

# PARTNERSHIP

# Mission in Action

2024 Sep Issue



Equipping Lay Ministers,  
Cultivating Missional Pastors to  
Strategically Engage Asia's Harvest

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## Dear Friends of BTS:

Without vision, people perish. Without action, mission perishes too. Mission is an active outreach of love and hope to those who have yet to experience the personal love of God and His forgiveness, often carried out in challenging environments. “How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!” (Rom 10:14,15). A critical part of BTS’s vision is to cultivate missional pastors with beautiful feet to strategically engage in Asia’s harvest. Cultivating expresses our commitment to accept fresh seminary students and develop them to be shepherding pastors with a passion for mission that extends beyond the church. The harvest fields are varied and different communities have their own customs and cultures. Cross-cultural understanding and sensitivity form integral components of our training curriculum.

Will Asian Christianity blossom or wither? Dr Tan Kang San, General Director of the Baptist Missionary Society, reminds us that Asia currently remains largely unevangelised and that Asian Christians, particularly those coming from countries with significant Christian populations, such as Singapore, must take increasing responsibility for global mission. Growing the Kingdom of God must not take place without depth. The Great Commission of our Lord Jesus Christ is not to churn out converts but to “teach them to obey everything I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:18-20). This involves ethical holiness through underlying worldview transformation, without which Christianity will only be a veneer that will not last. Dr Tan warns against adopting outward forms of Christianity while Jesus remains alien to the lifestyles, values and self-identities of believers.

This issue of Partnership newsletter also includes the testimonies of two BTS alumni serving as missionaries, one in East Asia and the other in South Africa. Their real names have not been used in order to safeguard their identities and ministries.

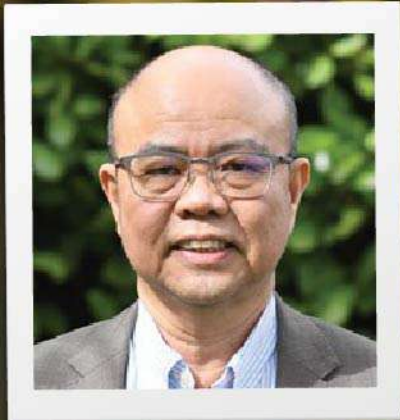
Ying and her husband Liang were undeterred by the restrictions imposed during the Covid-19 pandemic, yearning to return to minister in their target community. As soon as the doors were re-opened, they did not hesitate to return, serving in a place that is highly polluted, where the people are deeply entrenched in traditions and hostile to those of other faiths, and where the climate can swing to extremes. Prayers keep them going when the going gets tough. The joy of seeing the children smile and thirst for God makes all their hard labour worthwhile. There is no “one size fits all” solution for missionaries in the field. Ying and Liang have learned to continually seek improvement while listening, discerning and confirming the voice of the Lord.

Some of Eric’s friends thought that he was out of his mind when he shared about his calling to go to West Africa as a missionary during the Covid-19 pandemic. His friends saw the poor healthcare system and dangers from potential civil wars. Notwithstanding the muted global economy caused by Covid-19, Eric was compelled by the love of Christ to go. Serving as a cross-cultural ambassador of Christ, he treasures the importance of being firmly grounded in the inspired Scriptures to ensure that the message of salvation is always anchored on Jesus the messenger, who is the Way, the Truth and the Life. Humility, patience and perseverance, which are much needed as an ambassador of Christ, flow from an abiding relationship with Him.

Ultimately, it is the gospel that transforms lives and societies, not policies, procedures and polity. Singapore is a strategic and resourceful centre for growing missional disciples and mobilising cross-cultural mission in Asia. BTS is ready and open to establish mission partnerships with churches to go and make disciples. Come and talk to us.

Peter Tang  
Managing Director

# Theme article



## Will Asian Christianity Blossom or Wither?

Dr Tan Kang San

General Director of BMS World Mission  
Chair of the Global Baptist Mission Network of the Baptist World Alliance (2020-2025)

05

Many writers, including Andrew Walls, point us to the new fact of our times: the shift in the centre of gravity of Christianity from the global North to the southern hemisphere. Africa and Latin America could arguably be regarded as Christian continents. However, I think we must be careful when we refer to Asian Christianity as a centre for mission. Christians continue to constitute less than 5% of countries such as Thailand, Japan, China, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan. For those countries with sizeable Christian populations, such as South Korea, the Philippines, India, Singapore and Indonesia, it is more accurate to say that we have the potential to be a major force for global mission.

The growth of Christianity in Asia is uneven, with significant pockets of Christian influence in the midst of huge populations where Christ is not known. Therefore, one needs to hold two perspectives simultaneously: first, that Asia is still the least evangelised region in the world; and second, that Asian Christians, particularly those coming from countries with significant Christian populations, such as Singapore, must take increasing responsibility for global mission. Whether these Christians succeed or falter in carrying the torch of historic Christianity will depend on a number of factors relating to the self-understanding of these missional churches and their commitment to cross-cultural witness. While we cannot predict the future, we who are concerned for the glory of God's name must address a number of foundational issues so that the Asian church will continue to be God's chosen instrument for cross-cultural witness.

### **Growth without Depth**

During my sabbatical leave at Regent College in June 2003, I heard John Stott lament that "growth without depth is not pleasing to God." He was expounding on Paul's goal in mission "to present every man mature in Christ" (Colossians 1:28) and was speaking about the rapid growth of Christianity in the non-Western world.

The Great Commission commanded that the church's mission is not to make converts but to "teach them to obey everything I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:18-20). "Teaching to obey" involves ethical holiness through underlying worldview transformation. Often, Christian missionaries are preoccupied with external successes measured in terms of numbers of converts or churches planted. Students of mission history, particularly those who study the decline of Christianity in the West, have concluded that without whole life discipleship and total infusion of the gospel, Christianity will only be a veneer – it will not last. I was reminded of an incident where I was very impressed by the church growth in the villages of Sabah, but the local pastor lamented that "banyak Kristen kulit" (many are Christians in name, literally through 'outward skin') rather than "Kristen tulen" (pure or real believers in Christ).

Emil Bruner, in his book *The Misunderstanding of the Church* (1952), speaks of the paganisation of the church in the West in the 1930s. Observing nominal Christianity in Europe, Bruner noted that paganism is not only a problem among the heathen of Africa and Asia, but paganism has also entered the church in the West. Bruner identified four features of the pagan church:

- Absence of community
- Passionless devotion
- Partial conversion of believers
- Loss of confidence in God

The early church in Acts 3 suffered two major attacks: outward persecution (Acts 4:1-22; 5:17-22) and inward moral compromise (5:1-11). The early church grew despite physical persecution but was defeated because of moral corruption and compromise. Despite its rapid growth, the Asian church in South Korea, the Philippines and Indonesia faces the danger of Christianity becoming merely another social category. Usually this occurs when outward forms of Christianity, mainly Western, are adopted but Jesus remains alien to the lifestyles, values and self-identities of new converts.

Missiologists need to explore how the gospel can transform every aspect of society, principally by transforming the worldviews of a particular cultural group. It is easy for new converts to adopt outward behavioural patterns, such as worship styles, church buildings, leadership patterns and Christian jargon. However, such conversions will remain outward forms of Christian civilisation unless the gospel confronts the underlying values and belief systems of Asian cultures. Ultimately, worldviews defined as the total picture of reality, of what is real and unreal, and of what is true and appropriate, must be touched by the Christian gospel. For example, most Asian worldviews integrate the supernatural with human existence. If Western missionaries come and tell people there are no spirits, the fear of spirits remains untouched. When their children are sick, these converts may still go to “bomohs and dukuns” for healing and deliverance, as their belief in spirits has merely gone underground. Another example is the leadership structures of many churches in countries such as South Korea, China and Japan, which are deeply influenced by Confucianist values rather than biblical ones. Consumerism, nominalism and partial conversions of Asian Christians have resulted in moral failures and leadership crises among some Asian churches.

### **Responding to Asia’s mission challenge through theological education**

Singapore is a unique cosmopolitan centre for growing missional disciples of 21st century mission. If Singapore churches are to be the new centres for mission expansion, how do we mobilise Christian mission for Asia? What lessons could we derive from the decline of Christianity in the West, and how will Singaporean Christians contribute towards the gospel transformation of Asian cultures? Is our mission primarily to proclaim the gospel and plant more churches among the unreached, or is it the worldview transformation of life and society?

Will more churches serve together with Baptist Theological Seminary in equipping lay ministers and cultivating missional pastors to strategically engage Asia’s harvests? The ancient Chinese proverb reminds us, “If you are planting for a year, plant grain. If you are planting for a decade, plant trees. If you are planting for a century, plant people.” Mission is about growing people, and effective theological education is essentially to help leaders think clearly about God in order to love Him and participate in His mission for the nations.



The background of the entire page is a photograph of a mosque silhouette against a bright orange sunset sky. The mosque features a large central dome and several minarets. A person is visible in silhouette in the foreground, standing in front of the mosque. The overall mood is serene and contemplative.

# CROSS-CULTURAL MISSION

Tham

*A Common  
Testimony*

09

## The Love of Christ Compels Us

“If we are ‘out of our mind’, as some say, it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you. For Christ’s love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.

So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” (2 Cor 5:13-21)

Some friends had commented that I must be out of my mind to go to West Africa for ministry during the Covid-19 pandemic. It is not the most medically advanced place on earth. Furthermore, the threat of lawlessness and civil war is very real. It was absolutely the love of Christ that convicted me to go to West Africa with:

- a. His Word from 2 Cor 5:13-15 and Genesis 46:3
- b. His confirmation through His timely provision of finance and,
- c. His peace given to my parents and myself.

His love is vast and abundant and so are the possibilities for His ministry. He did not limit me to serving in the East or in any specific place. His love is poured out to the western part of Africa too. So, when the time came for me to sacrifice my family, friends, comfort food, church, leisure, colleagues and others to reach lost souls for Christ, I decided not to live for myself, but for Him who died for us. God’s great love reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation to others.

Based on my limited knowledge, the meaning of cross-cultural mission (CCM) is the calling of God's people who are carrying the love of God and the message of reconciliation with God to the different tribes / races / cultures / languages / places of the world.

### **An Effective CCM Missionary**

As an ambassador of Christ, one's calling is to draw people to Christ. In Easton's Bible dictionary, the term 'ambassador' is the name used by the apostles to designate those who are appointed by God to declare His will. As a CCM missionary, I am appointed to declare God's message of reconciliation to the West Africans.

It is a prerequisite for missionaries to be reconciled to God and to have received a strong grounding in the Word, before they can tell or help others to be reconciled to Christ. More importantly, a true and effective missionary is one with the passion to love lost souls and preach the good news to them. The missionary's life should reflect this love and knowledge of God so that others will be drawn into a deeper relationship with Him. Therefore some practical aspects of an effective CCM missionary are:



**a. First, we need to read the Bible and pray unceasingly.**

A deep knowledge of God's Word is necessary, for it is the sword of the Spirit (Eph 6:17) with which we can engage the enemy. We pray that the Holy Spirit will guide us to understand His will so that the mystery of the gospel is revealed to those who are still not yet alive in Christ. We need to abide in Him and He will abide in us (John 15:4). The message of reconciliation can only be done by partnering with Him. Apart from Him we can do nothing.

**b. Second, we need to humble ourselves by being active listeners and adopting a learning attitude.**

We need to be quick to listen and slow to talk. Immersing ourselves in the local culture opens up a window into people's minds and outlook in life. By understanding their language, culture and lifestyle, we can clearly speak the message of reconciliation to them and approach their fears and needs effectively.

**c. Third, we need to have patience and perseverance in sharing the gospel.**

We need patience and perseverance to learn new languages with a humble heart. We need patience and perseverance to repeat and share the gospel unceasingly even when we do not see the desired results. We need to recognise that patience is not a final destination, but rather an ongoing pursuit that we can refine and improve over time. Even though some might feel they are good teachers and sharers of the gospel, it is God's timing that results in reaping a harvest of souls. Therefore, humility and acknowledgement of God's role in salvation will bring great virtues of patience and perseverance. There is no alternative to constant practice and a willingness to share the gospel effectively, especially in a cross-cultural context.

## **Problems Which Hinder An Effective CCM Ministry**

The first steps of a baby are probably the most difficult. So it was for me when I decided to obey the Lord by going to West Africa as His ambassador. Some of the hindrances I faced and how God helped me to overcome them were:

### **a. Fear – fear of death, suffering, persecution, rejection and the unknown.**

When I first heard about the risks and the dangers of the place, I felt reluctant and unsure. Therefore, I prayed and read the Bible. The Bible convicted my heart to go by faith. God also convicted me to trust Him with my needs. Looking back, I witnessed God actively involved in putting the pieces of the jigsaw puzzle together to settle me in my mission field. Subsequently, seeing some successful harvests has really strengthened my faith and trust in Him.

### **b. Self-centredness**

If one keeps looking at oneself, then one will tend to neglect to love others. If I had kept thinking of my family, church and lifestyle, career and car, then I would have put aside or neglected God's ministry of reconciliation. If I were self-centred and proud or arrogant, I would never have been able to learn to care for God's sheep. Having freedom in Christ does not mean we get to do whatever we want. It is actually the opposite: the truest and noblest expression of our Christian freedom is to give up our personal desires so that God's will can be achieved through us. To be Christlike is to have the willingness to change ourselves, to decrease and deny one's own privilege, so that God's appeal of reconciliation can be made through us.

### **c. Impatient to learn and listen**

My own personal inability to learn well and quickly would be the greatest hindrance to an effective ministry in a cross-cultural context. Learning a new language is tough. Learning the culture of others requires us to be humble and patient. Sometimes I am too impatient and self-centred. In order to learn a new language effectively and immerse myself into the community, I have to change. In Africa, God taught me to embrace humility and a positive learning attitude, and I continue to look to Him for strength.

## Reflection

After two years of missionary life in West Africa with its ups and downs, I have learned to surrender everything into God's hand. If it is His will, He will fulfil it. I have also learned to walk with the Lord and have found myself enjoying the missionary calling. Day by day I continue to find purpose living and abiding in Him in this phase of my life journey.

In conclusion, if we want to bear much fruit in cross-cultural mission, we need to abide in Him, knowing that He has promised to abide in us. How sweet are the fruits one reaps in the ministry of reconciliation. Nothing is smooth all the time, but by abiding in Him and His Word and growing the fruit of His Spirit, I can keep in step with the Spirit to continue preaching His good news to the West Africans.

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.” (Gal 5:22-26)



# MUSINGS FROM THE M CITY

Ying

## Alumna Testimony

Thick smog enshrouds this M city,  
though winter rain brings life anew.  
The young child's smiling, laughing face,  
reminds us of God's boundless grace.

With grateful hearts, Zhi Liang and I were led by our gracious Lord and given the opportunity to return to our beloved P after an absence of four years. Despite the global pandemic restricting access to creative access nations, it did not dampen the yearning our hearts felt to return to serve in the city amongst the M.

### **Amidst the thick smog enshrouding the city**

Our teaching journey began each day by checking the air quality index. Almost every morning, we stepped outside, looked up at the sky and immediately retreated indoors, muttering, “How long do we have to endure this haze?” Checking the air quality on our phones, the screen would display Air Quality Index (AQI) readings exceeding 400 for L City that day: “Air Pollution Level: Dangerous.” Though I should have been used to this routine, my brow still furrowed involuntarily. In November 2021, L City in the northeast of P was named the world's most polluted city. According to official country reports, the local AQI averaged 289. Living conditions were challenging in this environment. The missionary host that Zhi Liang and I lived with mentioned that the average life expectancy here is 53 years. We have not verified this, but from what we have seen in our short time here, it seems to be true.

While there is no armed conflict, air pollution here ranks among the highest globally and the health of ordinary citizens is indeed threatened. I wonder how missionaries have managed to serve tirelessly in this city over the years, living with the worst air quality in the world.





## Winter rain welcoming new life

When we first arrived in P seven years ago, we learned first-hand about the strict cultural norms. Women wore tightly wrapped headscarves that could not be removed. I recall an incident where a sister who had come for a short-term trip had forgotten her headscarf whilst travelling and received stern glares from three of the female missionaries there throughout the journey. This scared me into never forgetting my headscarf when going out.

Returning this time, everything seemed familiar – the factories, colleagues, and the South Asian language. However, from the moment we landed, I noticed a subtle change: the strict tradition of women tightly wrapping their heads in public seemed less stringent than before. Perhaps due to the lockdowns during the Covid-19 pandemic, the resulting oppression in daily life, and the subsequent relaxation and adjustment, many rules that were once strictly enforced seem to have quietly loosened their grip.

On occasion, I removed my headscarf in shopping malls without receiving strange looks from the locals, which would have been unthinkable previously! There were even a few women now working as salespersons in the mall, which was surprising. Previously, it was mainly men, even in shops selling personal hygiene products for women. That was a bizarre sight.

Missionaries and local believers have endured great suffering in recent years, such as kidnappings and confinement, with some even sacrificing their lives. Believers are pressured by their families to renounce their faith – a situation that continues today. Perhaps the gradual relaxation of strict cultural traditions in this city signifies a potential future reduction in the difficulties and pressures faced by us missionaries in spreading the gospel. Quietly, I think to myself: this is undoubtedly a tremendous piece of good news! However, at this stage we cannot confirm it definitively. Given time, with efforts from teams both local and from around the world, we might find answers. In our first winter in P, standing at 4,693 metres above sea level in the northern region at the highest border crossing in the world, I uttered this prayer amongst the bleak snow and rain: “Lord, may you continue to inspire and strengthen us on this mission journey. Help us not to succumb to obstacles along the way and miss out on the glorious privilege of leading people to Christ as we stay on this narrow path that leads to life.”

## Children's smiling, welcoming faces

On weekday mornings and afternoons we taught at a primary school and secondary school run by missionaries. Walking to school in the polluted city air, I heard Zhi Liang coughing intermittently. I recall an incident when a donkey cart passed us. Looking on as the donkey took each laboured step while pulling a heavy load, I saw a parallel reflected in the daily struggles of most people in this city, plodding on and continuing to endure day after day despite their helplessness.

P's public education system offers nearly free basic education for children aged five to sixteen. Unfortunately, despite this low barrier, many families still cannot afford education due to other costs such as uniforms and textbooks. In our interactions with several impoverished families, we learned that many children are sent out at a young age to earn money to support the family. Christians in P, constituting 1.3% of the population, are mostly the descendants of Punjabis who converted during the British colonial period. Their living conditions are even more concerning. According to Open Door's 2022 World Watch List, P ranks eighth in the annual list for persecution of Christians.

It is not easy running a Christian school and we are thankful for the opportunity to support the teachers' professional development and to help improve the rural school building (primary, secondary and special schools) amongst other ministries there. Whatever discomfort one feels due to the weather or difficulty adjusting is immediately soothed by the sound of children reading, dancing and picking up new worship songs. Although Zhi Liang and I are completely exhausted by the end of each day, the joy of seeing the children's smiles and thirst for God makes all our hard work worthwhile.

Even more delightful was leaving the city and venturing into the countryside, visiting villages where children sang, listened to stories, and played under the blue sky and white clouds. We visited a small school which was established by local Christians in the village with funding and support from overseas missionaries who bought land and built classrooms for them. Saturday mornings featured special children's club activities for the village children: one of the most exciting events in the village. It's worth noting that M and Christians traditionally don't interact in P country's culture; Christians are seen as unclean by M. The village school and Saturday children's club provided opportunities for M and Christian children to come together, which was deeply moving. Witnessing the commitment of missionaries and local pastors to this children's ministry reminded me of the apostle Paul's sense of mission – they pour themselves into running the good race for God. "I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings."



## Reflections on God's boundless grace

Amidst our busyness, we managed to visit some other missionaries whom we've been partnering since 2017 and were able to prepare a meal for them. We cooked some soup and several Chinese dishes, hoping that it would remind them of home and that it would help them feel the warmth of mutual support in the Lord.

Over the years, some missionaries have integrated seamlessly into M communities, while others have remained stagnant. Zhi Liang and I have mixed feelings as we contemplate these two extreme situations. As this is a Creative Access nation, most missionaries entered as tentmakers. Should we be careful and cautious in ministry or should we take a leap of faith and be bold and creative in such a hostile environment? There are no easy answers. Zhi Liang and I will continue to ponder this. This visit reminded us that in the field of missions, amidst changing times, we must continually seek improvement while listening, discerning and confirming the voice of the Lord.

Looking back on God's provision, protection and guidance in P country, Zhi Liang and I are grateful. We had the opportunity to learn much and return safely. (The schedule was affected twice before due to local explosions.) Thank you for your prayers, concern and fellowship, dear body of Christ. We thank God for His mercy on this land, preserving His people through various challenges. It is our prayer that the Lord will personally lead His faithful servants forward and draw M to seek His face, hear His voice and experience His work in spite of the difficulties they face. May they enter His eternal kingdom and join the family of God.

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