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The Doctrine of Regeneration in the Second Century

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Having been raised within the evangelical community since birth, and having ‘gone forward’ at a Billy Graham crusade at the age of nine, there has never been any question in my mind as to what it means to be ‘born again’. However, since having begun to dabble in historical theology, the question has often occurred to me: ‘I wonder if Ignatius or Justin or Irenaeus understood [John 3:7](#) as I understand it, and if not, why not?’.

The purpose of this paper is not to critique twentieth-century evangelicalism’s doctrine of regeneration but to ponder this issue: if the idea of the ‘new birth’ is as foundational to the Christian faith, and the experience of the ‘new birth’ as central to the Christian life, as we evangelicals believe them to be; and if our (evangelical) view of regeneration is correct, as I presume most of us are convinced that it is; then why is it not more evident in the traditions of the sub-apostolic and early patristic Church?

There are two reasons that I have chosen to examine the second century in particular. First, the person of Irenaeus provides us with an appropriate and convenient focal point. He lived and wrote at the close of the period and was the pre-eminent systematic theologian of the century and arguably the first in the history of the Church. Furthermore, his greatest contribution was in the area of soteriology. Second, the chronological proximity of our primary sources to the age of the apostles should provide us with as faithful a representation of apostolic tradition as possible. For example, since he was a disciple of Polycarp who was a disciple of John,¹ Irenaeus stands third in an uninterrupted line of succession of apostolic influence and tradition (written and oral).

However, since no theology is formulated in a vacuum, we must first step back and consider several of the significant factors that would have influenced the formation of a second-century doctrine of [p. 100](#) regeneration. These include (1) Scripture, (2) mythology, (3) pagan religion and (4) the Church.²

¹ Irenaeus makes reference to this relationship in *Against Heresies (AH)*, III.3.4; as does Eusebius in *Ecclesiastical History (EH)*, V.20.4–7.

² Due to the constraints of time and space, we shall not at this time discuss Judaism or Hellenistic philosophy, two additional factors that had an impact on the formulation of patristic theology.

FACTORS IN THE SECOND-CENTURY DOCTRINAL FORMULATION³

Scripture

The specific term which is translated 'regeneration' (*palingenesia*) occurs only twice in the New Testament: once in [Matthew 19:28](#), with reference to the cosmic renewal which is to take place at the end of the age; and once in [Titus 3:5](#), referring to spiritual regeneration, or rebirth, as an aspect of personal salvation. However, the idea of regeneration can be found throughout the New Testament ([John 1:12-13](#); [3:1-10](#); [Galatians 4:23, 29](#); [James 1:15-18](#); [1 Peter 1:3, 23](#); [1 John 2:29](#), for example).

The concept of spiritual regeneration was a familiar theme in the second-century Church and perhaps the single most significant factor in its influence was the multiple reference to it in the writings of the Apostle John. We shall limit our discussion to a general review of several key Johannine texts.⁴

(a) [John 1:12-13](#) According to this verse, the fact of 'receiving' Christ as Messiah and 'believing' in him as the Son of God served as entitlement to the status of 'children of God'. The word for 'children' (*tekna*) is derived from the verb *tiktein* (to beget), and thus conveys the idea of being begotten by God himself. In verse [13](#), John further emphasizes that being born of God has nothing to do with natural human reproduction but is a supernatural expression of the power of God. It is worth noting that the imagery of birth employed in these passages is certainly such as would be universally understood! Although there is certainly a great deal of mystery regarding the miracle of birth, there is little question as to the end result. It is clear [p. 101](#) that Jesus and the Gospel-writer were attempting to communicate a wonderful truth that would be easily understood by all.

(b) [John 3:1-8](#) In this passage, Jesus articulates the theme in his dialogue with Nicodemus. The passive form of the verb in vv. [3, 7](#) can be translated either 'to be born' or 'begotten', which refer to the role of the mother or father respectively. The adjective *anōthen* can be variously translated as 'again', 'anew' or 'from above'. In this case, it may be purposely ambiguous in order to convey both senses.⁵

The query of Nicodemus in v. [4](#) clearly suggests that he understood Jesus to be speaking in terms of being 'born again'. In an intensely debated response in v. [5](#), Jesus appears to disregard the question and proceed to re-emphasize the necessity of spiritual rebirth⁶ as a prerequisite to entering the Kingdom of God, or inheriting eternal life.

In John's First Epistle, the idea of spiritual rebirth is related to a rich variety of other moral themes. (1) [1 John 2:29](#) points out that the one who bears a resemblance to the

³ This approach is largely due to the Influence of Gene A. Getz, *Sharpening the Focus of the Church* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1974), which suggests that an accurate perception of the contemporary Church can only be realized by viewing it through the three lenses of Scripture, history and culture. Certainly the same could be said of the historical Church, as well.

⁴ A more exhaustive exegesis of these and other texts may be found in Peter Toon, *Born Again: A Biblical and Theological Study of Regeneration* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1987), pp. 24-36.

⁵ Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, trans. William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), p. 76.

⁶ The second century fathers are essentially unanimous in their understanding of this verse as referring to water baptism and spiritual regeneration.

nature of God (in terms of righteousness) does so as a result of having been born of God. (2) [1 John 3:9-10](#) explains something of the nature of spiritual regeneration: that the seed of the Divine nature resides within the one 'born again', rendering that person incapable of again living comfortably or constantly in sin. (3) [1 John 4:7](#) identifies love as a primary evidence of one's regeneration and manifestation of the Divine nature imparted to the one born of God. (4) [1 John 5:1](#) establishes the necessity of personal faith as the human essential for spiritual regeneration to take place.

What, or how much, of our retrospective insight into these representative texts regarding the meaning of spiritual regeneration registered with those who followed Christ in the second century? That must be considered later; for there were other factors that influenced their thinking.

Mythology

Perhaps more so than in our day, there existed widely-regarded myths, many of ancient and uncertain origin, that were preserved through literature and oral tradition and were used to illustrate certain [p. 102](#) fundamental beliefs. The richness of the ancient mythology that relates to spiritual regeneration bears witness to the fact that the early Christians were not the first (or only) people to consider it. It is likely that when a second-century Gentile first heard the words 'Ye must be born again' memories of a host of regenerational myths bombarded his mind and influenced his initial understanding of what those words meant. Among the most widespread of these myths were:⁷

The Phoenix Perhaps the most universal symbol of rebirth, this mythical bird is preserved in Persian, Greek, Jewish and Oriental literature. With minor variations, the phoenix is described as a large bird of great beauty, of which only one exists at a time. It lives for 500–1000 years, feeds on the air and never sets foot on earth from the time of its birth until the hour of its death.

At the end of its life, this magnificent bird, laden with spices from the East, flies into Egypt, through the entrance to the temple at Heliopolis, alights upon the altar and builds its own funeral pyre nest. The heat of the sun interacting with the aroma of the spices produces the flames that reduce the phoenix to ashes. On the next day a new phoenix, already feathered, emerges from the ashes, salutes the priest and flies away.

Historically, this myth has been understood as illustrative of the flight of the human spirit and its dissolution followed by its reemergence with fresh vigour.⁸

The Wheel of Rebirth The religious potency of this mystical tradition is evident in Greek literature beginning from the 5th-4th century BC. The wheel represents the imperishable self with a motionless centre, while the turning of the wheel is symbolic of the cycles of existence (life and death, light and darkness). As the wheel turns, life is perpetually renewed out of the opposite state (death), giving expression to the Eastern notion of metempsychosis.

Psyche and the Butterfly The Greek goddess, Psyche, the name also given to the soul, was often illustrated as a butterfly in Greek art because of the change that takes place from the caterpillar to the butterfly stage. The sleep of death in the tomb-like chrysalis followed [p.](#)

⁷ These examples have been gleaned from a number of 'mythologies'.

⁸ This myth is also related in the early Christian literature; Clement of Rome, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, XXV, (ANF, V. I, p. 12) and Lactantius, *The Phoenix*, (ANF, V. VII, pp. 324–326), for example.

103 by the miraculous change in form, function and behaviour illustrates the mystery of metamorphosis, the eternal transformation of old forms into new through the process of rebirth.

The Serpent The snake has since ancient times been a symbol of death and rebirth due to its annual hibernation, shedding of its skin and reappearance as a new creature. As it freed itself from the constricting, seamless, outgrown encasement, the snake was thought to be undergoing the throes of death before rebirth. It is these regenerative characteristics of the snake that are reflected in the *caduceus*, the serpent staff of Hermes and Mercury, the emblem of the healing profession. The serpent's eggs also were symbolic of rebirth and regeneration for the Greeks, Indians and Chinese.

The Ever-Resurrecting Sun Greek and Roman mythology is full of allusions to the sun as a symbol of universal rebirth, due to its daily setting and rising and its annual resurrection at the vernal equinox. Numerous legends of semi-divine heroes (Orpheus, for example) who flourished before being killed and reborn are related in the context of the ever-resurrecting Sun.

Other Religions

Gnosticism The term Gnosticism designates a widespread syncretistic theosophical and philosophical religious movement current in the early centuries of the Christian era, which was characterized by the notion that salvation is achieved through knowledge (*gnosis*). Beyond that very general definition, it is difficult to speak specifically, because of the extreme complexity and diversity within and among the Gnostic schools.

What is most relevant to our present discussion, however, is that according to Gnostic anthropology there are three classes of people: (1) Hylics, dominated by the physical body, concerned only with the cares of life on earth, and incapable of salvation; (2) Psychics, dominated by the soul and therefore also subject to the lower powers, but with the potentiality for being saved; and (3) Pneumatics, those in whom the divine spark has been rekindled, and who are therefore destined to be liberated from the powers of this present world in order to rejoin the divine world from which they have fallen. This is the level of existence to which all Gnostics aspire; and such liberation takes place only through the mystical experience of illumination or reception of Knowledge. It would not be surprising for an unsuspecting p. 104 young Christian to equate such an event with the 'born again experience'. However, Gnosticism's emphasis on esoteric knowledge (*gnosis*) as the means of salvation was in sharp contrast to orthodox Christianity's emphasis on faith (*pistis*).

This religious movement sought to infiltrate the Christian community from the time of Simon Magus ([Acts 8:9–23](#)) and was most successful in the person of Valentinus, who was almost declared Bishop of Rome in AD 140.

Mystery Cults Among the most popular religious forms in the Graeco-Roman world during the first and second centuries were the mystery religions. Some of these had been imported from Egypt and the East, while others were indigenous to Greece. Those of which we know most include the Eleusinian mysteries, the cult of Dionysius and the cult of Mithras. These religious systems promised salvation and immortality to those who through the rites of initiation would enter into a 'secret experience'.

The power of these cults lay in the secrecy with which they guarded the 'mystery'. Through mystical re-enactments of every conceivable human and natural activity (death, marriage, sacrifice, sexual acts, battle, the harvest), the initiate was supposed to come by degrees to participate in the divine life and ultimately achieve immortality.

As with Gnosticism, many features of Christianity were adopted into the mystery cults, and it is likely that 'mystery-thinking' also had an influence on the early Christians.

The Church

The influence that the institutional Church had on the formulation of the doctrine of regeneration is of a different order from those already mentioned. Certainly a primary function of the Church at the end of the apostolic age was faithfully to preserve and proclaim the teachings of Jesus and the Apostles. However, partly because of the infiltration of non-Christian influences with their false prophets and teachers, it became necessary for the Church to regulate itself more closely.

This was accomplished in great measure by establishing more rigid requirements for initiation into the Church than a simple confession of faith. This practical need posed a problem for the Church whose own apostolic writings asserted that the only requirements for becoming a child of God (regeneration) were individually to receive Jesus Christ as Messiah (Saviour) sent from God and to believe in him as the Son of God, or Lord ([John 1:12](#)). p. 105

Thus it is possible that by the second century the Church recognized the need to devise requirements of initiation that did not appear in the teachings of Christ or the Apostles, in order to safeguard the integrity of the Church. And since at that time being a Christian was always identified with church membership, these secondary requirements might easily have been perceived as requirements for salvation or prerequisites of regeneration.⁹

Therefore, it is possible that the institutional Church, young though it still was, exerted a structural influence on the formulation of doctrines that were not necessarily conceived in a humanly-structured environment.¹⁰

Although there were admittedly other social, political and intellectual factors that influenced the thinking of early Christians, those considered above should enable us to listen to what they have to say with a moderate appreciation for the milieu out of which they speak.

EARLY SECOND-CENTURY ALLUSIONS TO REGENERATION

Clement of Rome

For the purposes of this discussion, we shall assume that *The First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians* was written by Clement, the early Bishop of Rome, who is likely to have been a friend of St. Paul ([Phil. 4:3](#)). It must have been written following the persecution of the Church under Domitian, between the years of AD 97–102. Therefore, it represents for us a highly regarded¹¹ document from the beginning of the second century.

The passage that first captures our interest is found at the conclusion of Chapter 9:

⁹ This pattern of thinking was not clearly stated until Cyprian (*Epistle* 74, 14, for example) declared that the Catholic Church as the spouse of Christ was alone able to bear sons of God.

¹⁰ Although this ecclesiastical influence certainly evolved over the years, it is first formally evident in the 'Apostolic Tradition' of Hippolytus in the first quarter of the third century. See Bard Thompson, *Liturgies of the Western Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1961), pp. 13–24.

¹¹ 'Almost canonical', *ANF*, I, p. 2.

Noah, being found faithful, preached regeneration to the world through his ministry; and the Lord saved by him the animals which, with one accord, entered into the ark.

The usefulness of this text lies in the fact that it relates the precise [p. 106](#) (but rarely used) biblical and theological term to a familiar historical account: the life and ministry of Noah. The phrase ‘preached regeneration’ may be considered parallel to ‘Noah preached repentance’ (Ch. 7) and ‘Noah, a preacher of righteousness’ ([2 Peter 2:5](#)). The gospel of salvation, even as preached in Noah’s day, was understood by Clement as embodying a multi-faceted redemptive theme, including a call to repentance, a call to faith and obedience and an offer of spiritual rebirth.

It is also suggestive of this passage that the message of regeneration preached by Noah was symbolized in the ark. Inasmuch as the wicked to whom Noah preached were offered new life in the face of certain doom, if only they would relinquish life as they had known it, so the gospel of regeneration imparts new spiritual life to those who would turn their backs on the old life in the face of spiritual death ([Romans 6:23](#)). And as ‘the Lord saved by him the animals which entered into the ark’, so he saves (regenerates) those who enter into fellowship with him through repentance and faith.

In another context, Clement introduces another aspect of spiritual regeneration that we shall see further developed in Irenaeus: the gift of immortality. It was generally believed by the early fathers that man in his natural state was neither mortal nor immortal, but bore the capacity for either. Immortality was considered solely as a characteristic of divinity.

Thus, it is significant that in Chapter 35 Clement exults: ‘How blessed and wonderful, beloved, are the gifts of God! Life in immortality, splendour in righteousness, truth in perfect confidence ...’ Listed first of the gifts of God bestowed in salvation is ‘life in immortality’! In the following chapter (36), he further affirms that ‘the Lord has willed that we should taste of the knowledge of immortality’. It seems that the Tree of Life from which Adam and Eve were excluded following their fall has been restored through Christ to all who have passed through ‘the gate of righteousness, which is set open for the attainment of life’ (Ch. 48).

We sense already that the idea of regeneration was perceived as representing, not so much an initial moment of spiritual conversion, as a new and higher order of life and way of living.¹² In spite of the fact that Clement’s Epistle is a letter of exhortation to believers to celebrate the gifts of their salvation, it is also evident that he places the highest [p. 107](#) priority on the proclamation of the regenerating power of the gospel of Christ. In fact, in Chapter 46, he gently chides his hearers for being ‘fond of contention and full of zeal about things which do not pertain to salvation’.

Ignatius

As Clement is believed to have been a disciple of St. Paul, Ignatius is recognized by tradition as a disciple of St. John along with Polycarp of Smyrna. He was, therefore, an approximate contemporary of Clement, though representing a different line of apostolic tradition.

For Ignatius, the contrast between life in Christ and death outside of Christ is an almost all-consuming theme throughout his writings to the point where he begs his friends not

¹² *The Epistle of Mathetes to Diognetus* provides as eloquent a description as we have of how this new and higher order of life manifested itself in the lives of the early Christians (*ANF*, I, pp. 26–27).

to hinder his martyrdom and describes his life as ‘a state of death’ and martyrdom as ‘living’ (*Epistle to the Romans*, VI).

In one beautifully instructive passage he illustrates the relationship of faith to new life in Christ in contrast to the spiritual death of the unbeliever in the world:

These two things are simultaneously set before us—death and life ... For as there are two kinds of coins, the one of God, the other of the world, and each of these has its special character stamped upon it, [so is it also here]. The unbelieving are of this world; but the believing have, in love, the character of God, the Father by Jesus Christ, by whom, if we are ready to die into his passion, his life resides within us. (*Epistle to the Magnesians*, V)

In the longer version of this text, he makes clear that whether one bears the stamp of God’s character or the devil’s is a matter not of nature but of personal choice. For Ignatius it appears that regeneration represents not merely a distinction between a higher and a lower order of life but a radical distinction as between life and death.

This rather cryptic illustration appears to be a veiled reference to [Matthew 22:19–21](#), in which Jesus was asked a question regarding taxation. He took a coin, asked whose image was on it, then uttered the familiar line ‘Give unto Caesar that which is Caesar’s and to God that which is God’s’, suggesting that once one has chosen to receive the imprint of God’s character on one’s life, one receives the irreversible stamp of God’s ownership, and the animating power of Christ’s life continues to pulsate within one’s being.

Justin

Justin, a student of philosophy, was persuaded to become a Christian **p. 108** by the boldness of Christian martyrs and his study of the Old Testament. By the middle of the second century, he had become perhaps the most compelling Christian apologist of the post-apostolic period. He sets out evangelical minds at ease by recounting in detail the circumstances of his conversion,¹³ although perhaps not in terms quite as ‘regenerational’ as some of us might like!

Justin’s contributions to the development of the doctrine of regeneration lie primarily in three areas. He advanced the idea of divinization, or *theosis*, as being the completion of the new birth; he articulated more clearly than had been done before the idea of baptismal regeneration; and he established the notion that regeneration affects not only the soul of man, but the flesh as well.

First, with reference to divinization, Justin in his first *Apology* responds to those who consider the Christian faith to be foolishness, by pointing out that there are many heathen analogies to Christian doctrine. For example, the divinization of the followers of Christ is no more preposterous a thought than the deification of the Emperor!¹⁴

He argues the point further with Trypho by asserting that Christians are the sons of God.

Let the interpretation of the Psalm [\[82:6\]](#) be held just as you wish, yet thereby it is demonstrated that all men are deemed worthy of becoming ‘gods’, and of having power to become sons of the Highest.¹⁵

¹³ *Dialogue with Trypho, a Jew*, VIII (ANF, V. 1, pp. 198–199).

¹⁴ *The First Apology*, XXI (ANF, I, p. 170).

¹⁵ *Dialogue with Trypho*, CXXIV (ANF, I, p. 262).

From this point on, the divinization of the believer is frequently alluded to in terms of immortality and incorruptibility and always as the destination of the pilgrimage of regeneration begun at the point of conversion.

Secondly, Justin engraved the doctrine of baptismal regeneration upon the history of the Church by pressing the analogy of Noah another step beyond Clement of Rome. This occurs in a number of passages, including the following:

For righteous Noah, along with the other mortals at the deluge ... being eight in number, were a symbol of the eighth day, wherein Christ appeared when He rose from the dead ... For Christ, being the first-born of every creature, became again the chief of another race regenerated by Himself through water, and faith and wood, containing the mystery of the cross, even as Noah was saved by wood when he rode over the waters ...¹⁶ p. 109

However, in a more extended discussion of Christian baptism, he suggests that although the miracle of regeneration takes place concurrently with baptism, it occurs as a result of personal choice, repentance, belief and a commitment to a life of obedience (*First Apology*, 61). On the basis of this text, it appears that the apostolic tradition advocated the baptism of 'him who chooses to be born again, and has repented of his sins'. Hence it is worth noting that the notion of baptismal regeneration gained its initial foothold within this specific context.

Thirdly, in his fragments on the resurrection, Justin boldly affirms, in contradiction of Pythagorean and Platonic principles, that the gift of regeneration brings salvation not only to the soul, but to the flesh as well.

It is not impossible that the flesh be regenerated; and seeing that ... the Saviour in the whole Gospel shows that there is salvation for the flesh, why do we any longer endure those unbelieving and dangerous arguments?¹⁷

It is certainly refreshing to see the Church at such an early date firmly establishing the uniqueness of its doctrine in the face of Hellenistic philosophical influence, to which many have suspected the Church of capitulating. Having gained a sense of the development of the doctrine of regeneration through the early years of the second century, we now turn to the most exhaustive and systematic treatment of soteriology of the period: formulated at the close of the century by Irenaeus, the Bishop of Lyon.

REGENERATION IN ST. IRENAEUS

The doctrine of regeneration in Irenaeus must be sifted out of his much broader treatment of soteriology. However, this search should not be in vain, for most scholars agree that Irenaeus made his greatest contribution as a theologian in the area of soteriology.

His soteriological formulation has become known as the doctrine of recapitulation. The term *recapitulatio* (in Latin) or *anakephataiōsis* (in Greek) appears in [Ephesians 1:10](#), 'the *summing up* of all things in Christ', a passage to which Irenaeus repeatedly makes reference. The word itself is rich and multi-faceted, reflective of Irenaeus' doctrine, but can generally be defined in terms of 'restoration, renovation and renewal'. To oversimplify, Irenaeus is speaking of taking something once done wrong (creation) and 'doing it over right' (redemption). That p. 110 'something' encompasses all of human history and includes both cosmic and personal renewal.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* 138 (*ANF*, I, p. 268).

¹⁷ *On the Resurrection*, X (*ANF*, I, pp. 298–299).

The backbone of Irenaeus' system is his parallelism between Adam (and through him, all mankind) who failed in every respect and Christ (and through him, all believers) who recapitulated the experience of Adam in every respect with a resoundingly victorious outcome. In order to develop this doctrine, Irenaeus becomes the first of the fathers to deal at any length with the nature of the Fall. However, he does not regard Adam's sin as a radical infraction of the Law of God for which the only equitable punishment is death, but rather as a moral mistake attributable to the spiritual and intellectual immaturity of Adam and Eve. Yet it was an act of disobedience that derailed the glorious purposes of God for mankind.¹⁸

Therefore, it became necessary for Christ to come in the Incarnation and retrace all of Adam's steps, replacing our natural spirit of disobedience with his spirit of obedience, thus setting in motion the 'summing up of all things in Christ'. In the final analysis, Irenaeus' message of hope is that mankind 'has been given the opportunity of making a new start in Christ ... through incorporation in his mystical body. The original Adam, by his disobedience, introduced the principle of sin and death, but Christ by his obedience has reintroduced the principle of life and immortality'.¹⁹

Although one could reasonably argue that Irenaeus' 'recapitulation' is primarily a doctrine of regeneration, the key to deriving out of it a more clearly focused definition may be found in his explanation of the need for Christ's recapitulation: 'God recapitulated in himself the ancient formation of man, that he might (1) kill sin, (2) deprive death of its power and (3) vivify man.'²⁰

Gustaf Aulén has treated the first two objectives extensively in *Christus Victor* (pp. 16–35), but it is the third that addresses the doctrine of regeneration. There is no question that for Irenaeus, salvation is equated with life and sin (disobedience) is death. So, as he compares the effects of Adam and Christ, he explains that 'as by the former generation we inherited death, so by this new generation [regeneration] we might inherit life'.²¹

The conditions for becoming partakers in this regeneration are p. 111 consistent with those described in [John 1:12](#), for he states that God 'rendered himself visible ... that he might vivify those who receive and behold him through faith'.²²

Irenaeus does not emphasize the relationship of baptism and regeneration other than to concur with the earlier tradition of interpretation of [John 3:5](#), as referring to outward baptism and inward (spiritual) regeneration.

What are the benefits of this spiritual regeneration or vivification in Irenaeus? First of all, Christ has gained for us the victory over our enemy (sin), whereas in Adam we were vanquished (*AH*, V.21.1). Secondly, we were reconciled to God (brought to 'friendship and concord'—*AH*, III.18.7). And thirdly, we see the flowering of the notion of divinization. In the anthropology of Irenaeus, man was created in the image of God with no essential difference from God except for the infinite distance between the two. But because in the Fall that image was marred, a major objective of the Incarnation and Atonement was to restore man to this intrinsic sameness with God.

¹⁸ *Against Heresies*, V.16.3 (*ANF*, I, p. 544).

¹⁹ J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1978), p. 173.

²⁰ *AH*, III.18.7 (*ANF*, I, p. 448).

²¹ *AH*, V. 1.3 (*ANF*, p. 527).

²² *AH*, IV.20.5 (*ANF*, p. 489); also III.16.8 (*ANF*, p. 443).

This is accomplished in the life of the believer in terms of immortality (he never dies), incorruptibility (he never decays) and *theosis* (he becomes as Christ is). These passages capture the essence of this the apogee of second-century soteriology:

He who was the Son of God became the Son of man, that man, having been taken into the Word, and receiving the adoption might become the son of God.

(AH, III.19.1)

Our Lord Jesus Christ ... did, through his transcendent love, become what we are, that he might bring us to be even what he is himself.

(AH, V.Preface)²³

CONCLUSIONS

Let us conclude our study with several observations based on the material we have considered.

(1) The perception that one finds in the second century is that regeneration is a process of growth that encompasses one's life from the moment of initiation into Christ to the moment of glorification beyond the grave, with the responsibility to remain faithful and obedient throughout all the stages in between. This seems to lend a cohesion to the Christian life that is not always appreciated today by [p. 112](#) those who view regeneration in terms of a one-time experience that often has little long-term impact on the quality of one's life.

(2) Baptismal regeneration as articulated in the second century does not appear to be incompatible with evangelical theology today. Nowhere was it stated that the act of water baptism produced regeneration, but only that water baptism constituted the sacramental means by which God illustrated to man the spiritual birth which takes place on the basis of repentance and faith. Even this position is stated only with reference to individuals who have already repented, believed and made a choice to be 'born again'. Therefore one finds no basis at all in the second century for any doctrine of baptismal regeneration relative to infant baptism.

(3) The analogy of Noah's day (salvation taking place only by one's inclusion in the ark), suggesting that spiritual rebirth can take place only within the community of the Church, presents a notion worthy of our consideration. Although the idea was to be taken too far a century later, perhaps we overstate the personal and individual aspect of conversion to the point that many apparent converts are never effectively integrated into the corporate life of the Church.

(4) However one is inclined to react to the idea of *theosis*, it appears to have enough basis in Scripture ([Psalm 82:6](#); [2 Peter 1:4](#); [1 John 3:2](#); etc.) that it deserves our contemplation. Regardless of how we conceive of it, it seems greatly to enhance the 'blessed hope' as a powerful incentive for godly living.

(5) Finally, we as evangelicals should be gratified to find our emphasis on personal scripture regeneration on the basis of repentance and faith so well represented in the post-apostolic Church. The Orthodox and the Roman Catholic Churches have effectively claimed the patristic period as their own by tracing their particular traditions through its centuries, leaving evangelicals with seemingly little heritage to claim between AD 90 and 1517.

Not only would we gain credibility in our dialogue with other branches of the Church, but we would also enrich our own tradition and broaden our appeal, if we were to claim

²³ See also III.10.2; III.19.1; IV.33.4; IV.38.4; and IV.39.2.

and demonstrate the presence of our theological and spiritual heritage in every age of the Church's history.

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New Testament Christology and the Jesus of Islam

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In the history of post-Enlightenment NT study we may speak in broad terms of two trajectories of research. One approach, which we might (in many cases anachronistically) call evangelical, attempts to capitalize on new insights from and innovations in the progress of human knowledge in the various recognized academic disciplines and to utilize these in coming to a contemporary understanding of the Bible. Yet it does this while retaining fundamental allegiance to historic orthodox Christianity, in particular its doctrine of Christ, or Christology. Modern learning is harnessed in the service of the cause of Christ—Christ understood, from this point of view, in terms which would meet basic agreement from an executive panel comprising, say, the Apostle Paul, Athanasius, Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, Calvin, Jonathan Edwards, and Barth.¹ Christ understood in historic orthodox terms, as attested to in canonical Scripture, sets limits to the claims of modern learning in important respects. At the same time, modern learning is not categorically repudiated as a promising source and necessary context for a better understanding of NT Christology.

The second approach is no less concerned with orthodoxy, but its orthodoxy rests on a much different conception of Christ (which, one might say, means that what it calls orthodoxy has since Nicea usually [p. 114](#) been called heresy). I have in mind here the

¹ Barth's orthodoxy (and that of neo-orthodoxy generally) is doubted by some evangelicals; see e.g. the recent programmatic comments by M. G. Kline, review of J. I. Durham's *Exodus*, *JETS* 32 (1989) 380–382. Certainly Barth's epistemological assumptions and resulting hermeneutic raise disturbing questions. And the chapter on Barth and Bultmann in Peter Carnley's *The Structure of Resurrection Belief* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987) demonstrates that both go to 'a false extreme by disqualifying the contribution of historians in understanding and interpreting what the original Easter witnesses claimed to have experienced' (Gerald O'Collins, 'Resurrection Belief: A Note on a Recent Book', *Gregorianum* 70/2 [1989] 341–344 [341]). in the past two hundred years, however, it is hard to think of a more incisive, original, and prolific theologian who has attempted so exhaustively to articulate a Christology comporting, *mutatis mutandis*, with earlier christological formulations. For present purposes I will, therefore, leave it to the executive committee named above to pass their own judgment on their modern colleague.

Christ of Reimarus,² of Harnack, of Bultmann, and of many others in the last two centuries, a Christ who is not to be described in terms of the virgin-born, resurrected, and ascended unique Son of the one true and living God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, known in his earthly days as Jesus of Nazareth. This approach, which we might call critical orthodoxy,³ is likewise concerned with modern learning—so much so, however, that at times it makes some contemporary ideological construct, or combination of constructs, the norm for the range of meaning which ‘Christ’ or any other component of Christian thought and history may have. Reimarus’ ‘orthodoxy’ consisted largely in fidelity to Enlightenment rationalism, which was in turn indebted to English deism.⁴ Harnack’s labours were in the service of anti-supernaturalist Ritschlian dogmatics and the cultural Protestantism of pre-World War I continental liberalism. The highly eclectic Bultmann worshipped at numerous altars, among them Marburg Neo-Kantianism, nineteenth-century historical positivism and liberal German Lutheranism, neo-orthodoxy as far as its theological stress was concerned, and Heideggerian existentialism. But all of these figures have in common their repudiation of historic Christian orthodoxy and especially its Christology.

This two-fold taxonomy of approaches to NT Christology is helpful in reflecting on NT Christology and the Jesus of Islam. For it gives both background and point to this paper’s thesis, which is that at this particular juncture in their history evangelical New Testament scholars need to engage in research of christologically significant NT texts and contexts, not only against the backdrop of the early ecumenical councils and Reformation debates, and not exclusively in the context of NT Christology as conceived in critical orthodoxy, tempting though this option may be; but also in the face of the serious challenge of [p. 115](#) major world religions like Islam to the claims of Jesus Christ and his gospel.

Let us examine key considerations undergirding this thesis in four steps: 1) the discipline of evangelical NT Christology, 2) the classic context of christological reflection, 3) the modern context of christological research, and 4) the christological context of the realized future.

THE DISCIPLINE OF EVANGELICAL NT CHRISTOLOGY

In the interest of methodological self-awareness, it should be stated at the outset that for our purposes the term ‘NT Christology’ signifies a discrete subdiscipline within formal NT studies concerned primarily with the origins, content, and import of the NT’s christologically significant texts. This subdiscipline’s methods and achievements over the last forty years have been surveyed most recently by John Reumann in an SBL/Scholars Press monograph.⁵ This is, then, a realm of research narrower than the quite broad band

² *The Goal of Jesus and His Disciples*, trans. by G. W. Buchanan (Leiden: Brill, 1970). This essay came from Reimarus’ pen sometime between 1730 and his death in 1768.

³ This should not be confused with that which John H. Haldane has recently termed ‘theological orthodoxy with a critical social outlook such as, for example, is to be found in the writings of [G. K.] Chesterton’; see ‘Critical Orthodoxy’, *Louvain Studies* 14 (1989) 108–124 (124). I refer rather to the post-Enlightenment, primarily Protestant (until recently) theological tendency which confers on classical Christian nomenclature new meanings as required by contemporary post-Kantian philosophy.

⁴ Cf. Buchanan, ‘Introduction’ to Reimarus’ *The Goal of Jesus and His Disciples*, 5f.

⁵ *The New Testament and Its Modern Interpreters*, ed. by E. J. Epp and G. W. MacRae (Philadelphia/Atlanta: Fortress/Scholars Press, 1989), pp. 501–564.

of inquiry which has given thousands of 'lives of Jesus' over the last two centuries; in envisioning the discipline one should think rather of works along the lines of Wrede's *Messianic Secret*,⁶ or Bousset's *Kurios Christos*,⁷ or Bultmann's *Jesus and the Word*,⁸ or Bornkamm's *Jesus of Nazareth*,⁹ or any one of scores of other monographs and articles which treat parts or all of Jesus' life and/or teaching from within the discipline of NT studies, as distinct from such disciplines as systematic or practical theology. When we speak of NT Christology, then, and as we move toward commenting on its role *vis-à-vis* Islam's Jesus, we are not thinking first of all of the Christology which the NT contains, but of the modern discipline which has taken on itself the responsibility of exegeting and to some extent applying the relevant NT texts and related data within the broad context of modern academic study of the Bible.¹⁰

Within this context, we can speak of evangelical NT Christology. p. 116 Here I do not have in mind, for example, the type of work done in Douglas Webster's excellent study *A Passion for Christ*,¹¹ which builds on many insights from NT Christology as just defined, and does so with a pronounced evangelical edge; but whose idiom and focus are ultimately more on systematic and practical theology for the seminary classroom. I am thinking rather of critical scrutiny of the relevant NT data proceeding along lines amenable to the first school of thought mentioned in my introduction, the approach to NT studies which attempts to capitalize on new insights from and innovations in the progress of human knowledge in the various disciplines and to apply these to contemporary understanding of the Bible, while retaining fundamental allegiance to historic orthodox Christianity, in particular its doctrine of Christ. I think here of Schlatter's *Die Geschichte des Christus*,¹² or Cullmann's *The Christology of the New Testament*,¹³ or Dodd's *The Founder of Christianity*,¹⁴ or Hengel's *The Son of God: The Origin of Christology and the History of Jewish-Hellenistic Religion*.¹⁵ Each of these studies,¹⁶ along with many more that

⁶ Greenwood, SC: Attic, 1971; German original 1901.

⁷ Nashville: Abingdon, 1971; German original 1913.

⁸ Edinburgh: Clark, 1980; German original 1929.

⁹ London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1960.

¹⁰ This context is analyzed sympathetically by Robert Morgan (with John Barton), *Biblical Interpretation* (Oxford: Univ. Press, 1988).

¹¹ Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987.

¹² Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag, 1922, rpt. 1977.

¹³ Philadelphia: Westminster, 1959.

¹⁴ New York/London: Macmillan, 1970.

¹⁵ Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976.

¹⁶ I realize that I have mentioned some works that would in the view of many fit more into the 'life of Jesus' than the 'NT Christology' line of research. Evangelically-inclined NT scholars tend not to erect an impermeable wall of separation between the two poles of emphasis since they see fundamental continuity between the so-called Jesus of history and the Christ of faith.

could be cited, speak from within the setting of critical NT studies, but do so without losing a distinctly Christian flavour and content in their observations and results.

What I wish to point out, in the interest of advancing my thesis, is simply that there is a discrete realm of academic inquiry called NT Christology, that it works within generally agreed parameters, and that evangelical scholars (as defined above) contribute to this discipline in constructive ways. This is heartening, if we happen to be evangelical Christians, for we see that the documentary sources giving substance to our beliefs stand the test of critical scrutiny and retain, if not increase, their theological power in the process. But what heartens us can in this case also harm us, as our next section will show.

THE CLASSIC CONTEXT OF CHRISTOLOGICAL REFLECTION

I think it is safe to assume that most evangelicals who think about **P. 117** Christology as such at all tend, to some extent justifiably, to carry out that reflection in dialogue primarily with the proceedings and outcomes of the four earliest ecumenical councils as well as the later Reformation debates. It will be my contention here that there is an obvious relative legitimacy, but also a subtle and profound danger, in limiting one's focus to these seminal discussions and their biblical bases.

That the debates culminating in credal formulations at Nicea (325), Constantinople (381), Ephesus (431), and Chalcedon (451) comprise the conceptual grid within which much evangelical christological reflection is carried out, seems unnecessary to document. Standard texts like Bernard Ramm's, with its description and defence of the early christological creeds, bear out the point.¹⁷ One of the strengths of Wolfhart Pannenberg's *Jesus, God and Man*¹⁸ is its consistent and tenacious awareness of what went on in those groundbreaking debates, and how the sometimes convoluted proceedings continually throw light on contemporary queries about Christ. Intelligent discussion of christological matters did not begin in modern times, and it would be foolhardy not to glean the wisdom, to learn from the successes and failures, of some of antiquity's most brilliant theologians as they formulated comprehensive and, they thought, definitive statements delineating Christ's person and aspects of his work.

Many Protestants will be as apt to find the Reformation an equally fertile context for contemporary christological thinking. Here important aspects of Christ's true significance, especially for soteriology, were rediscovered and promulgated. The ecclesiastical tremors creating theological waves that still rock us took place at that time. It is reasonable, justified, and even requisite to root modern christological deliberation in the findings and confessions of the fountainhead of much post-medieval theological thought. The evangelical who wilfully dispensed with the Reformers' wisdom could at best waste months and years reinventing the wheel and at worst arrive at convictions which in no way advance our understanding but rather retard or twist it.

There is, however, a subtle and profound danger in limiting one's focus to these seminal discussions and the biblical support for them seen in their light. This danger takes two forms. First, it can cause us to overlook the very different formulations regarding Jesus which **p. 118** proliferate today and which permeate our culture, especially in the academic circles where tomorrow's leaders, even theological leaders, are presently being trained. We need to be aware not only of Chalcedon but also of Claremont, not only of Nicea but also of Marburg—and increasingly even of Mecca—if we are to articulate a

¹⁷ *An Evangelical Christology: Ecumenic and Historic* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1985).

¹⁸ London, SCM, 1968.

Christology that transcends the categories of past cultural milieux, milieux which have forever given way to the settings in which we are called to formulate Christ's meaning for our day, just as orthodox visionaries of history did for theirs. And they did this, not without weighing the wisdom of their theological ancestors, but also without falling prey to the false assumption that fidelity to the traditions of the elders would suffice for proclamation of the gospel to their contemporaries. But more on this below.

Second, there is the danger, not of becoming frozen in the past, but of neglecting to lay foundations which will serve the immediate future. Fixation with whether Athanasius or Calvin would be pleased with our formulations, or even whether our views are verbally congruent with theirs, can overlook the responsibility that evangelical Christology bears, namely, to articulate an orthodox understanding of Christ's person and work in a conceptual framework which relates not only to past, but just as importantly to present and immediately future ideological and social realities. To move quickly to the specific example which concerns this paper: consider Islam. One out of every five persons on the face of the earth is Muslim, including one of every three individuals among the so-called unreached peoples.¹⁹ At a recent missions conference in Los Angeles Muslim leaders called for the winning of 50–75 million Americans to their faith, a goal they think attainable because of what they term 'the bankruptcy of the social order' in this country. It is generally agreed by missiologists that cities are key if Christian missionaries and their supporting churches are to have any hope of fulfilling the evangelistic mandate given them by their Lord; of the twenty-five megacities of the 1990s that will boast populations of eight million or more, six are virtually exclusively Muslim (Jakarta, Teheran, Baghdad, Cairo, Istanbul, Karachi). Four other of these world-class cities number their Muslim populations in the millions.

Turning our gaze back to the United States, Muslim spokesmen assert that they have the financial means and the determination to see [p. 119](#) their goals realized even if it takes centuries; in the words of a proverb from North Africa where Islam is so prevalent: 'We are in a hurry; let us walk slowly'. As William J. McConnell has remarked, Islam 'certainly emerges as a force to be reckoned with'.²⁰ We are in for a long and probably difficult struggle with our Muslim cousins²¹ in this country.

My point is that evangelical Christology needs to be concerned with more than fidelity to past formulations: it also needs to be adequate to current challenges to its veracity and relevance. Islam—and it is but one major world religion among several whose numbers are rapidly growing—has evangelistic designs and means (e.g. petroleum reserves and revenues) which are already affecting our students, our parishioners, and our own children, and which will result in increased Muslim presence and evangelistic pressure in the years just ahead. Do we reflect this highly significant state of affairs in our christological research and proclamation? Are we preparing those we teach and minister

¹⁹ Here and elsewhere in this paragraph I am indebted to Robert C. Douglas, 'The Challenge of the Muslim World', *World Evangelization* (November–December 1988) 15–17.

²⁰ 'The Quranic Depiction of Jesus', paper read at the Fortieth Annual ETS meeting, Wheaton College (IL), November 1988.

²¹ Islamic sociologist Haskan Askari notes, 'No other two faiths on this planet share 50 much of the other ... Jesus is the common centre between Christians and Muslims' ('The Dialogical Relationship between Christianity and Islam', *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 9/3 [1972] 477–488 [481, 482]). (Is Askari forgetting Judaism?)

to—and ourselves—for what lies ahead of us in our society, and for what we are to some extent already facing? I am not aware that we are to a sufficient degree. Surely we should, for reasons which I would like to make clearer shortly. But first I wish to touch on another context in which evangelicals may be tempted to exhaust their christological energies: one just as worthy of our attention and steel as Chalcedon or the Reformation, but every bit as deleterious to meeting challenges such as that of Islam if one fails to move beyond it in constructive ways.

THE MODERN CONTEXT OF CHRISTOLOGICAL RESEARCH

Some evangelicals are tempted to immerse themselves in Chalcedonian or Genevan controversies without ever rising to the surface to address, or even contemplate, contemporary christological issues and their application. But others run an opposite risk. This is the risk of being so enamoured of NT Christology as it is currently pursued in the academic discipline of NT studies, that 'Christ' in any meaningfully orthodox sense recedes from sight.²² **P. 120**

A mere moment's reflection will remind us that much academically oriented NT Christology radically repudiates the high Christology of the creeds and, evangelicals insist, of the NT documents themselves. The possibility of the full range of relevant evidence getting a fair hearing under such circumstances is not encouraging. The recent collection of essays edited by Stephen T. Davis called *Encountering Jesus: A Debate on Christology*,²³ constitutes a case in point. There both John Hick and J. M. Robinson are careful to show both their expertise as New Testament scholars (Robinson is especially vehement in recounting his credentials) and their disbelief of any semblance of Chalcedonian Christology—precisely as a result of their academic scrutiny of the NT, which they see as lending no support to subsequent credal Christology. Their point of view is echoed polyphonically in the essay by Reumann mentioned earlier, which sets forth in excess of twenty different models or types of Jesus, Christ, or both which are represented in scholarly literature of recent decades.²⁴ These include, e.g., Schweitzer's apocalyptic messiah, McCasland's and Fosdick's great teacher, Bultmann's existentialist rabbi or prophet, Allegro's Essene teacher of righteousness and later magic mushroom guru, Brandon's political revolutionary, Yoder's pacifist, Swidler's proto-feminist visionary, and any number of tradition-historically based reconstructions.

True, among these more non-traditional understandings one also finds Dodd's suffering servant, and this is a salutary reminder that if evangelical voices seem rare in this discussion, it may not always be so much the hostility of the covert presuppositions of the discipline as the unoriginal, generally weak, and sometimes non-existent scholarship characterizing too much evangelical research in the field of NT Christology. Still, we must not be oblivious to the socio-political realities of current academic study of Jesus as the Christ, or non-Christ, or anti-Christ, as the case may be. And the fact that modern study of Jesus is so fragmented in its methods and findings, and so rarely arrives

²² As it is, e.g., in William Thompson's *The Jesus Debate: A Survey and Synthesis* (New York/Mahwah: Paulist, 1985).

²³ Atlanta: John Knox, 1988.

²⁴ See 'Jesus and Christology', in *The New Testament and Its Modern Interpreters*, ed. by E. J. Epp and G. W. MacRae (Philadelphia/Atlanta: Fortress/Scholars Press, 1989), pp. 520–524.

at conclusions which would furnish any base for evangelical proclamation in general, let alone hard-nosed interaction with serious rivals like Islam, suggests that evangelical commitment to involvement in the discussion does have its practical limits—at least within the paradigm which seems at present to control the discussion. While p. 121 every effort should be made to learn all that the discipline’s practitioners can teach us, and while there is a serious need for qualified scholars with evangelical convictions to be more prominent and vocal in the discipline than is presently the case in order to move the discipline in a more constructive direction, we cannot afford to squander all our energy trying to accomplish before the eyes and ultimately in the hearts of erudite intransigents that which God’s Word and Spirit themselves have been unable to bring about.

My point is this. The NT’s christological message, as evangelical scholars articulate it, can be muted by undue preoccupation with the councils and the Reformers. But equally it can be stilled due to an exaggerated optimism that the SBL/AAR crowd would believe if we could, so to speak, bring Jesus up from the dead to warn them; when the more crucial issue is whether they have yet bent the intellectual knee far enough even to take Moses and his relevance to Jesus (as Jesus saw it) seriously—which in most cases they clearly have not. I do not in any way wish to weaken zeal for more serious evangelical involvement at the most painstaking and arcane levels of discussion within the discipline of NT Christology. But such involvement’s ultimate responsibility is not to the SBL and AAR, any more than it is to the IBR or ETS, but to Christ, to the biblical witness to Christ, and to his body the church. And that body’s present and future effectiveness is closely tied to the leadership it receives, not least in response to the challenge which world religions, in particular Islam, present. This brings us to our final point.

THE CHRISTOLOGICAL CONTEXT OF THE REALIZED FUTURE

Recently a spokesman for underground Christian leaders in an iron curtain nation hostile to Christianity implored several American evangelical scholars to lend them aid, at whatever cost to ourselves, in light of the imminent threat facing that country’s Christians. The threat? *Glasnost*. And why is *glasnost* seen as dangerous to Christians in this communist land by this church leader and thinker who lives and works there? Because he sees his fellow believers as utterly unprepared for the social realities and theological challenges which political and cultural liberalization will inevitably bring with it.

This leader’s insight and plea challenge us in our rapidly changing American setting as we think of NT Christology and its relationship with Islam. Whatever happens in his country in coming months, the truth and the church will be well served by such visionary readiness and sensitivity to possible cultural developments. Ironically, we live in p. 122 a setting where a kind of *glasnost* of vast religious significance and cultural dimensions has long been a part of the overall landscape; ‘In twenty years, 40 per cent of the U.S. work force will be minorities’, and white students at the University of California at Berkeley are already only 48% of the total enrollment.²⁵ While minorities obviously do not necessarily imply non-Christian religions, in many cases they do. Yet preparations, not for some vague eventuality, but for the state of affairs already with us, are slow if not utterly lacking. Wheaton College has not found it easy to locate many qualified candidates for a full time position in the area of world religions, a post still unfilled. Sermon series in evangelical churches, some of which now have temples and mosques in their neighbourhoods, dealing with world religions are still uncommon; one is likelier to find a popular seminar on the

²⁵ Margaret Wilkerson, ‘The Curriculum of Cultural Diversity’, *Academic Connections* (Summer 1989) 1f. (1).

New Age movement or, in some traditions, an old-fashioned prophetic conference, than serious review and biblical assessment of the teachings and the appeal of Buddhism, Hinduism, or Islam. (Active evangelistic outreach to local enclaves of non-Christian immigrants is for the most part still in its infancy, if indeed conceived at all, with some notable exceptions.) Most Bible and theology majors in conservative Christian colleges still never see, much less interact seriously with, the scriptures of other religions.

It is largely true that from the Muslim point of view 'the climate for any lively reckoning with the significance of Jesus ... is hardly propitious'²⁶—which is to say that Muslims usually see little reason at this point to dialogue with Christians about the different views their respective scriptures take of the man from Nazareth. It is nonetheless true for us as Christians that 'what has authority for some of the human race must have relevance for all'.²⁷ In the words of Kenneth Cragg, a distinguished Christian Islamicist who has devoted his life to this very thing, we ought to 'sustain a travail for the New Testament to be read'.²⁸ In all places at all times—and this includes of course Muslims everywhere today.

Moreover, in important respects circumstances *are* propitious for evangelical involvement in proposing new ways (or reinvigorating important old ones) of reading Jesus, ways that would eventuate in [p. 123](#) bringing our views of Jesus into more active engagement with those of Islam. 1988's national SBL/AAR meeting saw a mere two papers and two panels devoted to NT Christology.²⁹ By comparison, there were twenty-five papers and a number of panels on Buddhism, and nearly as many devoted to Islamic topics. Here is a golden opportunity to gain a foothold within a pluralistic context which would welcome competent investigation into the pressing comparative religions issue of how Jesus is regarded in both Quran and in the literature of the early church, whether orthodox or heterodox, all seen in the light of current trends in religious and theological studies.

Evangelicals are in some ways ideally suited to take the initiative here. Without making grandiose claims for their own admittedly imperfect comprehensions of the full significance and ramifications of the Christology they articulate, they at least know well the inadequacies of myriad aberrant christological formulations due to their longstanding interaction with the purely immanent Christ of critical orthodoxy. Western evangelicals have for two centuries now existed in a climate where Jesus (it is insisted in influential circles) can be seen only in non-Trinitarian terms as a first-century Jewish prophet and teacher. This Jesus of post-Enlightenment historical-critical theology has obvious affinities with the Jesus of Islam.³⁰ While evangelicals have been largely ineffective in thwarting Western secularization in the past two hundred years, they have often at least kept the memory and meaning of the living Christ alive, even if only imperfectly. As Islam moves into the Western world and inevitably takes on some of the West's cultural

²⁶ Kenneth Cragg, *Jesus and the Muslim* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1985), p. 282.

²⁷ Cragg, 'Preface', in *Readings in the Qur'an*, selected and translated by Cragg (London: Collins, 1988), p. 9.

²⁸ Cragg, *Jesus and the Muslim*, p. 287.

²⁹ Figures based on the 1988 SBL/AAR program guide.

³⁰ Cf. Cragg, *Jesus and the Muslim*, p. 285.

baggage,³¹ the same arguments which have told against the demythologization of Christ in the secular West (even if the West has too often ignored arguments) may prove useful in calling Muslims to reflect more responsibly on the demythologized Jesus of the Quran seen in the light of a fuller range of evidence than is normally considered. It should also be observed that by no means all of the readings of Jesus emanating from the discipline of NT studies are hostile to an orthodox Christology; the Czech NT scholar Petr Pokorny's recent monograph is a notable and exciting case in point,³² and work like his is not without significance as evangelicals seek to interact within the discipline as well as within the larger comparative religions milieu.

Sources for such study are available as never before. Cragg's excellent topical arrangement of some two-thirds of the Quran, translated into elegant English, may mark a new watershed in college-level Quranic studies, especially since it is published as a relatively inexpensive paperback and takes pains to give thematic coherence to material which, non-Muslims generally feel, the Quran presents in a highly confusing arrangement.³³ Passages dealing explicitly with Jesus, or Muslim beliefs about him often borrowed from apocryphal material arising in centuries well after the time of Christ,³⁴ are gathered within a short section of less than a dozen pages.³⁵ Appended to this paper are several additional studies which are pertinent to any attempt to relate work in NT Christology to the realities of Islam and especially its understanding of itself in the light of the Jesus its scriptures present. Works like Cragg's *Jesus and the Muslim* are replete with lengthier and broader bibliography.³⁶ Standard encyclopedia articles and popular-level studies like J. Dudley Woodberry's *Muslims and Christians on the Emmaus Road*³⁷ furnish entry-level orientation (as well as several more challenging studies) into basic facts and issues.

CONCLUSION

I am not maintaining that evangelicals should de-emphasize what can be learned from scrutiny of classical contexts of christological discussion, whether patristic or Reformation. Indeed I would argue for the abiding importance of those contexts. Nor do I call for a decreased involvement in the technical, sometimes anti-evangelical researches

³¹ For allusions to ways in which this is taking place see Cragg, 'Contemporary Trends in Islam', *Muslims and Christians on the Emmaus Road*, ed. by J. Dudley Woodberry (Monrovia, CA: Missions Advanced Research & Communications Center, 1989), pp. 31ff.

³² *The Genesis of Christology* (Edinburgh: Clark, 1987); cf. his earlier programmatic comments in 'Probleme biblischer Theologie', *Theologische Literaturzeitung* 106/1 (1981) 2-8.

³³ Cragg, *Readings in the Qur'an*, selected and translated by Cragg (London: Collins, 1988).

³⁴ Cf. McConnell, 'The Quranic Depiction of Jesus', paper read at the Fortieth Annual ETS meeting, Wheaton College (IL), November 1988, pp. 7, 25 n. 24, who cites William St. Clair Tisdall, *The Sources of Islam* (Edinburgh: Clark, 1901), pp. 46-73.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 'Prophets and Messengers from Adam to Jesus', pp. 163ff.

³⁶ Note also the extensive and invaluable 'Annotated Bibliography on Islam', pp. 359-385 of the work cited in the next note.

³⁷ Monrovia, CA: Missions Advanced Research & Communications Center, 1989.

into things christological carried on in mainline academic study of the NT. If anything I ask for an increase in such activity. **P. 125**

But I do believe that as evangelicals labour to keep abreast of and to advance current research in NT Christology, they ought to be cognizant of Islam's use of Jesus. While the Jehovah's Witnesses' misreading of [John 1:1](#), or their gratuitous textual emendation of [Colossians 1:17](#), are doubtless the object of professorial asides in many a Christian college or seminary, islamic (mis)appropriation of Jesus too seldom, one suspects, receives similar explanation and where necessary correction. And again, from another point of view, time is too seldom taken to show how Islam's reading of Jesus feeds into the larger body of Muslim belief and practice, an exercise which would be useful in two ways. First as a means of acquiring critical sympathy for their views; and second, possibly, as a model for how some similarly triumphalistic and politically aggressive strands within conservative evangelicalism make analogous untenable use of Jesus: not as a theological end in himself, but as a cog in a much larger religio-political juggernaut.

Pedagogically, such obliviousness to the Jesus of Islam reflects a cultural parochialism ill-befitting the institutions we serve, many of which are striving valiantly to cultivate a credible third-world awareness. Professionally it signifies a lost opportunity to involve ourselves in research and debate that has both academic and spiritual promise. Missiologically our failure to take Islam's Jesus seriously is a strategic error on our parts as leaders, for it fails to prepare our students, our parishioners, and ourselves for a religious future to some extent already with us, one which may see an attempt to reduplicate the Arab conquests of the seventh and eighth centuries.³⁸

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The Concept of God in Minjung Theology and Its Socio-economic and Historical Characteristics¹

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The chaos and crisis of modern theology, it is said, has been derived from the loss of God. Today's theology discusses the man-made god projected through philosophy and ideology instead of describing the Triune God who is met and served in the whole personal and

³⁸ Cf. Bernard Lewis, *The Arabs in History* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), esp. chs. 3–7.

¹ Trans. Myung Hyuk Kim, *Trend of the Modern Church* (Seoul: Sungkwang Publishing Co., 1987), pp. 250–295.

historical *Sitz im leben* through the Bible and the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit. Indeed, modern theology has come to be degraded merely to a matter of the humanities and social sciences, which, without God, describe the urgent socio-economic and political issues of man instead of describing God.

In this paper I have tried to describe the degeneration of the concept of god which has taken place in the history of modern thought, modern political theology and Minjung theology, as well as the characteristics of the socio-economization of theology which have resulted from it. Also, I have tried to point out that one of the tasks of evangelical theology is to recover the biblical concept of God in the church around the world.

THE CONCEPT OF GOD IN MODERN POLITICAL THEOLOGY AND ITS CHARACTERISTICS

1) Moltmann: The Futuristic, Historical God

i) The Historical Trinitarianism Jürgen Moltmann, the Protestant theologian of Tübingen, understood Trinitarianism in terms of a 'History of God' which is connected with Christ and man rather than as the unreal ritual symbol that has no connection with experience or practice.² 'God is not an object which man could define by any p. 127 concept. The history of God is not a fact that was closed once and for all and thus far distanced from man. For the history of Christ with God and the history of God with Christ becomes the history of God with us and the history of us with God through the Holy Spirit'.³ Thus Moltmann wanted to understand the God of Trinity from the viewpoint of Trinitarian history rather than that of the substantial Trinity of the subjective Trinity of the past.⁴

Moltmann understood Scripture as a witness of human worldly open history as well as of the Trinitarian God of the communal relationship. Such a concept of relationship and community was understood by Moltmann as developing from the teaching of the Trinity and manifested even to the relationship between man and God, between man and others and the whole of mankind, and between community and the whole creature. Accepting the panentheistic idea, Moltmann insisted that God, man and the world should be understood as ecologically connected and living together.⁵

By sending his son into the world, God saves the world, and by sending the Holy Spirit, God unifies the world with the Son and God.⁶ And such an order of Trinitarian salvation history corresponds to the order of inner-trinitarian origin, namely, the historical relationship of Jesus and the Father, of the Father and the Son, and of their communal relationship in the Holy Spirit which corresponds to the pre-existent relationship of God

² See Jürgen Moltmann, 'Die Trinitarische Geschichte Gottes', in *Zukunft der Schöpfung* (München: Kaiser, 1977), pp. 90f.

³ Moltmann, *ibid.*, pp. 90f.

⁴ 'The unity of God is not presented in the same essence or in the united subject, but is pursued from the trinitarian history and is developed trinitarianally.' (Moltmann, *Trinitat und Reich Gottes* (München: Kaiser, 1980, (p. 34.)) 'Namely, we hope to develop a social trinitarianism which is separated from the subjective trinitarianism and the substantial trinitarianism.' (Moltmann, *ibid.*, p. 35).

⁵ See Moltmann, *ibid.*, p. 35.

⁶ See Moltmann, *Zukunft der Schöpfung*, p. 93.

himself. That is, the Trinitarianism in the sending is based upon the Trinitarianism in the origin.⁷

ii) *The Eschatological Unification of God* Moltmann described 'the divine act on the cross', as that in which the Father sent the Son into the world and had him suffer by the Holy Spirit, as 'the trinitarian self-distinction of God', or 'the forsakenness of God'.⁸ And he said that as compared with classical Trinitarianism, which has concentrated on the original Trinitarianism seen in the light of Christ's sending, today's p. 128 Trinitarianism must be concerned with the Trinitarianism of glory, that is, 'the eschatological unification of God', seen in the light of his sending and also of his resurrection.⁹ When the Son gives all things to the Father, the eschatological unification of God and the unification of the world should be accomplished ultimately, and we can understand the final submission of the nation by the Son to the Father as the inner-trinitarian accomplishment which embraces the world and completes history. God then comes to his own glorification and the creation comes to its own fulfillment.¹⁰

iii) *God the Liberator* Moltmann understood the essence of divine work which saves the earth and unifies the world as liberation. The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is not the God of Pharaoh, the emperor or the slave-owner. He is the liberator God who leads his people from political slavery to freedom. That God is the liberator is the definition of God. Therefore, selecting between God and freedom is not possible. God is none other than our true liberator.¹¹

Moltmann, giving emphasis to that, believes that the centre of Old Testament tradition is the Exodus event, which set the people free from political restraint and then led them into the land of glory; and that the centre of New Testament tradition is the resurrection of Christ, who for the eternal free nation was condemned on the cross, which was the way to punish political offences. Moltmann pointed out that traditional Christianity and today's church has failed to make the Exodus and the resurrection events the centre of Christianity.¹² Accordingly, Moltmann said that the exploitation with which a man oppresses other men is a crime which goes against the Christian way of life, and means that there is a separation from God. The purpose of all kinds of liberation theology, then, is the liberation of the oppressed.¹³

By the way, Moltmann said that even the dominator and the oppressor, if he recognizes his oppressing act, can be justified through p. 129 the incarnation of God, the

⁷ See Moltmann, *ibid.*, p. 92.

⁸ See Moltmann, *Christliche Trinitatslehre* (München: Kaiser, 1979, 82), pp. 40f.

⁹ See Moltmann, *Zukunft der Schöpfung*, pp. 95f. 'The purpose of eschatology is the final unification of God, which means that the world becomes one in and with God. Therefore in view of eschatology, the unification of God is connected with the salvation of the world of creation.' (*Ibid.*, p. 99) 'Without all things becoming one with him, God does not want even the unification of Himself.' (*Ibid.*, p. 101).

¹⁰ See Moltmann, *ibid.*, p. 101.

¹¹ See Moltmann, *Menschen wurde Recht und Freiheit* (Stuttgart/Berlin: Kreuz, 1979), pp. 83f.

¹² See Moltmann, *ibid.*, p. 85.

¹³ See Moltmann, *ibid.*, p. 61.

sacrifice on the cross and a recognition of God.¹⁴ Thus when the oppressor recognizes himself as such, and recognizes God as well, he obtains salvation not only for himself, but also for the oppressed.¹⁵

We find that here in Moltmann, Hegel's panentheistic historical God is illuminated and highlighted through the framework of modern political structure, and that with his panentheism the idea of an eschatological unification of God prepared the ideological foundation which encourages the various modern struggles of the masses which have a tendency towards liberation theology and which pursue both political liberation and a future utopia.

2) Löffler: the Political Christ

Paul Löffler, director of the Missionsakademie, Hamburg, West Germany, presented the paper 'The Reign of God Has Come In The Suffering Christ' at a consultation held in Bossay, Switzerland, 1978. In this paper, he interpreted the cross of Christ and the coming of the reign of God in political terms.¹⁶ Löffler challenged the whole tradition in which the suffering of Christ is understood in personal categories, and insisted that the crucified Christ was not merely a divine person who suffered for others, but who suffered in the context of a confrontation with the ruling powers. He actually challenged a religious understanding of the cross, which interprets it in the framework of sin and salvation, and insisted that the cross represented the power of the powerless, the alternative to the rule of kings.

He insisted that the beginning of the reign of God was the context of the life and ministry of Jesus, and that the reign of God was concerned not with giving meaning to individual existence or with providing the occasion for the formation of a new religious community, but with bringing about a new dynamic of change which upset the established powers. He also insisted that as the direction and structure of the new [p. 130](#) dynamic were clearly outlined in the Synoptic Gospels, especially in the source Q, they were manifested by events such as the rise of the Baptist, the baptism of Jesus, his retreat into the desert for an inner struggle about the means and goals of his ministry, healing, liberation from demons, and setting people free from the bonds of the law, religious authorities, want and oppression. As a result, a people's movement emerged and this built up to an explosive confrontation with the established powers, its high point being the entry of Jesus and his followers into Jerusalem and its climax being the crucifixion. The event also manifested itself in a movement among the people, beginning in Galilee and reaching to the capital, Jerusalem. Its members came from among the poor and disinherited from among the marginalized and rejected. Löffler insisted that the authenticity of this new interpretation of the Synoptic Gospels is discovered and verified in the lives of thousands of Christians today who suffer and struggle in South Korea,

¹⁴ 'In this suffering of God, the love of God reaches to the creature doomed to death. In this sacrifice of God the unrighteous men have received righteousness freely.' (*Ibid.*, p. 76).

¹⁵ 'Whoever wants to free the oppressed, must begin with himself. He must no longer be the oppressor, and he must free himself ... that is, the oppressing action has to be eliminated from both sides. By doing so, the freed oppressor and the freed oppressed will serve each other.' (*Ibid.*, pp, 62, 79).

¹⁶ See 'The Reign of God Has Come In the Suffering Christ: An Exploration of the Power of the Powerless', *International Review of Mission*, 68 (1979), pp. 109–114.

Paraguay and South Africa. The reign of God manifests itself as a power which runs counter to the established and ruling power.¹⁷

Löffler, then, interpreted the suffering of Christ not in substitutionary but in political terms. While this suffering culminates in his crucifixion, it is really his whole life and work which is described as suffering, and it has to be seen as the result of his confrontation with the ruling power. From beginning to end, Jesus confronted the ruling powers instead of taking their side and compromising with them. Jesus recruited from among the poor those who would work with him to accomplish change. The criteria of the new order were: liberation of the suffering and oppressed, disregard for material wealth and power built on might and the work for 'shalom'. As Jesus thus rejected the world and the contemporary religious authorities and confronted them, he suffered and was persecuted. 'The suffering of Christ points to the fact that the reign of God has actually begun, but also to a permanent struggle for the implementation of its goals.'¹⁸

Löffler indicated that as is illuminated in these new insights about the Gospel and Christ, today's mission form is to be the participation with the poor in their struggles: 'We must get alongside the poor, not in order to help them, as our Christian agencies have done for centuries, but to practise solidarity with them in their struggles and to seek support from them. The Christian Truth as a message does indeed p. 131 equally apply to all human beings at all levels and in all classes, but recruits primarily from among the poor. That kind of rediscovery is bound to create a confrontation with the middle class membership which dominates our churches in Europe. To break out of that bondage seems, however, the first step in mission.'¹⁹ Löffler then listed concrete questions and methods for today's mission forms as follows: how can I express the joint struggle with black Christians in South Africa in the face of the fact that my own society profits from their exploitation? And how do I use the inherited power and influence to support rather than hinder their combat? To participate in the struggle for the kingdom is to work for peace in the educational field, in the public media or in political bodies, and to oppose militarism, military production and exports. It is to liberate the oppressed by raising human rights issues of migrant workers, or to practise love towards love-starved children or handicapped people. These struggles to accomplish the concrete goals of the reign of God inevitably bring us into contact with other people of other faiths, humanists, and supporters of ideological causes which struggle for similar ends. 'A priority for mission today is thus to open to those who struggle toward the same ends, rather than to practise a narrow, identity-ridden Christian missionary approach.'²⁰

We find that Minjung theology is just following Löffler's political interpretation of the cross and the kingdom of God and its missionary form, which reflects the trend and mark of the wcc's mission theology,²¹ and political theology which regards the struggle of the poor and oppressed as the nature of mission.

3) The Asian Theological Conference: The Liberation Theology

¹⁷ See Löffler, *ibid.*, p. 111.

¹⁸ Löffler, *ibid.*, p. 112.

¹⁹ Löffler, *ibid.*, p. 113.

²⁰ Löffler, *ibid.*, p. 114.

²¹ Kim, Myung-H., 'Trends of the Churches Today', *Journal of Reformed Theology* (Hapdong Presbyterian Theological Seminary), Vol. I, No. 2, pp. 349–375.

The Asian Theological Conference, held in Wennappuwa, Sri Lanka, in 1979, under the theme of 'Asia's Struggle for Full Humanity: Towards a Relevant Theology', explored the way and the content of Asian theology. There it was stated that the Asian theology is a theology of liberation to seek the liberation of the poor and the oppressed, and that God is present today in the struggles of people.²² p. 132 The summary of the content of Asian theology, which manifested itself in 'the final statement' adopted by the Asian Theological Conference, is as follows.²³

First, Asian theology must direct itself away from western theology toward the context and problems of Asia itself, including the poverty, exploitation and deprivation of human rights under military dictatorship. Today the struggle against these socio-economic and political exploitative forces is taken up by advocates of socialism on the one hand, and has been enriched by the traditions of the major religions of Asia (Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam and Christianity) on the other. The richness is expressed not only in philosophical formulations but also in various art forms such as dance, drama, poetry and song, as well as in myths and rites, parables and legends. The immediate issues of Asia are the suppression of human rights and the rights of workers, and the victimization of youth, women and ethnic minorities. To be relevant enough to solve these issues, Asian theology must undergo a radical transformation.

In the context of poverty and exploitation, theology must above all have a very definite liberational thrust, and must participate in the struggle of the poor for full humanity. We must affirm that the poor and the oppressed are called by God to be architects and builders of their own destiny. To be truly liberating, theology must start from the context of poverty and must be expressed by the oppressed community using the technical skills of biblical scholars, social scientists, psychologists and anthropologists. It also can be expressed in art forms such as drama, literature and folk stories. In addition, to be truly liberating, Asian theology must be the work of the Asian poor, who are struggling for full humanity. To be authentically Asian, the theology must be formulated in the religio-cultural history of Asia, must be integrated with the insights and values of Asia's religions, and must approach its task with the tools of social analysis of the realities of Asia. The Bible becomes an important source in the doing of theology. The God encountered in the history of the people is none other than the God who revealed himself in Jesus, and continues to be present in the struggles of people. Therefore the formula for Christian living and ministry has to be made through participation in the struggle of the masses of people. This requires the development of corresponding spirituality. We need to continue deepening our understanding of the Asian reality through active involvement in people's struggles for full p. 133 humanity. This means struggling side by side with peasants, fisherfolk, workers, slum dwellers, marginalized and minority groups, oppressed youth and women, so that together we can discover the Asian face of Christ.

We find that as the above summary statement clearly shows, the theological concern of the Asian Theological Conference has been almost completely concentrated with the people's liberation movement in its socio-economic-political dimension, and with the religio-cultural humanities and social sciences. We find also that inclination for socio-economic-political and religio-cultural concerns manifests itself as such in Minjung theology.

²² See Virginia Fabella, ed., *Asia's Struggle For Full Humanity: Towards a Relevant Theology* (Paper from the Asian Theological Conference, January 7–20, 1980, Wennappuwa, Sri Lanka) (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1980), pp. 1–202.

²³ See *Asia's Struggle*, pp. 152–160.

4) Esquivel: God the Labourer

The poetess of Guatemala, Julia Esquivel, who had impressively expressed the socio-economic and political trend and revolutionary enthusiasm of modern ecumenical mission theology, and had won great applause at the Melbourne Mission Conference and the World Council's Assembly at Vancouver, presented an article entitled 'The Crucified Lord: A Latin American Perspective' at the 1980 mission conference in Melbourne. In that article she satirically mocked, criticized, and denied the traditional Christian view of God, and presented the new picture of the god of Latin America's liberation theology.²⁴

First she criticized all the descriptions of God learned in Sunday School and at the Seminary, such as that God is omnipotent, that he punishes sin and protects the just, that he chooses his people and sustains order in this world, that he guarantees social and economic well-being on this earth, that he prepared for eternity, and that he presented and offered his son, Jesus, as personal saviour. She claimed that these descriptions were false images of god made by the ruling class. She said that the god fabricated in the western world many years ago is a false god which neither feels, hears, nor responds. It is a god which is erected for the generals of Guatemala, for merchants who make cosmetics and luxuries, and for murderers who make death weapons. She insisted that we are struggling against the powerful false god of a thousand faces, and that this enormous idol with feet of clay is [p. 134](#) beginning to crumble in Central America through the force of an awakening people.

Esquivel said that the real god, who so far is unknown, has begun to be accessible to the poorest. This god has been described in the People's Mass of the Nicaraguans as follows: 'You are the God of the poor, the human and humble God, the God that sweats in the street, the God of the worn and leathery face. That is why I speak to you in the way my people speak, because you are God the worker, Christ the labourer.' Esquivel continued to describe the real God who has begun to be known to Latin Americans in this way: This Living God has been found by the people who searched for him in anguish, with tears, insistently. When they lifted their eyes from their totally destitute situation, they found him. Right in their midst, in their neighbour, is the God that perspires in the streets, that shouts through the people asking for freedom, that suffers with the people (the suffering servant, [Isa. 53](#)), that has the pallid face of the tortured peasant of Guatemala. He can only reign through a people, in a people. That is the Justice-God, the Fraternal-God, the Liberation-God that appears as in the Exodus of the people of Israel and in each exodus of all people that march towards the Kingdom of Life. This God, unknown, is the God who changes the laws of the transnational free enterprise (the creation of abundance for some and death for many), who changes the law of the mighty in order to plant in the heart of the people the law of love and the law of life, who breaks through the frontiers of sex, race and class and makes fraternal communion. That God is fighting against the death-god which is alive in a system of capitalism.

The history of salvation shows us the God who reveals himself in the events of the daily lives of ordinary human beings such as fishermen, women and carpenters. But all of those who met him were discontented with the models of society in an unjust world, and dreamt of a different world and a different earth, a world of peace and brotherhood. They dare to come forth to transform history. By daring to move without knowing where they are going, they become friends with that God, they become the Word of God, and action of God among his people. Abram becomes Abraham, Jacob becomes Israel, Saul becomes

²⁴ See 'The Crucified Lord: A Latin American Perspective', *International Review of Mission*, 69 (1980), pp. 311-315.

Paul, Jesus of Nazareth becomes Christ. This Christ is the God of the people of Nicaragua, of El Salvador and Guatemala, the God of the poor, the human and humble God, the worker God. This God, which in the past spoke to us through the prophets, has spoken to us through Jesus of Nazareth. This Jesus also promised us that through his Spirit we would accomplish even greater things than he. Therefore, although Jesus did not leave us a finished plan in writing, he planted in p. 135 us the seed of Truth and Life. In this way he opened the way that leads to the kingdom that he announced, and announces today, amidst the people who struggle for liberation. Jesus is the way for and with the people united in a common project.

The picture of God the labourer, as Esquivel described him, is the struggling God and the liberating God who is sought for by modern ecumenical theology, and is present in the poor and oppressed. This God has nothing to do with the rich and the ruling class. This God is also the revolutionary God who easily digs into and raises a storm in the hearts of people all over the world who have suffered from the harsh evil of the socio-economic-political structure. We find that this picture of Esquivel's God is similar to the god of Minjung theology.

THE CONCEPT OF GOD IN MINJUNG THEOLOGY AND ITS SOCIO-ECONOMICO-HISTORICAL CHARACTERISTICS

Elsewhere I have pointed out that Prof. Seo Nam-Dong's Minjung theology is more of a social movement. Minjung theology considers the context of a few subjectively selected historical events from social, economic and political life (in the Bible, church history and Korean history) more valuable than the biblical text which has been the source and guideline of theology. It then talks of human gods (such as Kim, JiHa, Jang, Il-Dam, or a newborn baby of a prostitute) which are in the outcries (Han) of oppressed Minjung (the mass of people) instead of God who is the central theme of theology. It deals with Han instead of a major theological theme like sin. It puts the emphasis on hate, the resolution of Han and the actualization of humanity rather than on repentance or salvation; it therefore fails to be a theology and can be considered only as a social movement.

On the other hand, within the Hansin College of Korea Christian Presbyterian Church, which is the mecca of Minjung theology, there is a serious critic. Chun Kyung-Yeon, the professor of New Testament theology at the College, said in his thesis 'Minjung Theology Evaluation'²⁵ that it is not right to regard Minjung theology as a theology, claiming that it is prejudiced, narrow and destructive. He then pointed out the hermeneutical problem of Minjung theology, stating its interpretation of folk tales to be not only 'irrational sophistry', but also 'impudent and snobbish'. He criticized the p. 136 interpretation of prophetic books as having been 'a largely damaging work'. He further commented harshly, 'If one demands Minjung to become the subject of history, isn't the result only creating an army of devils who will fight against God?'

Let us attempt to analyze and evaluate the socio-economic and historical characteristics of the concept of God in the Minjung theology of Seo Nam-Dong, the one who pioneered and constructed it.²⁶

²⁵ See Min Young-lin; Chun Kyung-Yeon; Kim Kyung-Jae; Change Il-Cho, *Lights of the Korean Theology*, (Dae-Hwah Press, Dec., 1983), pp. 51-94.

²⁶ 'I am proud that I have set "Minjung" as the main theological theme, and have systemized it to claim that to be the centre of all theology.' (Seo Nam-Dong, 'I Talk Minjung Theology,' March, 1980), *Studies on Minjung Theology* (Han-Kil Press, 1983), p. 174.

1) The Concept of God in Minjung Theology

In an accurate sense, there is no God concept in Minjung theology, because the major interest of Minjung theology is not the traditional Christian God. It says that Christianity must look for a new form of God. They insist that it is time to think of God as a historical God who acts in history and man, instead of the doctrinal, metamorphic ontological God of traditional Christianity.²⁷

In fact, according to Feuerbach, Minjung theology's major interest is historical man—Minjung rather than the transcendent God. Prof. Seo claims that the God of tradition is the wrong God; therefore one needs to stand as an atheist against such a God (Boch, Bonino).²⁸ He sets Minjung as the 'central theme of theology' in 'an age of supra-Christianity', and Minjung becomes 'the subject of history'.²⁹ Feuerbach's understanding of man is applied directly in Minjung theology. Man in Minjung theology is not a mere rational being but a concrete, actual being (who is exploited and suppressed), not an individual, but a communal Minjung.

Since the object of Minjung theology is the historical Minjung, Minjung's God is a God who lives along with Minjung, is immanent p.137 within Minjung, and is equal to Minjung. Prof. Seo says that the people who are cursed and neglected meet God in their hearts. When you turn the bottom up, that becomes God, and the Messiah of Minjung appears (In-Nae-Chun; the people are equal to God). If a prostitute in the ghetto gives birth to a baby, in this slum a god appears in the form of a new life.³⁰

Prof. Seo's God is not a transcendental God, but a god immanent in human reality. Prof. Seo claims that 'Jang Il-Dam is the present modern-day Christ of 1970', and the same concept is repeated by poet Kim Ji-Ha.³¹ In his interpretation of [Luke 10](#), the parable of the Good Samaritan, he finds the image of Christ and his work in the man who was robbed rather than in the Good Samaritan.³² Prof. Seo reiterated his position in a panel discussion

²⁷ See Jose Miguez Bonino, *Room To Be People* (Geneva W.C.C., 1979), pp. 9–25.

²⁸ See Seo Nam-Dong, 'Blending of Two Stories', (March, 1979), *Studies on Minjung Theology*, p. 62; 'Shaping of Han and Its Theological Insight', (October, 1979), *Minjung Theology*, p. 83.

²⁹ See 'I Talk Minjung Theology', *Minjung Theology*, p. 174. 'The theme of Minjung is Minjung rather than Jesus.' (Blending of Two Stories', (March, 1973), *Minjung Theology*, p. 53). 'Dakawa decided that Minjung is the centre of theology as a result of his interpretation of Mark ... I theologically agree with the idea.' ('I Talk Minjung Theology', *Minjung Theology*, pp. 187f.)

³⁰ 'He saw it and said, "Oh! On this contaminated flesh a new life is born. God is born." There he learned the way. He then knelt down and said, "God is in your wombs. He is in your bottom. Oh! My mother." He kissed her foot.' ('Shaping of Hah and Its Theological Insight', *Minjung Theology*, p. 103). See also 'Blending of Two Stories', *Minjung Theology*, p. 79.

³¹ See 'Shaping of Han', p. 105.

³² 'The man who is hit, hurt, and calling for help—his painful groan (Han) is the call of Christ to those passing by. The attitude to him is the attitude to Christ.' ('Shaping', p. 107). See also 'I Talk', p. 180.

held in March, 1980. The title was 'Talks On Minjung Theology'. He said that the voice of Minjung is the voice of God, for God is immanent in Minjung.³³

Further Prof. Seo insisted that Jesus, unlike Moses, had not claimed himself as a hero, but 'came down into Minjung to identify with Minjung'; therefore Christ is Minjung, and Minjung is the Messiah.³⁴ He said, if traditional Christianity understands Christ's redemptive work in the sense of 'salvation for me', and 'dying instead of me', then the 'de-Christian' era's Minjung theology sees it as a 'recurrence of Christ by each individual'.³⁵

By that, Prof. Seo clearly has expressed himself. He said that his interest is not in Jesus. He confessed that Jesus is a 'tool' for understanding Minjung.³⁶ Therefore, Prof. Seo's Jesus doesn't necessarily p. 138 have to be the triune God of traditional Christianity, nor the subject of worship. Jesus was a model for the realization of true humanity, so one merely needs to imitate and follow the modeling. Naturally it is meaningless to believe in his divinity or to confess him as the Son of God.³⁷ The word 'faith' is no longer necessary in relation to Jesus.³⁸

Prof. Seo's Minjung theology has neither the Lord of judgment nor the eschatology of the coming New Heaven and Earth. Though he says that he does not necessarily deny the belief in Heaven after death, his words suggest some sense of mockery. He expressed it as if that kind of belief might be necessary when he gets somewhat aged, but not at this time.³⁹ Furthermore, his view of the judgment is almost insulting. He proclaimed that one

³³ 'When we say "the voice of God", which is the inner voice of an individual, socially it means "the public opinion" (Voice of Minjung).' ('I Talk', pp. 167f).

³⁴ See 'I Talk', pp. 187f. ' "Minjung takes the role of Messiah" means that sufferings of Minjung itself is doing the role ... In the understanding, Minjung is the Messiah and they are the Lord of the new era.' ('I Talk', pp. 180f.)

³⁵ See 'Blending', p. 79.

³⁶ 'The theme of Minjung Theology is Minjung rather than Jesus. In Minjung Theology, Jesus is a tool to understand Minjung, not the other way around.' ('Blending', p. 53; See 'I Talk', p. 187).

³⁷ 'To believe in Jesus is not that of confessing and acknowledging traditional doctrine, but is a practical sense ... People are all sons of God, but Jesus was one who is a son in a special way ... Jesus' humanity and life is humanization in its essence, and an example and a model for a man, so we try to imitate and follow him ... It is nonsense just to sit down and say, "I believe Christ is the Son of God." ' ('I Talk', p. 188f.).

³⁸ 'Therefore, we no longer need to have "faith" in Jesus of Nazareth, but a "historical knowledge" is enough for a relation to him.' ('I Talk', p. 173). 'No need to use the word "faith". I think it might be better to drop "faith" in the narrow sense of Christian faith.' ('I Talk', p. 170).

³⁹ 'In Church, old persons are there. They don't understand labour movement, nor ever engaged in it. They are waiting for death ... To give meaning to them in the Gospel, one has to teach that Heaven is waiting when you are dead. It might be necessary for me also when I get older. I might need "Life eternal".' ('The Victory of the Suffered', *Studies on Minjung Theology*, April, 1982, p. 256.

should not accept the invitation of Messiah, if the coming Messiah calls the rich and the rulers to the coming Kingdom.⁴⁰

Since the interest of Minjung theology is in Minjung, and its historical development of the socio-economy where Minjung is the leader, Minjung theology's God is not only equal to Minjung but also to historical development. Prof. Seo acknowledged that his God concept is sort of a pantheistic concept, and he also said that historical development and nature could be understood as God.⁴¹ Prof. Seo, in p. 139 accordance with Joachim Floris' theory of historical theology, said 'God is the immanent power in the development of world history, and God evolves himself to lead the process of history through humanization and incarnation process.'⁴²

In Minjung theology, the traditional Christian transcendent God has deteriorated to an immanent God of massiveness and history who acts within historical events of Minjung's Liberation. Prof. Seo said that God's revelation and salvation are experienced in the historical events such as the Exodus, the Cross, the March 1st. Movement and Korean Independence.⁴³ Also, the divine work of liberation of this kind is done through 'eternal revolution' (or a unification of God and revolution).⁴⁴ He expressed his change of God concept as 'God's transcendence converting from the dimension of metamorphic to transcendence of the future'.⁴⁵ There, the personal God of Christian tradition is again deteriorated into a force for historical development. In Minjung theology, we cannot find the God of grace who seeks, forgives, and saves sinners. Prof. Chun Kyung-Yoen of Hansin critically pointed out that Minjung theology 'does not mention a word about the gracious God who not only seeks but heals all the hurts of human pain and sorrow'.⁴⁶

⁴⁰ 'Then, if the Messiah invites me to sit in the same seat with the rich who have lived in luxurious houses and driven fancy cars, and the ruler who unjustly oppressed the people, I will definitely reject such an invitation ... It is necessary and possible to reconcile all other disagreements, but not those between the rich and the poor, the oppressors and those who have suffered.' ('About Minjung Theology', *Minjung Theology*, April, 1975, p. 35).

⁴¹ 'In a broad sense, we take a pantheistic position ... But I want to emphasize that I believe it to be a socio-economic historical development in which God leads the history. This is the main frame of my belief. God works through history. This, in an extreme application, means that the history itself is God ... To my understanding, God can be nature, or history.' ('I talk', p. 171).

⁴² See 'Blending', p. 59.

⁴³ See 'Blending', pp. 50f.

⁴⁴ See 'Blending', pp. 51, 80.

⁴⁵ See 'Jesus, the Church History, the Korean Church History' (Feb. 1975), *Minjung Theology*, p. 19.

⁴⁶ Light, p. 59.

Prof. Seo, though he agrees that his pantheistic and evolutionary historic God concept is from Hegel, who was indicted as an heretic by traditional Christianity, made the absurd remark that it is now time for conservative theology to accept this new concept of God.⁴⁷

2) Ideology of Socio-Economic History

It is difficult to acknowledge Minjung theology as a theology, since it ignores the personal and transcendent God, and considers God an immanent force for historical evolution whose action is limited within the realm of historical events such as mass revolution. It is proper to p. 140 consider it as an ideology.⁴⁸ In fact, Prof. Seo, who is the leader of the idea, repeatedly emphasized Minjung theology's core trait as that of a theology of socio-economical interpretation of history. The urgent objective of theology today, he said, 'is to interpret theology in the light of socio-economic history'.⁴⁹ And he claimed that modern theology should change its traditional inductive methodology and ideal speculation into sociological practices of deductive methodology.⁵⁰ Further, he clearly said, 'When we say we are doing socio-economical and socio-literary theology, it certainly means farewell to the old theology.'⁵¹

So Prof. Seo called Minjung theology 'a theology in the de-Christian era'.⁵² In this description, we find its non-Christian traits and socio-economic history characteristics. I will make a detailed analysis and evaluation to prove that Minjung theology is a socio-economic and historical ideology under the guise of theology.

i) View of the Bible and Hermeneutics Prof. Seo followed the theory of Tillich and Gutiérrez and said that the structure of theology no longer clings to the transcendent revelation or the personal existence of humanity, but must be the 'social conditions of humanity'.⁵³ Here, as Gutiérrez set his theological structure on the praxis of Latin America's monarchy and economical exploitation, and defined it 'a critical insight into historical praxis', Prof. Seo took the biblical, Church historical and Korean historical tradition of Minjung as his theological frame. He had especially narrowed the frame by dealing with the Korean social conditions of the 70s under President Park's regime when Christianity and Korean Minjung tradition were 'mingled together'. So he sees the events and descriptions in the

⁴⁷ 'That is Hegel's concept. It was condemned as a heresy by conservative theology. But now it's time for them to stand back.' ('The Objects of Minjung Theology as a Korean Theology', *Theological Philosophies*, Vol. 24, Spring, 1979, p. 123).

⁴⁸ Kim Kyung-Jae of Hansin College pointed out, 'There exists a danger that Minjung Theology might limit the sovereignty, transcendence, and free will of the biblical God in historical science. That means that there is a danger of theology becoming a flat theology of one dimension if it ignores existing religious experiences which transcend empirical science.' (*Illumination on the Korean Minjung Theology*, p. 108).

⁴⁹ 'I talk', p. 164.

⁵⁰ 'The Cross-Actualization of the Resurrection', *Minjung Theology*, April, 1983, p. 317.

⁵¹ 'The Objects', p. 126.

⁵² 'Blending', p. 625.

⁵³ 'Now when political theology bases its frame of reference on socio-economical history or sociology of literature, man's personal existence is not the frame but I he social condition of human.' ('Blending', p. 49).

Bible as a p. 141 'frame of reference' or 'a referable text' which records socio-economic-historical Minjung movement. In that, Minjung theology definitely denies that the Bible can be regarded as an absolute standard.⁵⁴

Prof. Seo goes beyond literal criticism and applied socio-economic and historical criticism of the Bible. He maintains that the Gospel of Mark is a true Gospel, because it is recorded according to the position of Minjung, and it is recorded at Galilee where repressed Minjung were. In comparison, the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles has corrupted the original Gospel, for those were recorded in the Jewish national perspective of history which went along with the people of Jerusalem, the rulers.⁵⁵ This interpretation is not original with Prof. Seo. As he has admitted, it is borrowed from Japanese theologian Dakawa,⁵⁶ and a similar interpretation is held by German theologian Löffler.

Prof. Seo also interprets the Covenant Law ([Ex. 20:22–23:19](#)), which he claims is the oldest record ever to be settled in a socio-economic and historical context. He claimed that the essence of the text is a human rights law which defines the socio-political system of the time.⁵⁷ To conclude, Prof. Seo says that 'socio-economic-historical methodology is the definite basis for hermeneutics', and 'one is able to see the important aspects when he sees socio-economic- p. 142 historically'.⁵⁸ The Bible becomes non-religious and socio-economical.

ii) God and His People The socio-economic and historical method of interpretation of Minjung theology is applied consistently to all the themes of theology. The God of the Jews, and the God of Jesus is a socio-economically sensitive God, who communicates only with

⁵⁴ "Traditional theology does not use the term "frame of reference"; instead it uses "absolute revelation" or "theological standard", i.e. the Bible. Conservatives sorely depend on it, saying that "the Bible is the absolute standard" is rejected by the Bible itself ... Therefore, I see the Bible as a point of reference. In other words, it is a reference textbook.' ('I talk', p. 184).

Chun Kyung-Yeon of Hansin College criticized Minjung theology's view on the Bible as follows: 'Minjung Theology is not listening to the whole context of the Bible. They only suggest passages that support their claims to be "the Biblical point of reference ..." Minjung Theology does not listen to the Word but to Minjung.' (*Illumination*, pp. 71, 79).

⁵⁵ 'In Mark, Galilee where Jesus spent his life is the land of Minjung, while Jerusalem is the seat of the rulers ... While Jerusalem is the center (capital) of the final victory and glory of the Jew in the traditional Jewish view of history, Mark seems to challenge the view by claiming Galilee as the final home of victory for isolated Minjung ... This is in sharp contrast to the Gospel of Luke and Acts where the resurrection and the second coming are centred around Jerusalem, therefore inspired traditional theology is a depoliticalized view of history. Jesus' mission field in Mark is an entirely isolated Minjung (*Ochlos*). It changed into people (*laos*) in Luke. Therefore "Galilee" is a symbol for oppressed Minjung, and "Jerusalem" is of rulers.' ('The April Revolution and the Resurrection', *Studies on Minjung Theology*, p. 129).

⁵⁶ See 'Blending', pp. 52f.; 'I talk', p. 187.

⁵⁷ 'The content is "protection law", "law on social justice", that is, human rights law. That constitution defined "political system of the society" ' ('I talk', p. 186).

⁵⁸ See 'I talk', p. 164.

the repressed poor. The Jewish God is not for the rich or the rulers, but for the slaves, and he is a God of hope and liberation.⁵⁹

Therefore Minjung theology describes Minjung as Jewish people with whom Yahweh first communicated, and the subject of salvation that Jesus dealt with as lowly ones, robbers and groups of beggars in socio-economical perspective. Prof. Seo, as some other Old Testament theologians, does not regard Jewish people as religious leaders, but as a low class mass of 'Habiru' who wandered around the Middle East.⁶⁰ We can easily see that Minjung theology's view of Jewish chiefs is faulty and twisted. Though the Bible speaks of the forefathers of the faith as a 'small herd of nomads' ([Deut. 26:5](#)) in a socio-economic sense, 'foreigners and strangers' ([Heb. 11:13](#)) in a religious sense, it never calls them 'a school of lowly wandering beggars'. The Bible, in turn, describes the Jewish ancestor Abraham who possesses sheep, silver and gold, servants, camels and donkeys abundantly ([Gen. 24:35](#)) as blessed of God. It describes his son Isaac as also very rich, having many sheep, cows and servants ([Gen. 26:12f](#)).

However, Prof. Seo clearly states that no riches or rulers can be included in the Covenant people of Jesus. Only oppressed low ones, poor ones and outcasts are included in the Covenant.⁶¹ Jesus himself dealt with and identified with the poor and the oppressed alone, not [p. 143](#) with the rich and the rulers. He claims that Jesus excluded privileged ones who possessed knowledge, intelligence, wealth, fame and position in the parable of God's invitation in [Luke 14:15-24](#).⁶²

Prof. Seo, on several occasions, has even said that the rich and the rulers are not entitled to pray or to receive the grace of salvation.⁶³ He then asserted that no rich person can enter heaven.⁶⁴ But the Bible, though it warns against a lust for things, teaches that

⁵⁹ 'Yahweh God was a God of slaves who had protected their human rights ... He was a God of hope who led slaves out into emancipation, with the fire pillar during the night and the cloud during the day. He took revenge in behalf of suffering slaves and protected their rights' ('The Biblical Reference for Minjung Theology', *Minjung Theology*, p. 237). 'The God of Jesus was not the kind that the poor and the rich can believe and worship together. He is God of the poor and the suppressed. He is one who liberates the poor and the suppressed.' ('Jesus', p. 12).

⁶⁰ 'Habiru was a name for the lowest. It was a name for wanderers who were out of the Empire's rule, without citizenship. These outcasts were poor. Many orphans and widows were among them. Sometimes, they were robbers. But many of them were slaves, farming slaves, cheap mercenaries. These outcasts were Habiru. Therefore Jews were not the one race of people, nor a cultural group of beggars who were out of ruling orders.' ('The Biblical', p. 236).

⁶¹ See 'The Priest of Hah', *Minjung Theology*, pp. 37f.; 'Blending', pp. 46f.

⁶² See 'The Biblical', pp. 230f.

⁶³ 'It is Christianity that does not allow the rich or the ruling to have the privilege of prayer. It is not Christianity nor God when the rich offer prayer breakfast meeting for the rulers and ministers. The God of the poor and the oppressed is different. That is Jesus.' ('Jesus', p. 13).

⁶⁴ 'It is apt to say that the rich cannot enter Heaven ... It is absolute nonsense ... That will be like saying "a round triangle" ... The rich going to Heaven is absurd ... Anyway, this is my unmovable position of faith.' ('I talk', p. 195).

God's blessing enables one to be rich, and the rich and the rulers can also be objects of salvation. 'It is the blessing of the Lord that makes one rich' ([Prov. 10:22](#)). 'The rich man's wealth is his fortress' ([Prov. 10:15](#)). 'Who does give salvation to Kings' ([Ps. 144:10](#)). Prof. Seo may reject these verses by saying that they are not reliable, for they were recorded at the time when the original Gospel was reduced to an ideology by the ruling class of the post-kingdom era.⁶⁵

Minjung theology understands man in human class relations; in other words, in the socio-economical perspective rather than the religious and spiritual perspective related to God. It is the Marxist view of man. Minjung theology, therefore, selfishly selects passages to justify its socio-economic and historical ideology, and rejects passages irrelevant to their use by labeling them as products of a contaminated ruler's ideology.

iii) Exodus, the Cross, the Resurrection Minjung theology is consistent with a socio-economic and political interpretation of Exodus, the Cross and the Resurrection. Prof. Seo follows the same path as Reimarus, Kautsky, Isler and Brandon who saw Jesus as a social revolutionist, and also as Löffler's modern political theology. So, he interprets these events as political events in socio-economic history. He saw the Exodus as 'a socio-economical event in which a group of slaves fought against oppressing rulers with violence, achieving p. 144 liberation and escape'.⁶⁶ In other words, 'it is a story of escaping slaves'.⁶⁷ The divine redemptive nature of the story has been eliminated thereby. He says that 2,000 years of Christianity have changed the story, making it religious instead of political, and making it an ideology of the rulers. Since the Exodus is a socio-political event, 'God's involvement in history today must take place in a socio-economical setting also,' he claims.⁶⁸

Prof. Seo also sees the cross as a political event resulting from political motivation. The sentencing of Jesus to the cross was due to his political uprising against the Jerusalem rulers who were exploiting Minjung, which eliminates the redemptive meaning of the cross.⁶⁹ His critique continues by saying that 2,000 years of Christianity again elevated the cross event as a religious event for the political purpose of the ruling classes.⁷⁰ He says that, since Minjung theology finds its frame of reference in the cross event in a political context, Minjung theology today sees that 'the salvation of Minjung is processed in the political area (narrowly in the socio-political area)'.⁷¹

Prof. Seo interprets the Resurrection and resurrection of the saints in the same way. He calls the death of Jesus 'a political murder', and the Resurrection 'a protest and

⁶⁵ 'Originally God was a being who led and protected the sufferers, the poor, and the oppressed social outcasts. This God had been reduced to a protecting God by David and his successors to make him an ideology.' ('The Biblical', p. 52).

⁶⁶ 'Blending', p. 52.

⁶⁷ 'I talk', pp. 164f.

⁶⁸ 'Blending', p. 51.

⁶⁹ See 'Blending', p. 54; 'The Biblical', p. 234.

⁷⁰ 'After that the Church dropped the judicial meaning of punishment but elevated it as a religious event. So they lifted the Cross up in the air to exaggerate as a great religious symbol of God's love and forgiveness.' ('The Biblical', pp. 234).

⁷¹ 'Blending', p. 54.

resolution of Han'.⁷² Also the resurrection of the believers is the resolution of Hah of those who were killed innocently or mistreated. Therefore those who have died after a natural life span are excluded from the resurrection. For the 'resurrection will only be of those who were killed'.⁷³ Prof. Seo has twisted the Revelation to rationalize his opinion: 'the Revelation does not include the Resurrection, but only the resurrection of the killed'.⁷⁴ p. 145 So the resurrection of the believers no longer signifies receiving a glorified body instead of a mortal body, but realization of a new social and political order on this earth as the resolution of Hah of those killed innocently. Resurrection is 'a socio-political concept', 'the effort toward a new society, and a Messianic politics'.⁷⁵ The reason resurrection is interpreted as an event after death in Heaven or a religious symbol is that the Church has changed the political context of it.⁷⁶ Therefore today's Church must restore and carry out the original political meaning and the power. This will be done through the awakening of Minjung and the revolutionary process. Prof. Seo summarized the idea of resurrection: 'for the Church of new era, the Resurrection of Jesus means the awakening of Minjung. From now on, the awakening of Minjung, who claim to be the subject of history, is the Resurrection of Jesus ... So, uprisings like the March 1st Movement, or April 19 Revolution are all resurrections. This is Minjung theology's new understanding of the Resurrection.'⁷⁷ This seems like a harmonized model of Hegel's absolute spirit concept of pantheism and Marx's ideal of social, economical and political revolution.

iv) Sin, Repentance and Salvation Minjung theology interprets the main themes of theology such as sin, repentance and salvation in the same way. Prof. Seo does not understand a sinner as a person who has sinned against God and his neighbour. He defines a sinner as one who was mistreated, meaning someone 'who had crimes committed against him'. Sin is 'a label' that rulers give to the weaker class.⁷⁸

⁷² 'The Resurrection of Jesus is that of the murdered. It is the protest, resolution of Han, and restoration of divine righteousness. Hah is the soul and the outcry of the dead who suffered. It is a suppressed emotion of those who were murdered unjustly, but justified falsely by the law. When their protests and explanations were ignored ... Denial of death, revealing of hidden truth, victory of the life and the truth—that is resurrection. Resurrection is resolution of Hah.' ('The Cross', pp. 318f.).

⁷³ 'The Cross', p. 319.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ 'Our resurrection is social. Resurrection is not returning to the world in an immortal body, but is a rebirth into a new society with a spiritual body. The Messianic Kingdom is not a visible thing but is a new era, new society and new politics which comes in the line of history ... The Resurrection Symbol is a sociological, political concept. Resurrection faith is the will for the coming new society and Messianic politics.' ('The Cross', p. 320).

⁷⁶ 'It is a present reality that the Church today only acknowledges a religious meaning of the Cross and the Resurrection instead of the full political meaning which they originally had.' ('The Cross', p. 317).

⁷⁷ 'I talk', p. 194.

⁷⁸ 'Sin, condemnation is, sociologically, only a label that the ruling puts to the weak and the opponents ... So called sinners are actually victims of the crime, sufferers.' ('Shaping', p. 106).

Seo said Minjung theology's major interest is to salve social injustice and structural contradictions. And this injustice is sin.⁷⁹ Naturally, p. 146 Minjung theology is not interested in condemning individual 'sinners' who are sacrifices of structural unrighteousness, but defends them. Prof. Seo agrees with Ahn Byung Moo's interpretation, and claims that Jesus has never condemned sinners, but received them 'unconditionally'.⁸⁰ Jesus never condemned anyone and was never concerned with their repentance. Luke records it seventeen times, which proves that it is his ideological concern. Jesus and Mark did not take repentance as a theme, he concludes.⁸¹ He then criticized preachers who teach sin and repentance as defenders of the ruler's ideology.⁸²

In a word, Minjung theology deals with Han rather than sin as a core theme.⁸³ While traditional theology teaches that the purpose of the life and death of Jesus is to redeem and save his people (Mt. 1:21, 26:28), Minjung theology says the life and death of Jesus is to identify himself with Minjung's Han and to resolve their Han. There Seo even calls Jesus 'Christ of Han'.⁸⁴ He claims the Minjung theology of today must be concerned with Han and the sorrow of Minjung to the extent of taking it up as the framework and the guide of theology, and the sole responsibility of modern theology. While the western Church and theology disguised its role as a mediator of redemption to speak of 'guilt and repentance as an ideology of rulers', Minjung theology's church must bear the role of 'priest of Hah' to resolve and comfort Minjung's Han.⁸⁵ In Minjung theology no repentance is necessary. A sinner is not to be ashamed, but bold. That means Minjung theology has replaced the religious matter of the God-man relationship with the socio-economical matter of man to man relationship. It is an inevitable result of a political theology that lacks love and respect for a personal transcendent God.

Minjung theology, in place of salvation through a restored relationship between man and God by repentance of sin and forgiveness, understands salvation as a humanization process through p. 147 resolution of Hah by means such as liberation, expression and clarifications.⁸⁶ Minjung theology speaks of 'working out one's own salvation' in which Minjung is the subject, instead of a 'dependent salvation' that relies on the blood of Christ.⁸⁷ Prof. Seo criticizes the traditional attitude of 'by the power of the blood' as an 'incantative religion', and condemned such redemption as 'only the morphine to Minjung,

⁷⁹ See 'I talk', p. 202.

⁸⁰ See 'Shaping', p. 106; 'The Objects', p. 142.

⁸¹ See 'Shaping', p. 106.

⁸² 'Today, ministers who are supposed to deliver God's message usually "preach" sin and repentance to the congregation which eventually is an excuse for the ideology of the power system.' ('Shaping', p. 105).

⁸³ 'So far, we treated the matter of sin as the Christian theology's theme. But Minjung theology's concern in the future is on Han rather than sin. This means more than mere forgiveness of sin.' ('The Biblical', p. 243).

⁸⁴ See 'Shaping', pp. 105-107.

⁸⁵ See 'Blending', p. 81.

⁸⁶ See 'Shaping', pp. 89, 107.

⁸⁷ See 'Blending', pp. 51, 57.

not salvation'.⁸⁸ Minjung theology's salvation is no longer the salvation of grace which reconciles God and man in the blood of Christ. It is a self-achieved human process by exercising Dan (an act accumulating Han) to resolve Han, therefore relating the process to 'eternal revolution'.⁸⁹ Prof. Seo said that *Missio Dei*, which is the salvation event of Minjung liberation, is possible without the belief in the blood of Jesus. And such events have happened in Korean history as well.⁹⁰ We can conclude that Minjung theology, following Löffler's socio-political understanding, has contaminated the biblical meaning of sin, repentance, and salvation.

v) *Pneumatological Interpretation* Prof. Seo, following Joachim Floris' evolutionary and modalistic Trinity's historic theology, says that his second presupposition is pneumatological interpretation. Minjung theology is a theology of the Spirit's age when the Father's age and the Son's age has gone by.⁹¹ Theology, in his definition, does not cling to the old traditional Christianity but voluntarily chooses and decides in accordance with the present experience and context.⁹² Past events (including the Jesus event) are only frames of reference or reference texts. Pneumatological theology does not value the past Jesus that much. While Christological interpretation says that Jesus was the ransom for me, pneumatological interpretation says, 'I am recurring Jesus, and the Jesus event is repeating at the present.'⁹³

Pneumatological interpretation is, for example, 'to make a decision p. 148 regarding God's will concerning whether to resist against a certain monarchy or not'.⁹⁴ In other words, a theological effort to resolve today's social economical and political characteristics of Minjung theology is clear.

vi) *Millennium* Prof. Seo has said that 'the doctrine of the kingdom of Heaven' and 'the doctrine of the Millennial Kingdom' are like two centres of an ellipse. Though it appears that he acknowledges both teachings, in truth he has called for revival and restoration of the Millennial doctrine which was Minjung's teaching of the First Church. He said the doctrine of Heaven had deteriorated and depoliticalized into an ideology of the rulers.⁹⁵ Minjung theology that emphasizes historical context must take the Messianic Kingdom as its central doctrine, he said.⁹⁶ He not only disregards the central biblical message of Heaven as God's Kingdom, but also interprets it as if the Bible is teaching a self-made socio-political utopia as its central doctrine. 'The Promised Land' which Yahweh had

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 80f.

⁹⁰ See 'I talk', p. 169.

⁹¹ See 'Blending', pp. 58–63; 'I talk', pp. 165f.

⁹² 'Christological is to mean "dependent" while pneumatological means "self-made" ' ('I talk', p. 165). 'I claim that pneumatological interpretation is given its appropriateness, for it accords with present experience and context.' ('Blending', pp. 78f).

⁹³ 'Blending', p. 79.

⁹⁴ 'I talk', p. 166.

⁹⁵ See 'The Cross', p. 320; 'I talk', pp. 192f.

⁹⁶ See 'I talk', p. 193.

shown to Abraham, Seo interprets as not a model, but the socio-political millennium itself.⁹⁷ For that reason, Minjung theology takes Thomas Wincher's social revolutionary movement as its appropriate historical frame of reference; and it was the most fanatical millennial teaching ever recorded in Church history.⁹⁸

Seo further declared that to carry out the 'actualization process' of millennium in today's context, and to see the process in the 80s, 'the Yusin constitution must be thrown out [former President Park's amended Constitution for the 3rd regime], and a new constitution must be established'.⁹⁹ Such political, economical and social democratization is The New Heaven and Earth of [Revelation 21](#) and [22](#), also of [Luke 14](#), and the Festivals in Heaven of [Matthew 22](#).¹⁰⁰ Prof. Seo, p. 149 in other articles, has even actualized the Second Coming by saying, 'Today's church needs to identify the coming Christ in the pain and Han of Minjung.'¹⁰¹

CONCLUSION

We have surveyed Minjung theology's socio-economic and historical characteristics, and anti-theological or non-theological elements, on the grounds of modern philosophical development and modern political theology. Minjung theology has gone out of the theological boundary. For its major interest is not the God or Jesus of the Bible but the liberation and the humanization of Minjung. Jesus and the Bible become a mere tool for understanding Minjung. The claim to call Minjung Messiah Or to believe eschatological faith as an actualization of the Millennium in a political, social and economical sense is nothing other than an ideology. Minjung theology has gone into the area of socio-economical action and political revolution from the faith of God and God meditation.

Prof. Seo lived as a sensitive intellectual and a responsible realist who tried to accept the rapidly changing theological trends in order to analyze and to solve today's practical problems. At the end, he accepted the worldwide historic action theology of the 70s in the Korean political context. This was the final destination of his theological meditation. Until the end of his life, he lived with Minjung in order to be on their side. To live the life, he willingly gave up the traditional God, the Bible and the Church. He will remain as a human rights fighter, a friend of Minjung in the hearts of Minjung. However, he cannot avoid taking responsibility for causing theology to deteriorate to a mere socio-economical ideology, and thereby disturbing the Korean Church.

⁹⁷ 'Yahweh told Abraham, "Go to the land that I will show you." Then, where is the Promised Land? That is the people's vision of Utopia. Biblically symbolized as the Millennium. This is actualization of human essence that is his future and hope.' ('At the Gate of the New Era', *Minjung Theology*, April, 1980, p. 154.)

⁹⁸ 'Blending', pp. 60-62.

⁹⁹ 'We are doing the work of actualizing the Millennium. We are planning the Millennium where the separation of the 3 powers will be established, there will be no unjust torture to the indicted, free speech and press will be there, 3 rights of labour will be guaranteed, and participation of workers in administration is allowed. This is the Promised Land.' ('At the Gate', p. 155).

¹⁰⁰ See 'At the Gate', p. 157.

¹⁰¹ See 'Shaping', p. 108.

It is inevitable that any theology that lacks a transcendent and personal God will become a void meditation or a mere social, political and economical principle. Good theology stands on an understanding of the true God. To know the triune God is to meet the enlightening and revealing Holy Spirit, then to relate that experience to the historical tradition of life and reality. The Korean evangelical Church is responsible for carrying out the historical task of re-establishing the biblical concept of God and of providing the right direction of good theology for the Church of Korea and the world. p. 150

Protestant Mission Education In Nineteenth Century China

Charles W. Weber

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A major consideration of the study of missions is the extent to which it is involved in acculturation. China in the nineteenth century provides an interesting case study for this, since during this period a resurgent industrializing Western culture, along with an activist, mission-minded Church, were making a more concerted impact on the Ching dynasty. The dynamic interaction of Western culture and Christianity with Chinese civilization provides a model of cross-cultural analysis.

Focusing on mission-provided education contributes significantly to an understanding of Western *versus* Chinese cultures because education is a socialization process. Therefore, mission schools become a means of communicating one culture to another, and in this process, the comparisons between the West and China become apparent as divergent customs and values come into proximity with one another. It was in the efforts of missionaries to propagate their religious beliefs, nurtured in their own cultural and historic traditions, that the difficulties of transplanting these beliefs into another cultural milieu became manifest. Missionary educational efforts can be used to highlight this cultural clash.

The missionary was the Western agent for this cultural interaction. John K. Fairbank stressed the importance of the missionary's role when he observed that 'in China's nineteenth-century relations with the West, Protestant missionaries are still the least studied but most significant actors in the scene', since missionaries were the only agents 'in direct contact with the common people in the two civilizations'.¹ In this regard the latter part of the nineteenth century was a period of dramatic mission growth in terms of increased numbers of mission agents, of mission stations, of Chinese converts, of literature translated into Chinese, and of humanitarian endeavours, such as hospitals, p. 151 dispensaries, orphanages, and schools. In relation to this last endeavour, schools, Fairbank (again) noted its special significance in indigenizing Christianity into China,

¹ John K. Fairbank, 'Introduction: The Place of Protestant Writings in China's Cultural History', in *Christianity in China* edited by Suzanne Wilson Barnett and John K. Fairbank, p. 2.

when he observed that ‘in the end the Christian influence was probably strongest in education’.²

With all this mission growth comes the need to evaluate the purpose of all these activities in overall mission strategy. The importance and effort expended on education made it one of the main objects of such evaluation. This resulted in a lively debate in the late nineteenth century. By the end of the century there had emerged two distinct and divergent points of view: the one emphasized education’s role as an adjunct support for evangelization, and the other proposed a broader role for education with its own distinctive and function *beyond* a mainly evangelistic one. The emergence and interplay of both of these viewpoints, and their significance for the indigenization of Christianity in China, will be explored in this paper. This topic is important not only for the understanding of mission involvement in China, and for the impact of Christianity on Chinese society, but it also provides an important insight into the precedents of China’s national system of education and of Western influence on general culture.

EARLY EDUCATION

From the beginning mission work in China included some consideration and involvement with schooling. By the 1840s every mission station had some kind of school which provided training for Chinese youths.³ Part of this motivation emanated from Chinese society itself where schooling was highly regarded as a means of propagating values and morality based upon literary study of the Confucian texts. Likewise, in their own way, missions sponsored their own schools to propagate morals they held in high esteem and, in order to appeal to their constituents, used traditional Confucian texts along with their Christian and biblical materials. Therefore the early mission model was based upon Chinese educational custom. In fact, early missionaries would often either hire non-Christian teachers to teach in their schools when Chinese Christian teachers were not available (and often **P. 152** they were not, in the early period), or missionaries paid Chinese teachers to let them speak to their classes on Christian themes.⁴ The point is that this early mission education grew haphazardly on an informal basis, responding to local conditions, having no overall policy upon which to draw, and no interest in higher education.⁵

There was no question that these earliest mission schools were clearly intended to aid evangelism and to provide a ‘means of bringing children under the influence of the Christian message’.⁶ Because Chinese schools attracted those who were most intent on preparing for the imperial government’s examinations, and because of the common Chinese perception of missions as an alien influence on their society, most students for

² Fairbank, ‘Introduction: The Many Faces of Protestant Missions in China and the United States’, in *The Missionary Enterprise in China and America*, edited by John K. Fairbank, p. 13.

³ Evelyn S. Rawski, ‘Elementary Education in Mission Enterprise’, in *Christianity in China*, edited by Suzanne Wilson Barnett and John K. Fairbank, p. 136.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 137–140.

⁵ Jessie Gregory Lutz, *China and the Christian College, 1850–1950*, p. 15; and Alice H. Gregg, *China and Educational Autonomy*, pp. 15–16.

⁶ China Educational Commission, 1922, p. 34.

mission schools in the nineteenth century were recruited from lower classes who aspired not to government jobs but to work as mission assistants; or who were willing to risk the social criticism of identifying with the mission in order to get an opportunity for an education, because they were not able to afford the traditional Chinese education. Other students came from families, usually of the humbler classes, identified with the mission and local church.⁷ As late as 1877 at the General Conference of the Protestant Missionaries of China in Shanghai it was still necessary, despite some movement in other directions (as we shall see), for mission education to be closely linked with the prime purpose of missions, that of evangelism.

TYPES OF MISSION EDUCATION IN CHINA⁸

At the General Conference of 1877, American Presbyterian missionary Dr. Calvin W. Mateer made a useful distinction between two approaches to mission education which were emerging in this period. These two approaches provide a basis for the growing divergence which would continue and take on sharper definition in the coming decades.

The first approach emphasized education 'as a means of getting so many heathen boys and girls under the influence of Christian truth, in the hope that they may be converted, and especially that they may p. 153 become preachers of the Gospel'. Mateer identified this view as the one 'most commonly held'. In this view the only real objective is 'to convert as many individuals as possible' through the use of education as a direct evangelistic tool. The predominance of this viewpoint in 1877 would insure its continuance into the twentieth century, as we will see below.

The newer approach, and the one Mateer felt to be 'much nearer the truth', presented education as 'an indirect agency' (as opposed to the more direct evangelistic method) where, in his own analogy, schools are 'fitted to break up the fallow ground, and prepare the way for the good seed of divine truth'. In this situation students are educated 'mentally, morally and religiously, not only that they may be converted, but that being converted they may become effective agents in the hands of God, for defending and advancing the cause of truth'. Such schools were intended to teach Western science and civilization and thus provide an added dimension to the development of a distinctive Christian community in China, so as to 'subdue the nations as a whole to Christ, to pull down the fortifications of heathenism, destroy the faith which supports it, and summon its emancipated votaries to submit to the captain of our salvation'.

This debate between the two approaches confined through the nineteenth century, with strong advocates on both sides and with neither one superseding the other. Both views had their advocates in individuals and societies, and each provided a contrasting model for the indigenization of Christianity in China.

THE DIRECT APPROACH: EDUCATION AS A MEANS TO EVANGELIZATION

The response to Mateer's characterization of education's subservience to evangelism was quick and pointed. It occurred during the discussion period following his 1877 address.

⁷ Lutz, p. 38.

⁸ *Records of the General Conference of the Protestant Missionaries in China, Shanghai, May 10-14, 1877*, pp. 172-173. Hereafter referred to as Shanghai (1877).

One of Mateer's fellow American Presbyterian missionaries, Revd J. Butler, criticized him as linking religion and the necessity for education without recognizing 'the truth that religion in its natural order comes first, that the human mind takes in religious knowledge first and easiest of all'.⁹ Another stressed that 'education is the outgrowth of Christianity' and that the 'danger' he feared from Mateer's opinion was the possibility that 'Christianity be looked for as the outgrowth of education'.¹⁰ Still p. 154 another expressed reservations based on recent experience that 'secular education did not of itself bring men nearer to Christ' and 'even made conversions more difficult'.¹¹

Well into the 1890s similar views were still commonly expressed. One stated that every teacher and missionary should 'look upon each little boy who enters school as a sacred trust committed into his hands by him who gave his life for all mankind'. Therefore the objective is to teach students to read and write and to understand salvation.¹² In 1894 a person identified only as a member of the Educational Association of China wrote a letter which condemned the view that missionaries 'simply give "a good education under the most thorough Christian influences"' because, the writer asserted, their role was to bring to Chinese 'the Gospel of the Son of God and make Christian disciples of them', and to make every school 'a powerful factor for the evangelization of China' and to make every scholar come under 'the Christian influence'.¹³

It should also be noted that some missionaries found educational work and evangelistic work incompatible, and schools a diversion of time and resources from a missionary's primary task of evangelism. This view was expressed in 1868 when efforts for missions schools were characterized as 'to a great extent lost labour'.¹⁴ Even in 1894 one missionary observed that educational work was a hindrance and too great a secularizer.¹⁵

But most missionaries advocated education as a means of evangelism, and were especially favourable to the village day-school (or primary school) as strategic in achieving their objectives. One of the most comprehensive defences of the day-school as an 'evangelizing agency' came in 1897 in an article listing ten rationales for these schools' contribution as 'distinctly Christian schools' which are not involved in 'merely secular education'. The advantages of primary village schools included the following ten factors:

- (1) They are a thoroughly Chinese institution, and as such are not liable p. 155 to be objected to as foreign agencies foisted upon the people against their long established customs.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 197.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 200.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 203.

¹² C. F. Kupfer, 'Dangers and Advantages of Day-Schools', *Chinese Recorder*, XXIV:3 (March, 1893), p. 110. Hereafter referred to as *CR*.

¹³ *CR*, XXV:1 (January, 1894), pp. 40–41. As late as May, 1897 an article in *CR* by T. W. Houston expressed similar sentiments in an article entitled 'The Highest Efficiency of the Educational Branch of Mission Work Dependent upon the Co-operation of the Evangelistic Branch', pp. 229–231.

¹⁴ L. B. Peet, 'On Mission Schools', *CR*, 1:7 (November, 1868), p. 135.

¹⁵ A. J. Gordon, 'Education and Missions', *CR*, XXV (February, 1894), p. 71.

(2) In many parts of China they are the only means of obtaining an education.

(3) They afford an admirable means of spreading a knowledge of the Gospel among the masses of the people and of opening new places to Gospel effort [especially the families of the students].

(4) They enable us to reach the children at the earliest or formative period of their lives, whilst they at the same time withdraw the children, for a large portion of each day, from the influence of heathen surroundings.

(5) They are less expensive than boarding-schools, and not open to the objection that naturally lies against the latter that they train the pupils to ideas of dependence on the church for support.

(6) They store the minds of children with Christian truth that may some time germinate and bear fruit in renewed lives.

(7) They are recruiting camps for candidates for higher education, if such education be desirable.

(8) They form a nucleus, around which a Christian congregation may be gathered.

(9) If, as is often the case in small villages, they supplant the heathen schools entirely, it gives Christianity a leading place in that neighbourhood.

(10) They supply a felt need, especially in the country districts. Schools in villages of from one to two hundred people are the exception rather than the rule. Thousands of children will grow up in complete illiteracy unless we give them this opportunity to learn.¹⁶

Certain mission societies were more prone to advocate this direct connection of education with evangelism. The China Inland Mission, by 1900 the single largest mission in China with about a quarter of all missionaries in China and 77 stations in 14 provinces,¹⁷ stressed its primarily evangelistic work into the countryside through 'itinerations'. In 1896 CIM stated its school policy and situation thus:

The character of the Mission being evangelistic, only elementary education has been attempted. The little that has been undertaken by boarding and day-schools has been chiefly with a view (1) to influence parents through the children; (2) to win girls to Christ, who may become useful Christian wives, and to qualify them for future usefulness; and (3) to provide a simple Christian education for the children of converts.

The Mission had in 1893, in eight of the provinces, 11 boarding-schools p. 156 (containing 133 children), all but one being exclusively for girls; 29 day-schools, with an attendance of 416 boys and girls. Sunday schools for both adults and children are common.¹⁸

This indeed was a very meagre educational programme for so large a mission organization; however, their emphasis was on converting all of China by establishing a Christian witness first in the provincial capital, then in prefectural cities, and finally in subordinate cities until the Gospel was 'diffused throughout the whole extent of a province'.¹⁹ As late as 1909 the CIM expressed concern that over half of all the missionaries in China are involved in institutional work like hospitals, schools and

¹⁶ D. N. Lyon, 'Mission Day-Schools for the Chinese', *CR*, XXVIII:1 (January, 1897), pp. 1–3. See J. E. Walker, 'The Relation of the Education of Chinese Youth in our Boarding Schools to the Evangelization of the Fuhkien Province', *CR* XIX:12 (December, 1888), pp. 554–566 for a similar defence.

¹⁷ Alvyn Austin, *Saving China*, p. 14.

¹⁸ *China Mission Hand-Book*, Part II, pp. 147–148.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 112.

philanthropic work and that 'the time has come when *direct evangelism* must be given the first place'.²⁰

Baptist groups including the British, American, and Southern, tended to follow the same pattern as CIM with an emphasis on evangelism and primary education to support it. In 1896 an English Baptist missionary stated that their goal was 'to make our schools evangelistic agencies, and we estimate their success not merely by examination results, but by their influence in securing obedience to Christ'. Similar views continued well into the twentieth century.²¹

The purpose of Baptist missions as it related to education was perhaps best summed up by William Ashmore when he stated that education is to be the natural outgrowth of evangelism with the education designed to serve the evangelization process and not the secular interests of society. He said, 'Our schools follow our churches.'²² With such a view the educational approach of the Baptists was very practical, stressing mastery of the vernacular languages, Bible studies and memorization of Scripture, preaching and evangelism, and learn-by-doing techniques.²³ Thus the objective of Baptist mission work in China and the role of education in that plan were carefully correlated.

The main motivating force for Baptist mission education was the feeling that 'an illiterate church would soon drift back to idolatry' and 'besides the children of Christians have an inherent claim to be p. 157 educated' giving special attention to 'character-building'²⁴ which consisted of training in Christian morals and ethics as missionaries understood it in late nineteenth century culture. Thus Baptist mission education was perceived as a means of strengthening the indigenous church, a means to which they felt the Chinese Christians responded positively.²⁵

The educational programme of the Baptists was formulated on four levels: primary day-schools, boarding schools for boys and girls, theological training, and informal schools for 'Bible women'. The curriculum was always essentially the same. The Bible was the main text. The students' responsibility was to master reading and writing in the vernacular and to learn basic doctrines from a catechism and the teacher.²⁶ The Baptists were practical in their curricular approach and thus desired to avoid an educational programme oriented to the liberal arts in literary subjects and sciences. Their objective was to provide leadership training for their parishioners.

The Baptists did not have any secondary schools until after 1900 because their emphasis on evangelism left little time, strength, or inclination for this kind of higher education. Yet after 1870 the pressure from Chinese Baptist converts for training for government service and professional leadership in their country, like that provided by the

²⁰ Quote from *China's Millions* [CIM's magazine] in 1909 from Shao-yang Lin, *A Chinese Appeal to Christendom*, p. 44. Italics mine.

²¹ A. G. Shorrocks, 'Shensi Mission Annual Report, 1885', *CR*, XXVII:6 (June, 1896), p. 269. H. R. Williamson, *British Baptists in China*, p. 223.

²² *Baptist Missionary Magazine*, LIX:8 (August, 1879), pp. 294–295. Hereafter referred to as *BMM*.

²³ Samuel H. Leger, *Education of Christian Ministers in China*, pp. 13–15.

²⁴ Henry C. Vedder, *A Short History of Baptist Missions*, p. 176.

²⁵ Robert G. Torbet, *Venture of Faith*, p. 169.

²⁶ *Annual Report of the A.B.F.M.S. for 1879*, pp. 58.

Roman Catholics and Episcopalians, was increasing; and the Baptists realized they were in danger of losing converts over this issue.²⁷ But the policy of Baptist mission boards and the lack of money and adequate staff delayed their higher education facilities until the twentieth century.

There is one major area where the Baptists, both American and English, refused to westernize. They did not use English as the medium of teaching. Their reasons were basically threefold. First, a knowledge of English by the Chinese 'opened the doors to temptation'; in other words they were more prone to go to work for the traders than to stay in mission work. Second, the missionaries wanted Christianity to be presented as naturally in Chinese as in English, thus emphasizing the idea that Christianity is a world religion which can be expressed in various cultures.²⁸ This view resulted in a vast literature in the colloquial languages which, although disliked by the Chinese *literati*, did facilitate the work of Bible women and preachers. Teaching was in the vernacular with the Bible as the main text. Lastly, although English was needed most in the teaching of science, the Baptists did not emphasize science in their schools namely because they thought it was too westernizing, and so they insisted on the vernacular. For these reasons the Baptists did not in the nineteenth century employ English either as a subject in their schools or as a medium of instruction. English was considered a hindrance to the overall purposes of their work.

In fact, in their own way, these societies expressed a sincere and protective, perhaps even a paternalistic, interest in traditional Chinese culture. As early as 1850 the instructions of the Executive Committee of the American Baptist Missionary Union espoused this when they informed their new missionaries both (a) to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ and not Western science, art, and culture, and (b) never to let translation or educational work take too much time from evangelization.²⁹ Here again, the emphasis on evangelism is preeminent and it is also coupled with a desire to limit Western influences. The intent, however difficult to attain, was to preserve as much of the indigenous culture as possible and to make Christianity an integral part of that culture without a wholesale inculcation of Western influences. The emphasis on evangelism and on training Chinese to undertake this evangelization of their own people, was a conscious endeavour to make Christianity a natural, religiously transforming force in Chinese society.

Two other societies, the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions and the London Missionary Society, followed similar approaches to the CIM and Baptist groups. Throughout the nineteenth century most ABCFM missionaries took the position that evangelism was 'vastly more important than education' and that education was mainly to train church workers and members.³⁰ The LMS did not supply funds for its schools until well into the nineteenth century, and also were later in starting schools of

²⁷ Torbet, *op. cit.*, p. 148.

²⁸ Mary Raleigh Anderson, *Protestant Mission Schools for Girls in South China*, p. 282.

²⁹ *Annual Report of the A.B.F.M.S.* for 1850, pp. 224–225.

³⁰ Janet Elaine Heininger, 'The American Board in China', pp. 47–48.

higher education.³¹ For the LMS, schools were not a 'department of special interest' and often the schools which did exist had disappointing results.³² p. 159

In conclusion, the point to be made here is that this position on making education serve direct evangelistic purposes is the traditional view inherent in the earliest missionary endeavours in China. And this view has a strong base of support in key and large mission societies throughout the nineteenth century and into the twentieth. In other words, while new views will emerge, this position of putting education in a subservient position did not disappear, but maintained itself as a clearly stated and practised approach by major mission societies in China. By 1900 it still was a widely-held approach to education in China.

TRANSITION TO ANOTHER APPROACH

The divisions on the issue emerged when it was proposed to separate mission education from a 'purely' evangelistic or support arm of the church to a more general role in the westernizing of Chinese society and in the creating of a new leadership for a modernizing China irrespective of a specific evangelistic function. In this new disparity the primacy of individual salvation now gives way to the goal of Christianizing the nation³³ and to 'long-run conversion and good works'.³⁴

The documentary evidence for the beginning of this transition goes back to the Shanghai Conference of 1877 and Calvin Mateer's paper, previously mentioned, which represents a shift to more of an acceptance of secular education and to a more critical attitude to the 'superficial view' that education is really 'not to educate them [the pupils] but to Christianize them'. Mateer's point was not to deny the need for evangelism and personal conversion, but rather to question the use of education as a prime means, 'a mere cat's-paw' in his words, to achieve this end. To Mateer, 'the school is the direct means for conversion, but it affords an admirable opportunity to secure that result'.³⁵ These views made Mateer a 'forward-looking conservative'³⁶ who was expressing views which, even he admitted, ran counter to the prevailing opinions. One practical outgrowth of Mateer's efforts and the 1877 Conference was the creation of the School and Textbook p. 160 Series Committee which was commissioned to translate textbooks and materials on secular subjects into Chinese. By 1890 this group was responsible for the translation of 84 books and 40 maps and charts.³⁷

In 1877 Mateer's position was opposed by the American Board's Devello Z. Sheffield, but by 1889, when he founded the North China College in Tungchow which he headed for

³¹ L. B. Peet, *op. cit.*, and Griffith John, 'London Mission Work in Hunan and Hupeh', *CR*, XXX:3 (March, 1900), p. 137.

³² *China Hand-Book*, p. 13.

³³ *Ecumenical Missionary Conference, New York, 1900*, p. 112. Hereafter referred to as Ecumenical Conference, (1900).

³⁴ Rawski, *op. cit.*, p. 136.

³⁵ Shanghai (1877), p. 172.

³⁶ William Purviance Fenn, *Christian Higher Education in Changing China*, p. 26.

³⁷ Irwin T. Hyatt, 'Protestant Missions in China, 1877-1890: The Institutionalization of Good Works', in *American Missionaries in China*, edited by Kwang-Ching Liu, p. 98.

twenty years, Sheffield had moved to a 'middle-of-the-road position'.³⁸ To him it seemed that education must be 'Christo-centric, and that such education can be made the very fountain-head of the best evangelistic life of the Church'.³⁹ Accordingly, he put education and evangelism on a par with one another and, furthermore, claimed that they were closely interconnected. In his own words:

Thus it appears that the ultimate aims of Christian evangelism and of Christian education are essentially one, the development of true manhood, that no life may have been lived in vain. Thus, teaching and preaching, if animated by the same spirit, have the same end in view; they are but the right and left hand that minister to the needs of the same body. Christianity, in its broadest application, may be regarded as a system of divine education.

The object of this paper is to urge the importance of education as a *missionary agency*, and to warn against that excessive zeal for evangelistic effort which forgets the part which education must have in building up Christian character, without which evangelistic efforts will be crowned with but partial, and often with disappointing results.⁴⁰

Thus the stage was set for moving education out of its subservience to evangelism and giving education, including a new emphasis on higher education, a greater role as an 'indirect agency' in Protestant mission strategy.

Throughout the nineteenth century opposition to greater emphasis on educational work gradually declined; however, missionary educators, as opposed to missionary evangelists, were still generally on the defensive. But by 1900 'the majority seems to have accepted education as a legitimate responsibility of Christian missions', and every major mission centre included a primary school, while many p. 161 had secondary schools and a few even had colleges or universities.⁴¹ At this time the educational and evangelistic roles tended to be intertwined. In 1896 it was noted that 'most of the so-called educational work is avowedly evangelistic, and much of what is called evangelistic work is really educational'.⁴²

This new acceptance of education's function resulted in a marked increase in schools and students. In 1877 there were 193 schools with over 3,000 pupils and by 1899 the number of schools had increased to 1,766 with over 30,000 students.⁴³ American Methodists, Presbyterians, Episcopalians, and Congregationalists operated over half of these mission schools in China and it was these mission societies who participated more directly in this transition to greater emphasis on the role of mission education.⁴⁴

THE INDIRECT APPROACH: EDUCATION AS A CHRISTIANIZING FORCE IN SOCIETY

³⁸ Lutz, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

³⁹ D. Z. Sheffield, 'Christian Education; its [sic] Place in Mission Work', *CR*, XXVIII:3 (March, 1897), p. 126.

⁴⁰ D. Z. Sheffield, 'The Relation of Christian Education to other Branches of Mission Work', *CR*, XXI:6 (June 1890), pp. 247 and 257. Author's italics.

⁴¹ Lutz, *op. cit.*, pp. 17 and 24.

⁴² L. N. B. Smith, 'The Purpose of Mission Schools', *CR*, XXVII:3 (March, 1896), p. 138.

⁴³ Rawski, *op. cit.*, p. 136.

⁴⁴ Hyatt, *op. cit.*, p. 98 and Lutz, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

Gradually education was given, by some, a new role to play in missions and in Chinese society. The object was not to emphasize schools 'as a proselytizing agency' but rather to have education 'Cluster around the children of our native Christians and to give these children an opportunity for advancement in life'. These schools must train students' 'consciences as well as their intellects'.⁴⁵ Such a purpose served both to educate Christians for important roles in Chinese society and to give the Church a more prominent place in China. This linkage is summarized as late as 1900 in the following statement:

But the school, thus necessary for the growth of the Church itself, will always be a strong evangelizing agency, it is a matter of universal experience that sooner or later the value of the Western education becomes evident to the outside world. The youth of non-Christian lands, high-caste or aristocratic though he may be, is soon found wishful to sit on benches in the missionary school, even at the price of sitting by the pariah and submitting to the foreigner. He recognizes the justice of the theory of education which counts morality an integral factor, and he makes no objection to the Scripture p. 162 lesson. To him there is nothing higher under heaven than the teacher, and he has placed in that venerated seat the missionary, the preacher of the creed of Christ. The fact is eloquent of a whole world of change. What an opportunity is thus gained! How eagerly does every true evangelist seize this strategic position!⁴⁶

Thus was made the identification of Church with education. In other words:

Western education is Christian education; it is ever aiming to reproduce the manliness of Christ and nothing else will satisfy ... Western science and civilization cannot be taught apart from the teachings of Christian faith.

Christian education is a constant moral training.⁴⁷

It was during the later nineteenth century that these views were promoted by the Educational Association of China and its regular reports in the *Chinese Recorder*.

This new stress on education called for missions to provide the very best in education so that the 'Christian school must stand so high as a giver of knowledge that no secular institution can afford to point the finger of scorn at its equipment or its alumni' nor should the secular subjects 'be thrown in as a bribe to secure an opportunity for adding a Bible lesson'.⁴⁸ The desire now is for Christian schools which provide an excellent education by any, especially Western, standards. Now the purpose goes well beyond individual salvation to the end of providing 'light and leaven' to all society as well as the Church. This innovative approach was already expressed at the 1877 Conference:

Therefore let us by all the means in our power provide, *and help the Native Church* to provide, a liberal *Christian* education for the children now growing up in the Church. The better instructed, the more intelligent the Church is, the greater will be her power to influence for good the whole nation. We are not working simply for the present generation. Let us keep in view the growth and extension of the Church throughout all China, and now at the commencement do what we can to provide for the spread of general

⁴⁵ 'Missionary Conference held at Ku-ling, Central China, August 22nd to 25th, 1888', *CR*, XXIX:12 (December, 1898), pp. 583 and 587.

⁴⁶ Ecumenical Conference (1900), p. 115.

⁴⁷ Bishop Graves, 'The Moral Influence of Christian Education in China', *CR*, XXIV:7 (July, 1893), pp. 325 and 327.

⁴⁸ Ecumenical Conference (1900), p. 114.

knowledge (that kind of knowledge in which the Chinese are miserably lacking) *within the Church as it is now growing up*. We shall thus help to fit it for becoming a beneficent power and the source of *Christian* civilization and enlightenment to the whole land.⁴⁹ p. 163

Here a 'liberal education' becomes an asset to both the maturing 'Native Church' and the 'good of the whole nation' for all of China. Christian civilization in its broadest sense is being imparted to China. Christian schools thus become the vanguard of the best of Western culture and of the building up of a strong and intelligent Church which will lead in this process. The end result is intended to be the permeation of the non-Christian community with Christian concepts and knowledge. Likewise the stimulation of Chinese intellectual life, it was believed, would make the Chinese more receptive to Christianity because Western learning was a means of Christianizing China, and especially of reaching Chinese who were not influenced by proselytizing. The Western learning that was particularly promoted included geography, mathematics, history and science. Science was given a priority because it both demonstrated the superiority of Western learning but also counteracted the superstition of Chinese religion and showed the enlightened nature of Christianity. It was said in 1900 that 'sooner or later the value of Western education becomes evident'.⁵⁰

In many ways the Chinese demand for Western education stimulated mission agencies to provide this schooling as an opportunity to appeal to the Chinese in their curricular desires while at the same time providing a Christian context. This desired education could be obtained in places like Hong Kong, Shanghai or Japan, but the mission agencies had the ability to provide it more generally throughout China under their own auspices, especially in higher education.

This approach to education appealed to the creation of a Chinese educated elite where the Christian schools and colleges were the primary mediators of Western civilization. This view was eloquently stated in 1900 when it was said that Christian education was 'a great reconciler, and affords a platform upon which the leaders among the Chinese and the leaders of the Christian Church can stand together'.⁵¹ In other words, 'a first-class Christian school should give a first-class Chinese education with the direct object of making first-class Christian scholars'.⁵² This appeal for a quality, Christian educational system resulted in the demand for mission boards to send missionaries who were trained educators and not just ordained preachers who saw evangelism as their main function. p. 164

The heightened consciousness and the furore over educational matters raised many new issues of debate as the twentieth century opened. Some of these issues were enumerated in the *Chinese Recorder* in 1900 when an appeal was made to solicit missionary educators' views on continuing issues of concern.

Surely the last word has not yet been said upon, 'Courses of Study', 'Text Books', 'Discipline', 'Manual Training', 'Self-support', or 'English in Mission schools', or the more general themes of the 'Relation of the New Learning to the State', 'The New Learning and

⁴⁹ Shanghai (1877), p. 203. Author's italics.

⁵⁰ Ecumenical Conference (1900), p. 116.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 130.

⁵² J. C. Ferguson, 'How shall we teach the Chinese Language and Literature in our Christian Schools and Colleges', *CR*, XXXI:2 (February, 1900), p. 88.

Social Reforms', 'Religion in the School', and 'The Place of Science in Mission Schools'. Upon these or any other living topics the editor will be pleased to receive contributions.⁵³

The topics were a considerable distance from the earlier watershed of the relation of education to evangelism. In addition there was a considerable discussion on whether or not teachers in Christian schools had to be Christian, or whether 'heathen' teachers could be used at all; and if they were employed, whether it should just be temporarily until Christian teachers were found.

The language issue was also a major concern. Some believed that only Chinese could be used because it was necessary to indigenize Western learning into the local language, and thus give the Chinese the ability to express modern culture and learning in their own idiom. It also would keep Chinese from being seen to be too much influenced by foreigners. But the lack of curricular materials in Chinese proved a serious hindrance. Others asserted that modern scholarship was best expressed in English; English was the language of the international, educated elite and also would serve to protect modern learning from being poorly or incorrectly expressed in another language—by which they meant Chinese. Some high claims were made for English as containing the 'treasures of spiritual and scientific truth'.⁵⁴ And in addition:

If the people of China could be led to adopt and speak the English language, they would, by so doing, unite their destiny, so far as civilization is concerned, with the English speaking races. The gain to China would be incalculable. The inexhaustible mine of our marvellous English literature would be opened to this people and would pour its store of wealth into the lap of the nation.⁵⁵ p. 165

The fact of the matter is that by the early twentieth century English was taught in nearly all boarding schools and many day-schools.⁵⁶

CONCLUSION: EDUCATION AND INDIGENIZATION

And so two divergent but clearly defined approaches to the role of Protestant mission education had emerged and sustained themselves through the course of the nineteenth century. It was not a matter of one supplanting the other, because both had their missionary advocates and mission boards tended to follow one or the other approach, although variations among people within mission organizations could be found. Also, it needs to be stated that the impetus for schools, and thus for mission educational policy, originated with the Chinese situation and was not an educational system imposed from the outside.

The two approaches—direct and indirect—had major theoretical differences as described above. But their differences in practice, especially on the local level and over an extended period of time, are more difficult to ascertain. The Chinese environment and

⁵³ E. T. Williams, 'A Word to Teachers', *CR*, XXXI:4 (April, 1900), pp. 199–200.

⁵⁴ Ecumenical Conference (1900), p. 135.

⁵⁵ D. C. McCoy, 'How Far Should the Curriculums of Western Schools and the Western Methods of Education be Adopted In China', *CR*, XIV:4 (July–August, 1883), p. 250.

⁵⁶ J. A. Silsby, 'Teaching English in China', *CR*, XXXIV:1 (January, 1903), p. 35. See World Missionary Conference, 1910, pp. 92–93 for a discussion of the pros and cons of using English as a medium of education.

church communities tended to establish the expectations for mission education. This point was understood and succinctly stated when it was observed that ‘whatever may be *our* aims, the character and aims of the pupils will determine the actual character of the schools’.⁵⁷ But the question remains: what do these two approaches indicate about the indigenization of Christianity into Chinese culture? What are the implications of educational theory for the rooting of Christianity in China?

The direct approach has its own method of indigenizing Christianity where the emphasis is on the local village and the local church, because their priority is on evangelization on the broadest possible geographical level and among the greatest number of people. The immediacy of this motivation meant that the local language was used as much as possible, as were local Chinese people, in the capacity of teachers, preachers and evangelists. There was no effort to retain these jobs for the missionary because the objective was to prepare local agents. Even the missionary had to learn the local language and dialect p. 166 and sometimes, as with the CIM, was expected to dress like the Chinese. Here the aim was for the missionary to identify with the local populace and to produce a Chinese church leadership which would be the primary teaching and preaching agents. Supplementing this objective was the creation of an indigenous Christian literature which was meant to minimize the ‘foreign’ taint of Christianity.⁵⁸ Education should include Chinese literature as a means ‘of approach to the minds and hearts of the people’. This was essential to indigenization:

The Chinese classics occupy an honoured place in all Christian schools in China. In Christian academies and colleges a general statement would be that one-fourth of the curriculum is given to the study of the Chinese classics, one-fourth to Christian studies, and one-half to English and western science. So long as elementary Christian schools exist in China and pursue this policy, they will act as a check upon any tendency to create a non-indigenous or foreign type of Christianity, or to detach Christians from the great Chinese world of thought and movement.⁵⁹

The end result was to be the reading, writing, and speaking of the Christian message in the Chinese language and idiom in both rural and urban areas. The priority on evangelism meant that the focus of attention was on the locale and involvement with the local culture. Of course, almost by definition, all mission work results in some separation of national Christians from their traditional culture. Those following the direct approach did try consciously to minimize this process to some extent by emphasizing the expression of Christianity in the Chinese language (and its dialects) and within the local Chinese community through the use of an active Chinese leadership in their churches and schools by both lay and ordained leaders.

The indirect educational approach had its own approach to indigenization. This philosophy put its priority on providing an education based upon the teaching of an essentially Western curriculum especially in literary and scientific areas. The purpose here was to train an educated elite which could lead the church, take positions of prominence in society such as in business and government, and provide moral and social leadership to changing Chinese society. Training this leadership necessitated a highly developed school system from the primary to collegiate level and often meant the

⁵⁷ J. E. Walker, ‘The Relation of the Education of Chinese Youth in our Boarding Schools to the Evangelization of Fuhkien Province’, *CR*, XIX:12 (December, 1888), p. 560.

⁵⁸ World Missionary Conference, Edinburgh, 1910, *Report of Commission III*, p. 252.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 249 and 248.

extensive use of English as the medium of instruction. This schooling p. 167 was intended to be of a quality equal to the best available in the West and consistent with the moral precepts of Christianity. In the twentieth century these schools would provide models for new Chinese policies in education. One illustration of this approach contained the analogy of grafting elements of the Western system onto the ancient trunk of Chinese culture, not with the purpose to

denationalize the Chinese. In giving them a better civilization we would not do so by sapping the foundations of institutions which have long been revered for their local and national associations, and which, without material change, may be made the best elements of the new system.⁶⁰

This was a more conscious effort to reform Chinese society, while at the same time protecting the integrity of Chinese culture in an era of change and modernization.

The next decades would bring new pressures and influences on mission education and modifications would need to be made. But they were made on the basis of the divergent mission educational philosophies that had emerged and been formulated in the latter decades of the nineteenth century.

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Training Missionaries in Asia

Titus Loong

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Here in Asia, for the last twenty years, churches have started to see their part in preaching the gospel to all nations by crossing cultural and linguistic barriers. Mission-minded Christians realize the value of learning new languages and the significance of planting churches cross-culturally. They also recognize how Christian professionals can become strategic tentmakers in some countries.

Asian mission is new. Churches and sending agencies are still working hard to improve areas such as orientation and training, children's education and care for missionaries' parents. Many Asians start their missionary services hardly prepared to face the conditions. Asian missionaries are in some aspects quite different from Western missionaries. Though some Asians may be well supported financially and prayerfully, they often lack adequate pastoral care from their churches. Unlike their Western co-workers, Asian missionaries are often 'first generation' Christians. Their missions awareness comes from hearing talks and reading books about current world mission

⁶⁰ McCoy, *op. cit.*, p. 253.

issues, rather than from parents and Sunday schools. Asian missionaries might also have to overcome additional cultural barriers if they send their children to boarding schools.

In order to serve the Lord in cross-cultural settings, one must be spiritually mature and knowledgeable about missions. It is important to learn church planting and other cross-cultural skills. As a matter of fact, one needs to learn to live cross-culturally.

OBJECTIVES OF ACTI TRAINING

The ethos of my own institute, the Asian Cross-Cultural Training Institute, is practical missionary training in a cross-cultural community, with a strong emphasis on missiology. We aim to avoid any dichotomy between practical and academic training.

The training objective at the ACTI is fourfold: to experience cross-cultural community life, to learn cross-cultural evangelism and church planting, to find self-identity (as families or individuals) in a cross-cultural context, and to develop creative Asian perspectives on missions. This objective is achieved through learning and living in the ACTI community. [p. 169](#)

Intensive English Speaking Environment

Asian missionaries today face a unique difficulty. We have to adjust to two new languages and two new cultures. We must study the target language as well as English, and learn to adjust to the local culture as well as the 'missionary culture' which is still largely Western. English and Western ways usually predominate in missionary gatherings. Asian fellow missionaries will have to find their own way to fit themselves in. ACTI not only provides English classes for missionaries, it also uses English as the teaching and communicating medium and requires trainees to complete a research paper in English on a topic relevant to their future ministry.

Pitfalls of Short-Term Trips

Some question the need for live-in cross-cultural training since there are short-term trips available to Christian workers for cultural exposure before their missionary assignment. Personally, I see limitations in these mission trips. During the trip individuals are highly motivated to identify with the local culture, because they know that within a short period of time they are returning home. The excitement they experience in a new culture is enough to carry them through. But problems such as the frustrations of language learning, loneliness, or the difficulties of educating children fail to be considered. Singles may not have thought seriously about the question of parenting children on the mission field. Or perhaps on a disastrous mission trip a candidate may see only the worst aspects, and then decides that he or she cannot be a career missionary. Here at ACTI we spend a long time living together and discussing how to equip ourselves for long term service.

Experience Oriented

One alumnus later told us that the missiology studied at ACTI has proved very practical. He found his missionary identity when God spoke to him through difficulties. Had he not had chances to think through the biblical basis of missions, and what it would take to be a long term missionary, he might have found it very difficult to continue his cross cultural service. The months spent at ACTI have helped trainees gain the quality of 'stickability'. A single missionary shared that the experience of rooming with people of other cultures was not easy, but proved helpful for her life on the mission field.

At ACTI, trainees not only study the 'why' and 'who' of missions, the basic information about world evangelism, but also explore the 'how', p. 170 'what' and 'where' of missions. Trainees learn to set short and long term goals. It is a pre-field training designed for those seriously called to serve cross-culturally on a long term basis.

Missionary Family Life

ACTI also provides time for couples to sort out their roles as husbands or wives and establish how to serve together effectively. Alumni couples have found that ACTI life had enriched their relationships. Families can spend time talking to missionaries. Lectures on missionary family life have helped trainees with questions of the education of their children. Some choose to send their children to boarding schools while others decide not to. During our mission study trips we have taken them to visit CheFoo School or Faith Academy.

Preliminary orientation Six months before candidates arrive, ACTI sends out materials for trainees to read. They are informed about Singapore culture, the church situation, and things they need to know as new guests. Suggestions are included for cross-cultural community living as singles, couples or families, as well as on how to improve one's English. Later they are encouraged to start praying for their fellow trainees in their batch.

Orientation week The first week is scheduled lightly so that trainees have time to adjust to time difference and climate. Families need additional time to settle down. The week is devoted to let everyone learn as much as possible about living at ACTI and in Singapore. We apply the culture bonding principle and facilitate early exposure to the new environment.

THE CURRICULUM AT A GLANCE

Each year we have a ten-month training course for new missionaries. Local church involvement and mission study trips are provided for broader exposure in their cross-cultural experience.

Mornings are occupied by formal missiological classes and seminars, audio-visual presentations and discussions. We look into theological and historical perspectives of missions, cross-cultural church planting, cross-cultural communication, the study of different world religions and people groups, practical and current topics such as missions in a revolutionary age, basic health, missionary family life, education of children and handling stress. p. 171

Some very practical topics are studied; for example, Muslim women, the Charismatic movement in Asia, spiritism in the Philippines, how to cultivate understanding with one's sending churches, folk religions, cross-cultural counselling, missionary children's education and urban missions.

There is a concern that trainees might spend too much time reading books. Ideas are therefore expressed and challenged through classroom and informal discussions. Trainees also compare notes about their previous church-planting experiences.

We have six weeks of linguistics and phonetics, cross-cultural Bible study and cultural anthropology. Afternoons are left for counselling, prayer, study or rest.

During the two mission study trips, trainees learn from national church leaders and missionaries in different countries. By doing so we extend our lecture room outside Singapore.

THE OPERATION OF THE ACTI TRAINING PROGRAMME

In the ACTI operation we emphasize team work between staff and trainees. On the one hand the staff provides a suitable environment for learning. On the other hand we offer trainees the privilege and responsibility of sharing in the operation. We respect their input of ideas and labour so that they will be creative counterparts while maintaining the role of learners.

Conducting a Learning Community

Community living is not something new, but something that has disappeared from view. Today we have more possessions, more freedom and access to personal conveniences. All these things *separate* rather than unite us.

Training through community living corresponds to the concept of building the Body of Christ through small groups or retreats. But cross-cultural training in close proximity for ten months is more than attending retreats. It places a strain upon the participants, both trainers and trainees. But as with any skill, knowing comes from practising. The whole thrust of ACTI is to expose everyone to active interpersonal interactions in a cross-cultural Christian caring and sharing context.

Facilitating Cross-cultural Modes of Thinking

One common question asked is whether a missionary from (say) Korea [p. 172](#) going to the Philippines needs to know about cultures other than the one to which he is going. The need is obvious, in view of a fast-changing and internationalized world. When someone from country A already knows to a certain extent the culture of people C, D, or E before going into country B, he has already developed some skills in cross-cultural thinking. He will observe differences and listen to others before he jumps to a quick conclusion about who is right or wrong. His experience reminds him that it could be a matter of different ways of doing the same things.

Providing Asian-Western Dynamics at ACTI

Western missionaries are seen as successful if they can adjust to the culture of their host country. However, the success of Asian missionaries is partly judged by how well they can get along with the other (Western) missionaries.

One goal at ACTI is to prepare Asian candidates for the times when they will interact with fellow non-Asian missionaries. In other words, ACTI plays a significant role in the missionary training of non-Western missionary candidates in such a way that our community living also simulates the missionary compound or missionary circle culture. ACTI tries to keep the community size small, to imitate the one-to-one and small group interaction which takes place on the field.

One of the 'simulation activities' which happens at ACTI is the afternoon tea time and Friday night prayer meeting (with tea to follow). Other simulation activities include recreation, such as volleyball matches. Both ball games and tea were once considered a waste of time by some Asian trainees.

But by participating, the Asian candidates have a chance to practise and adjust their views before facing the real situation on the field. A Korean alumnus serving in Taiwan said that he is now able to appreciate, and relax in, the weekly prayer meeting with his fellow missionaries. When cake is served, he picks up a fork, and enjoys it. Seemingly harmless situations such as these can trigger many problems for Asian missionaries who are unprepared to handle them. Another Asian missionary lady felt hurt when she tried several times to say something amusing to a Western group but none laughed. Jokes are

in fact the hardest of all aspects of a culture for foreigners. This explains why the Friday night prayer meetings at ACTI have come to mean much to the trainees. We see our Western trainees as very good bridges between the West and the East. p. 173

Building a Cross-cultural Trust

To build a trust in one's own cultural context is not always easy. It is even more so in a multi-cultural situation:

Trust is a necessary condition for stable cooperation and effective communication. The higher the trust the more stable the cooperation and the more effective the communication. (Johnson 1975: 388)

When the trust level is high in field ministry, missionaries will be able to express openly their feelings and thoughts and to discuss their different opinions and ideas. By contrast, it is difficult to work with someone who suspects everything seen and told. Such an attitude is very destructive to the person and to his service. At the ACTI, members of the cross-cultural community can learn how to build trust through observation, self evaluation and the weekly tutorial time with lecturers. Commitment is required.

Application of Group Dynamics

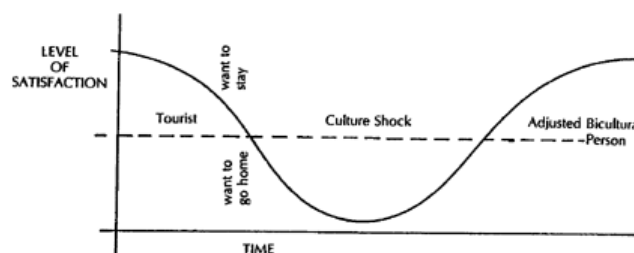
Lectures on awareness and handling of group dynamics are offered during the first term. Throughout the months that follow, staff and trainees can try out these theories and principles among ourselves by experience and observation. Trainees, and staff as well, go through what Johnson (quoting Tuckman) suggests as the 'stages of development of learning groups'.

During the forming stage, there is a period of uncertainty in which members try to determine their place in the group and the procedures and rules of the group. During the storming stage, conflicts begin to arise as members resist the influence of the group and rebel against accomplishing the task. During the norming stage, the group establishes cohesiveness and commitment.... setting norms for appropriate behaviour. Finally, during the performing stage the group develops proficiency in achieving its goals ... (Johnson 1979: 423)

Paul Hiebert (1976: 40) sees three stages in one's cross-cultural experience: 'tourist', 'culture shock' and 'adjusted bicultural identity'.

Initial or forming stage: like a tourist, full of curiosity and motivation. This is usually the first two month of ACTI experience.

Storming stage: the person is encountering culture shock as well as spiritual crisis or interpersonal conflicts. These happen around the third to the fifth month of the training course. Some trainees get sick, p. 174 lose weight or become quiet and passive. Others might challenge the staff or other trainees.



The above graph describes a phenomenon which takes place during ACTI training.

A group will go through a period of challenging the authority of the co-ordinator. It is an ordinary occurrence and should be expected.... Participation in a co-operative learning group requires students to take responsibility for their own learning and the learning of the other members of their group ... Sometimes group members will resist these responsibilities and attempt to return to the more traditional passive, self-centred, minimal-effort student role. (Johnson 1975: 425)

In the Asian context, the staff must not overlook the emotions of Asian trainees underneath their seemingly obedient or calm outlook. Sincere one-to-one sharing usually helps a great deal to turn passive members back to their active, performing roles. Asian trainees need more initiative to be supplied by staff.

Norming stage: the person is coming up from the pit of depression. During the fifth or sixth month trainees begin to eat and sleep better, talk more and enjoy each other's presence. They have begun befriending local Christians as well.

Performing stage: this describes an adjusted bicultural person. After six or seven months, our trainees have gained much understanding of the life and service of a missionary, and have learned to witness and help in a church of a different culture.

More than a personal experience, it is a group experience. Johnson (1975: 427) also included a last group stage called 'terminating'. ACTI p. 175 is a group which ends totally when trainees go on to their assigned countries to serve. They may not see each other again. Staff need to help them as much as possible to have interpersonal conflicts resolved before the group ends. The life of a missionary is always on the move, but not every missionary has learned to move on feeling guilt-free or hurt-free.

Mission Study Trips

The experience of travelling together provides a preparation for the trainees' future missionary career, rather than a time to do lots of evangelism. At ACTI we require the wives and children to go along so that parents can be trained to handle travelling situations. For example, the father may have to fill out four or five forms while the mother watches over the children and their belongings. What if the entire family cannot fit into a tricycle? What about evening meetings? Will the wife stay behind alone with the children? Older Asian kids have to learn Western table manners at mission hostels, another subculture.

WHOLISTIC TRAINING FOR MISSIONARIES: FORMAL AND INFORMAL

Grunlan and Mayers wrote:

In Societies where formal education is based on the teacher-pupil educational relationship, telling is the primary means of teaching ... Influence of the teacher on the student is thus only in the specific area of the course. Evaluation is thus of minimal value within the life of the student because only end results are tested and evaluated, i.e., the examination. (Grunlan and Mayers 1979: 81)

Two questions have often been raised regarding missionary training programmes:

1. Should ACTI and similar institutions aim for theological accreditation?
2. Or is ACTI a type of informal *training* (as opposed to the 'formal' degree programme offered by Western seminaries)?

I would like to pose the following points for discussion and allow the group to draw conclusions:

1. It is commonly noticed that some 'missiologists' have not been actively involved in mission work. After intensive studies they are no longer 'fit' for field assignment. Why? They could be too old and their children are schooled. Perhaps they have too much head knowledge; p. 176 therefore they are not bold enough to move on. We therefore question whether formal, academic missiological study alone in a seminary is adequate for missionary service.
2. Some Asian missionaries, after their first two terms of service, will seek academic studies. They benefit much from missiological studies and can gain much insight from their own as well as others' experience.
3. Today's technologists provide a useful model. They have their formal training (one chooses a major, evaluated through exams, which leads to a degree). Yet they are also required to take job-related training before their work. In the same way, ACTI is on-the-job training for new missionaries. That is why the Singaporean government looks at ACTI members not as students but 'trainees' and grants them work permits.

FEEDBACK FROM ALUMNI

Five years ago when ACTI was taking shape, the committee was fully aware of the high drop-out rate among Asian missionaries. The main reasons are: lack of cross-cultural knowledge; lack of contact with home churches and thus lack of supportive pastoral care; and difficult interpersonal relationships with fellow missionaries. A fourth reason could be the education of children.

The usefulness of a training programme can be evaluated through observing the life and ministry of the alumni and gathering their honest feedback. Twenty-nine ACTI alumni are now serving in Japan, Taiwan, the Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand and Pakistan. Three caught dengue fever within their first year. Two missionary wives have experienced a miscarriage. Another two have had children born to them. One suffered months of bed-ridden severe back injury. Two families sent their young children to boarding school and can only see them twice a year. Two had to make trips home on occasion to sicknesses or death of parents. Some families experienced two or three of the above-mentioned traumas.

The first batch are already having their home-assignment (furlough). The second batch and some of the third batch have completed their language study. All are doing well in church planting or teaching. I have visited several of them and have been keeping close contact through correspondence. As far as I know all enjoy a stable single life or marriage, and are relating well to colleagues. An alumnus put it this way: 'It is not without difficulties, but we know that those are to be p. 177 expected, and that one by one the difficulties will be overcome. Some Western co-workers still "surprise" us from time to time but I can learn to accept them.'

One couple has seen their new church become independent. As a fruit of their discipling and training ministry, the two-year-old church in Taichung has a strong deacon team and is calling for its own pastor. Those couples serving in Japan have to be more patient, and expect slower growth in the numbers of believers, as this is the church situation in that country. A lady alumnus in the Philippines is helping to organize churches for converts from the slum areas.

Couples with children have commented that ACTI has helped them prepare for their children's education. In one case the mother learned to escape from being very tense (when she and her child went through culture shock) to becoming relaxed and

comfortable in their new surroundings. They have been sending their daughter to an 'MK' school for three years now; and the child can still speak her mother tongue, much to their comfort.

Another couple has made the difficult decision to send their children to boarding school. The decision came as a result of hearing other missionary parents' testimony and visiting the CheFoo school.

All the Westerners expressed how beneficial ACTI has been to them, simply because they have been accustomed to living with Asians as minorities. At times the ACTI community living was difficult to them. They discovered their pride and insecurity. Sometimes it was hard to realize that, for example, the Asian fellow trainees were financially stronger.

Singles have found it extremely lonely, even when they can mix well with other trainees. The problem of loneliness is then dealt with and prayed for. One said she was bored. Cross-cultural and isolated life-style can hit singles very hard when they have no one to turn to. Singles are able to look at these issues carefully at ACTI before they have to face the stress of language study on the field.

LOOKING INTO THE FUTURE

ACTI (or rather its predecessor AMTI) was started in 1985 by the Overseas Missionary Fellowship because churches in Asia were calling for a training programme for cross-cultural missionaries. It aimed to emphasize practical training in community, focusing on biblical and missiological insights and seeking to develop creative Asian perspectives on missions. The programme has trained 29 Asian **p. 178** and Western missionaries in the past four years. The graduates are now serving in six countries as church planters and cross-cultural professionals.

In 1988, in order to enhance inter-mission involvement in this programme, OMF invited 8 other mission agencies to join in reconstituting the Board of Directors. The coming together of nine mission agencies to form ACTI was indeed God's doing. It was an answer to the prayers of many Singaporeans who are interested in the training of cross-cultural missionaries. The various agencies had been running on their own for too long, sometimes even to the point of competing with one another, especially in the areas of finance and personnel. That is all in the past now. With co-ordinated strategies, combined income and the better use of existing personnel, the work of training should take a leap forward. The future looks bright.

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An Evangelical Theology of Pluralism

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AN EVANGELICAL THEOLOGY OF PLURALISM

It would be extremely pretentious to call what follows 'An Evangelical Theology of Pluralism'. What it is, rather, is a sketch of some of the issues that need to be considered in formulating such a theology and an outline of some of the basic principles that should condition such a theology.

To begin with the title. I take it that what is meant by 'pluralism' is the pluralism of religions or even worldviews that is characteristic of Western democracies in particular, or the consciousness of a plurality of religions or worldviews which modern communications makes it impossible to ignore. A range of worldviews is now available to us from which we are perfectly at liberty to choose. That this is so is partly the result of certain historical developments in British Protestantism. As a result of conflicts in British Protestantism in the 17th century, a society became conceivable in which people were free to choose what they believed. Initially this freedom was granted to various types of Protestants with limitations on the role which certain types of Protestants could play in the state. But little by little the religious and political limitations were removed so that by now we are free to adopt any worldview we choose as long as that worldview when put into practice does not contravene the law of the land, e.g. we would not be allowed to adopt a religion which practises human sacrifice. The choice now available to us in the UK is enormous. Not only can we choose from a very large range of different Christian denominations and sects but there is also a large number of Christian heresies and also groups representing non-Christian religious traditions.

One of the most significant results of the availability of a variety of worldviews is the fact that adherence to one worldview rather than another is becoming much more a matter of choice than a matter of tradition. However much we might like to put up barriers to insulate us and our children from contact with worldviews other than our own it is becoming increasingly difficult to do so. We may do everything in our power to educate our children in the Christian worldview, and we may [p. 180](#) warn them of the dangers and errors of other worldviews but in the last analysis they have to choose from a number of possible alternatives. This is 'the heretical imperative' which Peter Berger writes about in his book of that title. We live in a supermarket of worldviews. Just as we can choose from a range of twenty or more different types of aspirin when we have a headache we can choose from a whole host of different ways of understanding the world in which we live, our role in it, its past and its future. Practically speaking, as with the aspirin, the number of alternatives that are actually tried is probably very small but a choice is made and has to be justified. Once made the choice has to be continually justified as new alternatives come to light unless there is a fairly drastic withdrawal from the world.

That there is freedom to choose what worldview we adopt and that we are free to propagate our worldview must be good. But this freedom is good not because of the equal truth of all worldviews but because it makes possible the open propagation of the true worldview and adherence to that worldview without coercion. It is because we value this freedom that we would defend the right of others to believe as they do. Yet we should

understand that other worldviews might not share our view of freedom in a pluralist society. For example where Marxism has gained the upper hand restrictions are almost invariably placed on the freedom of those with a religious worldview to propagate their faith, and where Islam is in the ascendancy severe restrictions are placed on the freedom of the adherents of all other worldviews. Universal toleration is, therefore, both risky and challenging because it entails giving their freedom to those who would destroy our freedom if they were in a position to do so.

Things become somewhat more complicated when we begin to think of this pluralist situation in the context of education. One of the basic questions here is whether or not it is the responsibility of the educational system, as it has developed over the last century or so, to introduce pupils to a representative range of worldviews that they are likely to encounter. It would be very difficult to argue against such a responsibility. The difficulties arise when we begin to think how this responsibility should be carried out. One opinion which has become very popular during the last ten years is that pupils must be presented with a range of alternative worldviews objectively. What is meant by 'objectively' is that the teacher must hide his own worldview and present the various alternatives as if there was no such thing as truth and error in the last analysis. But this ideal of an objective presentation of various alternatives fails because everyone either implicitly or explicitly is forced to express their worldview in their teaching whether [p. 181](#) they like it or not. The only way objective teaching is possible is by doing away with the teacher, which would rather undermine the whole educational process, and leaves us with the noble savage learning virtue directly off the bosom of nature! If we must have teachers, and I believe we must, then we cannot have an objective presentation of various worldviews. The education of pupils in worldviews cannot be a matter of directing pupils to the supermarket with 'objective' instructions in their hands as to the different types of aspirins that are available and listing totally fairly the virtues and vices of the various types. Any instructions formulated by a teacher must inevitably be conditioned by personal experience, however minimal or maximal—minimal probably in the case of worldviews—of the different types of aspirin and their effectiveness in the relief of headaches. The analogy with aspirins breaks down here but I would say that the most unobjective teacher is the one who is convinced that all aspirins are equally valid as a means to relieve headache. That teacher is dangerous not because the view held is necessarily false but because it is deluded—the teacher thinks he is being objective while being totally conditioned by a very definite worldview. (The issue raised here will be more fully discussed theologically in due course.)

To return to the relationship between the educational system and a society in which we have a pluralism of world views. The glory of such a tolerant society for the Christian is the freedom it gives to propagate Christianity without fear of persecution and the fact that in such a society Christianity can stand on its own merit without any coercion against anyone to become an adherent. The question is whether or not a Christian teacher can claim the freedom to propagate the faith in the classroom. I would say yes—but not in order to claim a special privilege for Christian teachers but because all teachers are inevitably propagating some worldview or other. The difference between Christian and other teachers very often, it seems to me, is not that the Christian has a definite worldview which he wants to share while other teachers have no worldview but that Christian teachers are rather better thought out in the area of worldviews than their colleagues! But having emphasized the Christian teacher's right to propagate the faith we must also emphasize that the propagation must never be coercive. No teacher of any integrity should use his position, his superior knowledge and argumentative skills to coerce his pupils in the direction of Christianity. But if it seems quite impossible for the Christian

teacher not to propagate the faith on the psychological plane then it is more impossible still on the spiritual plane. To be Christian is to subject the whole of our life to the Lordship of Jesus Christ—which p.182 means loving Him with all our heart, soul, mind and strength and our neighbour as ourselves. If a teacher is a Christian in any real sense, therefore, it is as impossible for that teacher not to propagate the faith as it is for a fish to live out of water. How can a Christian bracket faith in Jesus on entering a classroom to discuss matters which have to do with the ultimate questions of human existence? To do so would be to deny the Saviour and to be unconcerned about the eternal destiny of pupils.

I have argued that the fact that we live in a pluralist society should mean that a teacher should have the right to be a Christian teacher. There is now, however, a very strong lobby particularly in the area of Religious Education or Religious Studies that would deny Christian teachers this right. This lobby emphasizes the ideal of objectivity and the injustice of using the state educational system to indoctrinate pupils. But these emphases are not fundamental to their position. Fundamentally they represent one particular theological standpoint which is very much a minority standpoint in the spectrum of Christian theology but which seems to have been able to corner the market in the area of Religious Education. The gurus of this school are Ninian Smart, John Hick, Cantwell Smith, Mircea Eliade and the like. Theologically the first three are liberal Protestants and Eliade was a very liberal Catholic. To consider their view of revelation will help us to see the crucial importance of the traditional Evangelical view of the Scriptures if we are to develop an Evangelical theology of pluralism.

Whatever else may be said about the contemporary exponents of Religious Studies they put a very heavy emphasis on the vital importance of religion for the wellbeing of mankind. They have no doubt that there is Something there over and above man and that it is very important for man to be in contact with that Something. They also believe that that Something reveals Itself to man, (e.g. Eliade's 'theophanies'). But they are united also in denying that that Something reveals Itself in *words*. Revelation to them is essentially a non-verbal experience of some kind. The archetype of this genre is 'the feeling of absolute dependence' of Schleiermacher and Otto's consciousness of an ineffable mystery that is both awesome and attractive is another example. The 'divine' is There continually as Something which stands over and above man, as something beyond man's control and as Something on which man depends. Occasionally certain individuals or groups experience this overriding reality in a new way. Having experienced It they then try to explain their experience by putting it into words which can never adequately express the experience. In fact the verbal expression in some ways kills the experience—fossilizes it p.183 by making it into something historical rather than existential. A somewhat extreme though, I believe valid, illustration of the status of words in this view of revelation is the Hindu *mantra*. Very often the mantra is a meaningless 'word' which when repeated over and over again is believed to evoke an experience of the 'divine'. The meaning of the word in the mantra is not important; what is important is that its use evokes an experience. When applied to the question of revelation and the Bible in the context of Christianity this approach yields the view that the Bible is not God's revelation but an attempt to express an experience of God's revelation. The revelation itself cannot, by definition, be embodied in a verbal expression. God cannot speak, it is man only who has that privilege. We do not read the Bible, therefore, to discover certain statements which can be said to be true but we read it in the hope that it will evoke in us the same experience as its authors had.

The adoption of this subjectivist view of revelation brought with it a tremendous revolution in theological thinking. With the rejection of the objective standards of the Bible and dogma the emphasis moved to religious experience and religious experience is not something found only in the Christian tradition. Everywhere men have had religious

experiences and then tried to express those experiences in a bewildering variety of ways. But given their commitment to a 'god' who cannot speak there is no question of being able to make any sense of the variety of man's religious experience by appeal to some objective standard. The only alternative is to argue that one expression of religious experience is superior to another in terms of fulfilment or moral superiority. Quite a lot of theologians are still trying their best with this approach to proving the superiority of the Christian verbalization of the primal revelation. Others, such as Smart and Hick, are now abandoning the attempt and saying that every religious tradition is an equally valid response to revelation.

As Evangelicals, however, we do not believe that it is unreasonable to hold that God has spoken with man. But even though we can marshal various arguments to justify this belief we gladly admit that in the last analysis it is a matter of faith—just as a rejection of such belief is also a matter of faith. But an Evangelical theology of pluralism must begin here, with the conviction that the Bible is God's word to man. This emphasis has been central to evangelicalism in its British sense from the beginning and continues to be so. Members of the Evangelical Alliance, e.g., still have to declare their belief in 'the divine inspiration of the Holy Scripture and its consequent entire trustworthiness and supreme authority in all matters of faith and [p. 184](#) conduct.' This might seem a very obvious point to make but I think that we do need to remind ourselves as evangelicals today that this is where we begin. This is not to say that we worship the Bible as some would have it. It is God whom we worship—but the God who has revealed Himself to us in the Bible. We don't begin with some experience of a Reality greater than us which we try to describe with our inadequate language but we begin with He who in the beginning created the heavens and the earth and who *said* ' "Let there be light," and there was light.' We know that we are caught in a round argument when we say this. All we can say is that we cannot make God subject to human reason or experience and being that He is God our creator we believe that He is able to communicate with us in words. Precisely how He speaks, of course, is a big question.

We begin, then, with the Scriptures. We read or hear of the God who is described in them. We trust Jesus for the forgiveness of our sin and eternal life. We know in our own experience the power of the Holy Spirit in the struggle with our own corruption and the corruption in the world around us. We go to the same Scriptures to make sense of the religiously pluralist situation in which we find ourselves. To say this does not preclude discussion about precisely how the Bible is the word of God but it does preclude the belief that the Bible is simply a weak and inadequate human attempt to express ineffable spiritual experiences. We refuse to open up this unbridgeable gap between an experience of God and its verbal expression which has been opened up by liberal Protestant theology. In this context I would think that a Biblical view of religious experience and particularly of the experience of divine inspiration developed in the context of the view which dominates Religious Studies at the moment would be a valuable contribution to an evangelical theology of pluralism. I am in no position to even outline the Biblical view of religious experience but I can offer a critique of the gap theory which might help in clearing the ground.

I would like to look in particular at Cantwell Smith's distinction between 'faith' and 'belief' as an excellent example of the matter in question. For Smith 'faith' is intensely personal. 'Men's faith,' he states, 'lies beyond the sector of their religious life that can be imparted to an outsider for his inspection.' In *The Meaning and End of Religion* (1962) he discusses the various ways in which 'faith' has been expressed, such as through art, community, ideas, words or beliefs. Here 'faith' and 'belief' are very different. Belief belongs to the world of the relative and the mundane—the world of history. Faith on the

other hand is man in the presence of the transcendent. This experience p. 185 of faith can never be captured in words or beliefs; as the Tao Te Ching puts it, 'The truth that can be told is not the eternal truth.' And unbridgeable gulf is opened up between faith and belief and Smith's attempts to describe faith must be seen in the context of this gulf.

In *Faith and Belief* he describes faith as a 'quality of human living' which 'at its best has taken the form of serenity and courage and loyalty and service: a quiet confidence and joy which enable one to feel at home in the universe, and to find meaning in the world and in one's own life, a meaning that is profound and ultimate, and is stable no matter what will happen to oneself at the level of the immediate event.' (Princeton 1979 p.12) In *Towards a World Theology* he describes faith as 'an orientation of the personality, to oneself, to one's neighbour, to the universe; a total response; a way of seeing the world, and of handling it; a capacity to live at a more than mundane level; to see, to feel, to act in terms of a transcendent dimension. The early Christians proclaimed that in Christ faith had become available to man, so that a new life thereby became possible.' (pp. 113–4) Consistent with his basic view of faith these attempts to describe it are really attempts to describe its effects without any reference to belief.

Smith's distinction between faith and belief has been subjected to critical analysis by William J. Wainwright in an article entitled 'Wilfred Cantwell Smith on faith and belief' (*Religious Studies*, vol. 20, 1984, pp. 353–366). Wainwright rightly contends that the heart of Smith's position is his conviction that assurance of the truth of certain propositions is not essential to faith. He then examines the various arguments Smith offers to justify this point of view. One argument Smith uses is that since belief (doctrine) is important in some religious traditions and not in others then it cannot be essential to faith. Wainwright, however, is very doubtful whether there are any religious traditions where belief is entirely unimportant and charges Smith with failure to distinguish between a formal system of doctrine and being convinced of the truth of certain propositions. It is true that a formal system of doctrine is unimportant in some religious traditions but it does not follow that the adherents of those traditions have no convictions that certain propositions are true. To the contrary it is very unlikely that one could find a religious believer who does not believe in the truth of some proposition or other.

A second argument of Smith's is that faith remains constant while belief varies from age to age. Beliefs change in response to various historical pressures but authentic faith can be found in every age. Beliefs, therefore, are not essential to faith. What Smith is doing here according to Wainwright is assuming the correctness of his idea of p. 186 faith as the foundation for his argument. He builds his case on the unproven conviction that there is something essential and of vital importance for mankind at the root of the diversity of the religious traditions. This essence he assumes cannot be subject to change and must differ from everything that does not change. Doctrines or beliefs change and so they cannot belong to this essence—which brings us back to the beginning of the circular argument.

Another assumption underlying Smith's argument is that the objects of faith as expressed in belief are unimportant, i.e. what faith is and does can be divorced from its object as expressed in doctrines so that it does not really matter whether one believes in Christ, Buddha, Allah or any other object of faith. These names are in the last analysis attempts to express in words the essential reality (at the core of religion—they are merely shadows of the ultimate reality) that lies beyond them. As Wainwright correctly comments, 'this argument's premise will only be granted by those who are antecedently convinced that the nature of one's doctrinal convictions is only peripherally related to the authenticity of one's faith.' A rare creature among religious believers I suspect!

Another assumption underlying Smith's thesis is that faith is primary and belief secondary or derivative. Wainwright questions the possibility of having any religious

experience, or experience of faith as understood by Smith, that is 'logically prior to any sort of conceptual articulation'. His analysis of the illustrations that Smith uses to support his point proves the justice of Wainwright's criticism in my opinion. What Smith claims to be contrasting here is what he calls 'insight' (i.e. knowing the truth of something, recognising it) and 'propositional knowledge', (knowing that something is true). Faith, he claims has the quality of 'insight'. He illustrates the point by comparing 'insight' to seeing what is funny in a joke, a 'seeing' which, according to Smith, is quite separate from the telling of the joke. But Wainwright points out quite rightly that there would have been no 'seeing' without the 'telling'. 'Propositional knowledge' must be at least part of the process of 'seeing'. This does not mean that 'propositional knowledge' and 'faith' are identical but it does mean that the relationship between them is much closer than Smith is prepared to admit. Smith fails to see that to say that A cannot be identified with B is not the same as saying that A is unlike B. While not exhausting the being of God it is conceivable that certain propositions could correctly describe God—though only partially. If this is so where two beliefs contradict each other both cannot be true—it is this conclusion that Smith seeks to avoid at all costs. [p. 187](#)

It is very interesting how very suspicious Smith is of propositions, propositional truth or propositional knowledge. He possesses almost the same fervour as an 18th century revivalist in his insistence that religious head knowledge is not enough and that there is no authentic 'faith' without a commitment of the heart. The great difference between Smith and the 18th century revivalists is that for Smith head knowledge is profoundly unimportant. In this he is typical of many modern Western thinkers who are searching for some final experience beyond the understanding, some solid ground underneath and out of the reach of the tumult of the conflicting voices of our pluralist society. He offers us some island of hope beyond the horizon towards which we can sail without a compass and without any certainty that the island is there at all. One way in which he expresses his suspicion of propositions is that 'the object of faith's cognitive attitudes is the transcendent, not propositions or statements'. Here again he seems to misunderstand the basic mechanism of faith. No one who claims to believe in the Apostle's Creed is saying that the propositions of the creed are the objects of their faith. God is the object of the believer's faith, the God who is described in the creed. A similar mistake is made by those who charge 'fundamentalists' with bibliolatry. To believe that the Bible is the word/s of God is not the same as worshipping the Bible and to suggest that it is is illogical.

Another problem with the gulf which Smith opens between 'faith' and 'belief' is that, according to Smith's own assumptions, this idea itself belongs to the realm of beliefs. After all what he says about 'faith' is a series of propositions. One is reminded here of Dilthey's statement, 'the relativity of all human concepts is the last word of the historical vision of the world'. According to Smith all beliefs belong to the flux of history and this must include Smith's own beliefs which are not difficult to extract from his works. Smith believes, (i) in 'God' the transcendent reference point of man's experience. (*Meaning and End of Religion* p. 184); (ii) that this 'God' is worshipped in all the religious traditions of the world (*Towards a World Theology* pp. 103, 164–5); (iii) that where authentic existence is found this transcendent reference must be at work (*Faith and Belief* p. 12); (iv) that the universe bears witness to the fact that this transcendent reference is love (*Towards a World Theology* p. 151). For anyone familiar with the history of theology since the 19th century this creed has a strangely familiar ring. What he sings is the old and familiar tune of liberal Protestantism.

It might be felt, maybe, that I have laboured the point somewhat with Cantwell Smith but in fact the argument is very relevant to the type of thinking that has come to dominate multi-faith RE. As I am [p. 188](#) made to understand Cantwell Smith seems particularly

relevant since his position could be described as 'subjectivity' rather than 'objectivity'. But whether the emphasis is on objective or subjective understanding underlying both approaches is a very definite religious conviction that is as much a matter of belief as the explicit credal system of an evangelical. If I as an evangelical—or even if I was a Muslim—decided to embrace the views of Cantwell Smith or Ninian Smart then I would have to turn my back on my evangelicalism—or my Islamic convictions. I would go as far as saying that the dominant view of RE at the moment is a challenge to all who adhere to a specific historical religious tradition to abandon their faith and embrace the liberal Protestant creed. Another major objection to this point of view, in my opinion, is that it does not take seriously enough the doctrinal schemes of the religious traditions. Their conflicting doctrinal schemes are essential to Buddhism, Christianity, Islam etc. and if we fail to be serious about these doctrinal schemes then we fail in our respect to the adherents of the various religions. And if doctrines are much closer to religious experience than the liberal Protestant is prepared to admit then doctrines have more to do with truth also—to suggest that true religious experience flows from contradictory doctrines is nonsense.

I am not at all sure whether what I have included in this paper can be described as a 'sketch of some of the issues that need to be considered in formulating' an evangelical theology of pluralism, or that it is 'an outline of some of the basic principles that should condition such a theology'. I might have cleared some of the ground to begin a task that needs to be completed and hopefully given some encouragement to those who are in the thick of it to stand firm as evangelical Christians.

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Book Reviews

THE CHURCH IN THE BIBLE AND THE WORLD

by Donald A. Carson (ed.)

(Paternoster: Exeter, 1987; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988)

xi + 359pp., price £12.50

Reviewed by Rev. Jacob M. B. Sudhakaran. Printed with permission.

This book is the product of a consultation by the 'Faith and Church Study Unit' of the World Evangelical Fellowship Theological Commission, under whose sponsorship several prominent evangelical scholars met to discuss the theme, the nature and the mission of the Church.

Edmund P. Clowney affirms in his paper (on the biblical teaching on the Church) that the ministry of the Church is three-fold, like God's nature: the Church is a worshipping assembly, the body of Christ and a fellowship of the Holy Spirit. The mission therefore involves the community, discipleship by following Christ as members of his body and witnessing in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit through the various gifts endowed to the Church by the Spirit. In the second paper, P. T. O'Brien's focus is on the eschatological dimensions of the Church; he discusses how the Church can be an eschatological reality

here and now. O'Brien concludes that the earthly responsibilities of the people of God today are to be derived from Christ himself: as those raised with Christ they now participate in his resurrection life.

Russell P. Shedd's paper discusses (by examining concepts like time, temple, worship, sacrifice, and the priesthood of all believers) the bipolar nature of Christianity: the content of the faith and practical worship, the sequel being that liturgy is theology acted out, and that worship of God and theology are inseparable in Christian life. His conclusion: sacrificial life and the universal priesthood of all believers are an integral part of worship and therefore 'the whole of life is related to and situated within the missionary movement of God to men' (interestingly, a quotation from the WCC Report, 1967). Ronald Y. K. Fung's discussion revolves round the use of spiritual gifts in the ministry, the function of office in the ministry and the role and place of women in the ministry. He emphasizes that function, gift and office in the Church ought to be closely integrated on the one hand and spiritual gifts be expressed independently of office on the other. He tries to justify an individual's extraordinary claims for special gifts and does not see the need to test such claims in the church through the Word of God. While speaking on the ministry of women he contends p. 190 that women are subordinate to one man, husband or father, not to all men. However he strives to avoid any office or function which would involve women in exercising doctrinal or ecclesiological authority over men.

Donald A. Carson scrutinizes von Allmen's thesis on the contextualization of theology. Though he admits the need of contextualizing theology in different cultures he gives five suggestions to draw limits to the extent of contextualization: any contextualization is to be based on the authority of the whole Bible; historical theology cannot be normative but is to be assessed both culturally and against the norm of Scripture; doing theology in different cultures involves using different languages, metaphors, genres and so forth—but these theologies are to be reciprocal; the authority that corrects every culture is the Word of God; the fallenness of human nature and finiteness of human reason can lead to hermeneutical disaster and hence the convicting, transforming and regenerating work of the Holy Spirit is to be acknowledged in doing theology. The risks are syncretism, universalism and christopaganism. Carson is speaking to both missionary and indigenous theologians involved in doing theology in the third and second horizons respectively.

Sunand Sumithra analyzes the theological aspects of syncretism and secularization (which were also the key issues discussed in the 1928 meeting of the International Missionary Council). Affirming that adaptation, assimilation, absorption, digestion, acculturation, and accommodation are strictly speaking syncretistic processes, he claims that only Judaism and Christianity remain non-syncretistic although they underwent some of these processes. Their illegitimate forms are syncretism. The biblical revelation which has no contamination of falsehood is the norm for judging these processes. In the process of secularization the uniqueness of biblical revelation is at stake because it is human expertise which is the criterion for human values and goals, while the Scripture becomes merely a reference point. He calls for a renewal of individuals' hearts as the antidote to both. The Holy Spirit as the agent of God's renewal, waiting upon the Lord in prayer, and believing and obeying the Word of God, are the needs of a secularized church.

The discussion on the Church in persecution by David H. Adeney is practical. Adeney shows how Christians can avoid certain types of persecutions. Division among believers, undermining spiritual vitality and evangelistic outreach, is to be avoided to combat persecutions of all types. He brings out the positive results of persecution which encourage Christians to be steadfast in their faith: purification of the p. 191 Church, deeper fellowship with God in prayer, revival in the Church, spread of the gospel by scattered

Christians, reality of Christian faith made known, witness to the Christian hope and church growth.

Donald A. Carson, the editor, has given a fine shape to these seven papers. The main thrust of the book revolves around the quest for relevance of the church in today's world, to restate its nature, meaning, purpose and goal in modern vocabulary and to make the world's modern evangelicals come out of their self-made enclosure of rigid creed-based or religion-based church life. The book shows that the Church is a dynamic force and movement based on the biblical principles and centred around the triune God.

I cannot resist adding that it would be wonderful if the same foundation that sponsored the ANTS deliberations would likewise underwrite the possibility of Third World Seminaries undergoing such worthwhile analysis and reflection.