Meditation As Mission:
Recovering Hidden Spiritual Practice in Mission

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Orthodox Christian monks and nuns widely applied the spiritual practice of inner stillness since the 4th century and St. John Climacus, a 7th century Orthodox monk, introduced the Greek word “Hesychasm,” which means “stillness,” to this same phenomenon of spiritual practice. According to Guigo II, a 12th century Roman Catholic monk, the terms “meditation” and “contemplation” are separate phenomena and have different meanings in the process of the spiritual practice of stillness. He also used the Latin words “Lectio Divina” for the specific practice of “divine reading.” However, in our age, the terms “meditation” and “contemplation” have been defined in various ways and so they become confusing terms for ordinary people. Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines the word “meditation” in a secular sense and “contemplation” in a spiritual sense. In the Oxford Dictionary, “contemplation” means religious meditation or Christian meditation. Yet, the Cambridge American Content Dictionary defines the word “meditate” as a religious activity as well as a secular activity. In fact, both terms are widely applied alternatively to secular as well as religious practices of interior calmness. In order to simplify and communicate this paper in a straightforward manner to contemporary readers from various backgrounds, the term “meditation” is applied in this study to the spiritual practice of stillness.

INTRODUCTION: RECOVERING THE GAP IN CHRISTIANITY TODAY

Various research projects have revealed that the Christian population is declining at a dramatic rate in many European countries and in the United States. There is also a clear decrease in the number of professing and practicing Christians in the Roman Catholic and Protestant churches in our post-modern world. Since such research findings generally serve as landmarks for viewing our future reality, it is worth taking the time to analyze them seriously in order to develop an effective missional theology for the church of tomorrow. This section looks into the updated survey of Religion and Public Life, 2010-2050 by the Pew Research Center study.

The survey looks at the dimension of eight major global religious groups—Christians, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Unaffiliated, Jews, and Other Religions—from 2010 to 2050, based on a variety of demographic factors. The research predicts that in the United States, in general, Christians will decline from more than three-quarters of the population in 2010 to two-thirds in 2050. In Europe, it will become less than two-thirds in 2050. On the other hand, the number of religiously unaffiliated people and other religious groups (except Buddhism) continues growing in the United States and Europe.

Furthermore, in 2010, 27% of the world’s total population was under the age of 15; 62% was between ages 15 and 59 and 11% are ages 60 and above. In fact, it is more likely for adults to leave their childhood religion (if they

are going to convert) in early adulthood, and it is generally exceptional for elderly people to change to another religious tradition. Giving our attention on the age group of “15 to 59,” it indicates that Christians and Muslims share the same rank, 60%, which is the lowest among the percentages of all eight religious people groups (except Jews) in the global population. The other six religious people groups at the same age group are: 62% in Hindus, 65% Buddhist, 65% other Religions, 67% folk religions, Jews 59% and unaffiliated 68%. But what is really significant is the change over time in the U.S. report of the list of age by religious tradition. It shows the membership situation in 2007 and in 2014 for different groups by age. Focusing on the age group of 18–29 year olds, it points out that most of the non-Christian religions in this group rose significantly, while Christianity barely stayed the same.

It is also projected that, by 2050, about 40 million of world’s population are predicted to switch to Christianity and 106 million are predicted to leave the Church. Most people who leave the Church are expected to join the religiously unaffiliated group. An astonishing thing is that, in the United States, although 42% of the total population left their childhood religions, only 3% to 4% of them are atheists or agnostics, and 44% of them said: “religion is very important or somewhat important in their lives.” It can be inferred that these people are still spiritual and finding God in their own ways. Most people leave their childhood religions in order to search for


new spiritualties that quench the spiritual thirst of post-modernity, post-Christendom, or life in the post-World War cultural context.\textsuperscript{15}

In the West, many people look to the Eastern religions for spiritual direction; consequently, the resurgence of formal world religions has taken place in this era. Some Christians have converted to Hinduism or Buddhism. Some have experienced “double belonging,”\textsuperscript{16} and claim such labels as “Buddhist-Christian” or “Hindu-Christian.” Some turn to triple belonging—a combination of Buddhist-Hindu-Christian belief.\textsuperscript{17} Some create new religions, such as the New Age Movement and the Unitarian Universalist Church, which focuses on multi-spiritual practices, human rights, and ethics. Some look back to traditional spirituality and traditional folk religions are often revived. Besides these movements, in order to compete against modern Christianity, the Church of Satan also appears in this era.\textsuperscript{18}

No matter how different from each other these various religions and spiritual communities are, in beliefs and practices there is the common spiritual practice defined as “meditation.” In fact, meditation practice is popular not only in religious communities, but also in secular society as well. It is appropriate to say that the most popular spiritual practice in the post-modern age is meditation. Various forms and disciplines of meditation practice have become revived in both formal and informal religions. The topic of meditation has been well-received, with the support of scientific studies, both in the East and the West. Its popularity can be traced, not only on


\textsuperscript{17} Rheenen, “Religionquake,” 88.

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popular media, but also in various academic disciplines, such as medicine, politics, psychology, neurology, sports, music performance, and beauty, to name just a few.

On the other hand, modern Protestant Christians assume that meditation practice is not for Christians, but for Buddhists, Hindus, and other Eastern religious traditions. However, missiologists and mission practitioners are alarmed with the report that traditional Christianity in the West does not satisfy current spiritual needs within modern Western Christianity in the new era following World War II. Johannes Blauw, the


late secretary of the Netherlands Missionary Council, mentions that “every age needs a fresh encounter with the Bible, because every age has its own questions and problems.” In the same way, Ajith Fernando, former National Director and presently the teaching director of Youth for Christ in Sri Lanka, has this insightful thought:

Faced with the charge from postmodernists that Christianity does not fully satisfy human yearning for subjective spirituality, when we look to the Scriptures we find that the Bible was not defective. It was our understanding of the Bible and our practice of Biblical religion that was defective. Every generation misses some vital aspect of Christianity. Sometimes people outside the church discover the need for stressing that. Christians will discover that what these people are looking for is satisfied only through Biblical religion. The challenge from outside may help the church rediscover a treasure that it had buried and neglected.

Going along with Blauw and Fernando, my observation is that people outside the Church have located the vitality of meditation practice in their day to day life, and it is high time for the Church to rediscover the treasure of meditation practice which has been neglected by modern Western Christianity and buried in biblical Christianity. Thus, this paper is an attempt to examine how meditation practice became popular, and why it influences people’s daily life in order to renew a Christian missional spirituality of meditation.

I. ESSENTIALITY OF MEDITATION IN THE AGE OF SPIRITUALITY

By tradition, modern Christianity has been praised for and satisfied with the social services and gospel message that transforms the lives of individuals and communities, liberates the poor and the oppressed, and gives


hope for life-after-death salvation. But Christianity has failed to address the growing need for meditation as an answer for many issues in today’s world. In our age, the world proclaims and testifies that various disciplines of meditation practice help change people’s lives, dissolve their stress-related physical and mental issues, leads them to peace, happiness, and harmony among fellow human beings, and boosts their capacity to carry on their daily activities in this world.

One of the founders of meditation practice in the West was Maharishi Mahesh Yogi (1918-2008) who introduced Transcendental Meditation (TM), a practice of Hindu meditation in 1955. The Maharishi believed that spirituality and material life are like two faces of a coin. For him, meditation is the source of knowledge and wisdom, and it is also the science of being (spiritual life) and the art of living (practical public life, or material life).29 By 1967, his teachings inspired the members of Beatles: John Lennon, Paul McCartney, Ringo Starr, and George Harrison. At that time, they were spending their lives by using drugs, especially LSD, in order to have an experience of cosmic subconscious or eternity. The Maharishi promised them that they could reach such a place through TM techniques.30 In 1968, they even learned meditation techniques under the Maharishi in India.

On October 4, 1967, the Beatles shared their powerful experiences of meditation on the popular British TV talk show, The Frost Programme. They witnessed to the world that meditation helped transform individuals and gave them energy for peaceful success in their secular lives. George Harrison stated: “the youth of today are really looking for some answers—for proper answers the established church cannot give them, their parents can’t give them, material things can’t give them.”31 In the present day, the second generation of the Beatles continues receiving the benefits of

meditation. Shadowing his father, John Lennon, Sean Lennon, who is an American multi-instrumentalist, singer, composer, and music producer, shared his testimony this way: “for me, Transcendental Meditation is like a scientific method to calm my brain down and to make my frontal lobe more active. It’s an exercise, really. It helps me to have about 10 per cent more conscious thinking, which is good, because we make a lot of decisions in our subconscious that aren’t always good—like the decision to smoke cigarettes or to eat bad foods.” In the same way, James McCartney, a musician and the only son of Paul McCartney affirms that meditation helps him in his mental balance. He says: “To support me in my daily life, I have already developed a solid self-care routine which involves healthy eating, regular exercise and of course meditation.”

Consequently, diverse disciplines of meditation practice, from all the religions and secular creativity, have mushroomed all over the world in this current age. Popular religious meditation practices are OM, or mantras, yoga, self-enquiry or “I am,” which is attached to Hinduism; and vipassana, insight, zan, samadhi, or calm and loving kindness, which connects to the Buddhist tradition. It appears that religious meditators gain power for ethical living and generosity through meditation. Additionally, studies expose the reality that Chinese traditional movement meditation practices, such as chi kung or qi gong, and tai chi boost brain activity. In Western culture, there are


many more psychological meditation practices that differ from their original religious roots and philosophies. Mindfulness, guided, and focus-attention meditation techniques are widely applied in the West by various advocates and promoters such as researchers, medical doctors, neurologists, successful business persons, psychologists, scientists, musicians, and world leaders from many other fields. They propose the idea that meditation provides holistic wellness.

In fact, the aim of meditation is not only for personal wellness but also for communal benefits and world peace. On August 29, 2000, S. N. Goenka, one of the icons of Buddhist Vipassana meditation, gave an address to around 1,000 worlds religious and spiritual leaders at the Millennium World Peace Summit in the United Nations General Assembly Hall. In his address, he gave a message of peace and harmony to the world from the ancient Buddhist perspective. He highlighted the need of experiential inner peace to bring a real peace and real harmony to the world. Goenka believes that there will be no real peace in the world unless each individual experiences peace within oneself.

In the same way, the goal of Maharishi University of Management (MUM), formerly known as Maharishi International University, is world peace. Dr. Yukio Hatoyama, a former Japanese Prime Minister, delivered an address to 96 undergraduates and 252 graduate students from over 60 different countries at the 2015 MUM Graduation. In his address, he expressed his sadness due to the ISIS attacks in the Middle East, the problems between Ukraine and Russia, and the growth of cyber-attacks. Hatoyama went on to say, “It’s my firm belief that bonds of fraternity created between individuals will naturally evolve into bonds of fraternity between countries, between

regions, and then—to peace around the world. I'm deeply impressed by the success of Maharishi in defining a concrete and simple route to that end.”

Moreover, Jacob B. Hirsh, professor at Rotman School of Management, and Megan D. Walberg and Jordan B. Peterson, professors at the Department of Psychology at the University of Toronto, examined the relationship between political orientation, spirituality, and religiousness. The study reveals that, “meditation makes individuals more politically liberal in their outlook and action.” It is also surprising that meditation or the practice of quiet time turns out to be an optional practice in many offices, schools, and prisons in the major cities in the United States.

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Within Roman Catholic Christianity, the practice of meditation was revitalized by American Trappist monk, Thomas Merton (1915-1968). Merton initiated interfaith dialogue and discussed faith issues personally with Asian spiritual leaders, such as the Dalai Lama from Tibet, the Vietnamese monk, Thich Nhat Hanh, and Japanese Buddhist professor and scholar, D. T. Suzuki. His writing on Zen Buddhism reveals that he was very interested in Zen Buddhist spirituality. He tried to lead Christians, through his writings and teaching, to highlight mystical theology and the depth of humanity’s spiritual experience in meditation rather than through Christian doctrines and institutions.

Another leading figure of Christian meditation is John Main (1926-1982), an English Benedictine monk. He first learned the practice of meditation from an Indian monk, Swami Satyananda in Malaya. When he became a monk, he looked into the roots of the Christian monastic tradition and the desert fathers, especially John Cassian. In 1975, Main established the Christian Meditation Centre in London. Laurence Freeman has continued teaching meditation since John Main passed away in 1977. Freeman started the World Community for Christian Meditation in England in 1991. For them, meditation is, “a universal spiritual wisdom and a practice that we find at the core of all the great religious traditions, leading from the mind to the heart. It is a way of simplicity, silence and stillness.” From that time on, both solitary and communal meditation practices have continued to develop in the Roman Catholic Church in the West.

It appears that Zen Buddhist and Hindu spirituality led both Merton and Main to renew Christian meditation practice, creating the disciplines of centering prayer, contemplative prayer and the like, in a global context. Then, some Roman Catholic spiritual leaders looked at the hesychastic

tradition from the Orthodox Church. In Orthodox Christianity, Matta El Meskeen or Matthew The Poor (1919-2006), an Egyptian Coptic Orthodox monk, reawakened this meditation practice in post-modern Christianity. He developed the patristic traditional forms of inward meditation. Besides Matthew The Poor, the resurgence of meditation has been taking place in other areas by other Russian and Greek Orthodox monks and laity; consequently, the practice has spread throughout world.

The spiritual practice of inner stillness can still be found in a few communities and churches in the Anglican and Protestant traditions as well. A very small number of spiritual leaders can trace their Christian traditional spirituality and have revived such ancient Christian meditation practices as hesychasm and lectio divina. David Bosch recognizes that the Church in the West “only too frequently responds by digging trenches and preparing for a long siege” to the contemporary culture, even though the New Age movement and related groups flourish on it. Ken Gnanakan, a prominent Indian theologian and Christian leader, observes that meditation practice has been neglected in modern Western Christianity, misinterpreting it as Hindu or Buddhist spiritual practice. Gnanakan points out the necessity of a theology that addresses the theme of spirituality, which is central to all other themes.  

47 Father Matta El-Meskeen (Matthew The Poor), Orthodox Prayer Life: The Inner Way (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2003), 39-66.
On the other hand, prominent scholars such as Martin Kahler, David Bosch, Andrew Kirk, Stephen B. Bevans, and Roger P. Schroeder recognize the essential role of mission in doing theology. They believe mission is the mother of theology. It can be inferred that a theology of meditation needs to locate where it attaches to the theology of mission. In fact, meditation, one of the spiritual practices, generally highlights the essential nature of quietness and silence, as well as solitude. Contrary to this view, Christian mission is easily commonly understood as activities, or sending people out to the world with assigned tasks such as proclamation, witnessing, social justice, and social work. Theological and practical connections between meditation and mission are rarely encountered under one discipline, and so these two disciplines are sometimes considered mutually exclusive. Even so, the following is an attempt to position meditation within the theological and practical aspects of mission as a part of mission theology.

II. Meditation As Missio Dei’s Inward-Sending Movement

The Latin word for “mission” in English is best translated as “sending.” Even though the word “mission” does not appear in the Bible, it has been widely used in Western Christianity since in the sixteenth century. In fact, the theological background for mission derives from the doctrine of Trinity. David Bosch, an influential missiologist in the twentieth century, understood that the traditional understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity in Western Christianity is: God the Father sending the Son, and God the Father and the Son sending the Spirit. To extend this doctrine further, there is another

“movement” as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are sending the church into the world.\(^{55}\)

From this point of view, there is only one direction of the *missio Dei*’s movement, which flows from the Trinitarian God toward the world (all creation), or to the world through the church. As a consequence, the *missio Dei* is traditionally understood as the Church’s participation in the Trinitarian God’s sending-out active movement to all creation. The goal of mission is to reach the world, the nations, and all creation. In reality though, within Christian doctrine, God is the center of the paradigm, and as such he enables and empowers the balancing of all creation. Therefore, God is not simply the One who saves the world in one direction; rather, he also brings the world back to himself, thus indicating the *missio Dei* is really a two-way directional movement of God reaching out and also bringing back.

The Creator God sends the Spirit of the Triune God towards all creation in order to bring it back towards himself. To put it in different way, the first *missio Dei* movement in God’s salvation plan is found as the Spirit of God sends the church toward all creation in order to make God known, and the second movement of God’s salvation plan is found as the church, through the power of the Spirit, sends all creation toward the Creator God, in order that the creation might come to know God. These two directions of the *missio Dei* concept is uncovered by Jesus Christ in his prayerful dialogue with God the Father for his disciples in John 17. One of the directions of mission for Jesus is to glorify God on earth by finishing the task that is to make the name of God known to those whom God gave him (4, 6). Another direction of mission for Jesus is to be with God and gloried in God’s presence (5). In the same way, the disciples were sent, by Jesus, to the world in order to make the Father’s name known (19) and ‘to be one with God, the Father, and Jesus, the Son, is the purpose of this mission (11).

It can be understood that ‘to be one with God, the Father, and Jesus, the Son, is another direction of *missio Dei*. As a matter of fact, the second *missio Dei* movement is an eschatological sending movement. It is invisible, eternal and can be achieved only by faith alone. On the other hand,
the Christian spiritual practice of meditation is an inner experience of this *missio Dei*’s movement. It is part of the here-and-now experiential reality of salvation. Through the spiritual practice of meditation, the Spirit of the Trinity sends the meditator/Church from the cosmic world to the meta-cosmic world as well as from human culture to God’s culture, so that the meditator/Church becomes converted into the light of the world.

1) Cosmic to Meta-cosmic: Meditation As Territorial Crossing Mission

Traditionally, mission is interpreted as the responsibility or mandate of the Church or Christians to go with the purpose of proclaiming the gospel to a foreign land. History reveals that Roman Catholics were the forerunners who interpreted and used the term “mission” and the Jesuits were the first ones who used that term in order to spread the Roman Catholic faith to non-Roman Catholics in the early seventeenth century. By the end of the eighteenth century, this territorial crossing missionary theology and practice was revived by William Carey in Protestant Christianity. Carey read Matthew 28:18-20 and understood that the verb “go” in the Scripture was the main imperative verb saying, “Go into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. This commission was as extensive as possible, and laid them under obligation to disperse themselves into every country of the habitable globe, and preach to all the inhabitants without exception, or limitation.”

Later, evangelical scholars revisited the Bible and developed the theology of the missionary nature of God and his territorial crossing mission. John R. W. Stott, an influential evangelical theologian, and Walter C. Kaiser, the Colman M. Mockler Distinguished Professor of Old Testament,


reviewed Genesis 12:1-3 and recognized within it the centrality of God’s call to Israel through Abram that they go to all nations with blessing/promise. They also believed that God is calling the Church today to go and announce the gospel in every nation on earth. On the other hand, it seems that for Conciliar Ecumenical and post-Vatican II Roman Catholics, “mission” is more meaningful if they follow Jesus’ example (John 20:21), focusing on peace and justice as they go to the nations.

In any case, the center of traditional missiology, to all appearances, is on God’s outward sending movement, that is the Church, with a global message through Word and deed, is sent to cross the geographical frontiers toward the ends of the world. It is indisputable that the Church is called to be a witness to the nations near and a far in word and in deed. That is a means of biblical, historical, and theological mission. On the other hand, especially in the Old Testament, from time to time, God also calls his people to enter his presence and the people of God turn their faces upon him by entering his presence, or his realm, or his territory (Ex. 28:30). They seek his face (2 Chr. 7:14, Ps. 27:8, Hos. 5:15); mediate upon him (Ps. 77:6), his promise (Ps. 119:148), his love (Ps. 48:9), the Law or his Word (Jos. 1:8, Ps. 1:1, 119:15, 119:23, 119:48), and his wonderful deeds or creation (Gen. 24:63, Ps. 77:12, 119:27, 143:5, 145:5). In the same way, we can understand that God wants us to cross from our cosmic realm to the meta-cosmic or spiritual realm, where we can see him through our spiritual eyes and personal experience.

In the New Testament, the practice of meditation is not noticeably mentioned, but it appears that Jesus often observes the same phenomenon of spiritual practice in a deserted place (Lk. 5:16). He usually prayed to the heavenly Father in a solitary place (Mk. 7:24) in the very early morning while it was still dark (Mk. 1:25). He regularly withdrew from the world and took time with God on the Mount of Olives (Lk. 22:39). He often left his disciples and the crowd and went to a mountainside (Mt. 14:23; Lk. 6:12) or the countryside to pray. It is understandable that, when he was on earth, Jesus crossed from the cosmic realm to the meta-cosmic realm in order to communicate with God the Father, who is in heaven, which is in the spiritual realm.

The author of Hebrews noted: “For Christ did not enter a sanctuary made with human hands that was only a copy of the true one: he entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God's presence (Heb. 9:24). God went across the meta-cosmic realm to the cosmic realm, through his Son, Jesus Christ, in order to show how these two realms are interconnected and crossing each other. Through Jesus’ life style of prayerful meditation in stillness and solitude in prayer, he taught his disciples that one can cross over these two territories through the spiritual practice of stillness.

Moreover, Jesus taught his disciples about the Father in heaven, which we encounter 27 times in the NRSV. He also taught them to address the Father, who is in heaven, when they pray (Mt. 6:9). It appears that only after the mission of “waiting” can the mission of “going” come. Before obeying the Great Commission to ‘go’ to the nations, and experiencing Pentecost’s mystical event, the disciples were called to “wait” for the gift that God the Father promised (Acts 1:4-5). It can be understood that they were instructed to take a time of stillness in their relationship with God through prayerful meditation until the Spirit of God visits in power. In obedience to their Lord Jesus, the disciples went back to Jerusalem and were constantly devoting themselves to prayer in the upper room (Acts 1:2-14). It is expected that the disciples followed Jesus’ way of prayer, they silently entered into the presence of God.
The Bible reveals that the disciples’ mystical experience of Pentecost only happened after taking some time and waiting for the power of God through centering on prayer. The inference here is that, in the apostolic church tradition, the disciples launched their outward geographical-crossing mission only after their inward-crossing mission of the spiritual realm through prayerful meditation. They waited upon the power and wisdom of the Holy Spirit in meditative prayer by means of the interior mission of God in advance of the outward mission of “going” to the nations. They received power and wisdom from God through the Holy Spirit in advance of geographically crossing the nations with the gospel message. It becomes clear that the inward mission of spiritual territorial crossing enhances and empowers the outward mission of physical territorial crossing.

Traditionally, Evangelicals articulate this eschatological movement of mission very well and give their attention to this eschatological reality. On the other hand, Evangelical Christianity is born in the West where there is an action-oriented culture. In the West, spirituality is normally measured by spiritual action and ministry action. For example, John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, is also known as one of the leading figures of evangelism and as a Western spiritual revivalist. He is also well recognized for his balancing of theological reflection based on four essential elements in Christianity: Scripture, reason, tradition and experience. Yet, Wesleyan spirituality started off from his experiential and gracious love of God through justification and sanctification by faith in the Holy Spirit. The purpose of being justified for a person in Wesleyan theology is “to be zealous of good works.” It appears that there is no room for sanctification through experiencing mystical union with God in Wesleyan theology.

Wesley’s holistic view of good works, furthermore, is all works of piety such as prayer, searching scripture, as well as all works of mercy which are related to the body or soul of human beings. To grow in grace or in the image of God and to grow in the mind which is in Jesus Christ, a person needs to be justified and involved in good works. Well-known Wesleyan scholar Howard A. Snyder observes Wesley’s theology of life and ministry

61 John Wesley, Sermon 43, “The Scripture Way of Salvation”.
62 John Wesley, Sermon 43, “The Scripture Way of Salvation”.

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and notes that “the Christian life is lived in the light of eternity—actively, not passively.” “Wesley’s emphasis on grace and on final judgment gave him a dynamic rather than static view of redemption.” One of the disciplines of the Methodist Movement is that “a person could continue as a Methodist only if he or she submitted to Methodist disciplines and lived a life of faith and good works.”63 It is appropriate to say that evangelicalism has strongly focused on the outward-sending message of the *missio Dei* by proclamation of the message of eschatological reality and other outward salvation movements. As a consequence, they gradually neglected to see a inward-sending message as mission.

By tradition, the desert fathers and mothers, many of the saints, as well as many monks and nuns from the Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches, as well as some spiritual leaders from the Protestant Church support and practice the spiritual disciplines of Jesus and the disciples. They admit that by the grace of God and the assistance of the Spirit, they are able to achieve the process of meditation,64 and to have a mystical experience of God.65 In the Orthodox tradition, the spiritual practice of meditation is an inner journey, a spiritual way to enter into the meta-cosmic realm of God, in order to share divine love, energy, and wisdom.66 These spiritual leaders have found the hidden treasure of the *missio Dei* in the process of inward stillness through their first hand experiences. One wonders if the spiritual experience that they have gained is able to fill the gap found in today’s modern Christian spirituality. Does Christian meditation have the possibility to address the

questions the Church is facing in the age of spirituality? If it does, then it carries immense possibilities for mission outreach to a modern generation searching for spiritual experience.

2) Human Culture to God Culture: Meditation As Cross-Cultural Mission

After World War II, missionaries and missiologists from the West were aware of changes in the world’s political culture that brought changes to the religious culture. They realized that the world had become a multi-cultural world through the effects of globalization and the nature of Christianity had become global. Thus, “mission theorists and practitioners adopted more culturally sensitive approaches.” In fact, most parts of Asia and Africa had been multi-cultural communities since the pre-missionary era and missionaries took notice of this and communicated with focused groups within these communities.

Nevertheless, in the post-modern world, missiologists and mission practitioners extensively listened to the phrase “all nations” which is a key part of the Great Commission (Mt. 28:18-20, Mt. 24:14, Acts 1:8), and realized that the emphasis of the Great Commission is not to cross just the geographical boundaries of nation-states; rather, it is to reach “people groups.” As stated by Ralph D. Winter and Bruce A. Koch: “The ‘nations’, Jesus was referring to, are not countries or nation-states. The wording He chose (the Greek word *ethne*) points to the ethnicities, the languages and the extended families which constitute the peoples of the earth.”

As a result, mission leaders rallied around the idea of reaching people groups. “In order to work together strategically, mission leaders have been refining the concept of ‘people groups’ as a rough measure of our progress toward completing the entire task.”\(^{70}\) Hence, the term “mission” is gradually equated with “cross-culture” or “inter-culture.”\(^{71}\) Missiology thus became a theology of crossing anthropological cultural barriers. Andrew Walls, one of the most significant scholars of Christianity, notes “the determining factor in the contemporary Christian situation is the cross-cultural diffusing of the faith.”\(^{72}\)

Bevans and Schroeder recognize the emphasis of “culture” in Protestant Evangelical and Pentecostal mission. They mention that: “the great advantage of this strain of missionary theology is to be found in its power to motivate Christians to undertake explicit evangelizing and cross-cultural missionary work.”\(^{73}\) The document of the National Conference of U. S Catholic Bishops in 1986 also reveals the importance of culture in a dialogical approach to mission and evangelism. The statement reads, “In this work of dialogue and evangelization, the church must be a leaven for all cultures, at home in each culture.”\(^{74}\) While I totally agree with the work of contemporary missiologists who have addressed the various cultural issues that the Church faces in our current postmodern context, the approaches they focus on for doing theologies in context are primarily religious holism, social identity, social change, social anthropology, linguistics, political science, geography, and history.\(^{75}\)

\(^{70}\) Winter and Koch, “Finishing the Task”, 534.


\(^{73}\) Bevans and Schroeder, *Constants In Context*, 346-347.


Still, there are some moral issues that go astray from biblical truth, but are widely acknowledged as truth within the broader society, issues such as same-sex marriage, abortion, and corruption, just to name a few. There may be many more moral and ethical questions in people’s day-to-day activities that the Church needs to address in each cultural context and in its generation. For example, today same-sex marriage has been legalized in twenty-one countries and most of them we formerly known as Christian countries, or missionary sending countries from the West. The acceptance of homosexuality has encroached into Western culture since the new millennium. Since it is legally recognized by various governmental authorities and increasingly influences the rest of the world, it is understandable that the paradigm on homosexuality has shifted within many of the world’s cultures. Some local churches have chosen to follow the world and give some support to this cultural shift. This is one of the many challenging issues for which the Church needs to give a proper answer.

On the other hand, what is accepted by the Western understanding of culture seen as a disease for Asian culture. Another well-known Hindu guru, Swami “Baba” Ramdew, believes that homosexuality is a disease, and he affirms that it is curable. For him, it can be cured through meditation. On the word of the Swami: “It can be treated like any other congenital defect. Such tendencies can be treated by yoga, pranayama and other meditation techniques.” It is interesting that life-change-testimonies of gays through meditation can also be encountered on some internet web sites. I am of the same mind as the Swami, that the Christian practice of meditation is able to help men and women find the reality of their true nature as men and women.


Today’s popular culture of same sex marriage can be overthrown by God’s culture, which is a true image of God that reveals God’s glory in each person.

One influential anthropologist, L. L. Langness states, “Culture is shared behavior and ideas that are cumulative, systemic, symbolic, and transmitted from generation to generation extragenetically.” At the same time, anthropologists also generally believe that culture is changeable. Theologically, God created man and women in his own image and he knows the imperfect nature of human culture in this fallen world, so he has revealed his saving plan from the beginning. One recovers his or her own original image, or the authentic moral image, when he or she encounters God, and this full image of God will be recovered at the end of time.

According to the Scripture, every now and then, the people of God were reminded that they are made in the image of God and crowned with glory and honor (Ps. 8:5, Zech. 12:8, Ps. 82:6, John 10:34-36). In the Old Testament, when the people of God were filled with the Spirit of God, they were filled with wisdom, understanding, knowledge, and all kinds of skills (Ex. 31:3, 35:31). Joshua was filled with wisdom in Deuteronomy 34:9. Micah was filled with power, justice, and might when he was filled with the Spirit of God (Mic. 3:8). It appears that when people become full of the Spirit, they receive wisdom in order to live as the people of God, and receive skills in order to serve God and his people. Since human beings are made in God’s image, they are responsible to follow God’s culture.

In the New Testament, the Apostle Paul taught the early Church to put on Christ, to clothe themselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and not to think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh (Rom. 13:14, Col. 3:12, 1 Cor. 12). This means the Church needs to be united with Christ and to put on the godly characteristics of Christlikeness on a daily basis. The Apostle Paul also taught about spiritual gifts such as knowledge, wisdom, and understanding (Eph. 5:18; Col. 1:9), and the fruits of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23), in order to live according to a godly culture within the world, and other spiritual gifts (Rom. 12 and Eph. 4, 1 Cor. 12) in order to continue the
mission of God. Protestant Evangelicals and Pentecostal Christians widely believe that these spiritual gifts and fruit of the Spirit can be attained by faith. Nevertheless, a faith-oriented gospel message often does not work in a post-modern culture that appeals to mystical experience in disciplinary practice.79

On this point, the theology of meditation in the Orthodox tradition addresses the question as to how one can have an experience of transformation that will proceed to a godly culture. Hesychasm, the Orthodox spiritual practice of inward stillness is normally associated with ascetic practice. For Orthodox hesychasts, the goal and final state of inward silent meditation is theosis (Greek) or deification (Latin), which means, “becoming like God.” Matta El-Meskeen shares his experience of theosis through prayer in this way: “The more the mind is quiet and silent, the more divine truth radiates, shines, and is transfigured within it.”80

At the initial stage, one meditates upon short scripture verses or the Jesus Prayer. Matta El-Meskeen said that at that moment, “all his (her) senses would be controlled by, and his will focused upon, prayer. His (Her) heart would also be spiritually ready for receiving any directions from the Holy Spirit.”81 Then, the mind goes to the heart and it reaches a totally silent stage. At this stage, the hesychast loses his or her self-awareness and experiences the visit of the Divine Soul; the spirit of the hesychast attaches to the Divine Spirit. Finally, he or she comes under the control of the Divine Spirit with shared Divine energy and wisdom, but not the Divine essence. Matta El-Meskeen admits that the whole process of meditation requires the support of Divine grace,82 which we can understand as the grace of the missio Dei, where the Holy Spirit has sent us on an inward journey toward God, but empowering us in our outward mission to the world at the same time.

80 Matta El-Meskeen, Orthodox Prayer Life, 56.
81 Ibid., 41.
82 Matta El-Meskeen, Orthodox Prayer Life, 57.
The phenomenology of Orthodox meditation enlightens the Church in the post-modern world, so that meditation, the inward missionary movement of *missio Dei*, can make visible the invisible image of God (Col. 1:15). Meditation helps empower the meditator to put on a godly culture and Christ’s likeness for missional living and being. Metropolitan Emilianos Timiadis of Sylibria helps us understand the missional spirituality of the monk who practices meditation in this way: “The monk, without saying it, shows to the world that the great virtues which Christ taught are accessible in spite of the obstacles of the world and in spite of the resistance of our fallen nature.”83 That is why monks and early Church Fathers possessed the spiritual gifts, and why one of their significant gifts was discernment. They discerned “the evil of their times, an evil that was much more serious than the heresies and attacks to which the Church was subject.”84 Christian spiritual practice of meditation are one of the solutions for the Church as it encounters the ethical crises of today.

**CONCLUSION:**

Christians believe that God created the universe with his amazing power. One of his incredible creations is the human brain which governs the whole body and mind. He created the human brain in a complex and unique way. Neuroscientists have uncovered that the brain controls millions of our daily functions such as visual and auditory processing, memory, emotions, sensation, learning, as well as motor control. They also notice that there are two hemispheres of a brain so that it has two different ways of thinking and processing information; however, these two halves work together for our daily activities. There is a common conclusion of neurologists: “Both hemispheres of the brain are capable of some kind of awareness, but their methods of experiencing and expressing it are very different. The generation

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84 Ibid., 39.
of human conscious awareness, in all its multilayered fullness, depends upon the harmonious integration of both sides of the brain.”

The analogy of how the brain functions may help us see that there are two ways of thinking, experiencing, and expressing the theology of the missio Dei in terms of its sending movements: outward sending activities and inward sending experiences. When we explore God’s mission from a bird’s eye view, it can be inferred, that modern Christians in the West are gifted in outward action-oriented mission and people in the East are gifted in terms of the inward experiential mission. In fact, God’s mission as a whole has two directions—to the world and to God himself—that the people of God need to use together in harmony. In order to do this, it is high time for the present day Church to balance its outward action based mission with the inward stillness of experiential mission of meditation that people through our age are longing for.