

Penetrating Asia's cultural heartlands with the Gospel
~ A Challenge to Uninvolved Detached Approaches ~

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Introduction

I. Propositional Approach and its Challenges

The heart of our mission: verbal proclamation of the gospel

Problem 1: An Illusion of "Culture-free Pure Gospel"

Conceptual separation between gospel and culture

Extracting a "pure gospel" that transcends time and culture

Focusing on culture free and universal truth rather than incarnated one

Evangelism as proclaiming the purified gospel is culturally latent project

Problem 2: Cultural Superiority lurking under reductionist conviction

The Enlightenment's pursuit of objective and absolute knowledge

Lack of respect toward other culture and religions

Focusing on individual and private sphere rather than corporate communal sphere

Postmodern aversion to "overbearing" evangelism based on rational confident

Problem 3: The worded gospel detached from our life

Separation of the gospel from the presence of the communicator

Word/Deed: neatly worded conceptualized gospel detached from deed of believers

Focusing on how effectively the gospel can be transmitted than how people are transformed by and lived with the gospel

Evangelism can be seen as the *franchising* of the gospel, spreading the gospel contained in the spiritual pill of propositional statements

Problem 4: Conceptualized and unattached gospel enveloped by foreign narratives

Verbal proclamation (proselytizing) may end up telling an entirely different story

Deeds separated from the word are interpreted through common narrative.

Effective transmission of the "culture free" franchising gospel managed by "success story" with market logic.

Discrepancy between the word being spoken and the narrative unconsciously transmitted

II. Social Support Approach and its Challenges

Fundamental issue

The heart of our mission: "evangelism and sociopolitical involvement are both part of our Christian duty"...

Categorical and dualistic view on the evangelism and social involvement

Issues in the context of social involvement of Japanese evangelical churches

Problem 1: Division between action and words

Difficulty of proclaiming the worded gospel in the social support activities

Social service is welcomed as long as the proclamation of the gospel is restricted.

Problem 2: Social actions end up being charged with different words

Conveyed words through the social actions are common to all humankind:

"It is important that we all help each other in times of distress,"

"Life is more important than anything else,"

"It is truly gratifying to help one person at a time, regardless of religion."

The word through social surmise is limited to the average ethical teachings that

transcend age, nationality, culture, and religion.

Problem 3: Invisible and structural barriers between help giver and the recipient

Conscious level: Service is rendered from a position of weakness

Unconscious level: invisible barriers that are formed between help givers and the recipient

III Possibility of Witness

Indispensable importance of a flock transformed by the Lord

Comparison of three approaches interms of

What to Deliver?

Through what? (means)

Acturally What? (truth)

How (direction and attitude for receptors culture)?

	Proclamation	Social Service	Witness
What to Deliver	The Gospel as Absolute Truth	Goods and services needed by the recipients	People who are alive to the Gospel
Means	Organized and "correct" <i>word</i> of the gospel	<i>Actions</i> that serve and support for the receptors' needs	A flock of weak people, kept alive by the Gospel
Truth	proclaiming directly with confidence yet being detached form our life	Practice and show, but not directly tell, being diluted into the common teachings of mankind.	Let the recipients find out the truth, regarding sinful self and grace of the Cross.
Direction	communicate the absolute Truth to those who do not know it. (one-way)	listen to the needs of the recipient, then assist (from two-way to one-way)	in dialogue, the person has questions and is asked. (conversational / two-way)
Culture	Tends to be confrontational or even judgmental	More likely to be receptive and more sympathetic than corrective.	presenting a new way of life while living in the culture. creating new culture together.

A real story took place in Kenya:

A story of a Japanese woman who saved many people from the danger of AIDS

Three things that useful for drastically reducing AIDS in that population.

1. *clay furnace,*
2. *straw sandal,*
3. *kid's songs.*

IV Invisible Power of Witness

Three powers learned from the story: *question, rumor, and shared weakness.*

1) **power of questions**

“Wordless witness” of the people transformed by the Gospel stir up irresistible questions in others

If the witnessed is true, the question for the gospel is powerfull

2) **power of rumor**

the power for penetrating the Gospel was rumor that enabled the early church to spread the message with such vigor.

We must admit that communication by rumor is beyond human planning and strategy

3) **power of shared weakness**

Those testifying to the gospel need not be strong beings, but rather weak ones.

Conclusion

Word without deed and deed without word do not have penetrating power.

Social service provide a wonderful opportunity for witness.

Witness stirs up irresistible question that needs proclaimed Gospel.

Thus, we need both pulpits table where the gospel is proclaimed vertically and directly in words, and we need organized tables that provide social needs to help many people horizontally.

We must find out the importance of small fellowship table where we can see the penetrating power of question, rumormongering, and shared weakness through witness of Christ.

If the witness of those weak, sharing at the table, is the key for the penetration of the Gospel, something must have already begun at hand. "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed."
(Matt.13:31)