

Mission for Social Transformation

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At the outset I want to state the assumption that “mission can bring about social transformation.” I would also offer three hypotheses. One, effective ministry and mission can help to revive the declining churches. Missiology has an important influence on the churches— e.g. to rebuild the self-understanding of churches, to reform the missionary attitude, and to renew the vision and commitment of the congregation. Two, proper missionary activities could transform the social roles and functions of the churches. Three, churches can reform their social roles and functions through new ‘incarnated’ ministries, which are ways through which the churches can participate in God’s mission and the realization of God’s kingdom. The blessing of the Kingdom of God can bring about social transformation (especially spiritual and cultural transformation) to Taiwanese Christians.

The Presbyterian Churches in Taiwan had four theological attempts: (1) Mission for Social Transformation: Based on the Theology of the Kingdom of God; (2) Empowerment of the Church and Congregation; (3) Promoting Cooperative Mission: Reconstructing the Relationships of Local Churches; and (4) Holistic Mission: Both Grassroots and Ecumenical.

Taiwanese Churches need a Holistic Missiology

Based on our theological reflection and practice through the practical projects, we find that Taiwanese churches need a holistic missiology. A holistic missiology can open the mind, mission and vision of the church. Moreover, narrow ecclesiology and biased missiology will lead the church toward greater isolation or lead church members to pay attention to their own salvation alone. Taiwanese churches need the missiology of the Kingdom of God and the ecclesiology of incarnation.

In an effort to realize the ideals of God’s reign among the people of Taiwan, the Presbyterian Church of Taiwan (PCT), since its establishment in 1865 to the present, has manifested the strength of gospel renewal through evangelism, medicine, education, literature and social services. Therefore, PCT has her churches all over the nation.

But in recent years, because PCT congregations paid too much attention to their own needs, the result was neglect of their outreach ministries. Hence, church development remained

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stagnant, Christians are still a minority in Taiwanese society, and the church's capacity to influence social transformation became weaker. We can say that the churches ignored their realization of the Gospel. No wonder why the Taiwanese find it hard to recognize the privilege of the Gospel and to know the incarnated God.

Taiwan became a developed and democratic country during these past few decades. As soon as the churches reflected on their Taiwanese history, they discovered that many issues (political, social, ethnic, economic, ecological, and human) had to do with justice and peace. Finally, they recognized that the promise of the Kingdom of God is a very pertinent Gospel for Taiwan.

In the spirit of the Reformed Church, the PCT takes 'the Kingdom of God' as its central theological motif. In recent years, the PCT has emphasized the need to contextualize its mission while searching for ways to identify with the people and be rooted in this land. This New Taiwan Mission Project has adopted the theme, "to actualize the Kingdom of God through building *Koinonia*," because we recognized the need to participate in the development of the community.

The Kingdom of God means that God is reigning in the hearts of women and men. To enter the kingdom means "to make God King in one's own soul and life." Moreover, for Christians, God is also the King of all nations, all peoples, and all creatures, which is why God will also present God's divine action and reign in the world.

Therefore, we have reached the conclusion that Taiwan needs the incarnated church and the churches need to become incarnate in Taiwan.

1. Sharing the Gospel of Incarnation

A. Taiwan needs the incarnated church

When the Jews cried for the Messiah, God sent God's only son, Jesus Christ, who became flesh and dwell with God's people. Moreover, when people cry for justice and peace today, God will raise up God's incarnated churches to lead God's people out of the shadows. The church is the first fruit, which God gives to the world, in order that people can taste the Gospel and the heavenly gifts. In an effort to realize the ideals of God's reign among the people of Taiwan, the Presbyterian Church of Taiwan (PCT) has manifested the strength of gospel renewal through evangelism, medicine, education, literature and all manners of social services. We can hear the voices of Taiwanese people today from the Taiwan Social Change Survey (TSCS)² of the Institute of Sociology Academia Sinica, which led us to conclude that Taiwan needs incarnated churches.

² TSCS is the Taiwan Social Change Survey, a project to provide archival information for research on social change. This project is a long-term academic survey. All data collected since the first term of this project in 1984 has been released to the public to support academic research. Over the years, many scholars and students have utilized data from this project for their research and made significant contributions to the scholarly world.

B. The churches need to incarnate in Taiwan

The churches need to be incarnated in Taiwan. Jesus Christ is the blessing of incarnation from God. If churches are followers and the body of Christ, they should also be the incarnated churches of their Lord Jesus. When churches commit themselves to Christ and live as people of God, they need to show 'incarnated actions' as their dynamic response to God's reign. Through their incarnated actions they share and witness to the gospel of the Kingdom of God. Therefore, incarnation should be the mission of all disciples and all Christians.

The theology of incarnation is premised on the following convictions: (1) Jesus is the Emmanuel, God with us. So the churches need to be incarnated with the people. (2) An incarnated church needs to live as God's living Words—of truth, justice, peace and love. (3) The incarnated church is the practitioner of the great commandment, "love thy neighbor and love God." (4) The incarnated church is the seed of the Kingdom of God. When the church sows the seed today, she will harvest the fruits of social transformation in the future.

2. To Be the Servant of God's Kingdom

The mission of the church is to realize the Kingdom of God. A theology of the Kingdom of God is flourishing in Taiwan Presbyterian Churches. In my doctoral thesis, I made a theological overview of the Kingdom of God.³ At the conclusion, I reconfirm that the Kingdom of God is God's promise to all people and all nations. The kingdom is God's kingly rule. Whether expressed as justice in the world and society, harmony of spirituality, or the eternal world of souls, when everything is under the reign of God there the Kingdom is present. This promise is similar to the ideal world, which people wish to see. This promise always represents the treasured Gospel.

Churches need to know their role as the servant of God, sent to serve the world as to God. Churches need to proclaim the promise of God's kingdom and share the Gospel of the kingdom. We recognize that we are not the builders of the kingdom; it is God who gives it. Our task is to witness to the presence of the kingdom, to make it felt by our concern "for justice, peace, and joy" where we live and work, and to challenge every human society to restructure itself according to the kingdom's principles.⁴

Taiwanese Churches need Practical and Feasible Mission Projects

With 1218 congregations all over the nation, PCT has a potential of promoting social transformation. But many congregations of PCT have ignored their outreach ministry,

³ Hau-Sheng Chng, "To Be A New Creation: Mission and Social Transformation, A Reformed Ministry for Taiwanese Rural Mission," unpublished thesis of the Doctor of Ministry program of Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary, 2006.

⁴ John Fuellenbach, *The Kingdom of God: the Message of Jesus Today* (Orbis Books, 1995), 206.

resulting in the slowing down of their church growth. Over the years, Taiwanese rural churches have faced certain difficulties and crises. These are: (1) declining membership; (2) financial crisis; (3) high mobility for pastors in rural churches; (4) lack of young leadership; (5) secularization of the Christian faith; (6) lack of will for mission and church growth; (7) lack of resources and model for team mission; (8) isolation in the local area; (9) frozen ministries without renewal and creativity.

When PCT promoted the Church Redevelopment Program (CRP) conferences, participants inspired the churches. Based on the expectation of attendees the churches reached the conclusion that Taiwanese churches need to engage in practical and feasible mission projects such as the following:

1. Transforming Congregations for the Future: Church Redevelopment Program (CRP)

Based on our observations concerning the unique experiences and tasks of Tek-Tng Presbyterian Church, we believe that this mission paradigm is quite helpful and inspiring to other Taiwanese rural churches. We find that even though the church growth of Tek-Tng church is not very fast, it is purpose-driven and based on a careful strategy. This church has grown from 17 persons during Sunday worship in 1988 to 92 persons in 2005. Moreover, Tek-Tng Presbyterian Church has become younger (with an average age of 32 years old), active, creative and faithful. She is very different from other Taiwanese rural churches.

The revival of Tek-Tng Presbyterian Church was caused by three strategies, rooted in the spiritual, missionary, and visionary renewal. During the nineteen years, Tek-Tng church has gone through three stages of church redevelopment: (1) 1988–1989: Promote Church Revival and Redevelopment; (2) 1990–2005: Empower Congregation for the Future; and (3) 1997–2007: Outreach Ministry and Global Mission.

Most Taiwanese Presbyterian churches are small congregations of 80 members or less. As a congregation of less than 80 members, it is very difficult to promote a powerful mission for the community. One of the basic questions for those congregations, which are also suffering from low esteem, is how to become a powerful congregation and how to bind together small congregations into a larger congregation. Empowerment is a very important task of Taiwanese mission.

We find that the wonderful experience and strategy of Tek-Tng Presbyterian Church are identical with the CRP projects. We conclude that “Transforming Congregation for the Future” is an important strategy.

2. Koinonia—Cooperative Ministry: Sustain and Share

As Taiwanese rural churches are plagued by small size and suffering from low esteem and isolation, cooperative mission is a very important and helpful way to empower them. Cooperative mission helps *individual churches to become one body of Christ*. Moreover, it can transform the relationship of local churches by enabling them to do mission together (both the ministers and congregations), by moving from ‘separate relationship’ to

'united relationship', from 'mono-relationship' to 'sharing-relationship', and from 'solo-relationship' to 'cooperative-relationship'. The most wonderful result of cooperative mission is transforming the solo churches into one integrated area church.

There is a wonderful paradigm of Taiwanese cooperative mission in the Erlin Rural Mission Project, which was started by seven local congregations in 1995. The Erlin Rural Mission Institute is a wonderful paradigm and strategy for team ministry. Through this experience, ERMI encourages Taiwanese rural churches to do mission together, work together, and sustain and share with each other.

3. Empower the People: Social Transformation for Peace and Justice

The concept of "Empower the congregation" comes from the theological reflection on "*Making Disciples*." There are some practical paradigms of empowerment, such as "*education, organizing, and development*," which provide the theories for the practical projects.

The main point of the theological concern "to promote life education and sustainable human development" is making disciples for social transformation. There are four important steps to making disciples: enlightenment, equipment, empowerment, and enablement. There are two theological perspectives: 'Educational Role of the Church' and 'Education for Life'.

An important concern for the church remains: how can its mission empower the people today? Some very powerful *Life Education* programs have already been carried out in Taiwan during the past several years through the Presbyterian Church of Taiwan and the Champions program led by Steven Wayne Long since 1992. The assumption of this project is that if most of the churches widely promote these programs and make long-term commitments to those children and their families, they could help to transform society and bring changes in people's daily lives. Based on this assumption is the lingering concern about the most effective means by which to promote Life Education ministries in the local churches. We also inspired some churches that were already committing themselves to the mission of Sustainable Human Growth and Development Program (SHGDP). We strongly suggested that all the churches try to participate in the mission of SHGDP, such as: (1) Promoting the Life Education Program—in the Adolescent and Elementary level; (2) Sustainable Human Development and the Empowerment Program;⁵ and (3) Organizing

⁵ There are many possibilities for *Sustainable Human Development*, but only a few general ones are provided below: (a) sustainable human development for foreign marriage families, (b) sustainable human development for single parent families: Nursery Program for children of single parent families after school; (c) sustainable human development for the physically challenged: training program and shelter factory, and (d) computer education and e-commerce for remote districts: the Digital Opportunity Center paradigm.

⁶ As a program of the World Council of Churches (WCC) and Christian Conference of Asia (CCA), the Urban Rural Mission has played a very special and important role in mission. As it understands itself, URM dresses itself with "the missionary calling" of going to the frontier. Generally speaking, the URM program is committed to supporting people's struggles for justice and self-empowerment (within the context of national liberation), primarily through local community organizations and

the People for Social Transformation: Taiwan Urban Rural Mission (URM)⁶

The Mission-Driven Church can Bring about Social Transformation

Mission for Social Transformation springs from the promise of the Kingdom of God. There are several theological perspectives taken from Jesus' proclamation of the Kingdom of God. He emphasized that "God has dominion over all creatures (both Christian and the world)" and "the kingdom is a new world (both inner spirituality and the external world) under a new order." What people have sought after is the blessing of the Kingdom of God, a new heaven and a new earth.⁷ The Kingdom of God is both "making changes in the external, political order of things," and also "making changes in the spiritual order and in the lives of men and women." The realization of "thy Kingdom come" will not be through the ministries and activities of the church. I believe that when Jesus taught his disciples to pray for the coming of the kingdom, he was inviting them to react and actualize the Kingdom of God.

Today's church can learn about doing theological reflections based on the Bible and church history in order to have a whole and correct understanding of what it means to be the body of Christ. The church is a fellowship that has been called out as well as a group of people who have been sent into the world. There needs to be more reflections on Jesus' expectation for today's church, one that would enable the church to play a better part in her role and mission. With this in mind, after careful theological reflection, the Presbyterian Church of Taiwan (PCT) drafted a contextualized creed at the end of 1985. The statement on ecclesiology declares the following: "We believe the Church is the ecumenical fellowship of the people of God, called to proclaim salvation in Jesus Christ, to be messengers of peace, to root down locally, to identify with all the residents, and to become a sign of hope through love and suffering."⁸

1. To Be a Creative Minority

We know that mission is *Missio Dei*, the mission of God. The ERMI churches have experienced transformation in God's grace. They found that they could be a small church with creative strength. We have to confess our experience, which is, "There is no small church in God's hand." We cannot divide the churches into big or small. Perhaps a more helpful distinction is the church with life or the church without life. We want to invite

coalitions of the exploited, marginalized, and oppressed, e.g., slum-dwellers, women and children, industrial workers, victims of the tourism industry, and native peoples. The classes of TURM adopted CUT training courses, also called CUT. Training classes are divided into Phases I, II, and III. Phase I - Program of Social Issue Analysis. Phase II - Program of Social Structural Analysis. Phase III-1, Program of Trainers' Training; Phase III-2, Program of Nonviolent Action Training; Phase III-3, Program of Conflict Management and Resolution; Phase III-4, Program of Third Party Neutral Training Skilled Third Party Neutrals (TPN). TPN 1 - Becoming a Third Party Neutral; TPN 2 - Developing Facilitation Skills; TPN 3 - Developing Mediation Skills; TPN 4 - Principles, Practice, and Reflection.

⁷ Revelation 21:1.

⁸ Adapted from the Creed of the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan, November 1985.

those churches that wish to be transformed to be a creative minority.

2. To Be a New Creation

Finally, I have to reconfirm my conviction of *Mission for Social Transformation*. When the mission church can revive, society can be transformed. As the biblical mandate calls the "Church and the World to be a New Creation," and as evidenced by changes in the Tek-Tung church and ERMI churches, we can see the signs of church revival just like the new bud on the branch in springtime. As Paul said, "Therefore, if any one be in Christ, he is a new creature: The old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new."⁹

⁹ 2 Corinthians 5:17.