, justification, redemption, and reconciliation he theologized—and the way he proclaimed in a contextual form needs to be applied appropriately in any context. In sum, Paul’s understanding of mission is nothing more or less than God’s universal and apocalyptic action of redeeming the world in which we are invited to participate.

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¹¹⁸ Hultgren, *Paul’s Gospel and Mission*, 145.

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