

EVANGELICAL REVIEW OF THEOLOGY

VOLUME 19

Volume 19 • Number 4 • October 1995

Evangelical Review of Theology

*Articles and book reviews original and selected from
publications worldwide for an international
readership for the purpose of discerning the
obedience of faith*

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Published by
PATERNOSTER PERIODICALS



for
WORLD EVANGELICAL FELLOWSHIP
Theological Commission p. 322

ISSN: 0144-8153
Vol. 19 No. 4 October-December 1995

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Subscriptions

For the British Isles and Commonwealth (1995) £19.80.
For the USA: \$59.00.

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Editorial

In response to the many unsolicited articles received, the Board and Editors of ERT have decided to keep the October–December issue as an open issue. In some cases a common theme may emerge, but not necessarily. It so happens that many of the articles before us focus on the theme of mission and hence this has become the theme of this issue. The editors welcome contributions from our readers for the 4 issues of 1996. The themes for [Numbers 1–3](#) will be: The Theology of Prosperity and Suffering; Salvation in Christ in the Context of Islam and Faith and Hope for the Future (the theme for the Commission’s consultation April 1996). See the back pages for details. Articles received now may be used as resource papers for the 12 working groups. Book reviews should be sent to the Book Editor.

The theme of mission is increasingly one of global concern. Every church must take the gospel to all people beginning with their neighbours. The distinction between sending and receiving churches and countries is now obsolete with the massive movement of peoples in immigration, travel and international trade and government and as refugees. Ethnic and religious pluralism is the mark of our age, with large scale conversions to and from Christ and to and from every other religion and ideology. Third World missionaries now outnumber those from the First World. The issues of mission are not just strategies of reaching the unreached. They are deeply theological, as the very truth of the gospel is being challenged. They involve belief systems and culture, biblical authority and religious traditions, particular and universal salvation, evangelism and dialogue, contextualisation and syncretism, fundamental causes of oppression and injustice, the integrity of creation and so on. Our chairman, Peter Kuzmič, calls for ‘a theologically grounded missiology and for a missiologically focused theology’. At London next April we will set up ongoing study groups on the issues the consultation judge to be central to a vital and coherent theology of mission for the twenty first century. We invite you to network with us.

Editor [p. 324](#)

What has Boston to do with Bosnia?

Peter Kuzmic

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Installation address at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, September 9th, 1994

President Coolley, highly esteemed faculty colleagues, distinguished guests, dear students and friends;

I consider it a great honour to be installed today as professor of World Missions and European studies. By establishing this chair, Gordon-Conwell affirms its commitment to the vision of its founders for world evangelization.

This chair is distinguished not because of its occupant but because it carries the excellent and well deserving names of Eva B. and Paul E. Toms. By their long, faithful and outstanding pastoral and global ministry they epitomize the best of the church's holy calling to be God's shining light amidst the darkness of our present age. It is not without significance for this chair that Dr. Toms and I first met in Bucharest, Romania, only a few months after that 'Korea of Europe'—as I like to call that country of great suffering and genuine revival—was liberated from the chains of communist totalitarianism. The event was the first free congress of the Romanian Evangelical Alliance, at which I had the privilege to speak, and at which Dr. Toms represented the National Association of Evangelicals. The place was the famous 'Sala Palatului' which the ruthless dictator Ceausescu built for himself. Only a year earlier he alone was allowed to speak from a podium which now served as a pulpit for our victorious proclamation that 'Jesus Christ is Lord!'

I could be tempted to use this occasion to elaborate what happened there and elsewhere in my part of the world as we witnessed the 'acceleration of history' (Havel), the death of a very promising secular utopia and the collapse of the most powerful enemy the Christian church has ever encountered—Marxist communism. [p. 325](#) But on this topic and the missiological challenges of both post-communist Eastern Europe and post-Christian Western Europe I have already spoken from this place. And, apart from that, let us leave a few things for the classroom.

I also wish to express my deep admiration of and gratitude to professor emeritus of World Mission and Evangelism, Dr. J. Christy Wilson Jr, a citizen of the world, a prayer warrior and a practising protestant saint. It was, again, more than coincidental that Christy and I met twenty-two years ago in Christian ministry in (of all places!) Teheran, Iran. Since that first encounter, Christy has been my constant encourager and a true example of professorial and missionary servanthood.

It was a German missions director who pioneered the scientific study of missions. Dr. Karl Graul in his qualifying lecture at the University of Erlangen in 1864 made a strong plea for missiology to be included in the 'universitas litterarum'. 'This discipline,' he said 'must gradually come to the point where she holds her head up high; she has a right to ask for a place in the house of the most royal of all sciences, namely theology.'

This was the first missiological knock on the doors of theological faculties. They opened very slowly and it was a long and embattled journey before the study of missions was included in theological curriculums of most reputable seminaries and divinity schools both in Europe and in the United States. The first official appointment to the chair of missionary science was made in Germany in 1897. No wonder its occupant, Gustav Warneck, professor extraordinary of *Missionslehre* at the University of Halle entitled

his inaugural lecture 'Mission's Right to Citizenship in the Organism of Theological Science'.

A leading Dutch missiologist in surveying the status of missiological education in America some twenty years ago, expressed a concern about the declining number of university chairs of missions. His warning should be heeded: 'If missiology should ever disappear from the American seminary, it would mark a great loss and would result in the strong growth of provincialism and parochialism among both faculty and students.' (16)

I want to thank the leadership and the faculty of Gordon-Conwell for assuring Dr. Bekker and me—we are, after all, the department of foreign affairs in this institution, you know!—that missiology in this world class seminary is not treated as a dispensable addendum to our strong classical theological curriculum and for recognizing that all authentic theology rooted in and faithful to God's redemptive self-disclosure is implicitly missiological. I am deeply convinced that we are all called to be missionaries, that is to live on the very frontiers of God's redemptive involvement in our world. This is not a statement about location but about intention and our continuous and unreserved availability to serve the Lord of the harvest in whatever capacity and place he chooses to use us.

At the same time, I see my calling to this position linked to a deep concern about what I perceive to be [p. 326](#) a precipitous process of de-theologizing of missions, both in theory and practice. This is becoming especially evident in some market-driven anthropocentric North American missionary enterprises. In so much of modern-day missionary and evangelistic activity we are tempted to lose sight of the foundational nature and normative function of biblical revelation; of the fact that the Bible gives us not only the mandate but also the message and the model of how to incarnate the Good News of God's forgiving and healing love in our broken world. We are on dangerous ground when technique takes precedence over theology, and when human strategy and corporate planning replace the trust in the Word and reliance on the wisdom, guidance and power of the Holy Spirit. I add my voice to those who are calling for a theologically grounded missiology and for a missiologically focused theology. It is a holy union and therefore: 'Whatever God has joined together let no man put asunder!'

Last month I was in Bosnia, the place of my first missionary calling, a land in which I lived for a couple of years some three decades ago. I have been to Bosnia five times in the last twelve months, involved in the ministry of reconciliation and in alleviating human suffering in my homeland Croatia and in Bosnia, where over 200,000 people have been killed and 3 million have become homeless refugees.

As a result of my frequent intercontinental travels I have been nominated by a faculty colleague for a 'jet-lag specialist of the year award'. I have a confession to make: I still suffer from jet-lag. My wife Vlasta thinks that this biological time-clock disorder has a providential significance in need of theological interpretation for the benefit of our family. By not healing me from jet-lag—according to her, I must say, somewhat dubious exegetical method—the Lord is saying that he has not predestined me for a travelling ministry. But how do you teach and practise world missions and European studies without international travel? This dilemma has helped me to produce a new definition of jet-lag. I believe it is holistic and contextually appropriate and so I have decided to share it at this occasion.

Jet-lag is when your body is in Sarajevo, Bosnia, your stomach is in Boston, Massachusetts and your brain is in a holding-pattern somewhere in-between.

Committed to the missionary aspect of globalization, we are challenged today by a modernized recasting of Tertullian's question:

WHAT HAS BOSTON TO DO WITH BOSNIA?

One could make the paraphrase even more explicit by asking: ‘What has academia to do with missions, what connection is there between the seminary and the world?’

What has Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary to do with places, cultures and people so different and so far away? Why should we in the serenity of this ‘holy hill’, enjoying the beauty of our campus; in the peacefulness of our library and in our ultra-modern technologically well-equipped interactive classrooms—why should we concern ourselves with the human tragedies of Bosnia, Somalia and Bangladesh? Why [p. 327](#) should the holocaust taking place in Rwanda touch our lives when it is obvious that the sovereign Lord has placed us so as to be secure from those dangers and other winds of adversity? Should we worry about restoring democracy to Haiti, ask questions about human rights in China or be concerned with the plight of Cuban emigrants?

Why should we burden ourselves with the burdens of the world and allow ourselves to be disturbed by statistics of war, disease and poverty? Why should the turmoils of the world disrupt the tranquillity of our hearts and surrounding?

May I suggest that there is only one compelling reason—for *God so loved the world ...* Our loving Father God has a missionary heart and that is why he sent his Son into the world. Jesus was the missionary par excellence. He himself has given us the holy mandate, the Great Commission: *go into all the world ... as the Father has sent me so I send you ... and you will be my witnesses ... in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the world.*

We at Gordon-Conwell are strong believers in and serious students of the **word** of God. We specialize in the holy **text**. But we are also deeply committed to God’s purposes for the **world**. Our overarching hermeneutic is a constant search and journey, a busy two-way street between the **text** and **context**, a building of bridges between God’s holy **word** and his alienated sinful **world**.

We are unfaithful to the Word if we ignore the world.

The church betrays the mission of Jesus at the point of not recognizing the danger of what has been termed, ‘collective self-centeredness,’ when it becomes—as David Bosch used to say—the place that ‘collects and conserves people for heaven’, functioning as a ‘waiting room for the hereafter’ (Bosch, 1984, XXiV).

The church is God’s pilgrim community in the world, ‘proclaiming the praises of him who called you ...’ (cf. [1. Pet. 2:9–10](#)). By its very nature the church is missionary and can never be an end in itself. As Karl Barth put it in his *Church Dogmatics* ‘Its mission is not additional to its being.’ (CD, IV/1,725). Biblical orthodoxy does not allow what many contemporary Christians practise, namely to view and treat missions as an optional appendix to the church.

And so, Boston has as much to do with Bosnia as the church’s obedience to the Great Commission has to do with the world lost apart from Christ. This is stated in art. 6 of the Mission of our seminary: ‘To develop in students a vision for God’s redemptive work throughout the world and to formulate strategies that will lead to effective missions, evangelism and discipleship’.

We here in Boston have a message for Bosnia, a word for the world. And, believe me, Bosnia has a message for us. George Bernard Shaw perceptively wrote: ‘The worst sin towards our fellow creatures is not to hate them, but to be indifferent to them: that is the essence of inhumanity.’ A reader’s response to a recent **Time** magazine coverage of the horrendous events in Central Africa makes the same point: ‘Death in Rwanda, in harrowing proportions, [p. 328](#) came not only from massacres and cholera but also from apathy’ (Aug.22).

We need to hear both—the cross-cultural Macedonian cry of the world: ‘Come over and help us!’ and the universal commands of the Master who said: ‘Go into all the world!’

God’s glory cannot be extended among the nations and his purposes with humanity cannot be carried out without and apart from our obedience to the Great Commission. I believe in the primacy of evangelism within the overall mission of the church in the world. ‘The church that fails to evangelize is both biblically unfaithful and strategically shortsighted’ (Snyder, 101).

Bosnia has, however, taught me that evangelism without genuine concern for the suffering and hungry has more to do with religious propaganda than with the Good News of the Kingdom of God. It has taught me that servants of Christ cannot be credible unless they are willing to become vulnerable; that the Good News of our Lord cannot be preached in antiseptic conditions and that those who need it most have not only ears and souls but also eyes and minds, bodies and stomachs. Their receptivity to the Word is greatly conditioned by their painful context and the ability of both the message and the messenger to touch them at the point of their greatest need.

The staggering physical and spiritual needs of our world should not cause us to despair. We need the faith of a Martin Luther who amidst great adversity exclaimed: ‘Spiritus Sanctus non est Scepticus!’

The needs of the world are opportunities for the kingdom of God. We believe in Christ who by his death and resurrection has already defeated the powers of evil. And we believe in the Holy Spirit, the executive director of the mission of Jesus operative in our world. We here in our Boston academia need to respond to the battlefields of the Bosnias of our world by developing a ‘spirituality of engagement and not of withdrawal’ (Costas, 172).

Let me conclude by briefly revisiting an event and experience which twenty years ago changed the direction of my life and ultimately brought me to this place today.

Some 4,000 Christian leaders from more than 150 nations of the world gathered in July 1974 in Lausanne, Switzerland, for one of the most important events in recent Christian history, a great Congress on World Evangelization.

These days as we watch the controversies surrounding the Population Conference in Cairo, and hopefully discern its relative significance for the future of the human race, I was reminded of a digital world population clock, activated at the opening ceremony. From the moment of invocation until the last Amen it ticked relentlessly to register that during the ten-day Congress the net population increase of the world reached 1,852,837 persons. It also documented that since the 1966 Berlin Congress on World Evangelization, in which Dr. Toms participated, the world population increased by 590,193,076 people.

A young delegate from Eastern Europe, the twenty-eight year-old principal of a new Theological [p. 329](#) College in a communist country, stared in amazement at these figures while making sure that he copied them precisely into his notebook before leaving for home. And then he felt on his shoulders the hand of an African Anglican bishop whose heart was burning for world evangelization. He had never before met a bishop who was on fire for God. And the bishop whispered: ‘Just imagine, young man, Jesus died for each one of them.’

This is the reason I stand here today. This is the reason why you are here. While standing at the threshold of the third millennium after the birth of the Saviour, let us prepare well so that we may take his *whole gospel to the whole world*.

Dr Peter Kuzmic is President of Evandeoski Teoloski Fakultet, Osijek, Croatia and Professor of World Missions and European Studies, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, South Hamilton, USA [p. 330](#)

The Montreal Declaration of Anglican Essentials

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'In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; in all things, charity.'

St. Augustine

As members of the Anglican Church of Canada from every province and territory, and participants in the Essentials 1994 Conference in Montreal, we unite in praising God for his saving grace and for the fellowship we enjoy with our Lord and with each other. We affirm the following Christian essentials:

1. THE TRIUNE GOD

There is one God, self-revealed as three persons, 'of one substance, power and eternity,' the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. For the sake of the Gospel we decline proposals to modify or marginalize these names and we affirm their rightful place in prayer, liturgy, and hymnody. For the Gospel invites us through the Holy Spirit to share eternally in the divine fellowship, as adopted children of the God in whose family Jesus Christ is both our saviour and our brother. ([Deut. 6:4](#); [Isa. 45:5](#); [Matt. 28:19](#); [2 Cor. 13:14](#); [Gal. 4:4-6](#); [2 Thess. 2:13-14](#); [1 Pet. 1:2](#); [Jude 20-21](#). Cf. Article I of the 39 Articles, *Book of Common Prayer [BCP]*, p. 699.)

2. CREATOR, REDEEMER AND SANCTIFIER

The almighty triune God created a universe that was in every way good until creaturely rebellion disrupted it. Sin having intruded, God in love purposed to restore cosmic order through the calling of the covenant people Israel, the coming of Jesus Christ to redeem, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit to sanctify, the building up of the church for worship and witness, and the coming again of Christ in glory to make all things **P. 331** new. Work of miraculous power marks the unfolding of God's plan throughout history. ([Gen. 1-3](#); [Isa. 40:28](#); [65:17](#); [Matt. 6:10](#); [John 17:6](#); [Acts 17:24-26, 28](#); [1 Cor. 15:28](#); [2 Cor. 5:19](#); [Eph. 1:11](#); [2 Tim. 3:16](#); [Heb. 11:3](#); [Rev. 21:5](#). Cf. Article I.)

3. THE WORD MADE FLESH

Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God, born of the virgin Mary, sinless in life, raised bodily from the dead, and now reigning in glory though still present with his people through the Holy Spirit, is both the Jesus of history and the Christ of Scripture. He is God with us, the sole mediator between God and ourselves, the source of saving knowledge of the Godhead, and the giver of eternal life to the church catholic. ([Matt. 1:24-25](#); [Mk. 15:20-37](#); [Lk. 1:35](#); [Jn. 1:14](#); [17:20-21](#); [Acts 1:9-11](#); [4:12](#); [Rom. 5:17](#); [Philp. 2:5-6](#); [Col. 2:9](#); [1 Tim. 2:5-6](#); [Heb. 1:2](#); [9:15](#). Cf. Articles II-IV; the Nicene Creed, *BCP*.)

4. THE ONLY SAVIOUR

Human sin is prideful rebellion against God's authority, expressing itself in our refusing to love both the Creator and his creatures. Sin corrupts our nature and its fruit is injustice,

oppression, personal and social disintegration, alienation, and guilt before God; it destroys hope and leads to a future devoid of any enjoyment of either God or good. From the guilt, shame, power, and path of sin, Jesus Christ is the only Saviour; penitent faith in him is the only way of salvation.

By his atoning sacrifice on the cross for our sins, Jesus overcame the powers of darkness and secured our redemption and justification. By his bodily rising he guaranteed the future resurrection and eternal inheritance of all believers. By his regenerating gift of the Spirit, he restores our fallen nature and renews us in his own image. Thus in every generation he is the way, the truth, and the life for sinful individuals, and the architect of restored human community ([Jn. 14:6](#); [Acts 1:9-11](#); [2:32-33](#); [4:12](#); [Rom. 3:22-25](#), [1 Cor. 15:20-24](#); [2 Cor. 5:18-19](#); [Philp. 2:9-11](#); [Col. 2:13-15](#); [1 Tim. 2:5-6](#); [1 Pet. 1:3-5](#); [1 Jn. 4:14](#); [5:11-12](#). Cf. Articles II-IV, XI, XV, XVIII, XXXI.)

5. THE SPIRIT OF LIFE

The Holy Spirit, 'the Lord, the Giver of life,' sent to the church at Pentecost by the Father and the Son, discloses the glory of Jesus Christ, convicts of sin, renews the sinner's inner being, induces faith, equips for righteousness, creates communion, and empowers for service. Life in the Spirit is a supernaturalizing of our natural existence and a true foretaste of heaven. The loving unity of Spirit-filled Christians and churches is a powerful sign of the truth of Christianity. ([Gen. 1:2](#); [Ex. 31:2-5](#); [Ps. 51:11](#); [Jn. 3:5-6](#); [14:26](#); [15:26](#); [16:7-11](#); [13-15](#); [1 Cor. 2:4](#); [6:19](#); [12:4-7](#); [2 Cor. 3:18](#); [Gal. 4:4-6](#); [5:22-26](#); [Eph. 1:13-24](#); [5:18](#); [1 Thess. 5:19](#); [2 Tim. 3:16](#). Cf. Article V; The Nicene Creed.)

6. THE AUTHORITY OF THE BIBLE

The canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are 'God's **P. 332** Word written,' inspired and authoritative, true and trustworthy, coherent, sufficient for salvation, living and powerful as God's guidance for belief and behaviour.

The trinitarian, Christ-centred, redemption-oriented faith of the Bible is embodied in the historic ecumenical creeds and the Anglican foundational documents. To this basic understanding of Scripture, the Holy Spirit leads God's people and the church's counsels in every age through tradition and reason prayerfully and reverently employed.

The church may not judge the Scriptures, selecting and discarding from among their teachings. But Scripture under Christ judges the church for its faithfulness to his revealed truth. ([Deut. 29:29](#); [Isa. 40:8](#); [55:11](#); [Matt. 5:17-18](#); [Jn. 10:35](#); [14:26](#); [Rom. 1:16](#); [Eph. 1:17-19](#); [2 Tim. 2:15](#); [3:14-17](#); [2 Pet. 1:20-21](#). Cf. Articles VI-VIII, XX.)

7. THE CHURCH OF GOD

The supernatural society called the church is the family of God, the body of Christ, and the temple of the Holy Spirit. It is the community of believers, justified through faith in Christ, incorporated into the risen life of Christ, and set under the authority of Holy Scripture as the word of Christ. The church on earth is united through Christ to the church in heaven in the communion of the saints. Through the church's ministry of the word and sacraments of the Gospel, God ministers life in Christ to the faithful, thereby empowering them for worship, witness, and service.

In the life of the church only that which may be proved from Scripture should be held to be essential to the faith and that which is non-essential should not be required of

anyone to be believed or be enforced as a matter of doctrine, discipline, or worship. ([Eph. 3:10–21](#); [5:23](#), [27](#); [1 Tim. 3:15](#); [Heb. 12:1–2](#); [2 Tim. 3:14–17](#). Cf. Articles XIX, XX and XXI.)

8. THE NEW LIFE IN CHRIST

God made human beings in the divine image so that they might glorify and enjoy their creator forever, but since the Fall, sin has alienated us all from God and disorders human motivation and action at every point. As atonement and justification restore us to fellowship with God by pardoning sin, so regeneration and sanctification renew us in the likeness of Christ by overcoming sin. The Holy Spirit, who helps us practise the disciplines of the Christian life, increasingly transforms us through them. Sinlessness, however, is not given in this world, and we who believe remain flawed ‘in thought, word and deed’ until we are perfected in heaven. ([Gen. 1:26–28](#); [3](#); [Jn. 3:5–6](#); [16:13](#); [Rom. 3:23–24](#); [5:12](#); [1 Cor. 12:4–7](#); [2 Cor. 3:17–18](#); [Gal. 5:22–24](#); [Eph. 2:1–5](#); [Philp. 2:13](#); [2 Pet. 3:10–13](#). Cf. Articles Philp. IX–XVI; *Book of Alternative Services*, p. 191.)

9. THE CHURCH'S MINISTRY

The Holy Spirit bestows distinctive gifts upon all Christians for the purpose of glorifying God and building up his church in truth and love. **P. 333** All Christians are called in their baptism to be ministers, regardless of gender, race, age, or socioeconomic status. All God's people must seek to find and fulfil the particular form of service for which God has called and equipped them.

Within the priesthood of all believers we honour the ministry of word and sacrament to which bishops, priests and deacons are set apart by the Ordinal. ([Rom. 12:6–8](#); [1 Cor. 3:16](#); [6:11](#); [12:4–7](#), [27](#); [2 Cor. 5:20](#); [Gal. 2:16](#); [Eph. 4:11–13](#); [1 Tim. 3:1](#), [12–13](#); [5:17](#); [Heb. 2:11](#); [1 Pet. 2:4–5](#), [9–10](#). Cf. Articles XIX, XXIII.)

10. THE CHURCH'S WORSHIP

The primary calling of the church, as of every Christian, is to offer worship, in the Spirit and according to truth, to the God of creation, providence, and grace. The essential dimensions of worship are praise and thanksgiving for all good things, proclamation and celebration of the glory of God and of Jesus Christ, prayer for human needs and for the advancement of Christ's kingdom, and self-offering for service. All liturgical forms—verbal, musical, and ceremonial—stand under the authority of Scripture.

The *Book of Common Prayer* provides a biblically-grounded doctrinal standard, and should be retained as the norm for all alternative liturgies. It should not be revised in the theologically-divided climate of the contemporary church. The *Book of Alternative Services* meets a widely-felt need for contemporary liturgy, and brings life and joy to many Anglican worshippers.

No form of worship can truly exalt Christ or draw forth true devotion to him without the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. Prayer, public and private, is central to the health and renewal of the church. Healing, spiritual and physical, is a welcome aspect of Anglican worship. ([Jn. 4:24](#); [16:8–15](#); [Acts 1:8](#); [2:42–47](#); [Rom. 12:1](#); [1 Cor. 11:23–26](#); [12:7](#); [2 Cor. 5:18–19](#); [Eph. 5:18–20](#); [Col. 3:16](#); [1 Thess. 1:4–5](#); [5:19](#). Cf. The Solemn Declaration of 1893, p. viii, *BCP*; Articles XXV, XXXIV.)

11. THE PRIORITY OF EVANGELISM

Evangelism means proclaiming Jesus Christ as divine Saviour, Lord, and Friend, in a way that invites people to come to God through him, to worship and serve him, and to seek the empowering of the Holy Spirit for their life of discipleship in the community of the church. All Christians are called to witness to Christ, as a sign of love both to him and to their neighbours. The task, which is thus a matter of priority, calls for personal training and a constant search for modes of persuasive outreach. We sow the seed, and look to God for the fruit. ([Matt. 5:13-16](#); [28:19-20](#); [Jn. 3:16-18](#); [20:21](#); [Acts 2:37-39](#); [5:31-32](#); [Jn. 1 Cor. 1:23](#); [15:2-4](#); [2 Cor. 4:5](#); [5:20](#); [1 Pet. 3:15](#).)

12. THE CHALLENGE OF GLOBAL MISSION

Cross-cultural evangelism and pastoral care remain necessary responses to the Great Commission of Jesus Christ. His command to preach the gospel world-wide, making disciples and planting churches, still applies. **P. 334** The church's mission requires missions.

Christ and his salvation must be proclaimed sensitively and energetically everywhere, at home and abroad, and cross-cultural mission must be supported by praying, giving, and sending. Global mission involves partnership and interchange, and missionaries sent by younger churches to Canada should be welcomed. ([Matt. 28:19-20](#); [Mk. 16:15](#); [Lk. 10:2](#); [Rom. 15:23-24](#); [1 Cor. 2:4-5](#); [9:22-23](#); [2 Cor. 4:5](#); [8:1-4](#), [7](#); [Eph. 6:19-20](#); [Philp. 2:5-7](#); [1 Thess. 1:6-8](#).)

13. THE CHALLENGE OF SOCIAL ACTION

The gospel constrains the church to be 'salt' and 'light' in the world, working out the implications of biblical teaching for the right ordering of social, economic, and political life, and for humanity's stewardship of creation. Christians must exert themselves in the cause of justice and in acts of compassion. While no social system can be identified with the coming Kingdom of God, social action is an integral part of our obedience to the Gospel. ([Gen. 1:26-28](#); [Isa. 30:18](#); [58:6-10](#); [Amos 5:24](#); [Matt. 5:13-16](#); [22:37-40](#); [25:31-46](#); [Lk. 4:17-21](#); [Jn. 20:21](#); [2 Cor. 1:3-4](#); [Jam. 2:14-26](#); [1 Jn. 4:16](#); [Rev. 1:5-6](#); [5:9-10](#). Cf. Article XXXVIII.)

14. THE STANDARDS OF SEXUAL CONDUCT

God designed human sexuality not only for procreation but also for the joyful expression of love, honour, and fidelity between wife and husband. These are the only sexual relations that biblical theology deems good and holy.

Adultery, fornication, and homosexual unions are intimacies contrary to God's design. The church must seek to minister healing and wholeness to those who are sexually scarred, or who struggle with ongoing sexual temptations, as most people do. Homophobia and all forms of sexual hypocrisy and abuse are evils against which Christians must ever be on their guard. The church may not lower God's standards of sexual morality for any of its members, but must honour God by upholding these standards tenaciously in the face of society's departures from them.

Congregations must seek to meet the particular needs for friendship and community that single persons have. ([Gen. 1:26-28](#); [2:21-24](#); [Matt. 5:27-32](#); [19:3-12](#); [Lk. 7:36-50](#);

[In. 8:1-11](#); [Rom. 1:21-28](#); [3:22-24](#); [1 Cor. 6:9-11](#), [13-16](#); [7:7](#); [Eph. 5:3](#); [1 Tim. 1:8-11](#); [3:2-4](#), [12](#)).

15. THE FAMILY AND THE CALL TO SINGLENES

The family is a divinely ordained focus of love, intimacy, personal growth and stability for women, men and children. Divorce, child abuse, domestic violence, rape, pornography, parental absenteeism, sexist domination, abortion, common-law relationships, and homosexual partnerships, all reflect weakening of the family ideal. Christians must strengthen family life through teaching, training, and active support, and work for socio-political conditions **P. 335** that support the family. Single-parent families and victims of family breakdown have special needs to which congregations must respond with sensitivity and support.

Singleness also is a gift from God and a holy vocation. Single people are called to celibacy and God will give them grace to live in chastity. ([Ps. 119:9-11](#); [Prov. 22:6](#); [Matt. 5:31-32](#); [Mk. 10:6-9](#); [1 Cor. 6:9-11](#); [Eph. 5:21-6:4](#); [Col. 3:18-21](#); [In. 3:14-15](#).)

THE NEW BEGINNING

Together we reaffirm the Anglican Christianity that finds expression in the historic standards of the ecumenical creeds, the Thirty-Nine Articles, the Solemn Declaration of 1893, and the 1962 *Book of Common Prayer*. Respect for these standards strengthens our identity and communion. In humanity we recognize we have often been ashamed of the gospel we have received and disobedient to the Lord of the Church. God helping us, we resolve to maintain our heritage of faith and transmit it intact. This fullness of faith is needed both for Anglican renewal and for the effective proclamation of the good news of Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit.

We invite all Anglicans to join us in affirming the above as essentials of Christian faith, practice, and nature today. In this declaration we believe that we are insisting upon only what is genuinely essential. In regard to non-essentials, we should recognize and respect that liberty and that comprehensiveness which have been among the special graces of our Anglican heritage.

Participants in Essentials '94, with the Sponsoring Bodies:

Anglican Renewal Ministries of Canada

Barnabas Anglican Ministries

The Prayer Book Society of Canada

21 June 1994, Montreal, Canada

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The Korean Church: Growing or Declining?

Bong Rin Ro

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INTRODUCTION

Prior to the Korean War in 1950 not many people knew what the word 'Korean' meant. Virtually a hermit nation, Korea's doors to the West gradually opened with the Open Door Treaty in 1882. However, because of the '88 Olympics the eyes of the world focused on Korea. There has been special interest in South Korea's remarkable economic growth, especially since the devastation of the country during the Korean War. Similarly, Christians worldwide are amazed at the remarkable, explosive growth of the Korean church especially over the last two decades. Thousands of Christians from all over the world have visited South Korea and attended worship services and prayer rallies at some of the world's largest churches in Seoul and other major cities.

What motivates over 16,000 Christians to jam the Myung Sung Presbyterian Church of Rev. Sam Whan Kim for four pre-dawn prayer meetings at 4:30, 5:30, and 6:30 and 8:30 a.m. every day? How has what was a tiny suffering church a century ago been able today to evangelize one quarter of the total population of 44 million in the South and to send over 3,272 Korean missionaries all over the world? Many Korean Christians believe that Korea has become a CHOSEN nation ([2 Pet. 2:9](#)) today for God's purpose of evangelizing the world with the gospel in this generation. In fact, Korea during the Yi Dynasty (1392–1910) had been called the 'CHOSEN' Dynasty. In this article the author evaluates causes for the rapid growth of the Korean church in the light of its historical and cultural background and points out some crucial issues concerned with this fast church growth.

I

HISTORY OF CHRISTIANITY

a. Roman Catholic

The Roman Catholic faith was first introduced into Korea through China in the 17th century. Korean government officials in China heard [p. 337](#) the Catholic message and transmitted it to Korea. Mr. Chong Too Won brought Mateo Ricci's True Doctrine of the Lord of Heaven to Korea in 1631, and several reformed-minded Confucian scholars such as Chong Yak-chon, Kwon II-shin, and Yi Tokcho were deeply attracted to the gospel and studied the Christian dogmas in Seoul in 1777. The first Korean diplomat who was baptized in Beijing in 1783 was Mr. Yi Sunghun, who came back to Korea and spread his faith; thus, Roman Catholicism officially started in Korea in 1784.

In 1795 a Chinese priest Chou Moon-mo arrived in Korea but was executed in 1801. However, by 1800 there were already 10,000 adherents to the Catholic faith. The Beijing Roman Catholic bishop sent priests to Korea in 1811, 1815, and 1824. In 1828 Pope Leo XII instructed the Missions Étrangères de Paris to begin its work in Korea. In spite of periodic persecutions against the Roman Catholics in Korea, the Catholic population swelled to 20,000 by 1885.

Korean Catholics suffered persecution at the hands of the conservative Confucian government rulers in 1819, 1827, 1839, and 1866. In spite of severe persecutions against the Catholics in Korea, the Roman Catholic Church has continued to grow numerically to 5% of the total population (2.2 million Catholics) in South Korea. Pope John Paul II's visit to Korea in May 1984 further accelerated the Roman Catholic Church growth in South Korea and many Catholic social agencies also helped the Church to be accepted by society.

b. Protestant Missions

Protestant foreign missionary activities began in Korea, after Western powers entered this hermit kingdom in 1882. Prior to 1882 there were sporadic attempts to propagate the gospel to the Koreans who were residing in Manchuria. In fact, a British missionary, Rev. Robert Thomas, landed at Taedong River in North Korea in September, 1865 to witness to Koreans but was arrested and executed by the government. Western missionaries such as John Ross and John McIntyre witnessed to Koreans in Manchuria and baptized two Seo brothers in 1878, and in 1883 Mr. Seo Sang Lon brought a Chinese New Testament to Korea and started a Protestant church in central Korea even before the Western Protestant missionaries founded their first church.

Official Protestant missions began in Korea in 1884 with Northern Presbyterian missionaries from the United States, Drs. J. W. Heron, Horace J. Allen, and Horace G. Underwood and with the first American Methodist missionaries, Drs. H. G. Appenzeller and W. M. Scranton. The first medical missionaries, Drs. Heron, Allen, and Scranton, with Western medical knowledge made an enormous impact upon the royal families, as well as upon Korean society. Other foreign missions agencies sent their missionaries to Korea at the end of the 19th century: the Australian Presbyterian Mission (1889), Southern Presbyterian Mission (1892), Southern Methodist Mission (1896), and Canadian Presbyterian Mission (1898).

The most recognizable contribution of the foreign missionaries in [p. 338](#) Korea was the training of national church leaders. In 1890 a British missionary, Rev. John Nevius, visited Korea from China and introduced what is known as The Nevius' Methods of Missions. Dr. Kim Myung Hyuk, former President of Haptong Presbyterian Seminary, stated nine important principles of the Nevius' Methods: 1) Emphasis on personal evangelism through wide itineration; 2) Self-support; 3) Self-propagation; 4) Self-government; 5) Systematic Bible study for every Christian; 6) Strict discipline in the church; 7) Close cooperation with other Christian bodies; 8) Non-interference in lawsuits; and 9) General help for those in economic need. (Asian Evangelization, Nov.–Dec., 1988, pp. 2–3.) The Three Indigenous Principles of Missions (self-support, self-propagation, and self-government) especially well known in modern missions strategy, have been faithfully applied in the Korean church and resulted in rapid church growth.

II

CHURCH GROWTH EXPLOSION

a. Church Growth Statistics

Explosive church growth from 1980–1990 has resulted in the development of some of the largest churches in the world: the Yoido Full Gospel Church (706,000 members), Yongnak Presbyterian Church (60,000 members), and Kwanglim Methodist Church (73,000 members). In the capital city of Seoul alone with eleven million people there are more than 6,533 churches. One can observe hundreds of red crosses topping the steeples of church buildings at night. Three mass Christian gatherings in Seoul, namely the Billy

Graham Crusade in 1973, Explo '74, and the World Evangelism Crusade in 1980, filled the Yoido Plaza with a great mass of Christians numbering between one and two million people each time.

In the 100-year history of the Korean church, there have been four major periods of very rapid church growth: 1905–1910, 1919–1931, 1945–1960, and 1980–1990. According to the 1992 Christian Almanac, there were over 12.2 million Protestant Christians, 36,832 churches, and 67,008 pastors and evangelists in South Korea. There are more Christians among the middle class in urban cities than among the country people in rural areas. In the cities almost one third of the population claim to be Christians.

In the nation-wide election for the National Assembly in April 1992, 90 Protestant Christians out of 299 seats were elected. One surprising fact in church growth in Korea is the high percentage of Christians in the Armed Forces. According to an official report in 1991, 200,000 young men are drafted into the military service each year, and 40% of the privates and 70% of the officers claim to be Christians. There are 50 military chapels and each Saturday between 2,000 and 3,000 soldiers receive baptism (The Christian Times, Feb. 1, 1992).

Dr. Samuel Moffett, a retired veteran missionary in Korea, and now at Princeton Theological Seminary, described the explosive church growth:

When my father reached Seoul in p. 339 1890, there were between 10,000 and 17,000 Roman Catholics. Records for 1889 show only 74 communicant Protestants. Forty years later, when I was a boy in Korea in 1930, the number was 415,000 Christians, or 2 percent of the population. When I returned in 1995 there were 1,117,000, or about 5 percent. Today (1987) there are over 10 million Christians in Korea, or about 23 percent. Very roughly that would mean one Korean in a thousand was Christian in 1890, 1 in 50 in 1930s, 1 in 20 in 1955, and 1 in 4 today (Christianity Today, Nov. 20, 1987).

Many Christians around the world have asked questions such as, 'Why are the churches in Korea multiplying so fast?' or, 'What are the secrets of church growth in Korea?' or 'Do you have problems with this "wildfire" church growth in Korea?'

Nevertheless, since 1990 the church growth rate has levelled off for various reasons.

b. Historical Factors

Rapid church growth in Korea is not entirely due to spiritual factors. Historical factors as well as contributions from Christianity have contributed to this growth. Christianity introduced new ideas of political democracy into Korea through mission schools. Christianity has filled the spiritual vacuum created by the traditional religions of Buddhism and Confucianism, which have made little impact in their lives. The sufferings experienced by Korean Christians during the Japanese occupation in Korea (1910–1945) and during the Korean War (1950–53) and the constant threat of Communism from North Korea have encouraged the people to find their security in God rather than man.

After the United States signed an Open Door Treaty with Korea in 1882, other European colonial powers followed the Americans making their way into Korea. In addition to external pressure from neighbouring invaders and internal political disintegration through factionalism, Korea had no strong philosophical rationale that provided a basis for any political or intellectual ideologies. The country was in deep trouble in every way.

During this time of national crises, Christianity played a very significant role. Among the many contributions of Christianity to the nation, four areas listed below are particularly related to the growth of the church in Korea.

a. The Independence Movement Against Japanese Colonialism

Unlike China where the colonial powers were Western nations, Korea faced colonialism from Japan. Therefore, Koreans welcomed Western influence, including Christianity, in order to liberate themselves from the hands of the Japanese. While the gentry class in China rejected Western colonial powers and Christianity, many Korean intellectuals eagerly grasped Christianity.

Western missionaries fostered the concept of national independence and trained the younger generation to be free from the old-fashioned and conservative bureaucratic Korean culture. For example, the Korean Independence Association at the beginning of this century had several key leaders such as former president Syngman Rhee who were Christians. p.340 Christians played a leading role in the independence movement.

When a nation-wide revolt against Japanese rule occurred on March 1, 1919, the national independence declaration was proclaimed by thirty-three patriots, fifteen of whom were Christians. Christian schools promoted patriotism in their classes; many intellectuals accepted Christianity not only for spiritual reasons but also because of its political persuasion.

b. Christian Contribution to Modern Education

Christianity introduced the new concept of modern education, uplifted the status of women in society through education, and injected a new Christian ethical standard. The elite majority had educational opportunities to learn the Chinese classics, but the vast majority was illiterate. Pioneer missionaries translated the Scriptures into the Korean language and taught Koreans, through Sunday schools, vacation Bible schools, and Bible institutes, how to read the easy Korean phonetic script rather than the difficult Chinese characters.

Two of the best known pioneer missionaries, Rev. Horace G. Underwood of the Presbyterian Mission and Rev. Henry G. Appenzeller of the Methodist Mission, further popularized the Korean script by starting their own respective newspapers in the Korean script. These were the weekly Christian News and the Korean Christian Advocate in April 1885. It is not an overstatement to say that Christian Koreans were the only Koreans able to read the Korean script.

A number of Christian schools were opened by missionaries. A boys' Christian school, Baeje school, was started in 1886 and a girls' Christian school, Ehwa school, was started in 1887. Several Christian colleges were opened at the beginning of the 20th century: Sung Shil College (1906), Ehwa College (1910), and Yunhee College (1915). Ehwa University today is one of the best universities in South Korea. These two Christian universities along with others have produced a large number of Christian lay leaders in all segments of Korean society. Today there are more than ten Protestant colleges and universities. Many of the 270 theological colleges and seminaries have added liberal arts degree programmes to their theology departments.

c. Medical Missions

In 1884 a pro-Japanese political party incited a coup against the ruling pro-Chinese party and seriously injured the prince. Dr. Horace N. Allen, a medical missionary from America, treated Mr. Min, the prince with Western medicine. Within three months, Mr. Min recovered. As a result, Dr. Allen was allowed to start a mission hospital. This was the beginning of the well-known Severance Hospital in Seoul. The introduction of Western medicine into Korea as an alternative to traditional Oriental medicine was certainly one of the main contributions of missionaries to the Korean people.

d. YMCA and Social Service Agencies

The contributions of the YMCA, established in 1903, cannot be ignored. *p. 341* The YMCA introduced both vocal and instrumental Western music and modern sports such as baseball, soccer, volleyball, basketball, ping pong, and track.

Hundreds of Christian social service organizations, including orphanages, old people's homes, and caring centres for handicapped people have sprung up throughout the country to assist needy people. During the Korean War (1950–1953) the churches received enormous amounts of assistance from the West and played a major role in distributing food and clothes to hungry people.

c. Religious Factors: Spiritual Vacuum

Like other people, Koreans were religious even before adopting the imported religions from China and the West. A half dozen religions are prominent today in Korea: Shamanism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, Chondokyo, and Christianity.

Buddhism entered Korea from China during the Kokuryu dynasty in 372 A.D. and became a dominant force in every area of Korean life during the Three Kingdoms Period. It reached its peak during the 'Golden Age of Buddhism' (935–1392) during the Koryu dynasty (932–1392). Buddhism became not only a religious force but also a political power in the dynasty. Consequently, the political opponents to the controlling Buddhists in the Yi dynasty cooperated with Confucianism to drive out the Buddhist rulers. In 1456 the Yi dynasty even forbade monks from entering into the capital city of Seoul.

The decline of Buddhism in the early years of the Yi dynasty encouraged an increase in the influence of Confucianism among the intellectual classes. The decline also left ignorant peasants and women without a viable religion so they turned to superstitious Shamanism. For many centuries Buddhism lost contact with the people; however, some signs of a resurgence of Buddhism in recent years in Korea are evident.

Confucianism emphasized ethical conduct in individuals and government, and maintained a high standard of education. The Yi dynasty adopted Confucianism as 'the national religion'. Neo-Confucianism prevailed during the Yi dynasty. It adopted philosophical, metaphysical and religious terms concerning human existence and the nature of reality. Confucianists erected many Confucian schools throughout Korea, such as Songyunkwan in Seoul. Even though Confucianism met the intellectual needs of the elite, it ignored the vast majority of the Korean people.

Chondokyo or 'The Sect of the Heavenly Way' is another important religion which was founded by Choe Che Wu (1824–1864). He created a syncretistic religion which was known then as Tonghak or the 'Eastern Learning' in opposition to Sohak or 'Western Learning' which meant Roman Catholicism. Choe believed that all religions, from primitive Shamanism to Western Christianity, were valid and embodied truth. But each person had to seek truth according to his own ways. For Koreans Tonghak was the best way. The leaders of this religion played important roles in the independence *p. 342* movement, as also did Christians, during the Japanese domination of Korea. Yet Chondokyo's spiritual impact on the people was negligible.

During the spiritual vacuum in the Yi dynasty, Shamanism, which is said to be the original religion of Korea, grew among the common people. The religion teaches that a shaman can communicate with the spirit world in an attempt to better the fortunes of man. Taking over some of the supernatural characteristics of Buddhism and Confucianism, Shamanism to this day appeals to the common masses who are ignored by rational Confucianism.

Thus, the majority of the people do not practise Buddhism and Confucianism religiously. Many experience a spiritual vacuum, and for a significant number, Christianity has filled the void.

Since the traditional religions have lost their grip on the people, many Koreans have become sceptical of their forefathers' religions. The majority of the people do not practise any religion at all. When the former President Park Chung-Hee of South Korea was asked whether he was a Christian, his reply reflected a typical feeling, 'My father and mother were Buddhists, but I am nothing.'

d. Political and Economic Factors: Christian Suffering and Division of the Country

In order to understand the characteristics of the Korean church, one has to remember how she suffered for many decades from external invasions and internal revolutions. The Japanese government tried to enforce Shinto shrine worship upon the Koreans; some Christians believed that it was idolatry to bow down to the Emperor of Japan. Others believed that it was merely a political matter; they participated in the Shinto shrine worship under pressure from the Japanese. Those who refused to compromise were imprisoned and beaten. Many Christians were killed or later died in prison. On the day Korea was liberated in 1945, more than three thousand Korean Christians were released from prison.

Instead of gaining its hoped-for freedom in 1945, Korea once again became a victim of the ideological struggles between Communists and the free people which mushroomed and ultimately divided the country. By the thousands, Koreans under the Communists in the North began to escape to find freedom in South Korea. The tragic Korean War impoverished the people and brought added sufferings to the nation.

After 1945 the Communist Party of North Korea under Kim Il Song imposed tight control on the people. The Party set the national election day on Sunday, November 3, 1946, to hamper Sunday worship services, and demanded loyalty from the Christian churches. The Christian church in North Korea requested the government to observe five principles. The fifth principle was to guarantee religious freedom.

The Korean War also produced many Christian martyrs in South Korea. At the end of 1950 some 500 Christian leaders in Seoul were either killed or kidnapped by the Communists. During the war, 727 pastors and evangelists were martyred. Psychological tension during [p.343](#) the war and the ensuing economic poverty were indelibly imprinted upon the minds of the people. The Japanese persecution and the Korean War were the two decisive events which influenced every phase of life in the country.

In the midst of intense suffering and toil, the Korean church was able to give hope to the hopeless, food to the hungry, and shelter to the homeless. Christians looked forward to their heavenly home as a relief from the painful earthly conditions that surrounded them. They learned to trust God in time of trouble. Churches were filled with people who needed help and peace of mind.

The presence of the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ), North Korean tunnels into the South, the constant threat of Communist attack and possible persecution of Christians by the Communists are still providing a very important motivating factor to many Christians to renew their faith. People look for spiritual security rather than earthly uncertainties. The land is ripe for spiritual harvest. Therefore, the present uncertainty has been a real blessing to the Korean church. Tertullian of Carthage in the third century once said, 'The blood of the martyr is the seed of the church.' The church, like steel tested by fire, becomes stronger.

However, a number of important political and economic changes took place in the 1980s and 90s. President Rob Tae-Woo (1988-1993), who succeeded President Chun Doo-Hwan, and the present president Kim Young-Sam introduced new freedom and democracy, and implanted socioeconomic and moral reform movements. Economically, the country experienced rapid growth in the 1980s with the GNP of \$8484 annually in

1995; consequently, these political and socioeconomic changes brought new challenges to the church. The economic poverty and suffering of the people following the Korean War have been forgotten by the younger generation.

Young people under the age of 30 have experienced neither the tragic war nor the economic suffering and religious persecution which the older generation still vividly remembers. God has used both nonspiritual factors of war, poverty and suffering of the past plus the economic development and political freedom of recent years and the spiritual renewal movement within the church to produce the explosive church growth situation in South Korea. In spite of new waves of materialism and secularism challenging the church, the author believes that the Korean church will continue to grow and make spiritual contributions to the world.

e. Spiritual Factors for Rapid Church Growth

Any church growth at any place is the work of the Holy Spirit among his people. There are several spiritual factors within the Korean church which have contributed to the growth of the church.

1. Strength of the Local Church

The strength of the Korean church lies in the local church. The local church, under the spiritual leadership of its pastors, has organized various activities for its members for *p. 344* worship, fellowship, instruction in the Word, evangelism and missions outreach, and social service. Among 50 mega churches in the world today 23 are located in Korea. At least ten local churches in Seoul alone are gigantic in size with a membership of over 30,000 each, and there are hundreds of other churches with membership of between 500 and 1,000. On the other hand, there are many small-size churches especially in rural areas and small towns.

The strength of the local church has also produced a negative aspect of church growth—it has weakened cooperative efforts among local churches and denominations on the national and international levels. Nevertheless, the abundant supply of pastors from theological seminaries and the fervent dedication of pastors for their congregations have resulted in much fruit.

2. Spirit-filled, Hard-working Pastors

The role of a pastor for his congregation is crucial for the growth of the church. In fact, many Christians believe that the most important factor for church growth is the leadership of its pastor. Every church schedules a daily early dawn prayer meeting. This means that the pastor gets up at 4.00 in the morning for the pre-dawn prayer meeting in his church and works all day in the church until late evening. The pastor often goes to the prayer mountain for prayer and fasting. He trains lay leaders for weekly district Bible study groups and organizes other church activities. Twice a year he organizes a house visitation programme to visit the homes of his members and conducts family worship services there.

The Korean pastor is well respected as a spiritual leader in the church as well as in the society. Korean Christians have learned to support their pastor's physical and material needs while he provides the spiritual nourishment of the congregation. Therefore, it is not difficult for Korean seminaries to recruit the best students academically and spiritually, quite contrary to the situation in many countries in Asia. The ratio of students trying to get into Asian Center for Theological Studies (ACTS), a theological college, last year was nine to one. Out of nine students applying only one was accepted.

3. Prayer for Spiritual Renewal of Christians

Prayer is a necessary ingredient for any church growth. The Korean church has been known for its emphasis on prayer. Every church has a pre-dawn prayer meeting every day even in rain or snow. The origin of this pre-dawn prayer meeting goes back to 1906 when Rev. Kil Sun-Jun started the pre-dawn prayer meeting at his church in Pyong Yang, North Korea. The Koreans were going through a very painful experience of being annexed by the Japanese Empire after Japan defeated both China in 1859 and Russia in 1905. Christians poured out their hearts to God for his help at the time of national crisis. Since that time the pre-dawn prayer movement has spread to all other churches. The most well-known pre-dawn prayer meetings are at the Myung Sung *p. 345* Presbyterian Church in Seoul which started with a handful of members some ten years ago. Today, the church has 30,000 members. The secret of this rapid growth is the ministry of Rev. Sam Whan, who has faithfully conducted the pre-dawn prayer meetings every morning. March and September each year are designated for spiritual renewal of the church through the pre-dawn prayer meetings. The number of Christians who attended the last March 1995 pre-dawn prayer meetings at 4.30, 5.30, 6.30 and 10.00 a.m. reached between 10,000 and 13,000 each morning. Pastor Kim conducts the first three services and faithfully expounds the Scriptures for 20–30 minutes. The rest of the time is spent in individual prayer. The fourth service at 10.00 a.m. features Rev. Kim's message through video. Many Christians have testified that they learned much about God's Word through pre-dawn prayer meetings. Thousands of other Christians who attended pre-dawn prayer meetings in their own churches give similar testimonies; therefore, there is no doubt that God has blessed the Korean church through pre-dawn prayer meetings.

Another aspect of prayer emphasis in the Korean church is all-night prayer meetings, usually on a Friday evening each week or every two weeks. Christians sing hymns, listen to messages, give testimonies, and pray all night. There are also 521 prayer mountains (or prayer retreat centres) throughout the country, and thousands of Christians go up to prayer mountains for prayer. Korean Christians often pray audibly together with loud voices during the worship services. Besides the church prayer meetings, Dr. Kim Joon-Gon of the Korean Campus Crusade for Christ who is Director of the Korean Preparation Committee of the Global Consultation of World Evangelization '95 (GCOWE) introduced 'the 1.1.1. a day at 1.00 p.m. for one minute.' The emphasis on prayer has certainly brought spiritual renewal within the Korean church.

4. Witnessing Church

For evangelizing Korea with the gospel, local churches strongly emphasize the importance of personal and group evangelism at the grass-roots level. 'The Christianization of Korea by AD 2000' is the motto of every church. During the first spiritual awakening in the Korean church in 1909–1910, the Korean church launched out the 'Million Souls for Christ Movement'. Consequently, the General Assembly of the Korean Presbyterian Church (KPC) was officially inaugurated for the first time in 1912 and KPC commissioned the first three Korean missionaries to Shantung Province in China.

When Korea was liberated from Japan in 1945, Rev. Kim Chi-Sun, Pastor of Southgate Presbyterian Church in Seoul, proposed a 'Three Million Evangelization Movement.' At that time there were only 300,000 Christians among the population of 30 million. Today pedestrians in major cities often observe Christians standing at the street corner, singing hymns, witnessing, and distributing gospel tracts. Many local churches have personal evangelism thrusts by organizing small teams during weekends to visit friends' homes, hospitals *p. 346* and parks. The annual revival meeting at the local church has been used

to bring spiritual renewal to Christians and to invite many non-Christian friends to the meeting to hear the Christian gospel. There are different evangelistic organizations in Korea to reach different groups of people such as movie stars, policemen, business people, and sportsmen. One interesting and influential method of sports evangelism is the Hallelujah professional soccer team. Largely financed by a Christian businessman, this team has been recognized as one of the best soccer teams in the nation. In April 1992 millions of people were watching the Hallelujah soccer team of the Torch Center playing the final match for the South Korean Presidential Cup on TV. 'Hallelujah' has become a catch word in Korea as TV and radio sports reporters covered the 'Hallelujah' team. There are also professional Christian Taekwondo teams for sports evangelism. During the '88 Olympics the Seoul '88 Olympic Christian Outreach Committee was very active to mobilize 6,000 local churches to witness to 300,000 athletes and foreign visitors. Dr. John Chongham Cho, President of Korea Sports Evangelism, cooperated with other international Christian sports organizations and helped the Living Bibles International distribute 500,000 copies of a 32 page booklet called 'How to Be a Winner'.

5. Cell Group Bible Studies

Evangelism and teaching ministry of the Word must go together in order to produce a healthy church. One of the key concerns for every pastor is how to organize effective cell group Bible study programmes in different districts. Dr. David Yong Gi Cho's Yoido Full Gospel Church has organized about 52,000 cell groups for 706,000 members throughout Seoul for Bible study and prayer. Dr. Cho claims that the strength of his church lies in the cell-group ministry.

Pastors are eager to learn the best Bible study methods as well as to acquire the best materials for cell-group Bible studies. Three main texts, used at many churches are 'The Cross Ways Bible Study,' 'Trinity Bible Study,' and 'Upper Room'. The Cross Ways books and colour transparencies were all reproduced in the Korean language. A 1995 report shows that 8,000 people have completed the training in 21 seminars. Ninety percent of the students were pastors from different denominations.

6. Theological Education: Abundant Supply for Christian Workers

The Korean church is unique in Asia for its abundance of Christian workers. There are 270 theological colleges and seminaries, six of which have more than 1,500 students each. These theological institutions annually produce more than 8,000 graduates. Therefore, the best ways to utilize this large number of seminary graduates each year are to plant more churches and to send out more Korean missionaries to the ends of the earth.

As someone said, 'As the seminary goes today, so goes the church tomorrow.' Seminary education in Korea which has produced pastors and para-church workers has played one of the most significant roles for [p. 347](#) the rapid growth of the church. Most Korean theological seminaries have been known for upholding the evangelical historic Christian faith as modern theological liberalism has continuously encroached into other Asian theological institutions.

7. Rising Missionary Movement

With enough man-power from theological institutions plus the economic development in the nation, the Holy Spirit has challenged many Korean Christians to be involved in the work of missions. Although the Korean church sent its own missionaries to Manchuria and mainland China in the 1920s and 1930s, the number was very small. According to Dr. David Lee, Director of the Global Missionary Training Institute in Seoul, there has been an

increasing number of Korean missionaries. In 1979, 93 missionaries worked in 26 countries, in 1992, 2,576 missionaries in 105 countries, and in June 1994, 3,272 missionaries in 119 countries. Many pastors and mission leaders are praying that the Korean churches would be able to send 10,000 missionaries by the year 2000, i.e., that the churches in South Korea would be able to send 9,000 missionaries while 3,000 Korean churches in North America would send at least 1,000 second generation Korean American missionaries.

The Asia Missions Congress, which was held at Choong Hyun Presbyterian Church in Seoul in August 1991, under the sponsorship of Evangelical Fellowship of Asia, drew 1,300 participants from all over Asia, including one hundred Koreans. God challenged the Asian church leaders to join with Christians in other continents to fulfil the Great Commission in this generation. (Met Castillo, ed., *World Missions: The Asian Challenge*, Manila: EFA Missions Commission, 1992).

In North America the Korean World Missions Conference was held at the Billy Graham Center in Wheaton in July 1988 with 1,500 participants in order to mobilize 2,000 Korean churches in the United States and Canada to promote missions. At the end of the conference the Korean World Missions Council (KWMC) was formed with an office in Wheaton and elected Rev. Samuel Choi to be Executive Director of KWMC. The 2nd Korea World Mission Conference was held at the same location in Wheaton, July 25-August 1, 1992, with 3,000 participants.

There has been similar interest among mission leaders in South Korea to cooperate among some 100 missions agencies; consequently, the Korea World Missions Association (KWMA) was formed in 1991. In October 1991 the KWMA and KWMC jointly sponsored a Korean World Missions Conference among 300 key missions executives and pastors at the Korea World Mission Center in Seoul. From May 15–17, 1995 the second KWMA's World Missions Conference was held in Korean churches in both South Korea and North America are praying that they would be able to send 10,000 Korean missionaries by the year 2,000.

8. Stewardship

The Korean church has implemented the Nevius method of self-support and emphasized the importance *p. 348* of stewardship and tithing. Pastors preach tithing from their pulpits and the church provides envelopes for tithing and thanksgiving offerings for its members. The amount of tithing in comparison with the amount of Sunday morning general offering is ten times. In other words, the Korean church collects most of its income through tithing.

Korean Christians in general give their sacrificial offering to support the work of the church. Poor farmers and fishermen in small rural villages, especially after the Korean War, brought their grain and fish to the church as offerings. Some Christians even sold their houses and offered the money to the Lord for the construction of their church building. Although some Korean pastors are criticized for preaching the 'theology of prosperity' i.e., the more you give, the more you prosper, which is related to the traditional shamanistic teaching, God has touched the hearts of many Christians in such a way that they would gladly offer their tithes, thanksgivings offerings, and missions offering.

9. Innovative Contextual Expressions of Christian Faith

Protestant history in Korea is just over a century old, quite short in comparison with Western church history. Traditionally Korea has been a strong Buddhist and Shamanistic country. Yet Christianity has made a tremendous impact upon all walks of life in the country. Today, Christianity is no longer looked upon as a Western religion.

Korean Christians have introduced some innovative and contextual ways of expressing their faith according to their own cultural heritage: predawn prayer meetings, all-night prayer meetings, prayer mountains, annual revival meetings, audible prayer, initial minute prayer in the living room when a Christian visits his friend's home, a few seconds of prayer for a cup of tea/coffee, church name tags with a red cross on the front door of the house, twice a year home visitation by pastor, Hallelujah soccer team and Taekwondo team (like the Venture for Victory basketball team in the United States), Bible women, etc. The author encourages Christians in other countries to give serious thought to their own culture and history in order to produce more creative ways to express their Christian faith for the purpose of Christianization of their countrymen.

III PROBLEMS OF THE KOREAN CHURCH

There is no perfect church on this earth; the Korean church is no exception. If one looks at the Korean church carefully beyond the numerical growth and outward appearances, one can easily observe a number of weaknesses. The author will concentrate on three main problems of the Korean church.

a. Schismatic Division

The strength of the Korean church is the local church under its able pastor. Nevertheless, if the local church becomes an entity within itself, lack of cooperation among local churches can result. This is what has happened to the churches in Korea. There are too many strong local churches which see little need [p. 349](#) of cooperation among themselves within the denomination as well as with other different Presbyterian groups in the nation. A veteran Presbyterian missionary said on the schismatic character of the Korean church, 'The Church of Jesus does not get along with the Church of Christ; and yet, the Korean church is growing by splitting.'

The main division within the largest Presbyterian Church in Korea in 1959 between the ecumenical and the evangelical (National Association of Evangelicals-NAE) groups led to painful conflict at many local churches on the question of which group would control the church building. This schism resulted in the birth of two separate denominations known as the Tong Hap Presbyterian Church (Ecumenical) and the Hap Tong Presbyterian Church (NAE, evangelical). Each of these Presbyterian denominations has more than 5,000 churches with over 2 million members. It is extremely difficult to create cooperative programmes for evangelism, missions and social services, which require wider cooperation from different denominations. If the pastor of a local church is not involved in the organizational structure of a joint programme, his church often is not involved in the programme. The Korean church must learn the concept of partnership in Christian ministry among different Christian bodies within the country, as well as with other Christian organizations in other countries.

b. Need for More Christian Social Responsibility

Christian contributions towards the patriotic movement, democratic reform and social welfare are well recognized even by the secular society. However, there have been increasing cries from society as well as from many Christians that the Korean church must be more concerned for the needy by establishing more orphanages, handicapped peoples' homes, hospitals, marriage counselling centres, homes for unwed mothers, ministry to prostitutes, rehabilitation centres, etc.

Increasing criticism both from within and outside the church has been directed toward the Protestant churches because of their main interest in quantitative expansion with big church buildings and inward-oriented programmes without much effect upon society. Challenges have come in the form of questioning the allocation of the large sum of money collected from offerings and tithes each week.

In Asia today where only 3% of the three billion people claim to be Christians and where the traditional religions of Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam and etc. are prevalent among the people, many non-Christians are questioning, 'What are the real differences between Christianity and Buddhism? Can you show me the difference by deeds?' Unless the Korean churches make their contributions to society and the nation in the area of social responsibility, future church growth in Korea will be hampered. A holistic approach to Christian ministry must be emphasized in the Korean church.

c. Problems of Mega-churches

The world's largest churches from different denominations exist in Korea: Yoido Full Gospel Central **p. 350** Church (Assemblies of God) 706,000 members, Yong Nak Presbyterian Church (Tong Hap) 60,000; Choong Hyun Presbyterian Church (Hap Tong) 30,000; Kwang Lim Methodist Church, 73,000; and Kangnam Central Baptist Church, 3,500. Each of these mega-churches has an effective charismatic spiritual leader. The Sunday worship services are magnificent with splendid choirs and orchestras climaxed with a powerful message in a huge sanctuary. Many of the large churches have five or six worship services on Sunday, and a large number of pastoral staff are assisting the various activities of the church.

However, the question of whether thousands of church members can have their spiritual needs met at one local church has been raised by many Christians. In other words, how can a local church minister to thousands of people who are scattered throughout the huge city? When the pastor emeritus, usually the founder of the mega-church does not get along with his younger successor, conflict, division and discouragement can easily occur. In fact, several mega-churches in Seoul have already experienced this painful division of the congregation into two. Undoubtedly, mega-churches and other large-size churches will have many more problems which smaller churches do not usually face.

d. Will this Church Growth Continue?

The economic prosperity in the nation and the secularization of the society in recent years have greatly affected the life style of Koreans and the spiritual life of many Christians, particularly among the younger generation. There are a number of signs in the nation as well as in the church today that have hindered the growth of the church: materialism, secularism, resurgence of traditional religions, busy schedules, schism in the church, easy beliefs, rise of theological liberalism, etc. Will God continue to bring church growth in the Korean church? In fact, we are beginning to see the downward trend of the Korean church. Korean church leaders are shocked to read the recent government statistics which the Ministry of Information put out concerning church growth:

1989: 9.0% growth;
1990: 5.8%;
1991: 3.9%;
1992: 0.6%;
1993: -4.0%.

The slowing of church growth had already started from 1984, with the continual declining trend of church growth for the last ten years. Dr. Jon Ho Jin, Professor of missions at ACTS in Seoul, gives several reasons behind the downward trend:

1. Too fast growth of the church and the lack of discipleship training of these new converts.
2. Past growth due to the crises in the nation and the resolution of these crises.
3. Spiritual decline in general and the decline of revival meetings.
4. Stiff competition of big churches and the difficulty of newly planted churches.
5. Loss of church image and trust due to internal problems of the church.
6. Church ministry geared for the [p. 351](#) older generation and the departure of the younger generation.
7. Churches' lack of adjustment to new social changes.
8. Rapid social changes and the decline of rural communities and churches.
9. Change of world view from absolute truth to relative religious pluralism.
10. Rise of cults and influences of new ideologies.
11. Rise of women's liberation movement and disorientation of Christian family

e. Remedy to the Declining Situation

There is no guarantee by God that he will continue to use the Korean church in the future. Unless the Korean church once again comes to God in repentance and seeks God's help in humility, the Korean church will face similar problems to those which the churches in the West have been facing.

The author believes that there is a way to remedy the situation for the Korean church. Two important areas of modern church ministry in the Korean church must be emphasized: first, the Korean church must continue to uphold the importance of missions, not only for 70 million Koreans, but also for billions of others who need to hear the gospel of Jesus Christ. We must enlarge our vision for Asia, Africa, Latin America, Eastern Europe, and the West. If we have a lesson to learn from the history of the Christian church, it is this lesson. If the church which once had a spiritual vitality and missionary vision for the lost world loses that vitality and vision, that same church will decline in its spiritual effectiveness.

Secondly, the Korean church must express its Christian concern for social responsibility. Churches must utilize a part of their offerings to build orphanages, hospitals, old people's homes, and many other social agencies in order to take care of needy people, not only within Korea but also abroad. The non-Christian society must see that the Christian church is making its contribution to the nation and the world. Christians must be different from Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims, and non-Christians in their life style and spiritual life.

CONCLUSION

The Korean Christians believe that God has chosen them in a special way today to become a channel of blessings to the nations. The explosive growth of the Korean church has been widely reported throughout the world with articles such as 'Korea: Asia's First Christian Nation?' and 'Wildfire Church Growth in Korea.' Thousands of Christians have visited Korea to observe various activities of the Korean church such as the pre-dawn prayer meetings, prayer mountain, all-night prayer meetings and fasting.

There is no doubt that God's hand has been in all the activities of the church as well as earthly affairs of the nation in which he has brought this explosive church growth in South

Korea. In connection with this rapid growth of the church the Korean church has been experiencing p.352 the above-mentioned numerous problems and challenges both within and outside the church. With the wider vision for world missions and the consistent implementation of moral and spiritual life of Christians as light and salt in this world, the Christian church hopefully will continue to make an enormous spiritual and moral impact upon the church and the nation. The task of national and world evangelization challenges the Christian church, to depend on God's power to overcome the difficulties found in urban ministry, youth and rural evangelism and to join with other Christians of the world to reach the unrelated millions with the gospel of Christ.

With the astronomical numerical growth, the church has often been proud. In reality, the person who planted the seeds and watered the ground is God himself, and there is nothing for which Korean Christians can be boastful. As Korean Christians learn to lift up the name of Jesus Christ instead of themselves and their churches, God will continue to bless the Korean church abundantly and the eyes of the world church will continue to focus on the Lord of the Korean church.

'But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called -you out of darkness into his marvellous light' (1 Pet. 2:9).

May this verse be true of the Korean church as well as the church around the world. p.353

Appendix Korean Protestant Church-1994

<i>Denominations</i>	<i>Churches</i>	<i>Members</i>
Presbyterians: Denominations	61*25,331	*7,771,665
Six of the large Presbyterian denominations:		
Hap Tong	5447	2,158,000
Tong Hap	5330	2,101,000
Reformed	2000	650,000
Conservative	1454	562,000
Republic of Korea (ROK)	1379	345,000
Koryo	1319	372,000
Methodists: denominations	4*4,564	*1,369,092

Largest denomination
Korean Methodist Christian Church

Methodist	4,361	1,240,000
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Pentecostal: denominations

	8*1,429	*1,252,535
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Yoido Full Gospel Church

10 Churches	Satelite	706,000
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Evangelical Church: 2 denominations

Holiness*	2,542	*1,067,534
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Baptist: 5 denominations

	*1,910	*850,384
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1994 Statistics from the Christian Newspaper, 1995

* 1993 Christian Almanac, Christian Literature Press, Seoul, President, Young Je Han

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Theological Issues in the Philippine Context

Rodrigo D. Tano

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There are those who believe that systematic theology (traditionally formulated and taught) is the only valid theology because it is the only type that is biblically informed. Any other type, particularly contextual theology, is not valid since it may not be biblically based; hence, it should be rejected. Little do they realize that traditional systematic theology is itself arbitrarily organized around a system.

The traditional understanding of theology, systematic theology in particular, is that it is a discipline that presents an orderly, unified formulation of truth about God, man and

the world as set forth in divine revelation. This concept of the nature and function of theology is exemplified by A. H. Strong in his description of theology as the ‘ascertainment of the facts respecting God and the relation between God and the universe, and the exhibition of these facts in their rational unity, as connected parts of a formulated and organic system of truth’.¹

The basic—if not the sole function—of theology, according to this understanding, is the logical formulation of biblical teachings into a comprehensive, integrated whole. Accordingly, the desired end in theological activity is a ‘*theologia perennis*, the ever self-identical, unchanging articulation and application of immutable divine truth’.²

It has to be recognized that the systematic and comprehensive explication of biblical faith is most essential. Since the teachings of Scripture are not arranged in an orderly and comprehensive manner, it is most helpful to individual Christians and the church at large if such teachings are systematized.

It also has to be noted that although systematic theology is necessary, it is not sufficient for Christian thinkers simply to build p. 355 theological systems. Christian or biblical truth must be a living and transforming power. It must address issues and problems; it must meet people’s practical needs; it must enable the church to be God’s people where they are situated. The contextual realities which the church faces demand a pastoral and prophetic theology. This will require not the setting aside of biblical, systematic or historical theology, but going beyond these disciplines into critical but relevant theological reflection. Theology in Asia, then, as suggested by Japanese theologian Kosuke Koyama, does not begin by ‘studying Augustine, Barth or Rahner with an English-Indonesian (or English-Chinese, or English-Thai) dictionary nearby. It must begin with an interest in people.’³

One may be a student of theology but not a theologian, for a theologian is one who moves beyond mastering a theological system (a finished product) and engages in theological reflection and creative formulation (a continuing process). Theological reflection ‘involves a proper grasp of the meaning of God’s revelation in history and its relation to the present moment’.⁴ To understand the present the theologian should have a knowledge of the past, and a thorough understanding of the relevance of historical, cultural, social, and economic forces presently at work.

Theological activity, particularly in the Third World, should include wrestling with both the text (Bible) and the context, seeking the meaning of the present in the light of God’s Word and his purposes. As evangelicals we uphold the Scriptures as the unchanging basis of Christian teaching and practice. Given varied and changing situations, there will be a variety of formulations and applications of this unchanging truth. Therefore, we can speak of one truth but many ways of communicating and applying God’s truth in view of changing situations from country to country and from region to region. It is in this sense that we can have Asian or Latin American theology, Filipino or Japanese theology. Thus, to speak of a certain type of theology as Western, Asian or black or feminist, is to recognize its specific marks—its method, emphases, themes and concerns.

¹ A. H. Strong, *Systematic Theology* (Philadelphia: Judson Press, 1907), 2.

² David Lutz, ‘Theology at Risk’, *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* (Spring-Summer 1974), 171.

³ Kosuke Koyama, ‘Reflections on Associations of Theological Schools in Southeast Asia’, *Southeast Asia Journal of Theology*, (1974), 22.

⁴ Rodrigo D. Tano, ‘Toward an Evangelical Asian Theology’, in Bong Ro and Ruth Eshenauer, eds., *The Bible and Theology in Asian Contexts* (Tainan, Taiwan: Asia Theological Association, 1984), 94.

The text (Bible) should always enter into a dynamic interaction with the life-situation (context) of the church. And it is from this engagement that a life-situation or contextual theology emerges. As a theology-on-the-way, or pilgrim theology, contextual theology is neither final nor complete. From this perspective, Christian theology is not static but dynamic, and theological reflection is an ongoing enterprise. Clearly then, theology is both a finished product as well as a process, a *noun* but also a *verb*. p. 356

THEOLOGICAL SITUATION IN THE PHILIPPINES

In assessing the theological situation in the Philippines, Filipino Protestant theologian Emerito Nacpil reported that 'there are no clearly defined theological movements or theological schools of thought'.⁵ For while evangelical theology has had a predominant influence, 'there are no great or near-great writing theologians'.⁶ Nacpil points to some factors that explain the lack of significant writing, especially among Protestants.

First, the Protestant churches in the Philippines—products of American missionary effort—resemble their mother churches. The parent missionary organizations and denominations themselves have not sought to indigenize 'the ethos of the Christian life, the modes of theological thinking and the denominational emphases ...'.⁷ Moreover, the concerns and issues affecting Protestant churches are practical in nature: evangelism, pastoral work, and church extensions. Theological reflection is minimal. A third factor is the unbalanced stress placed on the personal aspect of salvation to the neglect of the needs of the whole person and the implication of salvation in social and national life. Finally, Protestant churches have separated and entrenched themselves from the world, confining their vision and activities almost exclusively to the inner nurture and the maintenance of organizational machinery.

To a great extent, the Protestant community cares little about understanding, much less relating, the gospel to the Philippine context. The curriculum and the training programme of Philippine theological institutions, most of which were established by expatriate missionaries, hardly include a course on theological reflection. Like their mother churches, these schools are not in touch with Philippine realities. While there is a healthy emphasis upon the proper exegesis of the Scriptures, there is no concern to properly exegete the context. Filipino theological students appear to be strangers in their own native land. The so-called study of theology is often confined to the mastery of a packaged theology that is often couched in foreign categories and deals with issues arising from another milieu whose theological agenda are not relevant to the local people. Creative theological reflection and construction which confronts the context with the text/Bible is not taught. Attempts to contextualize theology are often resisted for dubious reasons.

Among Protestants, those within the mainline denominations more than groups within evangelicalism and the charismatic movement, have had greater success in interacting with the context. Very few evangelicals (this writer included) have produced theological writings of significance. Such pieces, if any, are occasional and take the form of reactions to some socio-political p. 357 issues, or attempts to adapt systematic theology to the Philippine situation.

⁵ Emerito Nacpil, 'Philippines: A New Gospel for the Filipino', in Gerald H. Anderson, ed., *Asian Voices in Christian Theology* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1976), 117.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid., 117.

What has been stated about Philippine Protestants does not hold true concerning Roman Catholics. Several Roman Catholic churchmen have been perceptive in their analysis of the Philippine situation and have published a considerable amount of substantial literature. Leonardo Mercado, SVD, in *Elements of Filipino Philosophy*⁸ and in *Elements of Filipino Theology*⁹ attempts to understand the Filipino as a person, as a thinker, and as one who seeks harmony with himself, with others, with nature, and with God. His approach is incarnational, as he adapts Christian concepts to popular beliefs and practices. While evangelicals may not always agree with his method and conclusions, Mercado's writings provide extensive information on the Filipino world view, especially on the world beyond, fate and freedom, sin and curse, death, the spirits, and departed ancestors.

Vitaliano Gorospe, SJ has examined Filipino values and how Christian renewal may be attained by the internalizing of Christian truths through the value system. In *Filipino Values Revisited*¹⁰ Gorospe assembles the bulk of his writings which focus on faith and justice, active non-violence, a variety of moral issues, and a theological interpretation of 'people power'. In *The Filipino Search for Meaning*,¹¹ Gorospe adapts Christian ethics to the Philippine life-situation.

Catalina Arevalo, SJ, Edicio dela Torre, SVD, and Carlos Abesamis, SJ formulate a theology of development and liberation, given the inequalities, exploitation and the attendant suffering of the masses.¹² A lay Catholic theologian, Jose de Mesa has proposed 'theological rerooting' as an approach to incarnate the Christian gospel within the local culture. This approach is demonstrated in *And God Said, 'Bahala Na'*¹³ and *In Solidarity with Culture*.¹⁴ In these works, he attempts to overcome the 'lack of synthesis between the two thought and behavior systems, namely the values of the Filipino culture and the values of the Christian faith',¹⁵ which lack has produced 'folk Catholicism', 'popular religiosity', and 'split-level Christianity'. De Mesa believes that it is only as the gospel is re-rooted within the Philippine cultural soil that it can transform the latter. p. 358

Probably the most systematized and comprehensive presentation of the major Christian concepts in the light of Philippine culture is Belita's *The Way of the Greater Self*.¹⁶ Utilizing the Filipino mythos of 'the greater self', he shows how the greater self is redeemed, enriched, nurtured, and preserved by the gratuity of God's grace in the person and redemptive work of Christ, and how life-in-community may be informed by the gospel.

⁸ Leonardo Mercado, *Elements of Filipino Philosophy* (Tacloban City: Divine Word University Publications, 1976).

⁹ Leonardo Mercado, *Elements of Filipino Philosophy* (Tacloban City: Divine Word University Publications, 1976).

¹⁰ Vitaliano Gorospe, *Filipino Values Revisited* (Metro Manila: National Book Store, 1988).

¹¹ Vitaliano Gorospe, *The Filipino Search for Meaning* (Manila: Jesuit Educational Association, 1974).

¹² These Filipino liberationists have produced articles on liberation and development which have become part of anthologies on Filipino theology.

¹³ Jose de Mesa, *And God Said, 'Bahala Na'* (Quezon City: Maryhill School of Theology, 1979).

¹⁴ Jose de Mesa, *In Solidarity With the Culture* (Quezon City: Maryhill School of Theology, 1991.)

¹⁵ De Mesa, *In Solidarity*, 8.

¹⁶ Jaime A. Belita, *The Way of Greater Self* (Manila: De La Salle University Press, 1991).

ISSUES AND THEMES IN FILIPINO THEOLOGY

There are salient issues and themes that, to this writer, need to be dealt with in the attempt to bring the Christian faith to bear upon the local scene. Principal lines of biblical truth as well as theological motifs will be used to confront issues or develop pertinent themes.

The Filipino World View

Anthropologists consider the belief system or world view as the control box of culture. A world view is equated with the religio-philosophical framework against which the members of a culture seek to understand the universe and to relate to it in a functional manner. In terms of a local theology, this framework constitutes the context and provides the vehicle through which Christian truth may be understood and communicated.

The Filipino world view is characterized as animistic and fatalistic.¹⁷ In spite of the process of modernization and the advances in science and technology, the rural Filipino still looks at the world and nature as governed by personal, supernatural spirit beings (as opposed to the Western impersonal mechanistic view). His explanation of events in the universe is not rational nor scientific but religious and metaphysical. The Filipino farmer, for example, may rely more on planting rituals or luck than on the use of fertilizers or irrigation for a good harvest. On the whole, sickness and health, good weather or bad, volcanic eruptions, success or failure are understood in terms of a belief in the supernatural and in a capricious deterministic divine providence.

The Filipino outlook is also fatalistic. This perspective is expressed in the ideas of *swerte* and *bahala na*. *Swerte* is understood as one's predetermined lot in life, or simply one's luck. The concept is a major component of the traditional world view and supports the central value system. *Swerte* appears to be the explanation of everything that happens in one's personal life. This belief which is traceable to pre-Spanish origins emphasizes blind submission to the 'divine will'. Many Filipinos equate 'Thy will be done' with the unbiblical notion of '*pagbuot sa Dios*' (Visayan), '*itinalaga ng Dios*' (Tagalog) 'It is the will of God'. These beliefs perpetuate poverty p.359 and oppression and undergird a theology of limited good.

Akin to the concept of *swerte* is the cyclical view of life. Popular sayings express this inclination: '*gulong ng kapalaran*' (wheel of fortune); '*gulong ng palad*' (wheel of the palm). The picture is that of riding on the rim of a wheel of fate. If one waits long enough, one will find oneself on the other side of the wheel. Now he is under, tomorrow he will be on top. The average Filipino accepts his fate and comforts himself by saying: '*Ganyan ang gulong ng kapalaran*' (That is the wheel of fortune). The attitude of *bahala na* gives rise to optimistic fatalism and baseless resignation expressed as 'come what may', 'it's up to God', '*que sera, sera*', 'What do I care?'

Consequences of the Filipino World View

How does the animistic, fatalistic outlook shape the Filipino's attitude and behaviour? Let me enumerate some ways.

First, the Filipino is constantly under the grip of fear. The spirits that inhabit and control nature are both benevolent and malevolent. Often they are considered vengeful and capricious. They need to be appeased through the offering of sacrifices, novenas or *panatas* (devotions or vows).

¹⁷ For a discussion of this subject, see Socorro Espiritu, et al., *Sociology in the New Philippine Setting* (Quezon City: Alemar-Phoenix Publishing House, 1977), 73-74.

Second, the fatalistic outlook reduces the Filipino to a hapless victim of an arbitrary and inexorable fate. Here, man ceases to be the rational, moral being God intended him to be, capable of making responsible choices that could shape his destiny.

Third, the *swerte/bahala na* mentality is behind the Filipino's lack of initiative and foresight. It explains the do-nothing or do-little attitude that produces an unwarranted sense of dependence on *awa*, or the dole out.

Christian Faith and the Filipino's World View

This outlook on life and the world with its negative consequences requires a fully formulated, biblically based but culturally relevant understanding of man, Christ, and salvation for the Filipino. He needs to hear the liberating gospel, of the Christ who came to give freedom (salvation as *kalayaan*—freedom) from the flow and grip of evil spirits, from enslaving fatalism and from the distorted view of man as a helpless victim of circumstances. Christ should be presented as the powerful One who has triumphed over the powers through his physical suffering on the cross (the *Christus Victor* motif of the atonement). The Filipino needs to encounter God, the almighty and benevolent Father-Spirit who has control over nature and the spirit world, the integrating factor in the universe.

Against the fatalistic outlook that reduces the Filipino to a puny victim of blind, inexorable fate, we need to expound the biblical teaching on man as a responsible being, capable of making responsible choices. The Bible pictures man as lord over creation with the prerogative of tending, controlling and harnessing it for his use, and as shaping history in partnership with the Creator.

Man need not submit to blind fate. He can alter physical and social conditions instead of resigning himself p. 360 to fate and accepting the status quo. In Christ, man is no longer a slave but a son who can, in partnership with God and in faithful stewardship, direct history to fulfil the divine purpose.

THE FILIPINO UNDERSTANDING OF CHRIST

The dominant images of Christ to the Filipino are the *Santo Nino* (Holy Child) and the *Santo Entierro* (Entombed Christ).¹⁸ The one represents the weak, innocent child and the other, the tragic victim of suffering and death. These images suit the Filipino's sense of weakness and experiences of suffering under years of colonial rule and in the face of natural or man-made calamities.

Needless to say, these two images of Christ represent inadequate views. The child Jesus never grows up to manhood. This image overlooks the man Jesus, the virile Son of Man and Son of God in the gospels who preached the goodness of God to the poor, denounced the hypocrites, and drove away the moneychangers from the temple. The Man of Nazareth was certainly not a weak, face-saving Christ. In the words of Father Villote, he was the 'disturbing Christ' who made the comfortable uneasy and assaulted the oppressive establishment.

On the other hand, the horizontal Christ who lies in state (like the Black Nazarene of the Quiapo Church) is not the Christ of Easter Sunday. He is not the risen, glorious, awesome Christ whom John the seer saw as One whose eyes were like flaming fire, whose voice was the sound of many waters, from whose mouth issued a two-edged sword.

¹⁸ See Douglas Elwood and Patricia Magdamo, in *Christ in Philippine Context* (Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1971) for a historical and theological consideration of 'the popular Filipino Christ'.

To have a vibrant, assured faith, the Filipino needs to see Jesus crucified, buried, risen and glorified—the triumphant One. It is to the living Christ that the Filipino should give his allegiance, not to his *sakop* (group). The Filipino should make the will of Christ the rule of his conduct, not *pakikisama* (getting along) or *utang na loob* (sense of indebtedness to others). A biblically based but culturally relevant Christology for the Philippines could be formulated with the use of these titles of Christ: *Cristo Rey* (Christ the King), especially for Easter Sunday; *Cristong Matagumpay* (*Christus Victor*); *Cristong Makapangyarihang Tagapagligtas* (Christ the Almighty Saviour); *Cristong Buhay na Panginoon* (Christ the Living Lord). The meaning and implications of these titles for a Christology in the Philippine setting need to be elaborated on.

The Filipino Concept of Sin

Some anthropologists look at cultures according to their stress on either guilt or shame. A guilt culture stresses moral standards and the cultivation of moral sensitivity. In a shame culture, the concern is not to let one's sin become known. Due to a fragile sense of worth, the Filipino avoids being exposed, lest he be *mapahiya* (shamed or put to shame). Mercado makes the curious observation that when faced with the [p. 361](#) choice of being put to shame and committing sin, the typical Filipino chooses the 'lesser evil' of committing sin. (Is the Filipino the only one with this tendency?)

The Filipino's low view of sin and guilt is seen in the words used in the major dialects for sin. In his study of these words, Mercado claims that the Visayan *sala* and the Ilocano *basol* carry the idea of sin as involuntary, as a shortcoming or flaw, not as a serious offence.¹⁹ Though some Filipino proverbs show that the Filipino feels guilt and sin, the sense of guilt does not appear to be strong. Mercado cites two sayings to support his conclusion: '*Sapagkat tayo ay tao lamang*' (because we are only human); '*Masayop man gani ang kabaw nga upat may till; ang tao pa bay dill?*' (Visayan: If a carabao with its four feet takes a wrong step, what more for man?)²⁰ This means that since nobody is perfect, we should not be hard on those who fall into sin! Faults and imperfections are natural.

It also appears that the Filipino's behaviour is controlled more by the group around him (sort of an external conscience or point of reference) than by inner conviction. That is, there is the inability to internalize moral standards and stand up for them. (Again, is the Filipino the only human being on earth that behaves this way?)

Despite these observations, however, Mercado is quick to add that it does not follow that Filipinos have no feelings of guilt. There is an abundance of popular sayings that indicate this, such as the Visayan expression *Ang taong sad-an maluspad* (A guilty man turns pale), or the Ilocano *Ti adda babakna, adda aluadanna* (Whoever has sin has something to be aware of).²¹ Actually, the so-called weak sense of guilt may be checked by the Filipino concept of *gaba* (Visayan), *sumpa* (Tagalog), or *lunod* (Ilocano), which means divine retribution or curse. Mercado claims this idea is the local people's answer to the issue of moral responsibility.

Mercado, however, does not go beyond the analysis of the indigenous concepts of sin and *gaba*, so the following lines of biblical teaching must be used to deal with the problem. First, Philippine society (or any other society) should be taught that the God we worship and serve is the most high, the holy and righteous Lord who does not trifle with sin.

¹⁹ See Mercado, *Elements of Filipino Theology*, 77–84 for a full discussion of the Filipino understanding of sin and guilt.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 81–82.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 83.

Corollary to this, the Filipino should be confronted with the true nature and consequence of sin as transgression not only against fellow human beings (horizontal dimension) but against God (vertical dimension). Second, a deeper sense of personal moral responsibility should be indicated to produce a feeling of true repentance for sin, not just remorse or regret or shame. There can be no true repentance apart from a pungent sense of culpability and guilt. Again, in relation to the points just cited, the Filipino (as well as other Asians) should be made to realize that sin is not simply the violation of some taboos or the transgression against an impersonal p. 362 cosmic force that will bring inevitable retribution (which *gala* is), in the Hindu sense of karma. The local belief of *gaba* as divine retribution needs correction or transformation with the biblical truth of divine wrath which is the eternal reaction of a personal God, not of angry capricious gods or the inexorable law of karma. Here, the gospel's gratuitous offer of pardon and acceptance in Christ should be proclaimed as an answer to the Filipino's sense of shame and fear of retribution.

God: Distant or Accessible

Though Filipinos relate almost every aspect of life and experience to God through religious rituals, they also think of him as lofty, remote and unapproachable. So in approaching him, they resort to intermediaries through which they can approach him. This 'distancing' of God gives the impression that he is unknown, remote and impersonal.²²

The concept of God as awesome, dwelling in unapproachable and dazzling glory is of course biblical. God, however, has come to us, identified with us and made himself accessible and available through the incarnation of Christ the Son. The incarnation affirmed man, and in Christ God has sought man, and made himself available to man. The God of the Bible is the 'Emmanuel'—'God with us' (the God who is '*malapit*', '*kasama natin*').

The Filipino should be enlightened with the truth that in approaching God he need not go through a plurality of intermediaries like the saints, Mary, or Christ. For example, the television programme by the 'Saint Peregrine—Jesus Help Me' group where prayers for healing and success are offered to God, Mother Mary, and to Saint Peregrine—Jesus Help Me demonstrates this plurality. Christ the Son of God is the *tanging Tagapamamagitan* (only Mediator between God and man).

The Concept of Salvation

A former actor was narrating his quest for life's meaning. He thought he would find it in wealth, pleasure and popularity. But these things did not give meaning and a sense of security. Through the reading of the Bible and listening to the gospel message via television, he met Christ, and found what he was searching for.

On the same platform with him was a Samal Christian who also shared his experience of salvation. One time he was sick. Moreover, he was bothered by Satan and evil spirits. He went to the *Imam* (priest) who prayed for him but he was not delivered. Then he was prayed for by a Protestant *Mastal* (Teacher-Pastor). God healed him of his sickness and delivered him from the spell of spirits. He then became a follower of *Isa Almasih* (Jesus Christ).

To the former actor, Christ can give meaning and a sense of security. To the animistic Samal Muslim, Christ is the powerful Healer-Deliverer. Before formulating an appropriate

²² See Mercado, *Elements of Filipino Theology* for limited discussion of the subject, 39–42.

soteriology for the Filipino, it should be noted that our Lord Jesus did not present a uniform message to all people. To the [p. 363](#) woman at the well he spoke about ‘living water’. He confronted Nicodemus with the need to undergo spiritual rebirth. Indeed the New Testament concept of salvation comes under a variety of images depending on how the sinner’s condition is construed: justification, reconciliation, union with Christ, spiritual rebirth, newness of life; abundant life, wholeness, etc. The search for a culturally relevant but biblically informed image of salvation for the Filipino is therefore legitimate.

If you ask a Filipino Roman Catholic to receive Christ as his ‘personal Lord and Saviour’ (this is the standard definition of the process of attaining salvation as presented through the witnessing tools used in the Philippines), he may respond that he ‘receives’ Christ every time he partakes of the bread and wine in the Holy Communion. This is the Filipino sacramentarian understanding of salvation. The majority of Filipinos believe that salvation can be earned by performing religious rituals, fulfilling *panatas* (vows, devotions) or offering sacrifice. Given the Filipino’s world view and overall need, De Mesa suggests the intriguing indigenous idea of *ginhawa* as a rich and comprehensive concept with which to communicate the blessings that Christ came to bring to mankind. *Ginhawa* has a wide range of meaning within the local culture.²³ De Mesa lists the following which he elucidates with some examples: 1) Ease of life, comfortable living; 2) Relief from pain, sickness, straits or difficulty; 3) Consolation received; 4) Freedom from want; and 5) Convenience.²⁴

He believes that the idea of *ginhawa* could serve as the dynamic equivalent of the Greek *soteria*, the Latin *salus* (health), and the Hebrew *yasha* (the possession of space and the freedom and security which is gained by the removal of constriction.)

De Mesa explains that ‘the term *ginhawa* is related to the different experiences of a person. These can be “physical”, “emotional”, “spiritual”, or “material”—aspects which compose the life of man. The primary wish to every person in life is to be *maginhawa* in each of the aspects mentioned. This is really the ultimate goal of man.’²⁵ He believes *ginhawa* catches the ‘reality of total well-being of man and men in God’.²⁶

What leads De Mesa to opt for *ginhawa* as the equivalent of salvation is that the term enables the Filipino to think of salvation not just in a spiritualistic but in a holistic sense. It addresses man’s physical, emotional and spiritual needs. *Ginhawa* comes from God and Christ.

Much as the indigenous *ginhawa* concept appeals to the Filipino for its this-worldly holistic thrust, its emphasis is more on the physical, emotional and psychological needs of man, even though De Mesa is careful to include the spiritual and eschatological dimensions. He hardly treats man’s sin and guilt and the atoning death of Christ. He may have this in mind when he speaks of [p. 364](#) spiritual *ginhawa* but he has almost nothing to say about it. These comments notwithstanding, De Mesa’s effort to re-root the concept of salvation within the local culture is creative and insightful. It only needs a more careful exposition that embodies the meaning of Christ’s salvific mission.

In evaluating the *ginhawa* idea, one of my students in Contemporary Asian Theology proposed *kalayaan* (freedom) as a more appropriate salvation theme for the Filipino. For Christ came to bring freedom—from sin and guilt, from principalities and powers, from a

²³ See de Mesa, *In Solidarity*, 75–101 for a full discussion of the subject.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 80–81.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 83.

low self-image (a mark of the average Filipino), from despair and suffering. 'So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed ([Jn. 8:36](#)). 'It is for freedom that Christ has set us free ...' ([Gal. 5:1](#)). In the Galatians passage, Paul speaks about freedom from the law, as the old master, from 'basic principles of the world' (principalities and powers that enslave mankind). Perhaps more than *ginhawa*, *kalayaan* should have a greater appeal to the fearful and insecure Filipino as the gift that Christ brings. This image needs to be expanded but it is sufficient simply to mention it here as a salvation image that is both biblical and relevant to the Philippine context.

SOME SOCIO-POLITICAL ISSUES

At this point, let me isolate two socio-political issues that need to be continually addressed in the Philippines. First is the question of the relation between the institutional church and the government. Then there is the issue of social justice which requires the development of a theology of liberation. In wrestling with these questions, let me indicate some lines of teaching with which we can address the issues.

God and Caesar: The Church and the State

The political situation in many Asian countries is unstable and unpredictable. Revolutions, coups d'état, authoritarian rule, strikes and violent demonstrations and armed conflict occur frequently. What is the role of the Christian church regarding the exercise of political power? What is the relation between the church and the state? What is the place of the state in the purpose of God? From the biblical standpoint, the following statements may be made as guidelines in dealing with these issues.

First, power and authority belong to God. Government or the state reflects the lordship of God in a fallen world. Regimes and administrations may rise and fall, kings, emperors and governors may come and go, but government as an instrument which preserves order and stability remains, regardless of its forms. As a vehicle of the divine rule over the affairs of men, human government fulfils God's plan in the world.

Second, the basic functions of government are: 1) preserving order and stability (preservative); 2) restraint and punishment of evil (regulative and punitive); 3) rewarding the good (remunerative); 4) promotion of social justice and the welfare of the citizens (supportive).

Third, when a particular regime or administration fails to achieve these [p. 365](#) functions, it ceases to fulfil the purpose of God for the state. It is therefore in need of reform, or it should be changed according to the processes and avenues available to the citizens. What these are will vary from country to country.

Fourth, government is to function within its legitimate boundaries under God. Caesar (government) is just Caesar, not God. When a ruler or regime becomes corrupt, cruel, and unjust, or if it takes the place of God, it should be exposed and when appropriate, it should be resisted and changed. For the Christian, it is better to obey God rather than men. Efforts to reform or change governments or rulers should be done peacefully and nonviolently.

Fifth, revolution as radical and violent change in the political order may or may not promote justice. It may in fact bring a worse form of bondage and tyranny. It could trigger a series of counter-revolutionary actions and reactions. It may not, therefore, be the best option. A thorough grasp and evaluation of the situation is required before action is taken.

In many Asian countries, the governing elite and affluent class are often unwilling to share the means of economic and social advancement with the majority of the citizens. Often they entrench themselves in power and seek to protect vested interests—their own, those of their supporters, or of multinational corporations that help maintain their power.

In such situations, Christians can join all men of good will in exposing exploitation, in support of just legislation that will enhance the condition of the weak and powerless, and in opposing ideologies and techniques that encourage the wrong use of power.

Social Justice and Liberation

While there are a variety of factors that bring about poverty, it is generally agreed that economic and social inequalities are related to unjust political and economic structures on the local and international level.

Brazilian Archbishop Don Helder Camara describes misery as violence in three institutionalized forms. There is the violence of the local elite who are rich and powerful at the expense of the majority. There is also the violence imposed by the developed world on underdeveloped countries through self-serving politics and an international monetary and trade system that favours the rich nations. The third form of violence is exercised by local governments which perpetuate the first two forms by maintaining the present oppressive economic and political structures.²⁷

This situation provides the matrix for a theology of development and liberation. An Asian theology of development and liberation has arisen—particularly in the Philippines and in India—where the church is constrained to address the issue of poverty and injustice.

Human development refers to the ‘development of peoples in dignity as persons and the achievement of freedom, justice, and peace in the human community.’²⁸ The goals of development are ‘freedom from misery, an increased share of responsibility without oppression of any kind and in security from situations that do violence to the dignity of man ... in brief, to seek to do more, know more and have more in order to be more’.²⁹ Development is not possible, however, if the present oppressive social, economic and political structures are not rearranged so that the welfare of the poor and the exploited is promoted. Thus development should be linked to the concept of liberation. Liberation is the ‘effort of an underdeveloped people to break out of a condition of underdevelopment, dependency and marginality.’³⁰ The concern of liberation then should not only be with ‘enlarging the cake’, but with changing the way it is divided and distributed.

The following lines of biblical teaching may be utilized to formulate a theology of development and liberation to respond to the conditions of poverty, misery and injustice that pertain to some Asian countries. First is the infinite dignity and worth of man. Created in the image of God, every man and woman is of infinite worth and dignity. Second, God opposes the proud and the powerful classes that oppress the poor. Through the Old Testament prophets, God denounced the crimes directed against the poor—for example, fraud in trading and land-grabbing (see [Am. 2:6f](#), [4:1f](#); [5:1f](#); [8:5f](#); [Hos. 12:8](#); [Mic. 2:2](#); [Isa. 5:8](#)). God hears the voice of the poor who look to him for help ([Job 34:28](#); [Ps. 10:14](#)), and promises justice to them ([Isa. 5:8–10](#), [10:1–4](#); [Hos. 12:8–9](#)). The Messiah is pictured as coming to defend the rights of the weak and the poor ([Isa. 11:4](#), [49:13](#); [Ps. 72:2f](#)). From these indications, we can state that though the church should minister to the rich and the poor, it should be on the side of the poor if only to expose the guilt of the oppressive rich.

²⁷ Rodrigo D. Tano, *Theology in the Philippine Setting* (Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1981), 102.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Catalino Arevalo, in Tano, *Theology in the Philippine Setting*, 102–103.

³⁰ Ibid.

Third, the gospel brings a liberating message. Liberation is not simply from spiritual bondage. Man should be freed from every force that enslaves and degrades his personhood. The gospel of Christ addresses the total person with its message of freedom in Christ.

CONCLUSION

There are other themes and issues that could be added to this list. These include the Filipino spirit world and the Christian response to it, the phenomenon of 'split-level Christianity' in the Philippines, and the Filipino value system and how the gospel could transform it to bring about spiritual renewal in the Philippine church and in society.

The primary need is to re-root the gospel within the Philippine cultural soil in order to bring transformation. Short of this, the Philippine church will be susceptible to syncretistic faith, ideological captivity, and irrelevance. For years folk Christianity has prevailed. It is obvious by now that the process of relating the Christian faith to the Philippine situation requires the contextualization of theology. Contextualization involves: 1) the interaction of the text (Bible) p. 367 and the context (historical situation); 2) interpreting, challenging, and transforming a particular situation; and 3) adapting the gospel within a given culture.

It is to be admitted that preserving the purity of the gospel, while making it relevant to our times, is a necessary but complicated and risky task. Nevertheless, it must be done. As Argentinean pastor-theologian Rene Padilla correctly states, 'What is necessary ... is a theology that, taking advantage of that which is of value in any study, whatever its source, shows the relevance of biblical revelation to our culture, the relationship between the Gospel and the problem that the Church is facing in our society.'³¹ This enterprise requires a thorough understanding of our life-situation and the ability to interpret it in the light of the unchanging gospel. To properly 'read' our life-situation we need to utilize the research tools of the social sciences. Above all, we should study the Bible seriously and relate its teachings to our time.

There are at least three implications for theological education and the ministry of the church that arise out of this discussion. The curriculum of Philippine theological schools should go beyond the traditional biblical and theological course offerings and include a study of the contextual theological method and theological reflection. The course should be required of all students. It should deal with the Philippine context (history, world view, the value system, folk religion, historical, social and political realities), the nature and method of theology, and creative theological construction that addresses the context. Simply translating or adapting western theological traditions will not suffice. Systematic theology should be taught with sensitivity to the context. In some cases, segments of the western theological tradition may be bracketed off for lack of relevance.

The educational and nurturing programmes in the local church should deal with the question: How can I live for Christ as a Filipino, given the local world view and value system?

Further, we need to consider Schreiter's question, 'for whom is local theology intended?' It is imperative to recognize the audience of theology, as 'the question of audience affects the choice of themes, the procedures for development, and the criteria for judging its adequacy.'³² Tracy distinguishes three 'publics for theology: academy,

³¹ Padilla, Rene. 'Contextualization of the Gospel.' Unpublished paper.

³² Robert J. Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1985), 36.

church, and society.³³ Much of what is taught and written is directed to the academy (professional theologians or seminary students).

The service of the professional theologian or biblical scholar is of infinite value not just to the academy but also to the church. However, biblical/theological truth must be communicated intelligibly to the church and the community. Theological schools can train their students to do this.

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Contextualisation in Chinese Culture

Bruce J. Nicholls

INTRODUCTION

One of the fundamental factors in the growth of the church is our willingness and ability to interpret Christian Faith in the changing cultural contexts in which we live. This is our missiological challenge today. In this address I will attempt to speak to two changing cultural contexts mainland China with its billion plus citizens and Vancouver, Canada, a city in which one third of the inhabitants are immigrants.

We have traditionally thought of our task as one of indigenizing the church in terms of the people's traditional cultures and we continue to recognize the importance of this goal. However during the last twenty years the term 'contextualising' has been widely used, implying all that is meant by indigenization, but going beyond it to take into account the 'process of secularity, technology, and the struggle for human justice, which characterise the historical moment of nations in the Third World'.¹ Our task, then is to relate the gospel to both our traditional culture (in the case of Chinese culture this means primal shamanism, Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism) and to the modern industrial culture of secular materialism, and in the case of mainland China, to communism and its consequences. We may compare the difference between indigenization and contextualization to that between the National Geographic magazine and Time magazine. I enjoy both and I am sure you do also. However our task is more complex because most people live in at least two cultures at the same time. In business hours they are secular and materialist and at home they are traditional. For some people this creates conflicts, while others try to harmonize them.

In this address, I as a non-Chinese, will try to think in a Chinese way. How far I succeed or fail will show you how difficult the task is. Therefore I shall not use the lecture method of traditional western scholars which involves abstract linear thinking, rational language

³³ Ibid., 36.

¹ *Ministry in Context*, (Theological Education Fund, UK, 1972) p. 20.

and copious p. 369 footnotes, but one which involves thinking concretely, practically, using symbols, analogies and stories. I hope you enjoy my attempt.²

I. REVOLVING DOORS: BE QUICK!

Were you terrified the first time you entered a department store through revolving doors? You hesitated to step in, you were afraid of the door closing behind you. Today many people are terrified by the speed at which changes are taking place within their cultures. This is true both in China and in Vancouver. People suffer 'culture shock'. They freeze and are powerless to act. They are unable to make decisions or act upon them.

In the same way many Chinese people (and western secular people also) are terrified when they enter a Christian church. It is like entering through a revolving door. They feel trapped, they want to escape but can't. There is no door marked 'Exit'. Everything in the church is different, having to sit in straight pews, listening to western music, standing to sing, sitting to pray, and even being expected to make a donation when the offering bag is put under their nose. Even Christians find it frightening to go into a new church, especially if the service follows a liturgical form with which they are not familiar. This cultural jump is a major stumbling block to sharing the gospel with people today.

In the midst of rapidly changing cultures, the crisis of our age is one of identity. People are confused between returning to their cultural roots or abandoning them for the totally new culture in which they find themselves. The identity of the ordinary Chinese lies in their Chinese religion, for religion and culture are one. Primal Shamanism, Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism merge into one religion which provides a coherent world view, accepted values, and a very structured society, all of which is worked out in customs and daily behaviour. However, the younger generation of Chinese, whether in China or Vancouver, are largely ignorant of these great traditions and they believe them to be irrelevant to life in a secular world. The collapse of communism, the exposing of Mao Tze Tung, the shock of the Tiananmen Square massacre of 4 June 1989, has discredited both the ideology and the market place practice of communism. The alternative of a free market economy, with immediate wealth, is also proving a false utopia and an illusion. The poor see no change, their suffering increases. Thus a dangerous vacuum exists in both China and Vancouver. Will people go back to their cultural roots and again become very religious? Or will they turn to some new utopia and to some new self-proclaimed saviour? This then is the greatest threat to the church, and its greatest opportunity. We are confronted with a missiological task never faced before in the Christian church with such potential p. 370 for good and for evil. New Age philosophies and life styles which are sweeping across the western world offer a hope not unlike that of Taoism. In the search for peace and harmony in society many are turning to Buddhism and to Zen Buddhism in particular. Chinese Christians face a crisis: what does it mean to be Christian and Chinese at the same time? If I follow Christ and become part of his church will I lose my 'Chineseness'? Does following Christ mean that I have to reject my culture? If so, all of it or only part of it? Are there aspects of ancestral practices that I can adopt into my Christian faith? Must I destroy all my family tablets? Why are western churches so dull and uninteresting? Some are so noisy I don't find any peace there as I used to in the temple. When I enter by the front door I feel trapped. I suffer claustrophobia. Can I escape? Is there a back door?

² *Ways of Thinking of Eastern People* by Hajime Nakamura, ed. by Philip P. Wiener (University of Hawaii Press, Honolulu, 1964) pp. 175-294. 'Steak, Potatoes and Chop suey: Linear and non-linear thinking in Theological Education', *Evangelical Review of Theology*, October 1981, pp. 279-286.

I suggest to you that many people today of every race and culture feel this way about our churches. They enter the front door, and some time later leave by the back door of the church, never wanting to return.

So we must ask ourselves, 'Is our suburb in Vancouver a part of Beijing or is it part of New York? Is Regent College, which is sponsoring this conference, a part of Nanling Theological Seminary or shall we say Dallas Seminary Texas? Is it neither or is it both?'

II. TRAVELLING UP THE YANGTZE RIVER

I have travelled up some of the great and holy rivers of India, but not the Yangtze. Perhaps one day I will fulfil this ambition. Is the Yangtze river like the Ganges, meandering across the fiat plains, then cutting through the deep gorges of the mountains, reaching treacherous rapids and waterfalls? Are there dangerous sandbanks and rocks on the way? Is there an analogy between our journey to contextualize our Christian faith and travelling up the Yangtze? Let us explore this exciting but dangerous mission.

Our sailing junk is named 'Good News'. Our boat is well built and strong, tested through many a journey. Is there a pilot on board? YES, his name is Jesus Christ. He is a very experienced pilot, he knows every hidden danger in the river, but he is very strict with the crew and today we are that crew. He knows the currents, the deceptive shallows, the dangerous rocks, the submerged wrecks and the treacherous rapids. He keeps us within the markers, or beacons (the English call them buoys), for to stray outside is certain death. These beacons at every bend and dangerous point in the river protect us and warn us. There is freedom only if we stay within these signposts. If our missionary calling is to interpret the gospel to the people of our contemporary culture, whether in China or Vancouver, we have to be willing to take risks. We must decide which parts of our culture we can bring to the service of Christ, and what must be rejected as syncretistic or evil. Paul took risks. He used terms and ideas from Greek and pagan culture, filling them with Christian content and using them as bridges over which to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ. But [p.371](#) because he never lost sight of his goal or the master he served, he never capitulated to syncretistic thinking. Peter did and Paul had to rebuke him, for he allowed his Jewish culture to shape the message he had to proclaim.

Before we proceed we need a chart of the river. I suggest to you three principles in the chart of contextualizing the Christian faith.

1. First we must reject everything in our religious heritage and culture and in our contemporary culture that is contrary to the Scriptures, the unique and authoritative chart of our Faith and practice. Biblical revelation points to three principle areas where there can be no compromise, namely idolatry, immorality, and communication with the world of the dead. Firstly, the Lord's covenant with Abraham, the laws given to Moses and especially the ten commandments, the word of the Lord to the prophets, the teaching of Jesus Christ (especially the sermon on the mount), the New Testament epistles unite to declare the sovereignty of the one true and triune God. To project other gods, to create and worship God in our own image, or that of creation, is idolatrous. Idolatry includes sexual immorality, witchcraft, selfish ambition and greed ([Gal. 5:19-20](#); [Col. 3:5](#)). All idolatry is subject to the wrath of God and must be put to death. In religious practice idolatry is a way of manipulating God for a self-centred purpose. If true contextualising is to take place, all forms of idolatry, whether physical or spiritual, must be rejected. Secondly, all forms of immorality are contrary to the character of God as Holy Love, and his laws which reflect his character. The second tablet to the Mosaic law given at Sinai, codifies areas of immoral practice. These are expanded as personal and social ethics throughout the Biblical record. Only righteousness can be contextualized, never evil.

Therefore all aspects of cultural life which condone immoral practices, including those with religious sanctions such as child sacrifice and religious prostitution, must be rejected. Thirdly, all practices of divination, sorcery, witchcraft, or consulting mediums or spirits of the dead are detestable to the Lord and are forbidden ([Deut. 18:9-13](#)).

2. The second guideline in our chart is that cultural values and practices that are consistent with God's general revelation through nature and conscience, and which are not in conflict with God's special and saving revelation in Scripture, are to be accepted and transformed to the glory of God. For example, there are values in Chinese family lifestyle drawn from their Confucian heritage which are good and worthy of preserving. Respect for parents, the honouring and care of the elderly are to be commended and are worthy of affirming, especially when we see the lack of respect for parents and irresponsible behaviour to the elderly which so often characterizes western secular society. But for a wife to worship her husband as is common in Indian Hindu culture, or to worship the ancestors as in Chinese, Korean, and Japanese cultures, is contrary to God's design for marriage. But beauty, harmony and truth are found in the art forms of every culture, including painting, calligraphy, dance, drama, poetry, [p. 372](#) and music. These are to be made subject to Christ and to be enjoyed.

We must remember that culture in itself is never neutral. It is the way people respond to good and evil. The Lausanne covenant rightly stated: 'Culture must always be judged and tested by Scripture. Because men and women are God's creatures, some of their culture is rich in beauty and goodness. Because they are fallen all of it is tainted with sin and some of it is demonic. The Gospel does not presuppose the superiority of any culture to another, but evaluates all cultures according to its own criteria of truth and righteousness, and insists on moral absolutes in every culture' (para 10). Therefore, in the process of contextualising our Christian Faith, the gospel must transform every aspect of culture that is true and good, and reject all that is evil, and untrue. The gospel is never a guest of culture, rather Christ is the Lord who transforms culture to his glory.

3. A third principle in our river chart is that the gospel brings to culture new dimensions of truth and goodness. For example, the biblical doctrine of grace when properly understood is unique to the gospel. It is true that there are glimpses of divine grace in other religions including Buddhism, but they are but shadows of the uniqueness of the grace and truth that came with Jesus Christ. Likewise the Christian doctrine of eternal hope is unique to the gospel because the resurrection of Jesus Christ as the hope and model of our resurrection is unique in the realm of religious history. The hope of the resurrection in Islamic doctrine or the hope of nirvana as a release from karma as in Buddhism is a distant and uncertain hope compared with the certainty of the resurrection in Christ. This unique hope gives a totally new perspective to our relationship with our ancestors. These three basic principles in our chart mark the difference between good contextualizing and bad syncretism which is the fusion of truth and untruth.

We are now ready to start our journey up the Yangtze river in our worthy junk the 'Good News'. We will be guided by four beacons or markers that warn us of danger, sandbanks, and rocks, and guide us to navigate the never-changing direction of this glorious river. These beacons or markers will guide us in the contextualising of our Christian Faith as we travel from one culture to another.

1. The Kingdom of Heaven

The concept of heaven is a very important concept in interpreting the gospel in Chinese culture. The meaning of heaven has gone through several changes during the centuries. In maintaining consistency with the Genesis account of the origin of religion as being

monotheistic and salvation through sacrifice (burnt offerings)³ we propose the assumption that the earliest religion of the Chinese was both monotheistic and sacrificial. The further we go back in Chinese history the clearer becomes the [p. 373](#) possibility of an original monotheism. This is certainly true of the Vedic religion of Hinduism and the concept of a high God as creator which is common to most forms of the tribal primal traditional religions. While this hypothesis on the origin of religion is not widely accepted, I believe it is a working hypothesis which is consistent with biblical revelation. The earliest reference to religious belief in China (about 2500 BC) speaks of Shang-Ti as the Lord of Heaven who is personal but remote and unknowable. He is the sole object of worship. We assume he was worshipped as creator, though scholars debate this view. His majesty and holiness were emphasized, but little was said of his love and mercy and thus over the centuries Shang-Ti became more distant so that (by the Zhou Dynasty—1066–770 BC) only the Emperor as the Son of Heaven was permitted to worship him, and that only once a year. Shang-Ti, or T'ien as Heaven became more widely known, ruled everything and rewarded good and punished evil. In the time of Confucius Heaven was further secularized. For him Heaven was the power which controlled everything. However, Confucius shifted the emphasis in religion from heaven to the ideal man and to achieving harmony in society. Under recent communism Heaven lost all religious significance, yet in the hearts of many ordinary Chinese people the memory of Heaven was never lost and no doubt in post-communist China it will again become a living reality.

The challenge to every Chinese Christian is to take the meaning of heaven back to its original source as the creator/redeemer God and to use this belief as a bridge to bring the people to Christ. Paul did this when he used the bridge of the altar to the 'Unknown God' to the Athenian philosophies at Areopagus ([Acts 17:16–34](#)).

It is important to note that when Matthew spoke of the kingdom of Heaven in his gospel he was referring to what Mark and Luke called the kingdom of God. Matthew used Heaven for God in deference to the Jewish practice of not calling Yahweh by his Name. The link then between Heaven and God is clear in scripture.⁴ It has been noted in the history of Christian missions in China and Korea that when the missionaries used Shang-Ti for heaven and Hananim in the Korean language the church grew faster than when other terms were used.⁵

Thus the concept of Heaven is a bridge across the Yangtze to the New Jerusalem ([Revelation 21](#)), which graphically describes the Christian hope of Heaven. Christ is the Alpha and Omega. He is Lord of both Heaven and Earth. He is the living and eternal Heaven.

2. The Glory of the Cross

This second beacon on our journey shines brightly as a beacon of judgement and hope. The cross is God's answer to the human predicament of suffering and lostness. The cross is God's response to the rebellion and sin of our first parents, Adam and Eve, and to the continuing human [p. 374](#) race. If Adam and Eve had not sinned, the cross would not have been needed, and God's self-disclosure as creator would have been sufficient to point the way to God. If the cross had not been necessary then the ways of Confucius, Taoism, Buddhism, as well as primal religion would have been valid and sufficient for life, but the

³ See 'Origins of Religion' by Robert Brow in *Eerdmans' Handbook to the World's Religions*, (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1982) pp. 30–48.

⁴ Dispensational theologians do not accept this identification.

⁵ *Eternity in their hearts* by Don Richardson, (Regal Books, Ventura, 1984) pp. 62–71.

cross stands as a beacon pointing to God's judgement and hope. The cross was no afterthought of God for Christ the lamb was slain from the creation of the world ([Rev. 13:8](#)). The sacrifice of Christ as the Lamb of God was in the heart of God from eternity.

The human predicament or failure can be understood in the Asian context in the relationship of shame and guilt. In the biblical story our first parents were ashamed of their nakedness when their greed and desire for status equal to God was exposed ([Gen. 3:7](#)). Their self-image was broken. They were humiliated before their God and before each other. In shame they tried to cover themselves. At the same time they had a sense of guilt that they had disobeyed God. They each tried to transfer their guilt to the other and to the serpent. As a general principle, shame in Scripture is a term which speaks of humiliation and dishonour, while guilt or the feeling of being guilty is used in a more judicial sense of breaking the law and deserving punishment. It is most commonly associated with sacrifice as a propitiation for wrong done. David's confession of his adultery ([Ps. 51](#)) suggests his deep sense of guilt that his sin was primarily sin against God. He repented and asked for forgiveness. Thus shame is primarily a blushing or sense of humiliation before others, while guilt is a sense of sin against a righteous and just God. One speaks of a break of relationship in society, and the other in relation to God. However, in Christian theology they are interdependent since we are accountable to both God and our neighbour. In Asian religions this is not so. Chinese religion is primarily man-centred and God fades into the background or is denied altogether. Heaven has become secular. Therefore the focus is on loss of face, humiliation, and shame, rather than on a sense of guilt. A Confucian gentleman will experience shame but little guilt. A Taoist priest experiences no guilt, nor does a Confucianist monk. The glory of the Cross is that it offers liberation from both shame and guilt and the restoring of a true relationship with God and with one's neighbour. This is salvation. This is Good News. Is it possible then for a Buddhist monk to become a bodhisattra? Yes, if salvation is only overcoming shame. But if guilt demands a propitiatory sacrifice then it is not possible, for there was only one who was worthy to be that sacrifice, the Lord Jesus Christ. In his shameless and sinless life he made a sufficient atonement for the whole world on the cross. Chinese religion tried the way of self-discipline and self-renewal and it is not surprising that Marxism, which follows the same path, found a ready home in China. Only Chou En-Lai recognized that unless human nature was changed there could be no hope of a permanent change in human society. He too failed; he [p.375](#) ignored the way of the cross. How then can we explain the cross to someone who has never heard of Jesus Christ and has no understanding of sin and guilt? I suggest that our starting point be the felt need arising from shame. We have to begin where people are, not where theologically we think they ought to be. Therefore we must proclaim the Cross in the context of shame, so that we can lead people to a deeper understanding of sin and guilt, and on to repentance and faith. This is a central challenge if we are to effectively contextualize our Christian faith to people whose culture knows little of guilt.

3. The Hope of the Resurrection

This beacon is very crucial to our safe journey up the Yangtze, for it speaks to the problem of death and ancestral worship and practices which are so close to Chinese identity.

Chinese religion is preoccupied with the subject of death. Ancestral worship, cultural practices at the funeral, regular visits to the tomb, the preservation of the family tablets, all leave us in no doubt of this fact. They provide the integrating point for Chinese history, religion and society. The Christian response to ancestral rites is not a simple choice between acceptance or rejection. We reject the ideological content as contrary to Scriptural revelation, but many Christians believe that aspects of the cultural forms can

be adapted and transformed in Christian worship and in honouring the departed. Chinese Christians rightly ask: 'Where are my ancestors? Can I ensure their happiness? Will they bless me or curse me?' Scripture points to both continuity and discontinuity. God declares: 'I the Lord your God am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sins of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to thousands who love me and keep my commandments' ([Ex. 20:5f](#)) But there is also a clear discontinuity. Scripture prohibits any attempt to communicate with the spirits of the departed, as seen in Saul's attempt to communicate with Samuel through the medium of Endor ([1 Sam. 28](#)). All acts of worship of and prayers to the dead are forbidden.

The great religions of Asia point to parallels between their own religious faith and those of Christianity in such ideas as heaven, incarnation, the ethics of karma, and immortality of soul. The one fact that cuts across all parallels is that Jesus Christ rose from the dead, and that his resurrection is the pattern for our resurrection. Not even the Koranic understanding of resurrection comes near to the biblical understanding, for hope in Islam is to return to all the pleasures of this life. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is uniquely God's saving act. Christ's forty days on earth after his resurrection remind us of the unique properties of his transformed life. They testify to continuity with his human life and point to the discontinuity and newness in the way he transcended space and time. In Christ and Christ alone we have the glorious hope for ourselves and our ancestors in Christ of knowing the eternal presence of God himself. In the light of this glorious hope, the Chinese special [p. 376](#) telephone to the dead is obsolete. The hope that in heaven we will communicate with our ancestors in a way that will transcend all human communication experienced now on earth is good news. Understanding the resurrection gives a totally new understanding to death. A truly Christian funeral is the most powerful testimony to the gospel as every good pastor knows. Its evangelistic impact is beyond compare. In our missiological task proclaiming the resurrection can be the most powerful bridge in communicating Christ to people of other faiths. It is the beacon that shines more brightly than any other for those who live in the fear of death.

4. The Way

In Chinese religion Tao is the creative principle, the Eternal Order, the ground of all being. Man and nature have a common origin, and both are subject to Tao. Tao is manifest in the eternal duality of yin and yang, common to Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism. It holds the balance and harmony of heaven and earth, light and darkness, male and female, good and evil, the world of the living and the world of the dead. Tao is neither personal nor the creator. It pervades the unseen world of the spirits, good spirits (Shen), and evil spirits (Kwei). In visiting a Tao temple I was amazed to see the same degeneration from monotheism to panentheism and spirit worship that I have observed in Hindu temples. The lights in the midst of darkness, the disorder and dirt in the temple, the indifference of the priests, the multiple sacrifice to idols, the oppressive sense of the presence of evil declare that Tao is unknowable.

How different is the biblical beacon of the Way! Jesus Christ said 'I am the way (Tao), the truth and the life. No one comes to the father except through me' ([Jn. 14:6](#)). Tao is the eternal Word of God. In the incarnation 'The Word (Tao) became flesh and lived for a while among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son who came from the Father full of grace and truth.' ([Jn. 1:14](#)). In Jesus Christ the mystery of Tao becomes an open secret, Good News for those who walk in darkness. Good News as we journey up the Yangtze.

Christ the Tao triumphed over death in the Cross and brought eternal life to light. In him the kingdom of God triumphed over the kingdom of Satan. Paul writes, 'and having

disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross' ([Col. 2:15](#)). In his life Christ demonstrated this victory in healing the sick, raising the dead, and casting out evil spirits. In Chinese Religion Tao is the virtue of contentment, 'the emptiness of non-desire', the way to self-negation. According to Confucius, each man must find the Tao for himself and for society. For Lao Tzu Tao is the way to true peace and happiness. It is found in the mystery of union with the cosmos and with nature, of the grandeur of the mountains and the smallness of the man in his boat fishing. Through Christian eyes such art reflects the sovereignty of the creator God. I find it very moving and inspiring. [p. 377](#)

Yet biblical Tao as the ethics of living is also very exciting. For Tao as law reflects the glory of the character of God as Holy Love. The Psalmist is caught up with this love when he declares

The law of the Lord is perfect, restoring the soul;
The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple.
The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart,
The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes.
The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever

[\(Ps. 19:7-9\)](#).

We can rightly speak of the grace of law (Tao) as the goodness and mercy of God showing us the Way, and giving us the Holy Spirit to empower us for victorious living. God's power is the way to true peace and happiness. For Christ's peace is not as the world gives, but it is experiencing the bliss of heaven now. Clearly the concept of Tao is one of the most important bridges in contextualizing our Christian faith to people whose wellspring is one of Tao. It is one of the clearest beacons on our journey up the Yangtze.

III. GROWING PLUM TREE CHURCHES

I love plum trees in Chinese art. The gnarled trunk testifies to age and to strength in adversity. In India it is the mango tree which is equally impressive. The strength of the trunk, the symmetry of the branches, the evergreen leaves contrasting with the scorched earth, the luscious and beautifully shaped mango fruit so refreshing in the hot weather have inspired many an artist. The psalmist declares, 'Blessed is the man who is like a tree planted by streams of water which yield the fruit in season' ([Ps. 1:3](#)).

Plum trees belong to China, mango trees to India, but do Chinese plum trees grow in Vancouver? I don't think so. The climate and soil are different. Contextualization is about growing churches, churches that stand the storms of doctrinal dispute, ethical confusion, and rapid cultural change. Such churches must be rooted in culture but their strength comes from the Word of God, the water of Heaven, and the wind of the Holy Spirit. Our task is to plant churches that are true to Christ and the gospel and are not overcome by sectarian and secular philosophies 'distorting the Word of God', and yet are sensitive to cultural heritage and the needs of contemporary society. All too often churches are either potted versions of western originals or they are so radical and identified with local culture that they are hardly recognizable as Christian churches. This applies to both lifestyle and the physical plant. What then will a Chinese church look like in Vancouver? Or new churches in the new China? As a non-Chinese I cannot say. I can only point to some principles in cross-cultural church planting that are important. The task of contextualizing the church can only be done by Chinese Christians. This is your challenge. Let us look at three such principles using the analogy of the plum tree.

1. Cultivate the Roots

In our home in Auckland we have many fruit trees, some old and some [p. 378](#) we have planted in the past two years. We take great care of the roots, mulching the ground, adding compost, regular watering. We are rejoicing in the increased harvest. By analogy the roots of culture are in its world view and its values of what is true and good. Religious belief is the dominant factor in any world view. Arab culture is shaped by an Islamic world view, Chinese culture by Chinese religion. Communist culture is shaped by Marxist doctrine and practice. Paul Tillich has rightly said, 'Religion is the substance of culture and culture is the form of religion.'

While the church must be deeply rooted in culture, its world view and values are drawn from the divinely inspired Scriptures. The gospel is not of human origin; it is given to us by God. The gospel itself is not to be contextualized, but our theological understanding of it is and must be. In other words, the way we understand the gospel, the priorities we give to it will be deeply influenced by our culture. The West is orientated to abstract thinking and rational logic and to prose language, while Asia is orientated to concrete symbolism, analogy, and parabolic method. In this address I have attempted to explore the Asian and Chinese way of doing theology, and I leave it to you to judge how successful I have been.

Ultimately Christian theology is relational. Salvation and lifestyle flow from our vertical relationship with God and our horizontal relationship to one another. Rational understanding depends on the kind of relationships we maintain. Anselm, the archbishop of Canterbury at the end of the 11th century, believed that faith was a necessary foundation for rational proof. In his celebrated dictum, *Credo ut intelligam* (I believe so may I understand), he established a principle of doing theology that has been central to all good contextualizing ever since. Good theology begins with doxology—praise to God. This then is the foundation for effective church planting; it is the roots of the plum tree.

2. Prune the Branches

Last year I pruned rather severely an old apple tree in the garden around our home. The result this year is bigger juicier apples and less rot. Pruning is equally important for the growth of the church. Discipline is painful but necessary. If the church as the body of Christ, the temple of the Holy Spirit, and the family of God, is to grow, discipline needs to be exercised in all aspects of its life—doctrinal belief, ethical behaviour, social activity and in its day-to-day lifestyle. For example, Scripture ordains that sexual intimacy is the privilege of husband and wife. Adultery, fornication, homosexual unions are contrary to God's design and persons engaging in these need to be disciplined for the health of the whole body. The church must be a model before the watching world of a redeemed and transformed society in which peace, justice, and unity reign. We hang our heads in shame that this is not always so. But at the same time church life needs to be ordered, and discipline maintained in ways that are sensitive to cultural norms. The Confucian understanding of discipline is worthy of adaptation and transformation in line with [p. 379](#) the mind of Christ. To adopt it in its traditional form is syncretistic. The family is the biblical unit of the church and of society, and therefore the church will give priority to relationships within a family. Traditional Chinese filial relationships are not to be ignored but to be transformed and integrated into the body life of the church. Singleness within the church needs to be honoured as a gift from God and a holy vocation, with people living in chastity by the grace of God. Thus the body life of the church is the ground of its evangelistic outreach, individuals are reached by individuals, and families by families. In the priesthood of all believers we recognize the gifting of God to men and women in the

many ministries of the church, preparing God's people for works of service so that the body of Christ might be built up in faith and maturity ([Eph. 4:11-13](#)), symbolized in the gnarled trunk of the plum tree and its strong branches.

3. Harvest the Fruit

The plum tree blossom is a sign of fruit to come. Where there is justice, peace and harmony in the body life of the church the fruit of conversion and growth will surely follow. The fruit of the gospel in the church is that we as individuals and families are being recreated in the image of Christ. This is the work of the Holy Spirit, who convicts, refines, leads and empowers us for this new life of service. The fruit of the gospel must not be limited to adding to the numerical growth of the church; it must be seen in the transforming of society. The church's function is to make visible the kingdom of God in a hostile world, maintaining a prophetic witness of rebuke to everything evil, overflowing with love and compassion to the lost and needy, and being salt and light in the world.

Is the pastor the gardener or the fruit gatherer? Does he control the church or is he the servant of the church? Does the Confucian model of hierarchy determine ministry in the church or is it brought under the discipline of God's Word? Every structural model of secular Confucianism and Communist autocracy must be brought under subjection to Christ. Positions of respect in the church have to be won, and they are not hereditary. Respect is given to age and opportunity to the young. Some fruit ripens quickly, others slowly. To harvest before the fruit is ripe, or too late is equally disastrous. How true this is in our evangelistic ministry in Vancouver. If new immigrants are not contacted and nurtured within the first few months of entry into Vancouver it is less likely that there will ever be fruit from among them. When immigrants first arrive they are insecure and open to new friendships and spiritual possibilities. But before long they retreat into their cultural ghetto and find their identity in their traditions. They are beyond the reach of the church.

Conversion is a process of change as well as an event. Conversion is usually a progression beginning with change in outward behaviour and extending to family relationships and finally accepting new values and a new world view. As James argues, change in outward behaviour ought to be a sign of inward faith. [p. 380](#)

We rejoice that God is calling Chinese Christians, and I am thinking of some of the students at Regent College, to give up their freedom and return to their motherland. May they take the content of the gospel with them, but allow the form of the church to grow out of the soil of the new China. Transplanting Vancouver plum trees into mainland China may prove disastrous to the growth of the kingdom of Heaven in that land. Don't plant Vancouver plum stones in Beijing.

CONCLUSION

The work of contextualization is a necessary task if the church is to take root and grow from one culture to another. It calls for courage, wisdom and maturity. It is as exciting a task today as Paul found it to be in the first century as he travelled through the Roman empire.

But it is also a dangerous task. There are many sandbanks and hidden rocks. The whirlpool of syncretism is an ever-present danger to our fragile junk, but with Jesus Christ as the pilot aboard we need not fear. With his Word as a trustworthy chart we may go forward in faith. With his many beacons to guide and warn us we may venture into unknown waters in faith. The new Jerusalem is our goal, a city whose maker is God, a new heaven and a new earth in which dwells righteousness. The door is revolving; be quick.

Work while it is still day, for the night comes when no one can work. If our gospel is hidden it is hidden to those who are perishing ([2 Cor. 4:3](#)). What is your vision for the church in Vancouver and in China? The historian T. R. Glover said of the growth of the early church: 'The Christians out-thought, outlived and out-died the pagan world.' If this is what it means to contextualize our faith then we must contextualize or we will fail in our missionary task. We are being called to think more deeply and culturally about our faith, to be salt and light and be models of a new society, to take up our cross and to be willing to out-die the pagan world, ever seeking first the kingdom of Heaven and his righteousness.

May God help you to build churches that are truly centred in Christ and rooted in culture, and to God be the glory!

An address given at the Annual Spring Conference of the Chinese Studies Program of Regent College Vancouver Canada April 1, 1995. [p. 381](#)

A Nineteenth Century Church Growth Debate: India

Charles Hoole

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During the last three decades a distinctive form of missiology has been developed, packaged and marketed by a cluster of evangelical institutions based in Pasadena, California. Their growing influence in world Christianity was clearly evidenced in the Lausanne II-Manila conference, where their strategies using the year 2,000 A.D. as a date to complete world evangelization received considerable publicity. More importantly however, their influence can be seen in the proliferation of Church Growth centres and Church Growth Seminars, which encourage local churches to adopt the California way of growth which is authenticated by an array of arresting and yet mystifying statistics.

The new missiology attempts to reduce mission to a manageable enterprise. The missionary effort is thus narrowly linked to numerical growth. By implication anything that would hinder such growth has to be eliminated. So it is argued that if 'men like to become Christians without crossing racial, linguistic or class barriers' then for the sake of numerical growth, the converts ought to be encouraged to remain within 'their own hereditary societies'.¹ There emerges from this observation a 'homogeneous unit principle' that is perceived as the key to successful church planting and growth, which in the Indian context would point to the desirability of establishing caste-like churches.

¹ Donald McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1970), p. 108; *Ethnic Realities and the Church: Lessons from India* (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1979), p. 14.

Such an approach to mission is clearly not informed by biblical values and certainly denies the existence of a Christian social ethic. Sociologically it may be true that ‘men like to become Christians without crossing racial, linguistic or class barriers’ but theologically this fact is irrelevant; because through the reconciling [p. 382](#) work of Christ, God has brought into being a new humanity in which the barriers that separated the Gentiles from the Jews are broken down ([Eph. 2:11](#) ff). All who are baptized into Christ, whether they like it or not, become at once members of a new *koinonia* fellowship, where ‘there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female’. All who are incorporated into Christ thus become ‘one in Christ Jesus’ ([Gal. 3:27–28](#)). From a theological perspective, therefore, caste distinctions based on Hindu notions of pollution and purity, and the consequent division of humanity into groups of different nature (*guna*) and status, apart from denying the oneness and solidarity in Christ, are abhorrent to God in a number of ways.

Although the homogeneous unit principal for church growth is theologically suspect, the current popularity of the Californian prescription for growth seems to have its appeal in the confident assertion of its proponents that their prescriptions alone will produce growth. To those who doubt their prescriptions there is a dire warning that any form of insistence that converts should cross caste, race or class boundaries would have the reverse effect, and hence be a recipe for disaster. In the ensuing discussion, I wish to address this contention by providing an historical example that defies our conventional view of church growth.

THE WILSON LINE ENFORCED

The ‘Wilson Line’ named after Bishop Daniel Wilson (1778–1858) of Calcutta, which significantly influenced the nineteenth century Protestant approach to mission, is an important corrective to the pragmatic approach outlined above. It is noteworthy that until Daniel Wilson’s installation as Bishop of Calcutta in 1832, Protestant missionaries in India continued the long tradition of tolerance of caste, a practice that was closely associated with Roman Catholic and Lutheran churches. Tolerance on the part of Lutheran Pietists is rooted in Luther’s doctrine of the ‘two kingdoms’, which generally considers politics, culture and forms of church government as irrelevant to Christian faith and, based on this assumption, they were able to neatly separate religious matters from social. The celebrated Danish missionary, Christian Friedrich Schwartz (1726–1798), exemplified this position on caste and his influence pervaded all the southern churches. Owing to the policy of tolerance of caste and caste Christians, Anglican churches in Vepery, Trichinopoly and Tanjore, at the time Wilson assumed office, had become indisciplined, corrupt, riven with internal conflicts and experienced a steady flow of reversioners to Hinduism.

The ‘Wilson Line’, as it emerged in the 1830s, would diverge sharply from this tradition of toleration. Bishop Wilson was a prominent Evangelical much involved with the reformist group known as the ‘Clapham sect’ in England and a friend in particular of Charles Grant, Zachary Macaulay and William Wilberforce. Macaulay and Wilberforce were also members of his congregation at St. John’s Bedford Row, which was a ‘propriety chapel’ often regarded as a halfway house between the established church and [p. 383](#) dissent.² Immediately after his installation, Wilson attempted to deal with the problems within the churches. He was convinced that the retention of caste customs among Christians was not only a scandal to their religion, but also provided a convenient bridge which increasing numbers were now using to return to their previous faith. In short,

² Mildred E. Gibbs, *The Anglican Church in India, 1600–1970* (New Delhi: SPCK, 1972), p. 104.

retention of caste encouraged apostasy. Wilson's anti-caste feelings seem to have been shaped by the Evangelical pressure group with which he was associated in England.

On 5 July 1833 Bishop Wilson of Calcutta issued his famous letter to Anglican missionaries and congregations throughout his diocese (which then included the whole of India and Ceylon) in which he declared that 'the distinction of castes must be abandoned, decidedly, immediately, finally; and those who profess to belong to Christ must give this proof of their having really put off, concerning the former conversation, the old, and having really put on the new man, in Jesus Christ. The Gospel recognizes no distinctions such as those of castes, imposed by a heathen usage, bearing in some respect a supposed religious obligation, condemning those in the lower ranks to perpetual abasement, placing an immovable barrier against all general advance and fellowship on the one hand, and preventing those of Christian love on the other'³.

A STORM OF PROTEST

Wilson's letter roused a hurricane of unrest in the southern churches. When the letter, translated into Tamil, was read at Vepery Church in January 1834, 'the sudras in the congregation left in a body and their children were afterwards withdrawn from the school. The catechists and schoolmasters among them were consequently after due notice, dismissed'⁴. Similarly, in Tanjore, when the Bishop's letter was read from the pulpit, 'there were scenes of noisy confusion in the church', and to ensure that all would comply with the ecclesiastical requirements 'the seating arrangements in the church were changed, so as to abolish caste distinctions'.⁵

While the storm of protest was still raging in the southern churches of India, another letter was issued on 17 January, 1834, requiring the churches in Calcutta diocese to comply with the following:

- a. The converts all sit together in church.
- b. They come without distinction to the Lord's table.
- c. The country priest or catechist receives into his house anyone that comes to him ... whatever the caste.
- d. Godfathers and godmothers are taken indiscriminately from whatever caste.
- e. In the church-yard no separate place is allotted for the interment of those of the higher castes, as they are called.

In 1835 he visited the disturbed missions and faced the storm without budging an inch from his resolution p. 384 of abolishing caste. In Vepery, Tanjore and Trichinopoly he went to considerable lengths to ensure that dissidents complied with his demands. At the church in Trichinopoly, prior to the celebration of the holy communion, the Bishop 'took by the hand the members of a little group of Christians who were standing apart, and led them firmly to the seats in front ... Thus Sudra sat by Pariah, and no kind of resistance was made.' Following his example, 'the European residents voluntarily mixed themselves

³ J. Bateman, *The Life of the Right Rev. Daniel Wilson, Late Lord Bishop of Calcutta and Metropolitan India* (London: John Murray, 1860), pp. 437–443.

⁴ *Anglican Church*, p. 108.

⁵ *Anglican Church*, p. 109.

among Indians to show the example of union in Christ, a Pariah being placed between the Collector and his wife'.⁶

The Wilson line, it may be observed, was diverging not only from the traditional one but also from the Government line of noninterference with social and religious customs. The caste Christians of Tanjore, well aware of this, appealed to the Government and the matter was referred to London. Many more simply moved into Lutheran and Roman Catholic churches while others used the existing bridge to return to their previous faith. There is little doubt that Wilson's insistence that converts cross the boundaries imposed by caste directly contributed to the decline in numbers.

Despite the exodus, Wilson and his supporters remained steadfast, persisting in their common conviction that 'if caste be retained, Christianity will be destroyed'.⁷ This led to a gradual consolidation of feelings and practice in the Anglo-Saxon Protestant missions in favour of the Wilson line. A Protestant consensus was emerging by the middle of the nineteenth century, when all the Protestant missions, with the solitary exception of the Leipzig Mission, were in agreement in holding that caste was a great evil that must be ruthlessly uprooted from the church. A resolution of the Madras missionary conference in 1848 fully endorsed the Wilson line when it laid down that only those who broke caste by eating food prepared by a pariah should be entitled to baptism.⁸ In other words, boundary-crossing was now made a condition for baptism.

Throughout the 1840s and 1850s almost all the Protestant missions lost members, owing to their tough stand on what they clearly saw as an egalitarian principle too fundamental to be sacrificed for the sake of short-term advantages. The American Madura Mission insisted that all employees should demonstrate their rejection of caste by taking part in 'love-feasts', eating with missionaries and Christians from various castes, food usually prepared by a low-caste cook. The 'love-feasts' forced the issue and became a focus for dissension so that 'all the stations suffered from the dismissal of catechists and nearly all lost in the membership of their churches.'⁹

NEW CHURCH GROWTH

But the unexpected and dramatic part of the story is that in the 1860s **P. 385** and 1870s these same missions whose numbers had been almost static or had even declined began to grow at a rapid rate through mass conversions from depressed castes. Group conversions were something most Protestant missions had neither sought nor expected, and they were no doubt puzzled by this rather dramatic development.

But in retrospect this phenomenon is readily explicable. The 'Wilson line' on caste had developed out of the conviction that Christians of low-caste origin were entitled to equality of treatment within the church. Wilson and his associates had already shown themselves willing to act as advocates of the lowest in society through a series of controversies about equal access to public facilities and so forth, the best known of which is perhaps the 'breast cloth dispute'—the right of shanar or nadar women to change their

⁶ *Anglican Church*, p. 109–110.

⁷ Rt. Rev. Daniel Wilson, p. 434–435.

⁸ Julius Richter, *A History of Mission in India* (Edinburgh, 1908), p. 170.

⁹ John Chandler, *Seventy-five years in the Madura Mission* (Madura: American Mission, n.d.), p. 144.

traditional dress by covering the upper part of their bodies—in southern Travancore.¹⁰ A corollary of the missionaries' detestation of caste was their acceptance of the role of protagonists and patrons of the poor, virtually the only people of influence willing to risk schism in the churches or public disturbance for the sake of the depressed.¹¹

Those from the depressed castes were naturally attracted to the Protestant form of Christianity since it espoused the values of the dignity and equality of all. When the Nadars, Malas, Madigas, Sambavars and Chuhras embraced Protestant Christianity they also gained in esteem as the missionaries mixed freely with them and treated them with respect. There was also the real possibility of social uplift for them as converts. By contrast, Roman Catholics and Lutherans, because they were eager to maintain and Christianize existing structures of society, made conversion to their churches a less likely escape from a religious system of oppression. This was indeed the verdict of Bishop Caldwell who worked among the Nadars. He compared the Paravar fisherfolk converts to Catholicism very unfavourably with the Protestant converts when he stated that 'in intellect, habits and morals the Romanist Hindus do not differ from the heathens in the smallest degree.'¹² Caldwell's judgement may be too sweeping, but there is enough truth in it to explain why those who discouraged boundary crossing, and in effect, adopted and christianized existing structures, simply failed to attract mass movement converts.

In the last analysis, Bishop Wilson's approach to mission emphasizes what is at the core of the gospel of Jesus, the centrality of repentance and forgiveness, of love and acceptance of the marginalized, of justice and fairness in inter-human relationships. In particular, this gospel was acted out in Jesus' own attitudes and p. 386 relationships as well as responses toward the 'poor': the women, tax collectors, Samaritans and other marginalized people. The church in turn is called to emulate the gospel, that is, Jesus' practice of boundary-breaking compassion. As our example has amply demonstrated, when the church embodies such a gospel, God will also give it growth, causing the church to grow in quality as well as quantity.

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Issues in the Hindu-Christian Debate During the Nineteenth Century Bengal Renaissance

¹⁰ Geoff A. Oddie, *Social Protest in India. British Protestant Missionaries and social Reforms 1850–1900* (New Delhi: Manohar Publications, 1978), p. 70; Robert L. Hardgrave, *The Nadars of Tamilnad: The Political Culture of a Community in Change* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), pp. 55–70.

¹¹ Duncan Forrester, *Caste and Christianity. Attitudes and Policies on Caste of Anglo-Saxon Protestant Missions in India* (London: Curzon Press, 1980), pp. 71–73.

¹² *Caste and Christianity*, p. 83.

Chee Pang Choong

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The nineteenth century Bengal Renaissance is a vast subject. This study is mainly concerned with some of the major issues in the Hindu-Christian debate during this period.¹ The scope of this study is narrowed by its special reference to St. Paul's teaching on the religions of the nations.

By 'St. Paul's teaching on the religions of the nations' this study refers particularly, though not exclusively, to [Acts 14, 17](#), [Romans 1](#) and [2](#). The linking up of the main issues in the debate with Paul's teaching on the religions of the nations is a natural one. First, the debate itself shows that some of the major issues raised in it—creation, the divine self-disclosure in nature, knowledge of God, reason, conscience, idolatry and immorality—are clearly within the confines of the apostle's teaching in these passages. Second, these passages have generally been regarded as *logi classici* for the discussion on those topics since the time of the early Christian apologists.² Third, in spite of the many problems involved in the exegesis of these passages, one thing remains sufficiently clear: that these passages are the products of real 'encounter-situations' between the Christian faith and the religions of the Graeco-Roman world at the beginning of the Christian era. The early Christian [p. 388](#) apologists, such as Justin, Athenagoras, Tertullian and Tatian, who defended the Christian faith a century or so after Paul, found themselves in similar missionary situations, and used those passages quite considerably in their apologetics, although they had produced no substantial exegetical work on the apostle's teaching on those issues. Last but not least is the fact that the debate in nineteenth century Bengal was between renascent Hinduism and Christianity when the latter was beginning to assert itself as a formidable missionary religion in the British Indian Empire. Comparisons, however real or superficial, were not uncommonly drawn between the religious and moral states of the Graeco-Roman world in the early centuries of the Christian era and the conditions of the Indian Empire of the nineteenth century.³ Alexander Duff, for instance, saw in renascent Hinduism nothing but 'the struggles of an expiring Paganism ... of heathen Philosophy' which could be likened to what the Graeco-Roman religions and philosophies had gone through when confronted with the Christian gospel during the early Christian centuries.⁴ Nehemiah Goreh consciously took upon himself the role of a Christian apologist in the manner of the early Church fathers and apologists.⁵ Both

¹ One of the vital issues in the debate is christology. However, in view of the fact that the issue has already been given a very full treatment by scholars such as M. M. Thomas, it will not occupy a prominent place in this study. See M. M. Thomas, *The Acknowledged Christ of the India Renaissance* (London, 1969).

² See A. F. Walls, 'The First Chapter of the Epistle to the Romans and the Modern Missionary Movement', *Apostolic History of the Gospel*, ed. by W. W. Gasque and R. P. Martin (Grand Rapids, 1970); H. H. Farmer, *Revelation and Religion* (London, 1954), chapter 1; H. Kraemer, *Religion and the Christian Faith* (London, 1956), chapters 17 and 18; D. E. H. Whiteley, *The Theology of St. Paul* (Oxford, 1974), p. 58.

³ See e.g. Julius Richter, *A History of Missions in India*, Eng. tr. S. H. Moore (London, 1908), p. 249; M. A. Sherring, *The Sacred City of the Hindus* (London, 1868), p. 358; James Ross, 'The Missionary Character of Paul', *Indian Evangelical Review*, No. 1, July, 1873; Alexander Duff, *India and India Missions* (Edinburgh, 1839), pp. 31–34; and J. N. Farquhar, *Modern Religious Movements in India* (New York, 1915), p. 445.

⁴ *India and India Missions*, pp. 270–2.

⁵ *Theism and Christianity* (Calcutta, 1882), Part II, p. 45.

Krishna Mohan Banerjea and Nehemiah Goreh were regarded by the Christians of their days as having inaugurated an era of indigenous Christian apologetics.

Accordingly, the first part of the study is devoted to the historical setting of the debate. The word 'Bengal' is used instead of the more general and broader geographical term 'Indian', because it was in the province of Bengal of the former British Indian Empire that the renaissance of the country first began. Rammohan Roy, 'the father' of the Hindu renaissance, adopted the city of Calcutta, the East-West meeting place, as the centre of his reform movement. The Brahmo Samaj was basically a Bengali movement. Duff, the first missionary of the Church of Scotland to India, landed in Calcutta in 1830 to begin his work in that great city of the East. Banerjea, a convert of Duff, lived and witnessed in Calcutta during most of his lifetime. Even Goreh, a former pundit of Benares, addressed himself mainly to a religious movement, Brahmoism, which was of Bengali origin. All these, together with other possible considerations, clearly show that Bengal has a preferential claim over all the other provinces in the present study.

Although the political and social setting of the Bengal renaissance in the present study begins from 1773, the year of the very important Regulating Act of the East India Company, p.389 it is designed only to provide the study with a broader historical point of reference. In actual fact, the Hindu-Christian debate will be more narrowly confined to the period between the thirties and the eighties of the nineteenth century.

Of the various factors that contributed to the Bengal renaissance, two in particular, have been given places of prominence. These are: the British orientalists' discovery of India's cultural and religious heritage; and English education.

THE ORIENTALISTS' DISCOVERY OF INDIA

The orientalists' discovery of India's 'glorious' past is set against her being in a state of almost unprecedented stagnation and decadence both culturally and religiously, especially during the second half of the eighteenth century. Special attention is given to Warren Hastings' enlightened cultural policy and patronage which had provided the kind of incentive and encouragement for men like Wilkins, Halhed and Jones to pursue their research into the country's abundant sources. Most significant of all was perhaps Colebrooke's favourable account of the Vedic religion, for in it one begins to see the crystallization of the nineteenth century image of the 'golden age' of ancient India, an image which could justly be said to have provided the spiritual inspiration, national self-respect, confidence, and pride which were the most vital ingredients of the Bengal renaissance.

Side by side with this 'reconstructed' and 'romanticized' image of Vedic India⁶ was the gradual but steady process of the westernization of Bengal which was set in motion by its vital contact with the west through the British. In the Bengali context, westernization meant at the same time modernization, and this may be understood in terms of its inevitable social, economic, cultural and mental responses and readjustments to the stimulating forces from without. Special consideration is here given to the unique role played by English, the language of the rulers, and English education which was regarded by Rammohan Roy as being 'more liberal and enlightened' than the traditional Sanskrit training, a system of education held by the great reformer to have been in the captivity of

⁶ David Kopf, *British Orientalism and the Bengal Renaissance*, (University of California, 1969), p. 41.

the priestly order for centuries.⁷ It was to English education that the reformer believed that India could really 'look forward with pleasing hope to the dawn of knowledge'.⁸

There is perhaps hardly a better way of indicating the importance of English education than by simply pointing out the fact that virtually all the main participants in the Hindu-Christian debate during this period were well versed in English language and literature, even including Nehemiah Goreh who began his English training at a relatively late stage. Consequently, nearly all their works which are relevant to this p. 390 study were either written in English or had been translated into English. The Brahmo Samaj drew their main support from the English-educated to whom the Christian apologists from Duff to Goreh addressed themselves ceaselessly.

THE HINDUS' RESPONSE

Representing Bengal's early and most positive response to the challenge of western ideas and innovations was undoubtedly the group of educated Bengali under the leadership of Rammohan Roy.

While recognizing the influence that Islam and Hindu theology possibly had on the reformer during the early days of his youth, this study takes the view that it was from the newly reconstructed golden image of the ancient Vedic age and other western values and ideas that Rammohan Roy first received his real source of inspiration and impulse to begin the first reformation in modern India. However, two qualifications must be made with reference to this observation. First, although he readily accepted the image now created by the British orientalists, he evidently did not share their enthusiasm for classicism. This can best be illustrated by his campaign for English education as well as by his strong objection to the proposed founding of the Sanskrit College of Calcutta. It was Rammohan Roy's conviction that once the mind of the Hindus was 'enlightened' they could not fail to understand and appreciate 'the true meaning of our sacred books'. Again, like many of the enthusiasts for western education of his days, he did not see what devastating effects this system of education would eventually have on the youth of India, nor did he live quite long enough to see the kind of liberals, radicals, sceptics and atheists that an institution such as the Hindu College could produce. Second, it must be said that while the first impulse he received for his campaign against idolatry and other religious and social evils was basically western in origin, it was on the sacred scriptures of his ancestral religion, more particularly, the Upanishads, that he ultimately took his stand. From this point of view he was 'orthodox' and 'conservative', and he proudly identified himself with the main stream of Hinduism and categorically denied that he ever claimed to be an 'innovator'. It would be nearer to the truth to characterize his religion as a form of Vedantism than to regard it as 'Neo-Hinduism'. And it would certainly be an anachronism to call it a kind of 'natural religion' like later Brahmoism.

Duff deserves a place in this study for at least the following reasons. First, to a very considerable extent he represented the kind of nineteenth century British evangelicalism which was largely the product of the great evangelical revival that the country had experienced in the previous century. Second, his attitude towards Hinduism was an exceedingly negative one. And it was his *magnum opus*, *India and India Missions*, appearing in 1839, which aroused organized opposition on the part of the Hindu community in

⁷ A Letter on English Education, addressed to Lord Amherst, *The English Works of Raja Mohun Roy*, ed. by J. C. Ghose (Calcutta, 1885), vol. I. p. 473.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 470.

Calcutta, represented by Debendranath Tagore and his party. Third, he was a firm believer in the ultimate conversion p.391 of India by means of western education accompanied by Christian teaching. And he arrived in the country just in time to participate in the controversy over the matter of English education. Finally, he was the instrument for the conversion of the first high-caste Bengali intellectuals of the Hindu College, including Krishna Mohan Banerjea.

The Hindu protest against Duff's indictments of Hinduism found its indignant expression in the form of a Brahmo tract, 'Vedantic Doctrines Vindicated'. Although one may not agree with P. K. Sen that the work was 'calm and dignified in tone', it was clearly 'solid and substantial in its manner.'⁹ Apart from some of the substantial arguments that the tract had advanced for Hinduism, there was also in it the gradual emergence of the idea of modern Vedantism as a form of 'natural religion' which later characterized the creed of Brahmoism, although the 'vindicators' strongly-held that they were in no way trying to depart from the main line tradition of their ancestral religion. The other significant thing about the tract was that the main issues raised in it continued to be the most vital points of debate between the Brahmos and the Christians in the following decades.

The public declaration of the 'Vedantic Doctrines Vindicated' that 'the Vaidas and the Vaidas alone' were the sole foundation of modern Vedantism did not satisfy all members of the *Tattvabodhini Sabha*. Disagreements within the *Sabha* led to the formal consideration of the vital subject of the infallibility of the Vedas, from about 1846 to 1850. In 1850 came the modern Vedantists' rejection of the doctrine of Vedic infallibility under the leadership of Debendranath Tagore. It was resolved that henceforth

the Vedas, Upanishads, and other ancient writings were not to be accepted as infallible guides, that Reason and Conscience were to be the Supreme Authority, and the teachings of the Scriptures were to be accepted only in so far as they harmonized with the light within us.¹⁰

Although the belief in the infallibility of the Vedas had now been formally abandoned, the Upanishads continued to be greatly venerated by the Brahmos, or modern Vedantists. Upanishadic texts continued to be used in the divine services of the Brahmo Samaj and some were used in the composition of the *Brahmo Dharma*, or the 'Religion of Brahman', by Debendranath Tagore. On the other hand, the Brahmos never failed to lay claim on the 'volume of Nature' to be the new foundation of their 'natural religion'. The phrase 'volume of Nature' was often used interchangeably with other terms such as 'intuition' or 'natural reason', by the Brahmos.

In the next couple of decades following the dethronement of the Vedas a considerable amount of apologetic work was produced by the Brahmos to defend the new basis of their religion—'intuition' or 'natural reason'. There was also the belief amongst the leaders of the p.392 Brahmo Samaj that for the 'purposes of self-vindication as well as of conviction' their controversy with the Christians would have to continue.¹¹ At the same time the Christians were equally convinced that with the appearance of Banerjea's *Dialogues on the Hindu Philosophy* in 1861, and Goreh's *A Rational Refutation of the Hindu Philosophical Systems* a year later, an era of Indian Christian apologetics had dawned.

⁹ P. K. Sen, *Biography of a New Faith* (Calcutta, 1950), vol. I. p. 183.

¹⁰ Satyendranath Tagore (ed.), *Autobiography of Maharshi Devendranath Tagore* (Calcutta, 1909), pp. iii-iv.

¹¹ Raj Narain Bose, *Hints Showing the Feasibility of Constructing a Science of Religion* (Bengal, 1878), p. 25.

In the sixties a charismatic figure began to emerge in the Brahmo movement in the person of Keshub Chunder Sen. But very soon tensions between this progressive young leader and the more conservative 'old Brahmo' Debendranath Tagore began to show itself, and in 1865 came the great split within the Brahmo movement. A large number of the young Brahmoe gave their allegiance to Keshub Chunder Sen while the majority of the older and more conservative members remained with Debendranath Tagore's old party, now called the 'Adi Brahmo Samaj', or 'the original Samaj'. And Keshub Chunder Sen's group claimed the title the 'Brahmo Samaj of India'.

From the sixties onwards the Adi Brahmo Samaj began to claim openly that 'Brahmoism is both Universal Religion and a form of Hindooism', which sought to 'preach the catholic sentiments of *Brahma Dharma* in a national form'.¹² However, the balance between 'catholicism' and 'nationalism' was difficult to maintain. In the end the stress was on the national, or Hindu side; and a strong affinity was maintained between the new creed and traditional Hinduism. On the other hand, Keshub Chunder Sen appeared to be more and more 'pro-Christian' in some of his public pronouncements about Jesus Christ. At the same time the former *bhakta* became very much preoccupied with the idea of the 'direct perception' of the Deity and considered his Brahmoism as a 'living religion'. Sen's thought found its ultimate expression in his 'New Dispensation' in 1880.

THE APOLOGETICS OF BANERJEA AND GOREH

The apologetic works of Banerjea and Goreh from the early sixties till the eighties are the main concern of the third part of the study: Banerjea in search of a meaningful dialogue with the Aryan religious tradition; while Goreh was mainly concerned with his critique of natural religion, or Theism, and sought to present Christianity as the revealed religion.

Some of the major issues in the debate are recapitulated in the last part of the study with special reference to St. Paul's teaching on the religions of the nations based on the exegesis of [Acts 14](#), [17](#), [Romans 1](#) and [2](#). The concluding chapter attempts to give a summary of the salient points of the study.

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Christian Missions and the Western Guilt Complex

Lamin Sanneh

Reprinted with permission from The Christian Century April 8, 1987

¹² *Brahmic Questions of the Day*, by An Old Brahmo (Calcutta, 1869), pp. 4, 8.

When at the age of 18 I approached a Methodist church in the Gambia with a request for baptism, thus signalling my conversion to Christianity from Islam, the resident senior minister, an English missionary, responded by inviting me to reconsider my decision. And, while I was at it, he said, I should also consider joining the Catholic Church. My conversion obviously caused him acute embarrassment, and I was mortified on account of it.

However, his imaginative solution of my linking up with the Catholic Church did not work out; after a year of vain attempts I returned to the English missionary. After assuring me that the baptism of the Methodists was recognized by the Catholics, he agreed in principle to receive me into the church.

At that stage of my life I would have joined the church on almost any condition, for I had this absurd idea that the gospel had marked me out for something, whether for reward, rebuke or ridicule I did not know; whatever it was, I felt inexorably driven toward it. On the night of my baptism I was overcome with emotion, finding it hard to believe that my wish was being fulfilled. Not even the thousand tongues of Methodist hymnody could have given utterance to the avalanche of thoughts and feelings that erupted in me.

I make this extended autobiographical introduction to indicate how in the liberal Methodist tradition I first encountered the guilt complex about missions which I have since come to know so well after living more than two decades in the West. I have found Western Christians to be very embarrassed about meeting converts from Asia or Africa, but when I have repeated for them my personal obstacles in joining the church, making it clear that I was in no way pressured into doing so, they have seemed gratefully unburdened of a sense of guilt. Furthermore, when I have pointed out that missionaries actually made comparatively few converts, my Western friends have reacted with obvious relief, though with another part of their [p. 394](#) minds, they insist that missionaries have regularly used their superior cultural advantage to instil a sense of inferiority in natives.

It seems that for my Western Christian friends, if missionaries did not justify by their field labours the guilt the West carries about the mischief of the white race in the rest of the world, then other missionaries would have to be invented to justify that guilt.

It should provide food for thought that the church has succeeded in importing this guilt complex into Africa. I found the church there to be self-conscious about matters religious—especially matters involving God, death, judgement, the virgin birth and miracles—which presumably the Enlightenment banished from rational debate. Consequently, the church was wary of embracing members tainted with the brush of conversion, for such new members would not have acquired the reservation deemed appropriate to religious subjects.

The church took further precautions against religious enthusiasm: for my catechism I was introduced to New Testament form criticism and to Reinhold Niebuhr, Paul Tillich, John Macmurray, John A. T. Robinson, Vincent Taylor, Oliver Chase Quick and other 'sensible' writers. On my own initiative I discovered the works of C. S. Lewis, whose brand of commonsense Christianity encouraged me no end. Nevertheless, the liberal strand was the dominant theme in my formation, hallowed with the refined ministrations of writers like Bertrand Russell and Harold Nicolson.

The church's hesitant attitude about religious conversation in turn surprised, frustrated, dismayed, saddened and confused me. Also, given the prominent place religion occupies in Africa, I was baffled by the apparent determination of my church superiors to keep religious subjects from all 'decent' and 'culture' conversation. I realize now that this attitude is deep-rooted in Western liberal culture. However, before I left Africa for Europe I had no way of understanding it, for it had no analogue in my society, and, more important for me, it appeared to skirt the declared aims of a missionary church.

My business in this article is not to linger on Memory Lane but to confront directly the guilt complex about missions that so often prevails in liberal counsels. I believe that the liberal claim to openmindedness about missions would be strengthened by a closer examination of what actually happened—and may still be happening—in the encounter between Western missionaries and non-Christian peoples.

Much of the standard Western scholarship on Christian missions proceeds by looking at the motives of individual missionaries and concludes by faulting the entire missionary enterprise as being part of the machinery of Western cultural imperialism. But missions in the modern era has been far more, and far less, than the argument about motives customarily portrays.

Missionaries of course went out with all sorts of motives, and some of them were clearly unwholesome. Yet if we were to try to separate good from bad motives, I daresay we would not, after a mountain of labour, advance the subject much p. 395 beyond the molehill of stalemate. We might, for example, take a little out of the cultural imperialism bag and put it into the social-service category, and ascribe both phenomena to Western cultural conditioning. But that exercise would do little to further our understanding of the nature and consequences of crosscultural missions.

Instead of examining motives, I propose that we focus on the field setting of missions, where local feedback exerted an influence all its own. And what stands out in particular about the field setting is the emphasis missionaries gave to translating Scripture into vernacular languages. Most Protestant missionary agencies embarked on the immense enterprise of vernacular translation with the enthusiasm, urgency and commitment of first-timers, and they expended uncommon resources to make the vernacular dream come true. Today more than 1,800 languages have been involved in the worldwide translation movement. In Africa alone, the Bible has been translated into 522 vernacular languages, with texts in over 200 additional languages now under development. Catholic missions have been similarly committed to the transposition of the catechism into vernacular terms, with language study a crucial part of the enterprise. The importance of vernacular translation was that it brought the missionary into contact with the most intimate and intricate aspects of culture, yielding wide-ranging consequences for both missionary and native alike.

The translation enterprise had two major steps. One was the creation of a vernacular alphabet for societies that lacked a literary tradition. The other step was to shake the existing literary tradition free of its esoteric, elitist predilection by recasting it as a popular medium. Both steps simulated an indigenous response and encouraged the discovery of local resources for the appropriation of Christianity. Local believers acquired a new interest not only in the vernacular but also in recording their history and collecting accounts of indigenous wisdom. One missionary whose work sparked such response was J. G. Christaller, who came from Basel to the Gold Coast (now Ghana). Between 1871 and 1881 he produced a Bible translation, a dictionary and a grammar of the Twi language, crowning his labours with a compilation of 3,600 Twi proverbs and axioms. He also helped found the *Christian Messenger* in 1883, a paper devoted to the promotion of Akan life and culture. His *Twi Dictionary* has been acclaimed as an 'encyclopaedia of Akan civilization' by the modern generation of Ghanaian scholars.

Often the outcome of vernacular translation was that the missionary lost the position of being the expert. But the significance of translation went beyond that. Armed with a written vernacular Scripture, converts to Christianity invariably called into question the legitimacy of all schemes of foreign denomination—cultural, political and religious. Here was an acute paradox: the vernacular Scriptures and the wider cultural and linguistic enterprise on which translation rested provided the means and occasion for arousing a

sense of national pride, yet it was [p. 396](#) the missionaries—foreign agents—who were the creators of that entire process. I am convinced that this paradox decisively undercuts the alleged connection often drawn between missions and colonialism. Colonial rule was irreparably damaged by the consequences of vernacular translation—and often by other activities of missionaries.

Because of its concern for translations that employ the speech of the common workaday world, Christian proclamation has had a populist element. In many traditional societies, religious language has tended to be confined to a small elite of professionals. In extreme cases, this language is shrouded under the forbidding sanctions of secret societies and shrines, access to which is through induced trances or a magical formula. The Christian approach to translatability strikes at the heart of such gnostic tendencies, first by contending that the greatest and most profound religious truths are compatible with everyday language, and second, by targeting ordinary men and women as worthy bearers of the religious message. This approach introduced a true democratic spirit into hitherto closed and elitist societies, with women in particular discovering an expanded role.

For example, after George Pilkington, the English lay missionary, translated the Bible in Uganda, some 2,000 men and 400 women acted as colporteurs operating as far as the forests of the Congo. Pilkington's translated Bible sold 1,100 copies in the first year of publication, with an additional 4,000 New Testaments, 13,500 single Gospels and 40,000 readers. Theodore Roosevelt, who visited Uganda in 1910, witnessed the scene and said it was nothing short of astounding.

The project of translation contains implications about the nature of culture itself. Translation destigmatizes culture—it denies that culture is 'profane'—and asserts that the sacred message may legitimately be entrusted to the forms of everyday life. Translation also relativizes culture by denying that there is only one normative expression of the gospel: it results in a pluralism in which God is the relativizing centre. The Christian insight into this phenomenon carries with it a profound ethical notion, for it opens culture up to the demand and need for change. A divinized, absolutized culture precludes the possibility of change.

The impact of the translation process is, indeed, incalculable. Suddenly hitherto illiterate populations were equipped with a written Scripture for the first time, and from the wonder and pride of possessing something new that is also strangely familiar, they burst upon the scene with confidence in the whos and whys of their existence. For example, the Luo tribesman Matthew Ajuoga was helping missionaries translate the Bible into his native language. He discovered that the missionaries translated the Greek word *philadelphia*, 'brotherly love', into Luo as *hera*, and this experience caused him to protest, saying that 'love' as the Bible explained it was absent from the missionaries' treatment of Africans. He subsequently founded an independent church, the Church of Christ in Africa, in 1957, which gained a considerable following across tribal divisions. Another [p. 397](#) example is the Zulu Bible, which enabled Zulu converts to respond to missionary criticism of the Zulu way of dressing. The Zulus said that they found in [Genesis 27:16](#) sanction for their custom of dressing in skins, a practice the missionaries had attacked. In the eyes of the Zulus, it was the missionaries who were flouting the dress code. Thus it was that, confronted with the bewildering fact of Western intrusion, local populations used the vernacular to avert ultimate disenchantment, in this way utilizing the gains of mission to offset the losses to colonialism.

The evidence of the importance of translation in Christian missions is remarkably consistent. From the 16th century when Francis Xavier decided to cast his lot with the East against his own Western culture, to the 19th century when Cristaller singlehandedly

promoted Akan culture, to the 20th when Frank Laubach inveighed against the encroachments of American power in the Philippines, missionaries in the field have helped to promote indigenous self-awareness as a counterforce to Western cultural importation. Obviously missionaries wanted to proclaim the gospel because they believed it to be superior to any message others might offer. But it is really not consistent to blame missionaries for believing in what they preach. And we must note this salient, consistent feature of their work—namely, that they confidently adopted the language and culture of others as the irreplaceable vehicle for the transmission of the message. Whatever judgement missionaries brought with them, it certainly was not about the fitness of the vernacular to be the hallowed channel for communicating with God.

Besides the paradox of foreign missionaries establishing the indigenous process by which foreign domination was questioned, there is a theological paradox to this story: missionaries entered the missionary field to convert others, yet in the translation process it was they who first made the move to ‘convert’ to a new language, with all its presuppositions and ramifications. Thus we have the example of Robert de Nobili (1577–1656), an Italian nobleman who went to India as a Jesuit missionary, arriving there in 1605. He passed for a *guru*, an Indian saintly figure, and even for a *sannyasi*, a wild, holy man, adopting Hindu customs and religious terminology to define his own personal piety. Two other examples were Matteo Ricci (1552–1610), who adopted the opposite path to de Nobili by assimilating into upper-class Chinese society during the Ming dynasty, coming to China in 1580, eventually undergoing a profound cultural transformation as a Confucian scholar; and Charles de Foucauld, who served in the French army in the Algerian war where he witnessed moving scenes of Muslims’ personal piety, leading him to regain his own Christian faith, and becoming in everything a Tuareg Bedouin nomad. Whether missionaries converted anybody else, there is no doubt that they were their own first converts.

It is also apparent that at least in Africa, Christian missions expanded and deepened pluralism—in language, social encounter and ethnic participation in the Christian movement. p. 398 Missions helped to preserve languages that were threatened by a rising *lingua franca*, extended the influence of the vernacular through careful methodical and systematic investigations in the field, and helped to establish connections within the wider family of languages. In their grammars, dictionaries, primers, readers and systematic compilations of proverbs, axioms, customs and other ethnographic materials, missionaries furnished the scientific documentation by means of which the modern study of cultures could begin. Whether missionaries translated well or badly—and there are masterpieces as well as outrageous parodies—they made field criteria rather than the values of empirebuilding their operative standard.

Indeed, if there is any aspect of missionaries’ motives I would want to pursue, it would be their desire to excel in whatever they undertook. They scrutinized their work in the hard and sombre light of giving an account before God. Thus we find in their meticulous record-keeping, in the minutiae of account ledgers, in faithful official and family correspondence and in the assembling of petitions, an extraordinary concern for accuracy.

In examining missionary archives I am struck constantly by the missionaries’ painstaking attention to detail. Inventiveness was a rather rare vice in that stern, austere world of missionary self-accounting. Thus, unwittingly, was laid the firm foundation of modern historiography in Africa and elsewhere. Even the nationalist point of view that came to dominate much historical writing about the new Africa was to a large extent moulded by the missionary exploration of indigenous societies.

When they succeeded in translation, missionaries inadvertently vindicated indigenous claims, and when they failed they called forth the criticism of local people. Furthermore, their success in translation merely hastened the day of their departure, while failure called into question their continuing presence. Words have impact, especially in the abundant surplus of their unintended consequences. Translation is no respecter of motives—which is why it should be detached from the question of motives and examined in its own right.

Missionary statesmen in the 19th century saw quite clearly where the vernacular principle was leading, and they welcomed it as the supreme reward of Christian discipleship. For example, Henry Venn of the Anglican Church Missionary Society said that ‘the marked national characteristics’ that the vernacular principle fosters in the expression of the gospel, ‘in the overruling grace of God, will tend to its perfection and glory’. He spoke vividly of ‘a euthanasia of mission’ once the vernacular principle exerted its full force. He said the business of mission was ‘not to supply an European pastorate, but to prepare native pastors ... and to fix the spiritual standard in such churches by securing for them a supply of Vernacular Scriptures’ (*To Apply the Gospel: Selections from the Writings of Henry Venn* [Eerdmans, 1971]). Such an aim, he counselled, differed sharply from the goals of colonialism in perpetuating overseas dependencies.

The modern religious map of [p. 399](#) Africa reveals in a striking way the close connection between the growth of Christianity and the widespread employment of the vernacular. The converse also seems to hold: Christian growth has been slightest in areas where vernacular languages are weak—that is, where a *lingua franca* such as English, French, Portuguese, Arabic or Swahili has succeeded in suppressing mother tongues.

To make the contrast even starker, we can point out that the reverse phenomenon appears in Islam, also a missionary religion, but one that does not translate its Scriptures for its canonical rites. Islam is strongest in societies where a *lingua franca* exists, and weakest in places of vernacular preponderance. For example, Islamic gains in north Nigeria occurred at the hands of the Fulani reformers in the 19th century. In the process, the Fulani assimilated to the Islamized Hausa culture and lost their own Fulfulde language.

Islamic reform has nowhere to my knowledge made the perpetuation of the vernacular a concomitant of orthodox rectitude, and I know of no Muslim language institutes dedicated to the systematic study of the vernacular. Islam has succeeded brilliantly in its missionary enterprise, promoting at the same time a universal devotion to the sacred Arabic. In Africa, we see evidence of its considerable gains in spite of what we might regard as insuperable odds against a nontranslatable Scripture. For this reason the implications of Muslim success for pluralism are quite serious.

I will conclude, as I began, with a personal story, this one about the unexpected dynamics of translation. After completing my Islamic studies in the Middle East in 1969 I went to Yorubaland in Nigeria as a lay worker with the Methodist Church. I was immediately taken to the local market to purchase some bare essentials for my fiat. My companion was a senior English missionary who had spent many years in Ibadan and knew his way around. He translated for me as we did the round of market stalls, with the stallkeepers’ curiosity naturally aroused by the missionary, in their eyes a stranger from beyond the stars.

Before we had picked our way through the market, a small crowd had gathered to marvel at the sight of a white man translating for an African in an African language. It was as if we had got our arrangement wrong and put the Western cart before the African horse. The image of ‘total stranger’ the stall-keepers had of the Western missionary was completely belied by this exposure.

Of the several lessons one can draw from this incident, one is particularly relevant to the Western guilt complex about missions. There is a widespread tendency in the West to see missions as destroyers of indigenous cultures or else as alien cultural agents from the West. Yet in the incident at the local market, my missionary companion came to be acknowledged by the stallkeepers as an accomplished 'native', one of themselves, on the basis of the vernacular rule that they normally used to determine the boundary between insiders and outsiders. In p. 400 the act of translating, my missionary friend demonstrated that he had as much claim to being in Africa as he had to identifying with the West. His own Western cultural differences were no longer a barrier, nor even a useful evaluative standard, but an opportunity for cross-cultural interchange. This example suggests that Christian missions are better seen as a translation movement, with consequences for vernacular revitalization, religious change and social transformation, than as a vehicle for Western cultural domination. Such an assurance should help alleviate some of the Western guilt complex about missions.

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Book Reviews

THE UNIQUE CHRIST IN OUR PLURALIST WORLD

edited by Bruce J. Nicholls

(Published 1994 on behalf of the World Evangelical Fellowship by The Paternoster Press, Carlisle UK and Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA Paperback, 288 pp. ISBNs 0 85364 574 4 and 0 8010 2013 1)

(Reviewed by David Parker)

The WEF Theological Commission conducted a Consultation in Manila June 16–22, 1992 on the topic of this volume. More than eighty theologians from all parts of the world participated. The papers are here published under the editorship of Bruce Nicholls, a former director of the Commission and currently editor of its journal, *Evangelical Review of Theology*. In addition to his introduction, there may be found the fourteen page official statement for the Consultation, 'The WEF Manila Declaration', a foreword by the Commission director, Dr Bong Rin Ro and twenty papers grouped under the following areas: The Unique Christ in relation to the plurality of religions, the challenge of modernity, political ideologies, the church's diversity and unity, peace and justice and hope and judgement of the world. Writers include Kwame Bediako, Rene Padilla, Valdir Steuernagel, John Vissers, Christopher Sugden and Isaac Zokoue. Notes and a subject index are appended, increasing the value of this compendium on a subject which is 'arguably the most important and urgent task facing the church worldwide today'.

AN EVANGELICAL RESPONSE TO BAPTISM, EUCHARIST AND MINISTRY

edited by D. A. Carson

(Prepared by the Study Unit on Ecumenical Issues of the WEF Theological Commission.
Published on behalf of the WEF by the Paternoster Press, Carlisle, 1992 Paperback 60
pages, ISBN 0 85364 513 2)

(Reviewed by David Parker)

When the Commission on Faith and Order of the World Council of Churches met in 1982 and produced the document, *Baptist, Eucharist p. 402 and Ministry*, it invited responses from church groups around the world. The response of the World Evangelical Fellowship was prepared by the Study Unit on Ecumenical Issues of the Theological Commission and finalized in June 1989. A group of nine theologians worked on the document over a period of three years before it was completed. It is both a response to the invitation given by Faith and Order and a contribution to the thinking of the international evangelical community. For convenience, this volume brings together both the twenty-two page text of the response and the original Faith and Order document, thus presenting one of the most significant ecumenical statements in recent times and a 'useful perspective on evangelical positions on the sacraments, Christian initiation and Christian ministry at the end of the twentieth century'.

RIGHT WITH GOD: JUSTIFICATION IN THE BIBLE AND THE WORLD

edited by D. A. Carson

(Published in 1992 on behalf of the World Evangelical Fellowship Theological Commission by The Paternoster Press, Carlisle, Cumbria, UK /and Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA Paperback 309 pp. ISBNs 0 85364 516 7 and 0 8010 2561 3)

(Reviewed by David Parker)

This is the fourth volume to be produced by the Faith and Church Study Unit of the WEF Theological Commission. It is the product of a consultation held at Tyndale House, Cambridge in 1988 that brought together evangelical theologians from various parts of the world to work on papers that had previously been circulated for study. Thirteen papers are presented in this volume, together with an introduction by the editor, covering aspects of the topic ranging from biblical and dogmatic perspectives through historical developments to personal application and relevance to other religions. Contributors included Edmund P. Clowney (USA), Norvald Yri (Sweden), Ronald Fung (Hong Kong), Guillermo Mendez (Guatemala) and Chris Marantika (Indonesia). Working with such diverse backgrounds and setting out to create a comprehensive study of such a vital topic, the editor and writers have produced an unusually helpful manual which will repay careful study.

WORSHIP: ADORATION AND ACTION

edited by D. A. Carson

(Published in 1993 on behalf of the World Evangelical Fellowship Theological Commission by The Paternoster Press, Carlisle, Cumbria, UK and Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA Paperback 256 pp. ISBN 0 85364 523 X)

(Reviewed by David Parker)

This is the fifth and final volume in a series of studies produced by the Faith and Church Study Unit of the WEF Theological Commission and is devoted to biblical and theological aspects of worship. Representing p. 403 many diverse points of view, theologians from

several countries met in Cambridge in 1990 to finalize papers that had previously been submitted for study. Two chapters are devoted to biblical matters, four to discussion of Reformation traditions while five others discuss free church traditions, including the charismatic movement and the student world. The opening and closing chapters focus on personal and systematic concerns. The panel includes David Peterson (Australia), Klaas Runia (Netherlands), Peter Lewis (U.K.), Miroslav Volf (Europe), Yoshiaki Hattori (Japan) and Felicity Houghton (Bolivia). Extensive notes and references support the in-depth treatment of the topic which is intended to supplement the mechanical and inspirational treatment often given it in popular evangelicism. The opinions expressed, although at times in disagreement with one another, are an indication of the richness of understanding and experience in regard to worship that may be found in the worldwide evangelical tradition.

INTEGRATIVE THEOLOGY: VOLUME THREE

by Gordon Lewis and Bruce A. Demarest

(Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1994 Hb 576 pp. ISBN 0 310 59830 3)

(Reviewed by David Parker)

Denver Seminary professors, Gordon Lewis and Bruce Demarest, have completed their innovative systematic theology with this, the third volume. It deals with conversion, sanctification, the church and the last things under the headings, 'Personal Transformation', 'Social Transformation' and 'Future Culmination'. This volume contains just under five hundred pages of text, about the same as Volume Two, and uses the same two column format with all notes at the end of the book. The space devoted to indexes is less, but there is a short section of 'Review Questions and Ministry Projects' which is designed for use with each of the chapters.

The authors have not mentioned any modification of their method and approach in the introduction to this volume as they did in the previous one, thus implying that they are satisfied with the 'integrative' method they have developed (fully explained in Volume 1, published in 1987). This method is intended to relate the biblical, historical, systematic, apologetic and practical aspects of each doctrinal topic to each other. Even though this approach can sometimes be repetitive and artificial, it is a useful one for the more practical and controversial doctrines which are included in this volume.

It is noticeable, though, that the listing and appraisal of alternate contemporary and historical doctrinal viewpoints tends to produce only a critical catalogue of theological opinions. Furthermore, the biblical treatment does not take much account of the critical issues or the context which is a serious deficiency, given that in their explanation of their particular method, the authors place so much emphasis on the value of a comprehensive biblical analysis as an important way of [p. 404](#) overcoming confessional and dogmatic biases in theological reasoning.

Even though the treatment of topics is extensive, various current issues such as worship, ethics, contextualisation and relationships to everyday life are not covered. Rigid adherence to the traditional theological framework is the main factor here, which also limits the authors' opportunity to integrate the various topics with each other and so develop a dynamic theological vision to present to the reader. The problemcentred approach and the emphasis on ascertaining truth through testing rival claims also contribute to the problem.

Nevertheless, the wide range of issues and the detailed biblical, theological and practical treatment they receive are sure to make this series a valuable addition to the store of reference works now available.

THEOLOGY FOR THE COMMUNITY OF GOD

by Stanley J. Grenz

(Carlisle: Paternoster, 1994 Pb 890 pp. ISBN 0 85364 627 9)

(Reviewed by David Parker)

This ambitious volume by the Professor of Theology and Ethics at Regent College and Carey Theological College, Vancouver is one of the array of new evangelical systematic theologies now becoming available. As such, it is well above average in concept and execution. It builds in part at least upon guidelines set down in the author's earlier volume, *Revisioning Evangelical Theology: A Fresh Agenda for the 21st Century* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1993).

Grenz's work, (which contains some 859 pages of text compared with Erickson's 1,230 and Grudem's 1,150) consists of a lucid, almost narrative, exposition of all the traditional topics of systematic theology, rather than offering a manual of theology with detailed arguments or exhaustive listing of data; only the most important references are footnoted, resulting in one or two references per page on average. A valuable feature of the book is the interaction with other contemporary evangelical theologies, but most noticeable is its indebtedness to Grenz's theological mentor, Wolfhart Pannenberg.

The perspective is thoroughly baptistic with stress on believer's baptism and the regenerate church; it is also decidedly evangelical as witnessed by the centrality of salvation, the work of the Spirit and specific attention to the theology of conversion. But Grenz adopts a new approach in his understanding and presentation. For example, he often uses new terminology, such as 'sacred acts', 'The fellowship of Jesus the Christ with God' or 'Our spiritual co-creatures'. He also makes creative use of data and perspectives from other areas of contemporary theological and biblical study without being bound to the traditional schemas. A good example is his use of the NT studies approach to Jesus in terms of the Kingdom of God for Christology. While not overlooking the value of traditional ways of doing systematic theology, these features give Grenz's work a dynamic relevance and an [p. 405](#) appealing up-to-date quality, even though there is little explicit treatment of many issues of contemporary theology).

However, he also approaches the content and concept of theology from a new angle. As the title suggests, he has built his thinking around the integrating motif of the church as the eschatological covenant community which God is producing in the historical plane and eschatologically. In expounding this vision, Grenz focuses strongly on the nature and purpose of the triune God (from where the idea of community originates). Consequently, there is heavy emphasis upon the work of the Spirit as an executor of the divine will and the church as a vital product and agent in the divine economy.

One of the most valuable results of this approach is to show the interrelatedness of the various areas of theology, hence forestalling the tendencies to fragmentation and uneven emphasis (or downright faddishness!) which are constant problems for popular evangelicalism. He even attempts to use his key insights to solve age old problems such as the Calvinist-Arminian controversy by emphasizing the community and eschatological nature of election and its relation to the outcome of the divine mission.

Another important consequence is the way in which the practical value of theology for spirituality and the church's mission is highlighted. Furthermore, although Grenz does not allow himself to be diverted into writing a text book on ethics, he clearly shows the close relationship between theology and ethics.

Throughout Grenz argues rigorously and comprehensively, resulting in a highly commendable case for his point of view, even if it remains in this volume at the macro level. Nevertheless, it is not without some limitations and weaknesses. For one who seeks

a new approach to systematic theology, there are still too many remnants of the traditional structures and historical influences which interfere with the radically biblical approach which the author advocates. For example, even though he wishes to use the new terms of 'sacred acts' instead of 'sacraments' his discussion is too much coloured by the concerns of traditional sacramental theology. Ironically, although he is sympathetic to a deeper meaning for the sacraments than the common baptistic ultra-Zwinglianism, yet he ends up seeming to prefer the term 'acts of commitment' for the ordinances which does not seem to represent any advance at all on the old memorialist view.

There are also cases of uneven treatment, such as the great deal of attention given to baptism but the comparatively brief analysis of issues related to the Lord's supper; then again Grenz gives detailed treatment to complex issues related to the divine image, but other similarly important matters are treated in outline, suggesting heavier editing was needed.

Again, not all will be satisfied with some of his conclusions. For example, he accepts the doctrine of original sin but rejects original guilt and suggests that the beginnings of individual participation 'in the common human failure' may be seen in the [p. 406](#) 'ego-centricity and focus on the concern for self-survival' which is part of the psychology of infancy. Again, there is a tendency to leave some crucial questions open (such as the historicity of Adam), while occasionally insights from other disciplines seem to assume too great a dominance. A particular case in point is the idea that 'openness to the world', a concept drawn from anthropology, is seen as 'encapsulizing the basic situation of humans in the cosmos'; he uses this concept helpfully to understand human nature, but it is not altogether clear how openness to the 'world' can be transformed into 'our ultimate dependence on God and our special God-given destiny'.

In accordance with his overall theme and methodology, Grenz sees Scripture as 'one aspect of the Spirit's mission of creating and sustaining spiritual life.' Hence, he boldly places the doctrine of Scripture within Pneumatology but in so doing takes a strongly functional approach. Drawing insights from Narrative Theology, he sees the vital role of Scripture in providing 'the categories by means of which we understand ourselves and organize the stories of our lives.' Its further role is that it 'determines what constitutes presence within the community of the faithful followers of God who is revealed in Jesus Christ.' Or to put it briefly, the Bible gives us 'our identity as the people of God' and through it we 'learn what it means to be the community of faith in the world.' This functional emphasis is also seen in his treatment of the Spirit who is defined in one place as 'the dynamic of God at work, completing the divine program of effecting the eschatological community.' Thus, while there is an admirable stress on the interpersonal relations of the essential Trinity, terminology such as this does raise some questions about the personality of the Spirit.

On the practical level, the usefulness of the indexing is questionable. There are the usual Scripture and Name indexes, but the 8-page Subject index contains relatively few entries, each with many page numbers; for example, 'original sin' is not found, but 'faith' has about one hundred page entries. Without sub-categorization, such a long list is virtually unusable. Finally, although the paperback binding is strong, it will not be the last life of such a large and useful volume. [p. 407](#)

Index to Ert 1977–1995

This issue, author and title index to *Evangelical Review of Theology* (ERT) has been prepared to enhance the usefulness of this publication. ERT has been published by Paternoster Press on behalf of the Theological Commission of the World Evangelical Fellowship since 1977. It was founded by Dr Bruce J. Nicholls, Executive Director of the Commission who edited it until 1986. Successive editors have been Dr Sunand Sumithra (1986–89) and Dr Bong Rin Ro (1990) as part of their responsibilities as Executive Directors of the Commission. Dr Bruce Nicholls was again appointed editor in 1991 and remains in the post at present.

From the beginning, one of the features of the journal has been the re-printing of quality articles from other periodicals and elsewhere (with permission) to make them available to its own unique readership. The title page states *ERT*'s particular approach in these terms: 'Articles and book reviews original and selected from publications worldwide for an international readership for the purpose of discerning obedience of faith'. Hence it is appropriate in this *Index* to indicate which articles have been reproduced from elsewhere; they have been marked with an asterisk (*). Full details of the original publication may be found in the issue of *ERT* which contains the article.

In the earlier years, each issue included articles and book reviews covering a range of theological and pastoral areas, but in later issues, a thematic approach has been adopted. The policy has been to publish a group of articles on a particular topic, some classic and some reflecting the current state of the discipline and reporting on recent developments, thus constituting each issue a virtual mini-text book on the subject. This means that readers with only limited access to library facilities will have the opportunity to read widely and authoritatively on the topic.

No subject listing is provided in this *Index*, but the title listing will be a useful point of access; editorials have only been included if they were titled. No book reviews are indexed. It is hoped that some of these features will be covered in subsequent editions of the *Index*. It is no doubt inevitable in a production of this kind that errors will creep in. The [p. 408](#) publishers would welcome details of these so they can be corrected in future editions.

The WEF Theological Commission was established officially in 1974, but activity to encourage and coordinate theological work on an international level had been underway since 1968 under the name of the Theological Assistance Program. The first full meeting of the Commission was held in London in 1975. In the twenty years since that time, a great deal of work has taken place through study units, task forces, consultations and publications. As well as *ERT*, the Commission also publishes *Theological News* on a quarterly basis. One of the important by-products is the International Council for Accrediting Agencies (ICAA) established in 1980. As a constituent part of the Commission, comprising member organizations from all regions of the world, the ICAA has its own officers and programme devoted to the development of evangelical theological education internationally.

For convenience, *ERT* is indexed in *ATLA's Religion Index: One* (on line, CD and printed versions) and in *Religious and Theological Abstracts* (CD and printed versions) although not entirely. Back issues of *ERT* are available from the publisher, from whom subscription details may also be obtained. Permission is required to reproduce material from *ERT*, and applications are to be made to the publisher.

For further reading:

David M. Howard, *The Dream That Would Not Die: the birth and growth of the World Evangelical Fellowship 1846–1986* (Pateroster, 1986)

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