

“RESPONSE TO JORGE JULCA AND GIFT MTUKWA”
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Response

It is an honor to respond to these two interesting papers, which touch the common theme of this session but at the same time introduce us to their unique ideas and thoughts, because the authors represent two different parts of our world. Their papers are complimentary but at the same time, they use their own approaches and methods.

Gift Mtukwa shares with us his ideas of incarnational ministry through drawing upon Pauline theology. He discusses the character, the nature, and the goal of the ministry in the light of Paul's mission to Thessalonica. This approach includes word study and careful research of the biblical text. Jorge Julca presents his reflections about Christ as the paradigm for our mission and provides examples of theological perceptions, which are common among people of Latin America. Dealing with traditional images of Christ in Hispanic America, Julca leads us to the Living and Victorious Christ and to the proper understanding of His mission, which Christians are supposed to join as His followers.

In some sense, the papers presented to us address a very interesting issue related to our mission in this world as God's messengers and followers of Christ. What should be our conduct as God's envoys in order that we would be able to mediate God to all nations? How to find a balance when we convey the message about Christ crucified and risen? Julca and Mtukwa remind us of well-known truth that a missionary's identity is inseparable from her or his mission. As Mtukwa puts it, "the manner in which we go is as important as going". This reminds us of the words of Christopher Wright about God's mission in the Old Testament: "a sense of mission, not

in the sense of *going* somewhere but of *being* something."¹ Fortunately, we know our identity. This "*being* something" becomes for us "*being* disciples of Christ" and "*being* like Christ." Therefore, it is very important to know Christ and to understand in what sense we can be like Him. Our knowledge of God will lead us to "perfection" and "maturity" that we usually discuss from our Wesleyan perspective.

In his paper, Jorge Julca points to the sad truth that people from a "nominally Christian continent" do not know who Jesus really is. They follow their traditions instead of the Risen Christ and they worship an image created by their culture instead of the Person who can give them hope and transform their lives forever. What struck me the most is the universality of this problem. People call themselves Christians but their image of Christ, which was formed by their culture, has little in common with the biblical Christ. Being Russian, I can recognize similar misunderstandings, which were traditionally developed in the Eastern part of Christendom. Therefore, if we want as the church to participate in the redemptive mission of Christ in this world we have to contextualize our message, but at the same time, we have to be faithful to the Gospel of the crucified and risen Christ.

Both Mtukwa and Julca argue that to know Christ is vitally important because only our personal relationship with Christ may help us to carry on His mission. Mtukwa's paper takes inspiration in Paul's personal "encounter with Christ." He believes that this event not only influenced Paul's behavior but his whole understanding of missionary work or, as he said, "*modus operandi*" was changed according to "the pattern of Christ." This implies that Paul knew Christ and was able to embody His ministry as a missionary to the Thessalonians. Similarly, all

¹ Christopher Wright, *The Mission of God* (Nottingham, England: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 504.

God's missionaries should "embody cruciformity," which also includes the suffering of Christ's witnesses in this world. One of the best biblical scholars, Howard Marshall, perfectly expressed this idea when he commented on Paul's epistle to Philippians: "Paul wants to know Christ and to gain Christ... This experience includes sharing in the suffering of Christ, becoming like him in his death on the cross (Phil 2:8), experiencing the power of his resurrection, and attaining to the resurrection from the dead."²

It seems that Jorge Julca picks up and develops this idea further when he discusses in his paper "three theological key moments": Christ's incarnation, crucifixion and death, and His resurrection. Julca believes that the knowledge of "who Jesus is" should "link us with His model of mission." As he properly noted, we do not need "*Criollo* Christ" whom people perceived as the one who never lived as an ordinary human being. Therefore, they believe, Jesus is not able to understand the pains and hardships associated with everyday life in this broken world. This is a challenge for us to communicate the message of God and the image of Christ who is fully divine and fully human. Julca shares with us an interesting observation from his local context that shows what may happen when people pay too much attention to the "Christ of the cross" or to the "Christ of the crucifix." They may forget about the image of the triumphant Christ. According to Julca this leads to a distorted image of their Savior. People see Him as the one whom they may "pity and sponsor" rather than the One who can provide the power of resurrection in their lives. Therefore, our participation in God's mission demands our own transformation and a new life, which reflects Christ. As Julca explains using a quotation from Tozer, "this life is possible only from the other side of the cross," the life that "is born of death."

² I. Howard Marshall, *A Concise New Testament Theology* (Nottingham, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 2008), 134-135.

This death means dying to sinful and selfish ambitions, but this also means the resurrection to a new life in Christ, who is the source of our salvation. Christ is the One who sends us and He empowers us for this mission.

Both authors emphasize the centrality of the person of Christ for understanding the mission of God in this world. Although Mtukwa mentions Paul's encounter with the risen Christ, he pays more attention to the incarnation and crucifixion of Christ than to the resurrection. He talks about the "Christ's pattern" in Paul's life, implying the attitude of a servant who loves those whom he serves. This servant is supposed to care for the less favored in our society: for the poor, for the needy, and for the marginalized. Mtukwa describes this as an embodiment of cruciform mission when no deceit or tricks can be used but "only openness and truthfulness". As he explains, the behavior of missionaries should be Christological in a sense of renouncing their rights, which should not be used for selfish desires. In other words, he believes that the messengers of the gospel must exemplify only "Christ cruciform love." Otherwise, their methods will not be consistent with the gospel preached by them.

Jorge Julca adds to this discussion emphasizing the importance of a personal experience of Christ's resurrected power. Every new believer whom we introduce to the Christian God should understand that her or his identity is that of Christ. Despite our nationality, culture or traditions, in which we were raised, we have to share the Gospel of the Living and Victorious Christ who is above all cultures. His Kingdom is open for all people who know Jesus as their Savior and Lord. This is not knowledge about somebody but a personal experience of living relationships with God in whose image we were created. In this sense, Mtukwa's metaphor about Christianity "a mile wide and an inch deep" shows to us what a great mission God has prepared for his true followers. If we want to show others how deep this source of Good News is, then we

have to go through the cross in our life and to rise together with Christ in a new community of His disciples and children. If we say that we know Christ, then our actions and our behavior should witness to this truth. The significance of relational understanding of salvation cannot be overstated. God's mission may become our mission only if we know Him as the One who saves us, who loves us, and who guides us in this life in order that we can bring others to Him.

Conclusion

This was a pleasure to respond to these excellent papers, which provide a deep theological thinking about our mission and identity as Christians. Obviously, as the church, we will encounter different issues in our countries or even continents. However, the main principles, which God gave us in His word, may guide our missionary work all over the world. Our God through His indwelling Spirit is able to empower us that we may reach those who do not know Christ as their Savior in this world. Therefore, our role is to live a new life of obedience to God and to follow Christ in all places where He sends us in order to fulfill His commission: Go and make disciples in all nations!