

Underwood and Mt 28:16-20 & John 20:21

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Abstract

A Protestant Presbyterian missionary, Horace G. Underwood, arrived at Korea in 1885. His own book *The Call of Korea* written in 1906 is his reflection of twenty-three year's mission accomplishments. This book is one of the earliest first-hand information with which we can get some clues about his theology and view of Korea. I will examine his book and analyze two missionary texts (Mt 28:16-20 & John 20:21) to evaluate Underwood's missionary work. Throughout this essay, my questions are: What involves the "sending" of missionaries? What is biblical mission if any?

The earliest Protestant missionary was Allen, an American medical doctor, and came to Korea from China in 1864. He closely worked with the royal palace and established a good relationship with it by curing one of the royal family members. Then, a Protestant Presbyterian missionary, Horace G. Underwood arrived at Korea in 1885 (Davies, 795-820). He was one of the earliest American missionaries, who worked hard to Christianize Korea. His own book *The Call of Korea* written in 1906 is his reflection of twenty-three year's mission accomplishments. This book is one of the earliest first-hand information with which we can get some clues about his theology and view of Korea. I will examine his book and later analyze two missionary texts (Mt 28:16-20 & John 20:21) to evaluate Underwood's work. Throughout this essay, my questions are: What is to involve the "sending"? What is an original context? What is biblical mission if any?

Underwood: *The Call of Korea*

In fact, the huge wave of foreign missionary work in Korea has left indelible marks on Korean soil. The

vestiges of the missionary work permeate all social, political mindset of the subjected people. Hutchison rightly observes the American mission history in many different ways. (Hutchinson, 1-42). For example, there is binary opposition between bright and dark, good and evil, modernized and un-modernized, civilized and non-civilized, and Christians and pagans. Evangelization goes side by side with the economic, political program as Underwood writes in his book: “commerce and the church go hand in hand” (Underwood, 24).

His book *The Call of Korea* gives us some clues about his sense of mission, which reflects a larger scheme of the American church and a social, political modernization program. Therefore it is quite meaningful to glean from his book some of his thoughts about mission and Korea. This book’s subtitle *Political-Social-Religious* implies that he was interested in politics and society of Korea even though missionaries in Korea decided not to be involved in politics of Korea at that time because of political situations of imperial fight. His book starts with the sketch of Korean history, people, life, religion, and ends with the proud accomplishments of the mission in Korea. Even though this book is not the earliest writing, it certainly gives us some impression that he was a child of mission, - an American errand to the world, especially to Korea in the late nineteenth century. His book preface begins:

In the Providence of God it was my privilege to be among the very first missionaries to go to the Hermit Nation, and He has permitted me during the past twenty-three years to be present and to watch with keen interest the progress of His kingdom and the developments of the work, and to have some little share in it. We have seen His Church grow from nothing to a body of believers over one hundred thousand strong (Underwood, 5).

Underwood thinks that Korea is the Hermit Nation. Yes, it is true to him but it is not true to Koreans. Korea is not the Hermit Nation because for a long history of five thousand years Korea has lived in cooperation with or sometimes in conflict with neighboring nations such as China (many different powers) and Japan. Korea played a central role in its important geopolitical context. Korea, located in between China and Japan, has been a cultural, religious forerunner to Japan. Korea is very well known throughout its history in this region. So his view of the Hermit Nation is quite resonant with Columbus' Discovery of Americas.

Therefore, it would not be surprising that this book was published throughout the Western countries: New York, Chicago, Toronto, London and Edinburgh. I can imagine how Underwood's readers at that time felt sympathy with Korea, which is treated as primitive, less-civilized people of the Hermit Nation. I like to quote more from his book about his primitive view of Korea as such:

Each farm and farmer was almost absolutely self-dependant. ...
With such a primitive people, great wealth, as we understand it, would not exist (35).

Given an ignorant people with an ideal Paternal Monarchy and ...(37).

As has been seen, the Koreans are a primitive people and their furniture is also primitive and meager (51).

As in most semi-civilized and barbarous countries, ... and thus the blind in Korea are the diviners, the fortune-tellers... (93).

Underwood several times uses "primitive," referring to Korean people and even to Korean furniture. The use of this word is not accidental but it shows a typical view of any colonial, imperial power when each power enters a new colonial space. At that time, America was on the high rise of modernization and

civilization, whose harbinger was the Church and the missionaries. “Primitive” in this context was used with connotation of less-developed, less-civilized, and thus Koreans become a secondary people. A hidden ideal laid in this word is that Korea needs American power in the form of western modernization. Even archaic design of Korean furniture is also primitive to him. In fact, Koreans can have a different sense of design informed by a long history of our people and rich culture. It is not a matter of whether or not furniture or people are primitive. At this point, I am reminded of a story of women washing their clothing: the introduction of washing machines into a traditional village suddenly deprived women of gathering for their hand-washing at the common place of river or stream. In old time when there were no washing machines, women came out to wash clothes with hands and talked with their friends. They formed a community of loving and working. So we ask: which is a better life between washing machine-led convenient life without having a sense of women’s solidarity and the old form of life without the washing machines?

Underwood is also quite clear about his role as an errand to the world, especially about the economic connection with his home America:

In 1904 there was a sudden marked increase in imports, bringing up a total of \$8,800,000, but this was due to almost entirely to over \$2,000,000 of railway material for construction of new lines. This was mainly from America, and it was with some feelings of national pride that American missionaries rode in cars made at Wilmington, Del., drawn by a Baldwin locomotive, on rails from the Carnegie works, nailed to Oregon ties with American spikes. Thus do commerce and the Church go hand in hand, here as elsewhere, in forwarding His kingdom and spreading abroad the knowledge of the Prince of Peace (24).

He takes pride in riding American cars but that is understandable. But the problem is his view of mission:

“thus do commerce and the Church go hand in hand ... in forwarding His kingdom ... the Prince of Peace.”

This saying strongly suggests that he believe that the modernization or civilization is part of the church mission. Similarly, he thinks how modernization would help the church’s propagation of the gospel:

Telegraph and telephone lines now connect the main cities of the country with the capital and with each other. All of these tend to eliminate time and distance and to aid in the proclamation of the Gospel and to speed the feet of the messengers of Peace and Glad Tidings (43).

It should be noted that “to eliminate time and distance” can annihilate Korean culture and life in a different way as I pointed out value judgment. Here Underwood views the gospel as weapon to conquer the evil Korea. See the phrase “messenger of Peace and Glad Tidings.” Actually, he uses word like “conquest” in several places. In reflecting on his mission success in Korea, he used the phrase: “a constant and rapid conquest by the Gospel” (13). In another place, “to capture this race for Christ means the early conquest of the whole world” (43). I cannot close my eyes and mouth when Underwood attacks Korean religions and culture as primitive and evil in the mode of binary opposition:

It seems to me that I can see plainly before me to-day a new Korea—a nation emancipated, completely emancipated, politically, intellectually, spiritually, from a thraldom of misrule, ignorance, and superstition—a Christian Korea (125).

Underwood thinks that Korea must be liberated through Christianity because Korea is full of misrule, ignorance, and superstition. Actually, we find here general failure of mission in Korea because missionaries chose not to intervene in the matter of justice in Korea even when they hear cries of Korean people under the Japanese colonial rule. So the political atmosphere was clear that Japanese imperialism was engulfing

Chosun sooner or later. Even after a formal annexation of Chosun by Japan in 1910, missionaries were silent about Korean cries for liberation from Japan. In fact, the Presbyterian Missionary Council made a statement on the relationship between Church and State:

We the clergy are determined not to meddle in the political, and national affairs. There exist treaties between Korea and our countries. We abide by the agreements in those treaties. The ecclesiastical affairs and the political ones are not identical. We have taught our people that we do not get together at church to treat the political affairs, neither is the church to interfere in them. Koreans do not cease to be citizens of Korea even after becoming Christians. Therefore we exhort them to be loyal to the emperor without disobeying God's word, to obey the magistrates and to observe all the laws. The church ought not to induce the individual Christians to participate in the party politics, nor ought it to dissuade them from doing so. The church is not responsible for the mistakes and violations they made during their political actions. The church is not a place for politics, therefore, the church buildings and Christian schools are to be used for the cause of religion, not for the politics. Christians should not meet at church to discuss the political affairs, not to mention at the parsonage (Yang, 113).

Situations in Korea can be compared to the slaves Israelites kept in Egypt. God heard their cries and agony.

Where are God's voices in Korea? Underwood's emancipation was limited to kind of *docetic*, individual salvation. He continues to downplay Korean religions in the same mode:

It must be acknowledged that all three of the Korean faiths, or better, superstitions or philosophies, have accomplished very little in giving any real moral tone to the nation (95).

The Korean Shamanism peoples the world with spirits, demons, and gods, good and evil; in the main evil. The common belief looks upon these spirits as generally conspiring against the welfare of man (85).

The Shamanism is the most obstinate enemy that the missionaries have to meet in Korea. ... His work is simply to hold up Christ and Him crucified, and in His presence no other faith can live (90).

The Korean are said to be a people without a religion. Certainly they do not seem very religious. They have very few temples and shrines. ... and various influences have combined to render their faith in their old religions cold and weak and their service formal and less than half-hearted (77).

Finally, Underwood sees himself as an errand to the world, and to Korea. He quotes a former

Minister of the Interior (Chosun) trying to show how America is important to Korea:

The spread of Christianity is the hope of my country. About what your people say in regard to heaven and hell and a hereafter and Jesus Christ, I do not know, I have not studied; but I have noted that all the great countries of the world are Christians, and I believe, if the people of my country become Christian, my country, too, will advance (39-40).

Underwood seems to be confident about his role as a cultural and economic advancer of America as he

says:

Not only is this so, but in a marvelous way the hearts of the people have gone out to the Americans and the American missionaries in that land. The Korean, from even the Emperor and the highest official down to the lowest coolies, trusts the American and the American missionaries. Certainly the open door is plain before the Church, and in a marvelous way through His providential workings God is saying, "Go work to-day in my vineyard" (149).

Underwood ends central chapter *Mission in Korea* with this paragraph, which shows his great sense of

errand to the world, as a pioneer of the American church to the frontier:

To-day's is Korea's crisis hour. To the American Church in a peculiar way has been given the opportunity of winning this nation for Christ, and it is for the Church in America to say whether she will take advantage of the present opportunity or not (150).

Analysis of Two Texts

Mt. 28:16-20

Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age" (RSV).

The so-called Great Commission, 28:16-20, is one of the favorite passages oft-cited by evangelists and foreign missionaries. Especially in the context where Jesus commands his disciples last time, many people treat this passage as Jesus' last command, emphasizing the *going* to the nations, making disciples and baptizing all people. Let us look at a narrative location of this passage.

A Narrative Location of Ch. 28

A main character of the gospel is Jesus, the son of David (1:1), who is born as Emmanuel (1:23), going through Galilean ministry (4:12-18:35) and the passion narrative (chapters 26-27) in Jerusalem, and now this character reaches a narrative climax in chapter 28. The point of climax comes from Jesus' resurrection on the one hand, and from the narrative plots on the other hand. In brief, Jesus, from the very birth itself, was to be born as Emmanuel (God-be-with-us), and this Emmanuel had to live for and serve the oppressed and the poor, challenging the imperial mission and religious authority. The Emmanuel life of Jesus was to end with victory, because God raised him, which is powerfully narrated in

chapter 28. God resurrects him. Lastly, Jesus declares his becoming Emmanuel, as a form of sure promise that “I am with you always.” Emmanuel of Jesus’ birth ends with Jesus’ promise of Emmanuel with his people. Now, Jesus clearly says: “I am with you always.” Jesus is born, lived, suffers, dies, and is raised, as Emmanuel.

The important backbone of the plot is a kingly Messiah. In fact, from the earlier Magi’s story (2:1-12), the reader is told about Jesus’ kingship that Herod tried to destroy. Jesus is pre-known for king by such eminent men, the Magi. Jesus is portrayed as a Davidic, messianic king, who was doing this work through proclaiming God’s kingdom, not Caesar’s, teaching God’s righteousness, healing the sick, and forgiving sinners. Jesus’ as a king and Messiah is confirmed with resurrection of God’s power against the imperial, demonic and destructive power. Jesus is God’s agent and manifestation of God’s power. Within chapter 28, there is a fight of powers: God’s power against anti-God’s (imperial) power. God’s power is manifested with a great earthquake, and angel’s glorious appearance. In the meantime, the guards, representing the imperial power, go to the authority of Jerusalem, with the governor involved, take action against God’s power to cover up the story of Jesus’ resurrection. The final solution to that fight is Jesus as authority and power, and so Jesus charges his eleven disciples to continue his Emmanuel ministry, for which he came and now leave it to his disciples, promising his presence among them all the time. Jesus is concrete power and presence to live and to be lived through his disciples. In fact,

Jesus' final promise for the eleven disciples is Emmanuel: "I am with you always, to the close of the age" (28:20).

Reevaluation of the Great Commission

As seen from the above literary analysis, Jesus' mission can be a harbinger of justice and peace, fighting against the evil and the Empire. So the important job for the disciples is to continue Jesus' job – bringing justice and righteousness. The command form of "make disciples" (*mathethusate*) is to be understood in the context of Jesus' ministry of justice. Making disciples is not to convert people into Christianity or teaching them a set of doctrines or telling them how to become nice Christians.

"Go" in verse 19 is not an imperative but a participle, which means that "go" does not have an imperative force to the "going". The emphasis should be placed on "making disciples" which is an imperative form. But in evangelist circles, "go" is too much emphasized; that is why they GO to the foreign countries, believing that they have something to offer, for example, modernization. This GO accompanies their superiority over against other cultures: GO to Asia, Africa, Latin America, and then convert people there by baptizing them and teaching them necessary faith doctrines. Further, they seem to say: "all our mission work is guaranteed by Jesus who promises that he will be with our mission work always."

Furthermore, the translation of *ethne* appears to be nations in most of English translations, thus making it “make disciples of all NATIONS.” This political entity of nations became the object of mission. But the Greek term *ethne* does not connote a political entity of nations; rather it is close to people. But by making *ethne* a political term, evangelists and missionaries think they have tremendous power to cross any boundaries of the nations freely.

What then should be taught? Verse 20a reads: “teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.” What Jesus commanded is to live righteously, resisting all forms of evil and religious and political corruption. Many of Evangelists, missionaries, teachers, and preachers teach what they believe the best thing is often mixing the gospel with oppressive culture, or spiritualizing the message of Jesus without living out the gospel here and now.

John 20:21

Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I send you (RSV).

From a postcolonial reading, 20:21 can be weapon to invade other culture or country in the name of the Father, according to the logic of God-Jesus-disciples hierarchy. Disciples are special because Jesus sends them. Musa Dube points out the problematic of John’s worldview that the *logos* supercedes all other forms of culture, people, and religions (Dube, 224-245). The more problematic is an actualization of such a

reading by colonists. I cannot deny the fact that John's gospel contains the colonial impetus to other cultures and religions. But at the same time I can read Jesus' mission differently from my own experience, and also this reading makes sense from within the whole gospel as well. My reading lens is to ask the essential question behind Jesus' message in verse 20:21: "What is a meaning of the "sending" by the Father and Jesus? Why do they send for what? Jesus even speaks first "Peace be with you." What does this peace greeting have to do with this sending? Let me address these questions one by one. First, the meaning of the Father's sending of Jesus can be understood in two places. In the prologue of John, God sent Jesus, who came as the flesh. So the word became flesh (1:14), and later on Jesus confirms his sense of emissary by saying that his food is to do the will of God: "My food is to do the will of him who has sent me, and to accomplish his work" (4:34) (Kostenberger, 204). Interestingly enough, Jesus offers his flesh and blood as food for us in 6:51-56:

I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh." The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" So Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day; for my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them. *Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me.* This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like that which your ancestors ate, and they died. But the one who eats this bread will live forever" (NRSV).

Jesus offers us to eat his flesh and blood because it is true bread and drink, which means we have to live like

Jesus who does the will of God to the point of death (Erdmann, 207-226). Second, why do they (God, Jesus) send? John's vision is to live life full of abundance (10:10-11), which has to go through death (12:25) – self-sacrificial love for others (15:13). The purpose of the sending is not to teach but to die to live and to do the will of God. So any acts or teachings that do not advocate life (flesh and blood) betrays this purpose of sending in John. Third, Jesus greets with peace after resurrection. Peace cannot be brought by war or killing people even when enemies are evil. Peace of Jesus is the result of self-dying for others – which is the best love praised by Jesus (15:13).

Misunderstanding of the Sending: from Korea to the world

In a way, the dream of Underwood through his book *The Call of Korea* came true when Korean missionaries as errands to the world do the same things that Underwood did a century ago in Korea. What they take is an ardent faith with the fervent support from the Korean church. They easily build the local church in mission field with money sent by the Korean church. In under-developed countries, they perform cultural, educational duties in teaching them to be civilized –like Koreans. Korean churches support them because they think foreign mission is the only lifeblood of their faith and the church. The hidden goal behind strong mission-oriented policy is to feel good about the church's activity. They get their name to be known by local culture and the church. They work hard to convert local people. They GO to teach, make disciples, and baptize them but do not learn from the local culture. They also do not relate the mission with local politics and social justice. The primary and sole concern is to propagate the cheap, spiritual gospel that

does not have to do with sociopolitical world in mission field.

The Korean Church even today feel that Koreans are chosen to do sacred God's mission work through them, once Americans did. They think that God is using Korea at the last harvest time. They are very committed errand to the world. They go everywhere. See the following statistics about Korean churches and missionaries (web):

In 1982 there were 321 Korean Protestant missionaries. By 1992 that number had grown to 2,576. On May 25, 1995, the South Korean Church dedicated 105,000 young people for at least two years of mission service. Another 3,000 Korean missionaries are now being trained to go into China.

The one million Koreans in northern China, in what Koreans call the Kirim-Song area, are experiencing revival; about 100,000 are now believers.

Toward a New Mission

Thus far I reviewed and critiqued the earlier mission work of Underwood in Korea in the late nineteenth century, and searched for a meaning of the mission from two texts (Matthew 28:18-20; John 20:21). Also, I problematized the Korean mission movement, which is a replica of the American mission work in Korea. In this section, I will propose a new mission concept in the two texts, and from a postmodern, postcolonial, Korean perspective. Now let me suggest three things for a new mission. First of all, as Cardoza-Orlandi suggests, mission is not the only work of God. The work of mission, done with good or bad will, is part of social, political web. The church's sending out of the missionaries is not the only form of God's work in foreign countries. I often hear from the church leaders that the church's mission is to propagate faith and to

convert people into Christianity. Or some liberals insist on the social reform and justice. Either spectrum of mission cannot be exhaustive in God's work in this world. God uses politicians, economists, engineers, medical doctors, scholars, farmers, traders, miners, and all, all people. The Christian -mission cannot do all of this. However differently mission may be defined, we should recognize that mission is not everything. As the western mission history witnesses mission failure in colonized world, mission cannot annihilate local culture and religion.

Second, we have to reclaim God's mission, not the church's or Christian's. Cardoza-Orlandi put this (Cardoza-Orlandi, 45):

Mission is the participation . . . This phrase indicates that mission is not a mental state, or a desire or aspiration, or an activity of reflection or planning. Mission is "to participate," that is, to take an active part in the job another is doing. It implies uniting oneself with another or others to complete a task or determined action; it is to share in completing a job.

Mission is God's. As we discussed mission texts of Matthew and John, the message of sending is not to subjugate people and culture into Christianity. Matthew's portrayal of Jesus' mission is to make disciples who should perform the work of Jesus: to bring justice into the world in the midst of all kinds of evil. In John's Jesus also, the central message is conveyed through the metaphor of the flesh and blood: Jesus' food is to do the will of God. It is clear that Jesus does not promote his own name or agenda or whatsoever. Jesus lived dying for others, never being arrogant with the lowly and the poor. Jesus lived God's will because Jesus obeyed God's mission. If God is sender, we should know who God is. God is not only the God of Christians but also of all people. God does not stay inside the churches or cathedrals. God certainly transcends all and also God is everywhere, working in all cultures.

Third, mission should be mutual between senders and receivers. Both parties should humbly learn. No one can teach the one way. As Underwood wrote his impression and view of Korea, Korea was the object of mission, which was forced to take an American model of modernization in the name of Christianity. Korea was viewed as primitive: from people to furniture. In other words, missionaries usually come to teach or to give something without expecting to receive something from the mission field. They all come with cultural superiority and try to convert other people into American way of life and religion: individualistic, spiritualistic, otherworldly faith. I wonder if many missionaries would go not to give something but to learn and share life together. It will be fascinating to see how God is working in other peoples.

Likewise, from John 12:44, 49-50, we can learn “mutual participation” between the Father and the Son. Jesus never claimed he stood on his own but always made it clear that his mission is to do the will of God, which is to give life for others. But the question is how we can discern God’s will. If every missionary or Christian claims that he or she is sent by God, and therefore forces others to follow specific rules or guidelines, what should be a basis of discernment? That should be eternal life based on God’s commandment as Jesus speaks in 12:44, 49-50:

Then Jesus cried aloud: “Whoever believes in me believes not in me but in him who sent me . . . for I have not spoken on my own, but the Father who sent me has himself given me a commandment about what to say and what to speak. And I know that his commandment is eternal life. What I speak, therefore, I speak just as the Father has told me.

Eternal life, which is quite different from individualistic, otherworldly life, has to do with God's commandment, which is summarized to love, giving life, and dying for others (12:25; 15:13). As pointed out, the question is how to believe Jesus (the one who is sent). Jesus insists repeatedly that his work is God's and the criteria of his agency should be based on God's commandment. This passage implies the tension between Jesus and his audience because people do not seem to trust Jesus. So we also have tension between the proclaiming person (or missionary) and the proclaimed. Both should be judged according to God's commandment of loving and dying.

Conclusion

As part of cultural studies, I traced back to the root of Protestantism in Korea by looking at Underwood's book, and I found that he was a faithful errand to the world, inspired by the American ideal of individualism and modernization. It is a real joy and a learning moment to read a book written a century earlier, which contains the author's worldview and ideology. More importantly, his worldview and ideology is not purely personal or individual. Rather, they also come from a larger scheme of society that supports missionaries.

Maybe Underwood never imagined that a century later a child of his mission works in Korea would sharply critique his work from a postmodern, postcolonial perspective. In this regard, history is fair. But his legacy of mission work has left indelible marks on Koreans, who would then need a long time to erase or revise some of the unwanted remnants of the mission legacy he created. For the hope of correction, I examined two biblical texts both from a literary and Korean perspective. These texts show that mission is

deeper than we normally think that it is a foreign mission or a specific form of God's work. I suggested that one criterion of good mission has to do with life giving through dying. Lastly, I proposed a new mission model partly drawn by Cardoza-Orlandi and from the two texts I discussed. The kernel of a new mission model should be based on mutual supporting, giving, and sharing of life (flesh and blood). So before starting any action, either in local communities or international mission fields, self-examination is needed to see what he/she is concerned with/about, to see one's capacity to learn (not just teach) and share life with others.

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