



EDITED BY

FELIX

WILFRED

≡ The Oxford Handbook *of*
CHRISTIANITY
IN ASIA

THE OXFORD HANDBOOK OF

CHRISTIANITY

IN ASIA

Edited by
FELIX WILFRED

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His publications in theology are wide-ranging. They deal with the theology of icon in Orthodox theology (*Culture and Eschatology: The Iconographical Vision of Paul Evdokimov*); patristic theology (*Social Thought; Grace and the Human Condition*); eschatology (*Eternity in Time: A Study of Rahner's Eschatology; Death and Eternal Life*); the history of mission in Asia (*Mission and Catechesis: Alexandre de Rhodes and Inculturation in Seventeenth-Century Vietnam*); and liberation, inculturation, and inter-religious dialogue (*Christianity with an Asian Face; In Our Own Tongues; Being Religious*

Interreligiously). In addition, he has edited some twenty volumes (e.g., *Christianity and the Wider Ecumenism*; *Church and Theology*; *Journeys at the Margins*; *The Asian Synod*; *The Gift of the Church*; *Directory on Popular Piety and Liturgy*; *Christianities in Asia*; and *The Cambridge Companion to the Trinity*). His many writings have been translated into Italian, German, French, Portuguese, Spanish, Polish, Arabic, Croatian, Chinese, Indonesian, Japanese, and Vietnamese. He is the general editor of a multi-volume series entitled *Theology in Global Perspective* and a multi-volume series entitled *Ethnic American Pastoral Spirituality*. His writings have received many awards from learned societies.

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with *Britain* (co-editor) (2012), *Meeting Muslims* (co-editor) (2012), *British Secularism and Religion: Islam, Society and the State* (co-editor) (2010), *Christians and Muslims in the Commonwealth: A Dynamic Role in the Future* (co-editor) (2001), *Islam and Other Faiths, Christian–Muslim Dialogue in the Twentieth Century* (1998). *Christian-Muslim Dialogue in the Twentieth Century* (1997). He is also the author of *Islam at Universities in England: Meeting the Needs and Investing in the Future* (“Siddiqui Report” commissioned by the British government) (2007). He has contributed chapters and articles in several books and journals.

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Richard Fox Young holds the Timby Chair in History of Religions at Princeton Theological Seminary. An Indologist originally, *Resistant Hinduism* (1981), *The Bible Trembled* (1995), and *Vain Debates* (1996), all from the Indological Institute of the University of Vienna, are his most widely cited monographs on the encounter of Hindus and Buddhists with Christian missions in South Asia. Most recently, he has edited *India and the Indianness of Christianity* (2009) and contributed “Horton’s ‘Intellectualist Theory’ of Conversion, Reflected on by a South Asianist” to *Beyond Conversion and Syncretism*, edited by David Lindenfeld and Miles Richardson (2011).

THE OXFORD HANDBOOK OF
CHRISTIANITY
IN ASIA

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

FELIX WILFRED

THE past four years of preparation for the present Handbook have been for me a unique experience of learning. Not only was I able to come across exciting information and insights, but much of the knowledge I had accumulated over the years on the theme of Christianity in Asia and the convictions I had acquired came progressively under critical questioning, and I was forced to deconstruct many conventional views on Asian Christianity. It also led me to realize how vast and complex this field of study is and how rewarding the exploration of it could be. The study of Christianity has led me also to a fresh look on Asia itself.

BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE OF THE HANDBOOK

Christian presence in Asia goes back to the earliest centuries, attested by the existence of St. Thomas Christian community in India, and the traces of the Nestorian Church in China since the seventh century. The Franciscan missionaries were active in certain pockets of the continent in the thirteenth century. However, Christian mission, both Catholic and Protestant, spread throughout Asia in a major way from the sixteenth to twentieth century. Christian mission did not confine itself only to the preaching of the Gospel and caring for the Christian community but reached out to all peoples through its works of charity, education, healthcare, development, and so on. In general, this involvement of Asian churches was welcomed; however, colonial history and the presentation of Christianity in Western garb have led to the general view that Christianity is a foreign religion.

In more recent decades, Christianity in Asia has suffered under communist regimes in China, Myanmar, and Vietnam. In these countries, in spite of the economic opening, which happened in recent times to repair the damage done by state run and planned economy, religious freedom in general and for Christians in particular has remained a

very problematic issue. In the Islamic countries on the continent, local forces and global politics have made the life of Christian communities and their institutions increasingly difficult. Even in democratic countries like India, with the constitution guaranteeing religious freedom, there have been instances of alarming violence against the Christian communities in the past few decades. In spite of these critical situations, Asian Christianity has been flourishing with some of its frontier missions and innovations in relating to the society around. It has brought about keen interest among many intellectuals and scholars in countries like China, Korea, and Japan—the so-called “Cultural Christians.” Asian Christianity is also vibrant in human resources. Of late, missionaries from Asian countries—Korea, The Philippines, and India—have started to move to other parts of the world.

Asian Christianity presents many new prospects and hope for global Christianity, especially through its encounter with the ancient religious traditions of the continent, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Daoism. The development of Asian Theology in the last few decades has demonstrated that it has the potential to open up new horizons and vistas for global theological thinking.

In world Christianity, Asia has always been the exception. While the Americas and Africa either embraced Christianity or had it imposed on them, Asia, though the cradle of Christianity, has always proved to be an “obstacle” for its expansion because of its established cultural and religious traditions and societal structures. In Asia with millennial history of many civilizations, there arose a critical situation in the nineteenth century with the introduction of Western modernity, often mediated through the Christian missionary movement. Today Christianity in its many forms exists in practically all Asian countries as significant minorities; in S Korea, The Philippines, and East Timor, it has become the dominant religion.

The interaction between Christianity and Asian cultures and societies, however, is only at its beginning. The impact of Christianity in Asia cannot be overestimated: it led to intellectual revolutions, religio-cultural confrontations, and social conflicts but also to fundamental transformations of Asian societies. In the process, Christianity has also been transformed, leaving us not only with a rich legacy of theological controversies but also substantial contributions which are of importance for Christianity worldwide.

It has been said that the twenty-first century belongs to Asia because of the rise of China and India, but also of the tiger economies of Southeast Asia and East Asia, followed by the rise of Indonesia and Vietnam. In a similar way, Christianity is also slowly coming of age in this vast continent, reaching a critical mass both demographically and intellectually, so much so that important breakthroughs are likely to emerge in the next couple of decades. There are already signs that there will be important changes in the form and style of being Christian in Asia, in its interaction with society and state. After breaking free from Western “orthodoxy” and norms, Asian Christians are now confident enough to think the unthinkable which will result in new theological thinking and scholarly pursuits that are radically different from the past.

Although the importance of Asian Christianity is being recognized, with the exception of a few general statistical compilations and missionary encyclopedias that often suffer from confessional bias, there are still relatively few scholarly studies available that can claim to cover the whole region and serve interested scholars in other disciplines. The aim of this Handbook is to give a first comprehensive mapping of the current state of Christianity in Asia. The approach will be interdisciplinary, applying the analytical and hermeneutical tools of history, religious studies, and the social sciences. The Handbook is intended to capture the state of the art of research on Christianity in Asia and to identify the questions and issues that are likely to shape its future. This is intended to be a “benchmark” volume that frames, assesses and synthesizes the topic, as well as explores some possible future trajectories.

One of the significant aspects of this Handbook is that it does not attach importance to religious affiliation, but focuses on scholarship on the subject matter. In fact, the Handbook contains contributions not only from Christians but also from two Muslim scholars writing on certain aspects of Asian Christianity; so too from a Hindu scholar well-versed both in Christianity and Hinduism writing on the interrelationship and dialogue between these two traditions. In many works we find interested Christian scholars writing about Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and so on. Here we hear the voice of Muslim and Hindu scholars studying and analyzing aspects of mutual relationship. This turns the Handbook in a deeper way into an interreligious and intercultural enterprise.

PLURALITY OF CHRISTIANITY

To anyone who studies this volume, it would be clear that to speak of Christianity in the singular could be problematic, even if for conventional reasons, the singular is maintained in the title of the volume. There is such a great diversity in the way Christian faith is lived and practiced in Asia. It should be pointed out, however, that this plurality may not be interpreted in the light of the formation of early Christian traditions—Orthodox, Syrian, Latin, Coptic, and so on. What is happening in Asian Christianity does not give evidence to this kind of different Christian traditions. Plurality of churches came into being also after the Reformation and the various Christian denominations were introduced into Asia. Though these two forms of plurality are present in Asia, what adds a unique character to the plurality of Asian Christianity is its *indigenous Churches*, born locally out of specific historical, social, cultural, and political contexts. Sometimes they came into existence to reinforce group identity or in response to a national cause or reaction to the imposition of Western forms of Christianity. This is true as much as of India as of Korea and Japan. The wide variety of indigenous churches is well portrayed in the contribution of Paul Joshua Bhakiaraj.

If we widen the discourse, internal plurality characterizes all religious traditions. Buddhism has never been of one kind, but has given rise to numerous forms according to its growth in different soils—China, Japan, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and so on. There are

unique characteristics that distinguish Islam from region to region, country to country, depending on historical, social, cultural, and political factors. The Islam of Indonesia is different from that of West Asia, and even different from that of Pakistan and Malaysia. The same can be applied also to Christianity which gives lie to the stereotype view of it as a foreign or imported religion. While the indigenous Christianities could be viewed as expression of diversity, even the mainline Churches of Asia are undergoing changes so that a new configuration of them is emerging. In this way, there is room to speak of Asian Catholicism or Asian Protestantism. The Handbook is an attempt to present the kaleidoscopic variety of Asian Christianities.

The editorial board's discussion as to whether the Handbook would be called: "Handbook on Christianity in Asia" or "Handbook of Asian Christianity" throws more light on this point. By opting for the title "Handbook of Christianity in Asia," we wanted to underline the geographical and contextual character of this Christianity and the problems and issues connected with this particular geography, history, cultures, and civilizations. "Asian Christianity" would have sounded like "Orthodox Christianity" which has come to acquire certain features and is characterized as a tradition that could be replicated anywhere. That is not the case here. Asian Christianity is not anything homogeneous, nor has it acquired certain characteristics and features that it could find itself at home in any part of the world.

REACHING OUT

The Handbook aims at a wide range of readers. In its broadest range it targets all those who are interested in a critical and scientific study of Asian Christianity with the intention of updating their knowledge, independent of their religious affiliation. In that sense it is not a volume meant only for Christians about Asian Christianity but a volume that discusses with openness all aspects of Christianity in order to contribute to an enlightened dialogue with other religious traditions. A Muslim and a Hindu, a Buddhist and a Confucian, a humanist and an atheist will be able to gain a fair knowledge of Asian Christianity and the many social and cultural processes surrounding its origin and growth.

In fact, the contributors to this volume come from diverse disciplinary backgrounds—historians, sociologists, experts in religious studies, theologians, scholars in cultural studies, and so on. Since the volume is interdisciplinary in nature, it will serve as a point of reference for scholars in related disciplines—humanities and social sciences—in gaining up-to-date knowledge on the state of research in the field of Asian Christianity which they can relate to their own discipline and field of study. The volume will help Christian theologians in a closer understanding of how faith is lived in context and in becoming aware of the new theological questions and issues arising on a continent that is multi-religious in character. It will help pastoral agents analyze the challenges Asian Christianity is faced with, and thus aid in the formulation of plans and strategies to respond to emerging issues.

WHAT IS DISTINCTIVE ABOUT THE HANDBOOK?

Although the Handbook's principal object of study is Christianity, it does not follow a generic approach. First, its emphasis is not so much on the churches and communities themselves but on the interaction and social processes in the encounter between Christianity and sociocultural contexts. Second, it attempts to identify the major trends and controversies the encounter has generated. In that sense, the Handbook is not a compilation of facts and figures; rather it aims to be a major research tool, representing the best of current research, so that it can be used as a guide by scholars and the interested laypersons to understand and interpret the major issues in the subject.

The volume is not in the genre of encyclopedia or dictionary. In such works there is the attempt to be exhaustive, and facts, explanations, and ideas are often juxtaposed without being held together or being interconnected. What distinguishes the Handbook is that it has a *perspective* and its own *opinions* on various questions and issues concerning Asian Christianity, and they are held together by an overall vision and architecture. To put it differently, the Handbook is *hermeneutical* in nature. Its principal aim is not so much to inform the readers on Asian Christianity as to help them follow its journey of many encounters, analyze and interpret them in the context of global Christianity as well as in the context of other disciplines in humanities and social sciences. It is on purpose the historical survey making up Part I of the volume is kept to the minimum, and larger space is dedicated, instead, to the sociocultural and interreligious movements and encounters.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE HANDBOOK

Part I provides an overview of Christianity in the various regions of Asia and its general characteristics in each of those regions. In making geographical divisions, we have followed the classification of Asia under five regions by the United Nations—West Asia, Central Asia, South Asia, Southeast Asia, and East Asia. This part serves as a general background for the issues discussed in the rest of the volume.

Part II is entitled: "Cross-Cultural Flows and Pan-Asian Movements of Asian Christianity." True to its title, it goes beyond the regions to follow the pan-Asian movements that cannot be understood within a regional framework alone. Examples of these are the growth of Pentecostal and Charismatic churches, Contextual theologies, the Ecumenical movement, the feminist movement, and new religious movements inspired by Christianity, as well as more specific topics such as the cross-cultural interpretation of scriptures. The idea is not only to go beyond the particular regions but also beyond a static view of culture and Christianity. In this Handbook, both Christianity and culture

are viewed as movements, and Part II focuses on their mutual influence on one another across Asia. It offers many insights into these influences, and at the same time helps us to dispel the notion that Christians in Asia are mere recipients of the Good News; the active role of culture and the agency of Asians are clearly manifest here (as in other parts of the Handbook).

The Handbook takes us to another level in Part III, which considers many sociopolitical issues which affect Christianity and with which it is in a process of interaction. This part explores issues such as modernity and Asian Christianity, questions relating to colonialism, nationalism, problematic issues like conversion, Asian Christianity and the issues of peace, democratization, education, and the ambiguities at work in Christian social involvement and its engagement with the cause of women. This section gives special attention to the sociopolitical developments in West Asia and its impact on the Christian minority of the region.

Part IV turns to the Asian religions, and analyzes the relation between Christianity and Asian religions, historically and with reference to the contemporary situation. The view from the Asian religions is emphasized, regarding how Christianity has impacted these religions both positively and negatively. Similarly, how Christianity is being reconstructed due to the encounter with other religions in Asia is given special attention. After an overall view of the change of paradigm in Asian attitude toward other religions, more specific relationships are taken up for consideration. Thus we have a chapter on Jewish-Christian relationships, with a distinctive focus on this relationship within Asia—mostly West Asia, complementing studies which generally concentrate on the relationship of Jews with Christianity in Europe. Muslim scholar Ataullah Siddiqui treats the complexity of Muslim-Christian relationship, while the Hindu engagement with Christianity is discussed by a Hindu scholar, Ananta Giri. Other chapters deal with the encounter of Christianity with Buddhism and Confucianism. We also include here a scholarly theoretical discussion by Richard Fox Young on conversion, an issue highly debated across Asia. The author shows that the question of conversion is not something foreign to Asia, but an integral part of Asian history, tradition, and religious encounter. This part concludes with a chapter on “Asian Christian Art and Architecture,” in which we see in visible forms and symbols the transformation of Asian Christianity by the religious and cultural encounters across the continent.

Part V, the final part, is entitled “Some Future Trajectories of Asian Christianity.” Prognostics regarding the future of Christianity in Asia would be too ambitious, and this part has rather the modest scope of identifying those movements, questions, and issues which point to some of the future direction Asian Christianity may take in its encounter with the cultural and social environment, in public life, interpretation of its own history, its worship forms, spirituality, and so on. Bagus Laksana takes up the much debated issue of “multiple religious belonging.” He questions the validity and applicability of it in Asia, contrary to the views of many scholars. In the light of Asian past experiences he sees here more an issue of complex identity within the larger horizon of Asian negotiation of religious identities, rather than multiple religious belonging. In another chapter, Mario Francisco sees Asian Christianity not simply bound by geography but

as forming part of the modern global phenomenon of migration. Connecting migration and Asian Christian identity will surely evoke a lot of interest as more and more Asian Christians migrate to other parts of Asia and to other continents. The concluding piece of this part is by Francis Clooney, an internationally well-known scholar on Indic religious traditions and in comparative theology, and a member of the Board of Editors of this volume. As someone who has grappled for decades with issues of inter-religious encounter especially in South Asia, he reflects on what all these interpretations and insights of the present Handbook might signify for a Western scholar and a Western Christian. He sees the future of Asian Christianity in a mutuality that questions all kinds of dichotomies, including contrasts of East–West.

SOME SALIENT ASPECTS OF ASIAN CHRISTIANITY

If we read thematically across the volume, we discover certain themes that recur in different forms and thus resonate throughout, converging and reinforcing one another. Here are but a few.

The Agency of Asian Christians

There is hardly a chapter in this volume that does not remind us of the fact that Asian Christians are subjects, agents who shape their distinct form of Christianity; however dominant the West may have been at one time or another, Asian Christians have not been passive recipients of an imported Christianity. Everywhere operative is the process of the *appropriation* of the Christian faith and institutions according to the genius of the various peoples and societies of the continent. This is not something that happens only today. It has been the case right from the beginning of the Asian encounter with Western Christian missionaries, even if this did not get the attention it deserved in histories of Christianity in Asia. The fact of this Asian agency also tells us that we can make sense of Asian Christianity only when we take into account the complex interaction—cultural, social, and political—which took place vis-à-vis Christianity over the centuries. The agency could be seen in the way Asians in the various regions decided to convert and become part of the Christian fold with a new identity, doing so in spite of opposition from society and rulers; in their resistance to the domination of missionaries and efforts to uproot them from their culture and society; in their efforts to forge indigenous Christianities; in fashioning spontaneously forms of worship reflecting their tradition, symbols, and customs; in retaining in their Christian life and practice symbols and signs from neighbors of other religious traditions and in many such other ways.

Ambivalence and Contradictions

Asian Christianity is marked by ambivalence and contradictions in its history, life, and engagement, all signs of its complexity. One notable example is the relationship of Asian Christianity to colonialism and colonial powers. Christianity was as much part of the colonial establishment as it was against it. It could germinate and grow with the explicit or tacit support of the colonial powers and bask under their protection; but it also could challenge the same colonial powers on a number of issues and take side with those dominated and exploited by these very forces. The legacy of Christianity in this respect is highly ambiguous and open to debate. As for the religions and cultures of Asian peoples, Western Christianity has been a force that denigrated and disparaged these precious treasures of the people. Yet part of the same Christian history are also missionaries like Roberto de Nobili of India and Matteo Ricci of China who entered into dialogue and conversation with the religious traditions of the land. The significance of a person like De Nobili is that he showed that an indigenous form of Christianity could be developed in encounter and dialogue with a local culture, independent of the support of the Portuguese colonial power and its dominion. There are numerous instances when Christianity has accommodated the reigning powers, for the sake of its own mission and survival, while it has also stood up in prophetic spirit challenging these powers, paying a price. Here we may recall the legacy of the Christian martyrs in Japan, Korea, Vietnam, China, and elsewhere. Similarly, in India Christianity continues to espouse the cause of the upper castes and classes through its elite institutions, but it has also pursued with deep commitment and compassion the emancipation of those left behind by the society and the underdogs of history. What is interesting is that compliance and resistance, support and challenge, were justified by invoking Christian faith and the Gospel. This ambivalence cannot but leave critical observers perplexed as to the nature and mission of Christianity in Asia in the past and today.

The Ecumenical Character

The historical divisions within Western Christianity which Asia inherited became also a stumbling block for its mission over the course of the centuries. As has been widely recognized it is the mission which brought to the fore the ecumenical agenda. Although Asian representatives were numerically very small at the 1910 Edinburgh conference, their voices resounded, emphasizing the need for understanding among the various Christian denominations in the pursuit of a common mission to the people. We may recall here the contributions of Bishop V. S. Azariah of India, and T. C. Chao and K. H. Ding of China, thanks to whose efforts the impasse of division among the churches was broken. It is to be noted that it was in Asia, and specifically in South India, that for the first time the union of the different denominations took

place, paving the way for similar efforts in global Christianity, especially among the Protestant churches. The Church of South India came into existence in 1947 as a result of the union of three families of churches—Anglican, Methodist, and the South India United Church.

Asian Christianity and Modernity

It is undeniable that Christianity has had a modernizing influence on Asia. Ironically, the very Christianity viewed in the West as an anti-modern force was looked to in Asia as a gateway to modern science, technology, education, modern medicine, and so on. It is interesting to note that at the time of Matteo Ricci, many Chinese were interested more in the clocks, maps, astronomy, and techniques the missionaries introduced, than the Gospel the missionaries preached. In Japan, after a ban on Christianity for over two and half centuries, the attraction to Christianity grew precisely because of its prospective contribution to the modernizing of the Japanese society at the period of Meiji restoration. In India, modern education spread through the work of missionaries among the marginalized and women, offered new avenues for these groups for whom opportunities had been denied in the traditional society. Moreover, the translation of the Bible led to developments in local languages, specially the languages of the marginal groups, and infused their speakers with a new dignity and self-confidence. Obviously, modernizing was not the explicit agenda of Christian mission, but modernization was an important sequel to the project of the preaching of the Gospel. Several chapters of the Handbook enter from various perspectives into the issue of Asian Christianity and the modernizing of Asian societies.

Rethinking Asian Christian Minority Character

While speaking of Christianity in Asia, one thing that is invariably highlighted is its minority character. Statistically, it is a fact that Christians constitute a small percentage, except in the Philippines, East Timor, and to some extent in Korea. The politically loaded framework of minority-majority could limit the complex approach Asian Christianity requires so as to be understood at once as a religious, cultural, and social factor in the Asian landscape. The contributions of the Handbook, unlike other writings in the field, do not focus on the minority character of Asian Christianity, but open up a larger perspective than what the minority-majority scheme offers. They view the presence of Christianity, its life, and involvement, in terms of *relationships, transformations, and engagement in the public space*. The minority perspective often bears the implication that it is something introduced from outside, something foreign. The Handbook views Christians as an integral part of the life, history, tradition, and culture of Asian peoples. I think this is the message the various chapters cumulatively convey to us. All this has implications for the writing of an Asian Christian history.

Identity Construction and Negotiation of Borders

In our contemporary world the issue of identity has become a major concern; more and more studies have been published on this question from historical, political, cultural, social, and psychological perspectives. The Handbook deals in passing with how Christianity has been an important force for the identity-construction of peoples and groups, especially the marginalized. Often more than belief in doctrine, the fact of belonging socially to a new religious identity has had important consequences for the people. This is clearly the case with the Dalits of India and tribals in different parts of the Asian continent. In colonial times, for some groups, belonging to religious traditions of the powerful meant acquisition of new dignity and advantages. The issue was not so much a conversion in terms of a change in religious beliefs as a change to a new identity. Several chapters indicate this, particularly the articles by Richard Fox Young and Rudolf Heredia. Acquisition of a new identity was not a complete caesura from the earlier identity or total insulation from it, but it has often been a matter of negotiation. Other chapters in the volume go into the ways Asian Christians have negotiated and continue to negotiate their religious identities. That identity is so porous and open that many Asian Christians would not have a problem with the reading of the sacred scriptures of other religious traditions even in Christian liturgy, and they are theologically open to *communicatio in sacris* with their neighbors of other faiths. The chapter by George Gispert-Sauch presents the way the non-Christian scriptures are read and the chapter by Archie Lee brings in the issue of intertextual reading of Christian scriptures with other sacred writings, especially in the Chinese context.

CONTRIBUTION TO OTHER DISCIPLINES

The volume indirectly contributes to other disciplines—sociology of religion, history, and so on. If the sociologists of religion today speak about the resurgence of religion and their vitality, they could understand better what that means by studying the vibrancy that Asian Christianity exhibits and avail themselves of the insights of this volume in deepening their theorizing on the global issue of religion in the contemporary world. In an age when the validity and extent of applicability of the thesis of secularization is hotly debated, the experience of Asian Christianity and other religious traditions in the continent offer much food for thought for scholars of the sociology of religion. Another indirect contribution is the volume's challenge to the prevailing tendency to essentialize religious identities. Many chapters testify to the fluid and porous nature of religious experience, and this leads to re-conceptualizing the idea of religion itself as defined and developed in the traditional scholarship. In all, the Handbook is meant to be an instrument of dialogue in many directions and exploration in the frontier areas of the study of Asian Christianity.

ISSUES OF METHODOLOGY AND LANGUAGE

I conclude with several practical notes. The Handbook is not meant to be a comprehensive volume reporting on Christianity in each country or region. Except for the first part which gives a survey, the rest of the Handbook is issue-based. Various issues of Asian Christianity are taken up and dealt with, and they are interconnected so as to form an organic whole. Even here it was not possible to proceed country by country or region by region, nor was that thought to be the best method to follow. This would have permitted only a superficial treatment of the question, under the plea of being comprehensive. Each chapter is meant rather to be a window that opens a wider vista and allows the reader to extend the same kind of analysis and interpretation to other parts of the continent, even when they are not explicitly mentioned. In other words, the chapters reflect a pan-Asian perspective, even when they treat a particular question with reference to a particular experience and location. For instance, while one could go on writing about the question of Christianity and democracy in Asia, reviewing the situation of each country, the article on this issue by Huang Po Ho deals mainly with the struggle of democracy and Christian participation in Taiwan. But at the same time it opens up questions and issues that would find resonance in other countries and are applicable to other regions of the continent.

The preparation of this volume also presented considerable difficulties in terms of language and communication. As has been said, England and America are divided by a common language. The way English is written—not to say the way it is spoken—is often conditioned by the contributors' background, culture, language, and so on. And since we have scholars from about twenty different countries from four continents contributing to the volume, it has been almost impossible to streamline and standardize. However, efforts have been made to make changes in such a way that the meaning of the author is comprehensible across cultures and plurality of mindsets. We do not claim to have succeeded fully in this. We did not want language to be a barrier against benefitting from the rich fund of knowledge and scholarship of this group of international scholars.

PART I

**MAPPING ASIAN
CHRISTIANITY**

INTRODUCTION

GEORG EVERS

THE part entitled “Mapping Asian Christianity” aims to give an overview of the different situation of Christianity in Asia according to the historical development and the religious, cultural, and political situations in the various regions. For this purpose, the vast continent of Asia is divided into five geographical regions.

The first region is the area commonly called the Middle East or Western Asia and which is significant for Christianity as the birthplace of Jesus Christ and the region where Christianity took its beginning as a world religion. In his contribution “Christianity in Western Asia,” Herman G. B. Teule describes the present situation of Christianity in the Middle East which is significant for the exodus of Christians from this region. Looking for the reasons, Teule gives a brief historical overview of the emergence and present situation of the different churches. From there he proceeds to describe the long and rich interaction between Christianity and Islam, focusing on the juridical and intellectual perspectives. This is followed by a brief discussion of the concept of “Arab Christianity” and the implications of ethnicity in this context. The chapter concludes with the challenges Christians are faced with today and indicates some possible answers.

In the chapter “South Asian Christianity in Context,” Felix Wilfred starts with a look at the historical development of Christianity on the Indian subcontinent which, regardless whether one accepts the tradition that the Apostle Thomas came to India, dates back to the first centuries of the Christian era. With the arrival of the Western colonial powers Spain and Portugal, the missionary activities first by Catholic and later followed by Protestant missionaries started in the sixteenth and seventeenth century. With the beginning of the nineteenth century, a shift from mission to the building up of churches and institutions in the fields of education, charitable activities, and medicine can be observed. Wilfred then discusses the problematic and complex relationship between Christianity and the Portuguese, Dutch, and British colonial rulers which is characterized by collaboration and cautious support of the movements for independence. Christianity played an important and active role in the emergence of the South Asian renaissance in the religious, cultural, and political fields at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century. Christianity was also an active factor for the emergence of nationalism. To combat the image of being a “foreign religion,” the Christian churches started their efforts of indigenization of Christianity in the cultural

and religious traditions. This was accompanied by building up new positive relationships with the members of different other faiths. Wilfred continues with a critical look at the ambivalent position Christianity has taken with regard to the problem of caste, focusing on the situation of the Dalit and the Tribal Christians. The chapter concludes with a reflection on the minority situation of Christianity in the area.

In the third chapter Sébastien Peyrouse presents the situation of the “Christian Minorities on the Central Asia Silk Roads,” starting with a description of the historical development of Christianity in the five states of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan, which is characterized by having been a crossing point of different civilizations. The complex political and religious situations led to turbulent historical developments for Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant Christians in the course of history. An important factor was also the interaction with the Muslim majority religion in the area.

The fourth chapter deals with “Christianity in Southeast Asia.” Georg Evers starts by describing the common traits of the encounter of Christianity with societies, cultures, and religions in the area. The support by the colonial powers of Christian missionary activities constitutes a burdensome legacy even today. Positive influence of Christianity, however, contributed to the process of nation building in the middle of the twentieth century. Christianity also played an important role as a force of modernization in the societies of Southeast Asia. Evers then discusses the role of Christians as a minority religion in the interreligious context and interaction with Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Confucianism as well as with traditional religions.

In the fifth chapter, Edmond Tang presents the situation of “Identity and Marginality—Christianity in East Asia,” by starting with a historical overview. From there he continues to present some major themes and characteristics. The first theme he addresses is the role of Christianity in process of nation building accompanied by efforts of indigenization. Then Tang describes the emergence of independent churches which has shaped the appearance of Christianity in the region in recent times. For China and North Korea, the emergence of communism and its restrictive religious policies have led to persecution and divisions within the Christian communities. The historical, cultural, political, and religious situations led to the emergence of several contextual theologies in East Asia. The chapter concludes with the description of significant trends such as the “religious fever” in China, the emergence of Pentecostalism and mega churches, and the problem of multi-religious belonging.

CHAPTER 1

CHRISTIANITY IN WESTERN ASIA

HERMAN G. B. TEULE

INTRODUCTION

THE position of the Christians in Western Asia or the Middle East (covering the Arabic world, Eastern Turkey or Anatolia, and Iran) is a cause of great concern. Their numbers are dwindling for all kinds of reasons, economic, political, and religious. Several reports of Christian leaders even evoke the possibility of the disappearance of Christianity from the very region where it was born.¹ To counter this development, a number of initiatives are being taken both by the churches as well as by individual Christian politicians.

The objective of this contribution is to make the present-day situation understandable. To achieve this, it is necessary to give a brief historical introduction, focusing on the emergence of different churches and some attempts at overcoming the ecclesiastical divisions. Second, since throughout the greater part of its history Western Asian Christianity has developed itself within an Islamic context, I discuss the relationship between Christians and Muslims, both from a juridical and intellectual perspective. Next, I pay attention to the concept of “Arab Christianity” and the tension between this idea and the development of ethnical thinking among certain Christian groups. Finally, some challenges posed to the Christians of the region as well as some possible answers are examined.

THE EMERGENCE OF DIFFERENT CHURCHES

The biblical Book of Acts tells the story of the spread of early Christianity outside Jerusalem and Palestine. It was in the city of Antioch (today Antakya in Eastern Turkey) that the disciples adopted the name of Christians (Acts 11:26), and the story of their

journeys to different regions of Anatolia, to Greece, and eventually to Rome is set out in Acts. According to a venerable tradition, Egypt² would have been christianized by the evangelist Mark. Less well known is that, seen from the perspective of Palestine, some disciples not only travelled westwards, to the great centers of the Hellenistic civilization, but also to the lands situated at the eastern borders of the Roman Empire and beyond. Thus, we find traces of Christianity in the city of Edessa (today Şanlı-Urfa in Eastern Turkey), the capital of a semi-independent kingdom, situated within the Roman sphere of influence, by the middle of the second century or slightly earlier. From there, the Christian missionaries—and we know some probable names such as Addai and Mari—brought the Christian message to Eastern and Southern Mesopotamia, within the Persian Empire (today Iraq). One of the attractive features of both Edessa and Eastern Mesopotamia was that the first Christians of these regions, in Iraq often of Jewish origin, expressed themselves in a form of Aramaic, known as Syriac. Their adoption of Christianity led to the development of a most original Christian literature which remained much more Semitic in character than was the case in the Hellenized world. The most well-known name in this respect is Ephrem the Syrian (d. 373), a deacon from Nisibis and Edessa and the author of a great number of theological-spiritual works, but he was far from being the only one to express his Christian beliefs in a Semitic idiom and vein.³

However, in the fifth century, these Christians were affected by the Christological discussions which took place in the Greek-speaking world. At the Council that took place in Ephesus in Asia Minor (431), Cyril, Bishop of Alexandria in Egypt, defended a doctrine which emphasized the unity of Christ's humanity and divinity, against Nestorius, the Bishop of Constantinople who rather stressed the distinction between both. Cyril's doctrine is today known as miaphysitism ("one nature doctrine"), because in order to express this unity he used the term "one incarnate nature of God the Word." However, twenty years later, at the Council of Chalcedon (451) on the Asian shores of the Bosphorus, the fathers preferred to speak of two natures, one human and one divine, in Christ. This became the so-called Orthodox—or Greek Orthodox—position, professed by the Emperor, whereas the Christians of Egypt remained faithful to the concept defended by Cyril. Consequently, the Christians of Egypt (the Copts) came to be considered as heretical by the Imperial Church. The same fate happened to a part of the Christian population of Syria that also had miaphysite sympathies. In the course of history these Syrian Christians were sometimes known as Jacobites—also by later Muslim heresiographers—after Jacob Baradaï who was the organizer of this community in the sixth century, but this name is rejected today by the members of this Jacobite Church in the Arabic world, who rather trace their origins back to the Christianization of Edessa and prefer to be called Syrian-Orthodox.

Rejecting the Christological formula of Cyril did not imply that Chalcedon endorsed the position of Nestorius. The latter's refusal to call Mary "the Mother of God" as well as his insistence on two *hypostaseis* next to two natures (dyophysitism), whereas Chalcedon only accepted two natures coming together into one person and one *hypostasis*, was unacceptable. Although in the eyes of the "Nestorians," hypostasis was only

a term adding specificity to the more generic concept of nature, for the Chalcedonians it was almost a synonym of person. Hence, they accused the “Nestorians” of accepting two sons in Christ and considered them as heretics. In a long and complicated process the majority of the Christians in the Persian Empire adopted an outspoken dyophysite Christology, which in the eyes of both Miaphysites and Chalcedonians was flatly Nestorian and therefore heretical.⁴ Today, the descendants of these Persian Christians are split into two communities, the Assyrian Church of the East and the Ancient Church of the East. The latter community is only a recent creation (1968); its members left the Assyrian Church for a combination of tribal and liturgical reasons. Both churches no longer call themselves Nestorian because of the heretical ring to this term.

In the seventh century, the Byzantine Emperor Heraclius proposed a Christological compromise between Chalcedonians and Miaphysites known as “monotheletism,” the doctrine of one will and energy in Christ. It was accepted only by a small number of Christians from Middle Syria (Homs) around the Monastery of St. Maron. In later times, to escape persecution, these Christians moved to the mountains of Northern Lebanon; today, they are known as Maronites.⁵

This was basically the situation of the Christians in Western Asia on the eve of the advent of Islam. The relationship between these Christian communities was often tense and characterized by the development of a passionate polemical literature in Greek, Syriac, and Arabic, which in later times did not remain unnoticed by the Muslim world. In the Abbasid period, several Muslim heresiographers such as Shahrastani managed to compose detailed accounts of the different Christian positions.

In 1099, with the arrival of the Crusaders, a new Christian community made its appearance in the Middle East. These Crusaders, Latin Christians, established some Frankish states: the Kingdom of Jerusalem, the Principality of Antioch, and the Counties of Edessa and Tripoli, territories with still a massive Christian population. Less than fifty years after the so-called Eastern Schism of 1054, the split between Rome and Constantinople, one understands that they adopted a harsh policy toward the Orthodox Christians of these territories; many of their bishops were replaced by Latin prelates, especially in Antioch and Jerusalem. The Miaphysites and the Nestorians living in the Crusader states could reckon on a more lenient approach and we know of many contacts between the European and the oriental clergy. The Maronites even accepted the authority of the Pope and were prepared to align themselves on the doctrinal positions of the Latin Church. They thus became the first Uniate or Eastern-Catholic Church, an oriental ecclesiastical community in full communion with the Church of Rome, but allowed to preserve its own oriental liturgical, spiritual, and canonical traditions.

In the period between the eleventh and fourteenth centuries, many of the Christians in the Middle East realized that the traditional Christological differences were often superficial. By a new reading of the classical texts they discovered that the main Christian communities all accepted the full divinity and humanity in Jesus Christ; in their eyes the former differences were only a matter of terminology and not of substance. In the words of the Syrian-Orthodox monk Rabban Yeshu`, “it is not right to consider only ourselves

as orthodox and all the others as heretics.” This fresh insight opened the possibility of a new relationship between the Christians among themselves, including between the oriental Christians and the Church of Rome. In Cilicia, in East-Central Anatolia, Armenian Miaphysite Christians who had migrated from Motherland Armenia also worked for a union with Rome, but it never materialized. On the Roman side, however, it was not understood that the form of unity advocated by these oriental theologians and bishops was more a form of cooperation, based on equality rather than of submission, the Maronites being the sole exception.⁶

This situation changed dramatically between the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries. In the sixteenth century, the Christians of all denominations found themselves in an extremely difficult situation. In 1258, the capital of the Abbasid Empire Bagdad had been destroyed by the Mongols. Although the first Il-Khans had some initial sympathies for the Christians, especially the Nestorians and the Armenians of Cilicia, by the end of the thirteenth century, their leaders turned to Islam and the Christians lost a powerful protector. By the end of the fourteenth century, the Turkic-Mongol Amir Timur Lenk raided Western Asia, destroying much of the infrastructure of especially the Syrian Orthodox and the Nestorian churches, but also other Christian communities were affected. It was the beginning of a “dark night,” characterized by a decline in numbers, the loss of theological scholarship, and a crisis in monastic life. The Nestorian Church of the East withdrew to the inaccessible mountains East of Mesopotamia, where it organized itself along tribal lines and adopted the principle that the dignity of Patriarch remain within the same family.⁷ This difficult situation hardly changed when in 1516/17 the Arabic world was conquered by the Ottomans and became subjected to heavy taxation.

In the light of these developments, it is understandable that when in the course of the sixteenth century, especially in the aftermath of the Council of Trent (1545–63), Roman Catholic missionaries were sent to the Middle East, some eastern and oriental prelates seized this opportunity to improve their situation. Expecting help from Rome, some church leaders were prepared to follow the example of the Maronites and, together with some of their faithful, joined the Roman Catholic Church. In many cases, this was a difficult process, with setbacks and renewed attempts at a union. For example, the first union between Rome and a part of the Nestorian Church of the East can be dated to the middle of the sixteenth century, but a final union only materialized in 1830. In the period between 1553 and 1830, the following eastern Catholic, also called Uniate churches, came into existence: the Chaldean Church (split from the Nestorians, 1530–1830), the Greek-Catholic Church (1724, split from the Greek-Orthodox⁸), the Syrian-Catholic Church (1656 and 1782, split from the Syrian-Orthodox), the Armenian-Catholics (1742). To the exception of the Chaldeans, who mostly lived in Iraq and Eastern Anatolia, these Uniate churches had their centers in Western Syria or in Lebanon.⁹ Another consequence of the presence of these Latin missionaries was the development of a Roman Catholic or Latin Church. The beginnings of this community in the Middle East go back to the Crusader period, but much of its infrastructure was destroyed after the Crusaders left the region. For example, the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem, created with the First

Crusade in 1099 and already transferred to Rome by the end of the twelfth century, was reinstated in Jerusalem in 1847, but also elsewhere in Western Asia, one finds centers of Latin Christianity, such as Tehran-Ispahan, Baghdad,¹⁰ Syria, Turkey, and Lebanon. A recent development is the massive presence of Roman Catholic foreign workers (often from the Philippines, but also Syro-Malabar and Syro-Malankara Christians from Southern India) in the Gulf States, whereas in Israel and Palestine the decline in numbers of the autochthonous Christians is partly compensated by immigration to Israel of Russian and Ukrainian Orthodox having Jewish ancestry.

The nineteenth century saw the arrival of British Anglican, American Presbyterian, and German Lutheran missionaries, who succeeded in establishing a Protestant infrastructure in several regions of Western Asia, especially in Lebanon and Palestine.¹¹ In recent times, though traditional rivalries are not entirely overcome and even re-emerge in sometimes unexpected ways, the Christian communities try to develop ecumenical initiatives. A major event, in this respect, is the creation of the Middle Eastern Council of Churches (1974), initially consisting of the majority of the local Protestant and Byzantine-Orthodox and Oriental-Orthodox churches, but since 1990 including also the different churches in communion with Rome. The sole outsider is the Assyrian Church of the East and its recent offspring the Apostolic Church of the East because of traditional anti-Nestorian reflexes on the side of the Copts.

The complete picture of the Christians in Western Asia is shown in tables 1.1 and 1.2.

Eastern and Oriental Orthodox Churches

Table 1.1 Eastern and Oriental Orthodox Churches

Chalcedonians	Miaphysites	Dyophysites	Dyophysites	Miaphysites
Greek (Byzantine) Orthodox	Syrian-Orthodox	Assyrian Church of the East	Apostolic Church of the East (split from the Assyrian Church)	Armenians
Sometimes called Melkites	Sometimes called Jacobites, West-Syrians	Sometimes called Nestorians, Assyrians, East-Syrians	Sometimes called Nestorians, East-Syrians	
Patriarchs of Antioch (residence in Damascus) and Jerusalem (residence in Jerusalem)	Patriarch of Antioch (residence in Damascus)	Patriarch formerly of Seleucia-Ctesiphon and Bagdad (residence in Chicago)	Patriarch (residence in Bagdad)	Patriarch of Cilicia (residence in Antelias, Lebanon)

The Uniate or Eastern-Catholic Churches (in communion with Rome)

Table 1.2 The Uniate or Eastern-Catholic Churches (in communion with Rome)

Since: 1724	Since: 1666–1782	Since: 1553–1830	Since: Crusades	Since: 1742
Greek (Byzantine) Catholics Melkites	Syrian-Catholics	Chaldeans	Maronites	Armenian-Catholics
Patriarch of Antioch and Jerusalem (residence in Damascus)	Patriarch of Antioch (residence in Charfeh, Lebanon)	Patriarch of Babylon (residence in Bagdad)	Patriarch of Antioch (residence in Bkerké, Lebanon)	Patriarch of Cilicia (residence in Bzommar, Lebanon)

The Latin Church and Protestant Churches

Table 1.3 Latin Church and Protestant Churches

The Latin Church	Protestant Churches
Patriarchate of Jerusalem, responsible for the Latin Christians of Palestine, Israel, Jordan, and Cyprus. Dioceses or Vicariates Apostolic of Istanbul, Izmir, Anatolia, Southern and Northern Arabia, Beirut, Bagdad, Aleppo, and Isfahan.	Episcopal (Jerusalem, Iran, the Gulf), Evangelical (Jordan, Iran, Syria, Lebanon, and the Union of Armenian Evangelical Churches).

CHRISTIANS IN A MUSLIM SOCIETY

For the greater part of their history, the Christians of Western Asia have been living under Muslim domination. Within ten years after the death of the Prophet (632 C.E.), the great centers of Christianity became officially subjected to Islamic rule: Damascus fell in 636, followed by Jerusalem in 637/8, Antioch in 637, and Edessa in 638. The same happened to the Christians of the former Persian Empire when the Sassanid dynasty in power was defeated at the Battle of Qadissiyah in 636. This Islamic conquest and the concomitant disappearance of the borders between the Byzantine and Persian Empires allowed many Christians, former victims of pressure by the Imperial Church or of the persecutions by the Sassanid authorities, to breathe more freely and to improve their infrastructure. The number of West-Syrian dioceses more than doubled and the Church

of the East was strong enough to develop an intensive missionary activity, also outside the Islamic world, in Central and Eastern Asia establishing a network of dioceses and monasteries as far as Uzbekistan, Afghanistan, and China.¹² For different reasons, Christianity in these regions was not able to maintain itself. The Nestorian missionary efforts had more permanent effects in Southern India (Malabar). Until the arrival of the Portuguese, the majority of the Christians of this region, the so-called Thomas Christians because they traced their origins back to the preaching of the Apostle Thomas, belonged to the Church of the East. Today, their descendants are split into various independent churches, some of which changed allegiances and now belong rather to the West-Syrian tradition and/or accept the authority of Rome. All these churches try to preserve something of their Middle Eastern Syriac heritage, mainly in the liturgy, though Syriac is increasingly being replaced by the local Malayalam language.¹³

In Islam-dominated Western Asia, the juridical position of the Christians was regulated according to the *dhimma* system. This system, which was developed and refined over a long period of time, gave Christians certain rights such as freedom of worship and the possibility to organize themselves and to live according to their traditions and legal system, but it also consisted of obligations such as paying a poll-tax known as the *jizya*, wearing distinctive clothing, adopting a low profile with regard to public worship, and, in the first place, accepting the Islamic state system. The modes of application—from lenient to oppressive—differed from period to period and region to region. Although the system contributed to a certain segregation between the members of the two communities, on the official level it allowed for an institutionalized interaction between their leaders.

In both the Umayyad and the Abbasid periods, Christians were allowed to keep important positions within the administration such as secretaries, astrologers, or even as ministers. By their knowledge of Greek philosophers, whose works they translated into Syriac and Arabic and transmitted to the Islamic intellectual world, the Muslims were introduced to philosophical thinking which allowed them to develop forms of speculative theology (*kalām*) next to their more traditional exegetical and canonical ways of explicating their religious beliefs.¹⁴ The Christians, in many cases “Nestorians,” were also instrumental in translating Greek medical texts. In the second Abbasid period (around 950–1258) when Muslim philosophy and science had reached maturity, some West- and East-Syriac Christian thinkers, such as Gregory Barhebraeus (d. 1286) or Isho`yahb bar Malkon (d. 1246?), author of a few polemical treatises against Muslims, in their turn incorporated Islamic philosophical ideas into their own theological systems. This development led to new forms of Christian literature and is sometimes even characterized as a cultural and literary renaissance.¹⁵

The Abbasid period was also conducive to the development of interaction in the religious field. Muslims tried to understand the different Christological positions or challenged the Christians to explain why they were not prepared to follow the Prophet, whereas Christians refuted Islamic beliefs in a number of polemical treatises or tried to make their faith understandable for a Muslim readership. This latter apologetic literature is highly interesting for it required a rethinking of traditional concepts such as

Trinity or Incarnation, which now had to be explained to a new public. Other frequent themes were the veneration of icons, the veracity of the crucifixion of Jesus denied in the Qur'ān, the prophethood of Muhammad, and the authority of Scripture. It also required that Christians adopted Arabic as a medium for theological thinking. In some instances, there was an interesting *immediate* interaction between Christians and Muslims, characterized by openness and respect as well as a reflection on how to deal with interreligious differences.¹⁶ The Muslim Amir of Jerusalem Abd al-Raḥmān al-Hāshimi (ninth century) agrees with the Chalcedonian monk Abraham of Tiberias that it is necessary to “liberate one’s soul” or to put aside pre-established categories of thinking, when discussing delicate religious issues.¹⁷

As could be expected, these religious and cultural encounters were no longer conducted along the same lines during the period of the Dark Night and, later, the first centuries of the Ottoman Empire. The traditional themes were now simply repeated without the freshness of earlier periods or Christians and Muslims simply ceased talking about religion to each other. Especially, the intensive contacts of Christians with European powers in the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries contributed to the growing apart of both communities and to stereotyped thinking about the “Other.”

In the nineteenth century, however, Christian and Muslim Arabs found each other in their opposition against the Ottomans and their common struggle for an “Arab Awakening,” both in the literary and political field. Although the role of the Christians, mostly Maronites, Greek Orthodox, and Protestants, is sometimes exaggerated in eastern Christian publications, as if the renewal of the Arabic language would mainly be due to the Christians, this period of a shared history constituted the basis for political cooperation in the aftermath of the First World War during the creation of Arabic national states, when Christian politicians such as Michel Aflaq, one of the co-founders of the Ba’th Party with an outspoken Arab ideology, or Fares al-Khoury, Prime Minister of Syria (1944–45), could play an important role.

ARABIC CHRISTIANS

When Islam established itself as a strong political power and, subsequently, became the religion of the majority, an increasing number of Christians felt it necessary to adopt Arabic as a second language next to their own “national” idioms such as Greek, Syriac, Coptic, or Armenian. There had already been Christian Arabs in earlier periods. In pre-Islamic times, there were a number of prestigious Christian Arabic tribes such as the Nestorian Kindites or the Miaphysite Taghlibides for whom Arabic was their first language, but apart from possibly some early poetry, these Arabs had hardly developed any form of literature and did not even have an Arabic translation of the Bible at their disposal.¹⁸

In the First Abbasid period (750–950), Arabic not only became the spoken but also the literary language of many Christians who ethnically could not boast of Arab ancestry.

As explained in the previous paragraph, the necessity to explain their Christians beliefs to Muslims played a role in this development, but it did not take long before Arabic also became an internal Christian language, used for internal Christian theological issues and even for the liturgy. An Arabic Bible soon became a necessity.¹⁹

In the eyes of some Muslims, the binomial Christian-Arabic was not always self-evident. On the basis of Qur'ānic verses like "We have revealed it an Arabic Qur'ān, that you may understand it" (sura 12:12) and the fact that everywhere in the Islamic world the call to prayer and the ritual prayer (ṣalāt) itself are performed in Arabic made it the language of Islam. This idea was still reinforced by the popular *Hadīth* that the second Caliph 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb would have expelled the Christians and Jews from the Hījāz in the heartland of the Arabian Peninsula,²⁰ thus making Arabia a purely Islamic region. According to the World Chronicle of Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 1201), the language of instruction of Christians in ninth-century Bagdad had to be Syriac rather than Arabic.²¹ This mentality explains that the Nestorian author of a fictitious correspondence between the Muslim al-Hāshimī and the Christian al-Kindī (ninth century) takes great pains in proving his genuine Arabic origins and even criticizes the Muslim claim that the language of the Qur'an is more refined and pure than the Arabic of his, in this period still Christian, tribe of the Kindites.²²

This discussion about a Christian Arabic identity is not merely an academic issue, relevant for the study of the past. For Christians today in Western Asia, it is a matter of survival to actively assume this Arabic identity rather than undergo it as a consequence of the minorization process to which the Christians are subjected since the Second Abbasid period.²³ But also on the Christian side, this is not self-evident. On the one hand, there exists the understandable fear that assuming an Arabic identity implies the abandonment of the own national languages, vehicles of great cultures and rich theological and spiritual traditions which often go back to the earliest period of Christianity. An interesting example of the ambiguous attitude toward Arabic by some Christians is found in the report of a discussion between a Muslim official and a Nestorian bishop in the beginning of the second millennium. When discussing the issue of the superiority of either the Arabic or the Syriac language, the bishop, Elias of Nisibis, defends Syriac, whereas as a matter of fact, the majority of his writings were already composed in Arabic, including a Syriac-Arabic dictionary.²⁴ Second, since the early Ottoman period, some Christian communities were more interested in developing relationships with their western coreligionists. These relationships could take different forms, one of them being the rejection of Arabic, perceived as Muslim. This development becomes especially visible by the end of the nineteenth century among members of the Church of the East in Eastern Anatolia, so exactly in the period that Maronites and Greek Orthodox were struggling for an Arabic renaissance (*nahḍa*). According to these "Nestorians," they were the descendants of the pre-Christian Assyrians, in this manner giving a new ethnic coloring to their identity which formerly was in the first place expressed along religious lines.²⁵ In recent times, there has been a lively debate about a shared "Assyrian" or "Chaldo-Assyrian" ethnic identity of those Christian churches for whom the Syriac language is an integral part of their tradition: "Jacobite" and "Nestorian," Syrian-Catholic,

Chaldean, and even the Maronites.²⁶ It is a way of overcoming the traditional dogmatic oppositions and is met with skepticism by certain ecclesiastical leaders, who regret the loss of autonomy of their community. For some advocates of a common Assyrian ethnicity, it is however also a means of rejecting an Arabic identity and thus constitutes a breaking with the Arabic past of their communities. In the aftermath of the fall of the regime of Saddam Hussein in Iraq (2003), this idea has even received a political translation by the efforts of some Christian politicians wishing to create an “autonomous” Christian homeland in the region where Sureth, a modern form of Aramaic related to Syriac, is still an important spoken language.²⁷

CHALLENGES FOR THE FUTURE

In his recent work on the Church of the East, the scholar of religion Ph. Jenkins has developed the idea of a theology of extinction, the necessity of reflecting in the light of God’s plan with mankind, on the fact that religions or a particular religious community may disappear.²⁸ Although, as mentioned in the introduction, different local church leaders too have evoked the possibility of the disappearance of Christianity from Western Asia, they do not seem prepared to accept it as an inevitable outcome and develop strategies aimed at the survival of a meaningful Christianity in the region.

A first point is to overcome the traditional divisions, especially between the Orthodox Mother churches and their Uniate offspring. The reason is not so much internal ecumenical; unity and cooperation are also needed in order to strengthen Christian witness to the wider society, especially to the Muslim community. This is the background of Corbon’s idea of “a Church of the Arabs.” By assuming a common Arabic identity, the churches are capable of transcending both their dogmatic divisions, as well as their ethnic particularism, in order to reach out to the Muslim and Arabic world.²⁹ *Mutatis mutandis* this also applies to the Christians of Turkey and Iran; the traditional ethnic names (Greek, Armenian, Syriac, etc.) they bear in these countries make them irrelevant to the Turkish and Iranian societies. In the case of Iran, this marginalization seems a deliberate policy on the side of the authorities. Attempts at enculturation (Iranization) are met with suspicion. Some smaller Protestant communities, not happy with the low profile adopted by the autochthonous communities (Armenian, Assyrian, Chaldean), were accused of proselytism by both religious and civil authorities and heavily persecuted. In a more general way, a solution has to be found for the tension between the traditional autochthonous communities and their cautious strategies to reach out to Islam and the attitude of some recent anti-Islamic fundamentalist communities sponsored by western coreligionists.

Second, enculturation into the Arab, Iranian, and Turkish societies of today, which are profoundly Islamic, implies an apologetic effort to make Christianity understandable to a Muslim public. In this respect, it is important to study the original apologetic endeavors of earlier Christian Arabic theologians, to acknowledge its limitations,³⁰ but

in the first place to appreciate the reality of genuine encounters in earlier periods.³¹ The Papal Exhortation *The Church in the Middle East* emphasizes the necessity of dialogue, not only of daily life but also between theologians and experts. The first task of Christian Arabic or Middle Eastern theology is to find adequate responses to the challenge posed to Christians by the reality of their living within Islamic societies. Answers can only be developed within theological faculties and research institutes in the Middle East itself.

The third point is the necessity of reforming the liturgy, as well as certain ecclesiastical structures, that have become obsolete.³²

Fourth, a reflection on the issue of emigration is needed. According to several estimations, there are at present more Middle Eastern Christians living outside the region than inside and this process has not yet come to a standstill.³³ A thorough, encompassing study of the reasons behind the migration movement is most necessary. Scientific research is needed to establish to what extent next to religious motives (for example, the rising Islamism in some countries) economic and political reasons played a role in the decision to leave. This would put the Christian emigration into the wider perspective of the general political and economic situation of the Middle East and thus would make it a less exclusively Christian phenomenon. One of the consequences of the migration phenomenon is that some Christians in a diaspora setting are developing strong anti-Islamic attitudes and sometimes contribute to the promotion of the idea of a distinct non-Arabic ethnic identity. On account of the frequent contacts between the diaspora communities and the homelands these ideas also find their ways to the Middle East and may influence local Christians. Both religious and secular leaders of the Christian communities promote initiatives to encourage Christians not to leave or invite those who left to remain involved in the issue of a continuing Christian presence in the region, to finance certain projects, and even to return to their homelands.

Finally, the idea of a certain separation between the religious and the political should be promoted because, traditionally, the position of the Christian communities in the Middle East is defined along ecclesiastical lines. In several national states, the authorities still consider religious leaders as their political interlocutors representing the Christian communities. This is a remnant of the Ottoman millet system, where the patriarch was considered as the *millet başı* or ethnarch, the religious as well as juridical head of a nation. Despite the fact that this system allowed the Christian communities to preserve their identities, it also relegated them to the position of tolerated minorities. Christians did not enjoy full political and civil rights. Especially in view of the rise of Islamism and fundamentalism in certain West Asian Islamic states, some leaders advocate the necessity of developing a form of secularity, a distinction between the religious and the political spheres instead of a state system where religion co-determines the political agenda. In their eyes, secularity should not mean the disappearance of religion from the public sphere, but would allow for a genuine "freedom of religion" where the different religious communities will be treated on equal terms and will be free to express themselves, but will also be liberated from "the encumbrance of politics."³⁴ Full equality of Muslims and Christians as citizens of their national states seems the basis prerequisite for maintaining a Christian presence in Western Asia.

NOTES

1. On the danger of a monochromatic “Middle East without Christians,” see the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Medio Oriente* [The Church in the Middle East] by Pope Benedict XVI (Beirut/Rome, 2012).
2. Although the history of Christianity in Egypt has no place in a handbook on Christianity in Asia, some allusions to it cannot be avoided, since Egypt is an integral part of the Middle East and the Egyptian Coptic Church had intensive contacts with other West Asian Christian communities.
3. For a survey of early Syriac literature, see S. Brock, A. Butts, G. Kiraz, and L. Van Rompay, eds., *Gorgias Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Syriac Heritage* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2011).
4. For an introduction to the acceptance of “Nestorianism” in the Persian Empire, see H. Teule, *Les Assyro-chaldéens* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2008), 40–48.
5. The best introduction is found in R. Jabre Mouawad, *Les Maronites: Chrétiens du Liban* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2009).
6. Cf. H. Teule, “Saint-Louis and the Dream of a Terrestrial Empire: East-Syrians and their Contacts with the West,” in K. Ciggaar and H. Teule, eds., *East and West in the Crusader States: Context—Contacts—Confrontations III* (Louvain: Peeters, 2003), 101–22; F. Micheau, “Eastern Christianities (11th to 14th Centuries): Copts, Melkites, Nestorians and Jacobites,” in M. Angold, ed., *Cambridge History of Christianity*, vol. 5, *Eastern Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 373–403.
7. For a historical introduction to the Nestorian Church of the East, see D. Wilmshurst, *The Martyred Church: A History of the Church of the East* (London: East & West Publishing Ltd, 2011).
8. Greek-Orthodox: Chalcedonians in the Middle East, who after the Eastern Schism of 1054 (between Rome and Constantinople) had come into the orbit of Constantinople.
9. On this Catholic penetration into Western Asia, see B. Heyberger, *Les Chrétiens du Proche Orient: Au temps de la réforme catholique (Syrie, Liban, Palestine, XVIIe–XVIIIe siècles)* (Rome: École Française de Rome, 1994).
10. An insightful study of the genesis of a Latin Diocese in the Middle East is F. Filoni, *L’Eglise dans la terre d’Abraham* (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 2009).
11. H. Murre-van den Berg, ed., *New Faith in Ancient Lands: Western Missions in the Middle East in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries* (Leiden: Brill, 2006).
12. Cf. the collection of studies edited by R. Malek, *Jingjiao: The Church of the East in China and Central Asia* (Sankt Augustin, Germany, 2006).
13. See the entry by S. Brock, “Thomas Christians,” in Brock et al., eds., *The Syriac Heritage*, 410–14.
14. See D. Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture: The Graeco-Arabic Translation Movement in Baghdad and Early Abbasid Society (2nd–4th–/8th–10th Centuries)* (London: Routledge, 1998).
15. Cf. H. Teule and C. Fotescu, eds., *The Syriac Renaissance*, Eastern Christian Studies 10 (Louvain: Peeters, 2010). On Barhebraeus and Bar Malkon and their interaction with the Islamic world, see H. Teule, “Barhebraeus” and “Bar Malkon,” in D. Thomas and A. Mallet, eds., *Christian–Muslim Relations: A Bibliographical History*, vol. 4 (1200–1350) (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 331–38 and 588–609.

16. Two major studies on Christian–Muslim interaction in the Abbasid period: S. Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008); B. Landron, *Chrétiens et Musulmans en Irak: Attitudes nestoriennes vis-à-vis de l’Islam* (Paris: Cariscript, 1994).
17. Cf. G. Marcuzzo, *Le Dialogue d’Abraham de Tibériade avec ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Hāšimī à Jérusalem vers 820* (Rome: Pontificio Istituto Orientale, 1986), 288.
18. For a survey, see Th. Hainthaler, *Christliche Araber vor dem Islam* (Louvain: Peeters, 2007).
19. D. Thomas, ed., *The Bible in Arabic Christianity* (Leiden: Brill, 2007).
20. Cf. the Ṣaḥīḥ of Bukhārī, 3.39.531, <http://nafsadh.com/hadith/bukhari/3/39>.
21. Cf. J.-M. Fiey, *Chrétiens syriaques sous les Abbassides surtout à Bagdad (749–1258)* (Louvain: Secrétariat du Corpus SCO, 1980), 93.
22. G. Tartar, *Dialogue islamo-chrétien sous le calife al-Ma’mūn (813–834): Les Épîtres d’Al-Hashimet et d’Al-Kindī* (Paris: Nouvelles éditions latines, 1985), 196–98.
23. Cf. the pertinent study by J. Corbon, *L’Eglise des Arabes* (1977; reprinted with a new preface by Gabriel Hachem, Paris: Editions du Cerf, 2007).
24. Cf. S. Khalil Samir, “Deux cultures qui s’affrontent: Une controverse sur l’Iṣrā’ au XIe siècle entre Elie de Nisibe et le vizir Abū l-Qāsim,” *Mélanges de l’Université St Joseph* 49 (Beyrouth, 1975/6): 619–49; reprinted in Samir Khalil Samir, *Foi et culture en Irak au XIe siècle: Elie de Nisibe et l’Islam*, Collected Studies Series CS 544, Variorum reprint (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1996), p. xi.
25. On the acceptance of “ethnic” names of Oriental-Christian communities such as “Aramaic,” “Syriac,” “Assyrian,” and “Chaldean,” see J. Joseph, *The Modern Assyrians of the Middle East: Encounters with Western Christian Missions, Archaeologists, & Colonial Powers* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 1–32.
26. N. Atto, *Hostages in the Homeland, Orphans in the Diaspora: Identity Discourses among the Assyrian/Syriac Elites in the European Diaspora* (PhD thesis, Leiden, 2011), 263 ff.
27. H. Teule, “Christians in Iraq: An Analysis of Some Recent Political Developments,” *Der Islam* 88 (2011): 79–98. For a similar development in the Maronite community, see the contribution by Ahmad Abdul Hamid in this volume.
28. Ph. Jenkins, *The Lost History of Christianity: The Thousand-Year Golden Age of the Church in the Middle East, Africa, and Asia—and How It Died* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2008), 249.
29. Cf. Corbon, *Eglise des Arabes*, 65; A. Fleyfel, *La Théologie contextuelle arabe: Modèle libanais* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2011), 199–205.
30. Cf. Griffith, *Church in the Shadow of the Mosque*, 156–59.
31. Cf. L. Sako, *Christian-Muslim Dialogue: Theological Approaches in the Arabic Language in the Abbasid Period* [in Arabic] (Kirkuk, 2009).
32. L. Sako’s preface to A. O’Mahony and J. Flannery, eds., *The Catholic Church in the Contemporary Middle East* (London: Melisende, 2010).
33. Cf. the declaration *Christian Presence in the Middle East: Mission and Witness*, issued by the Conference of Catholic Patriarchs in the Middle East, *La Documentation catholique* 2052 (1992): 610.
34. Cf. Exhortation *Ecclesia in Medio Oriente*, section 29.

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CHAPTER 2

SOUTH ASIAN CHRISTIANITY IN CONTEXT

FELIX WILFRED

THE EARLY TRADITIONS

THE presence of Christianity in the Indian subcontinent is generally thought to originate from the time of what K. M. Panikkar termed as the “Vasco da Gama Epoch” of Asian history. It starts from the sixteenth century when European traders and missionaries landed on its shores.¹ But the fact is that there have been Christian communities in the subcontinent, well before Europe itself was converted to Christianity. Although the clear division of the countries of South Asia into nation-states is of relatively recent origin, the whole region shares a common civilizational history, root paradigms, symbols, and values. In many respects, their relationship with Western colonialism and encounter with Christianity bear common traits.

There are numerous records and evidence of the presence of a group of Christians on the West coast of India who claim their origins from the preaching of one of the disciples of Jesus, the apostle St. Thomas. In the northern part of the subcontinent—in today’s Pakistan—according to tradition, King Gondulphares was converted by the preaching of St. Thomas the Apostle, and there is the so-called Taxila cross, which was found in 1935 amidst the ruins of the city of Sirkap and whose origin dates back to the second century A.D. Evidence in Sri Lanka—formerly Ceylon—also suggests early presence of Christianity in the island. In his work *Christian Topography* written in A.D. 547, Cosmas Indicopleustes (Indian Navigator), a Greek traveler from Alexandria, observes, “In Taprobane, an island in further India where the Indian sea is, there is a Church of Christians with clergy and the faithful, but I know not whether there are any Christians in the parts beyond it.”² In the same book we also learn that the Church he is speaking about is one which had connections with the church in Persia from where presbyters and deacons were appointed to serve the Christians of the island. Archeological evidence supports this early presence of Christianity in Sri Lanka. In fact, in Anuradapura,

an ancient city in the island, a Persian cross was found, and it bears resemblance to the ones found in Madras and Travancore in India. There seems to be in different parts of the subcontinent traces of the presence of Christianity from Armenia as well. The Armenians, who from quite early times were engaged in flourishing trade with the ports in South Asia, constructed churches for the Diaspora communities.

OBSCURE MEDIEVAL TIMES

Little known is the story of Christian mission in the medieval times in this part of Asia. Attention was focused on China where the mission flourished under the Mongols. The Indian subcontinent benefited from the movement of missionaries who transited through its territory and halted for a while. This mission was fostered by the Franciscans and Dominicans—the mendicant orders. The three key figures in the medieval Christian mission in the subcontinent were John of Montecorvino, who spent a short period in Mylapore on his way to China; Jordan Catalani, who did missionary work in Thana, Sapora, Broach, and other parts of Gujarat, and who later became bishop of Quilon, situated in Kerala of today; and John Marignolli, who was the papal legate in China, and who spent some time in India and has left an interesting description of Christians in his recollections written around 1354. Marignolli seems to have also visited Sri Lanka.

EXPANSION OF MISSION—CATHOLIC AND PROTESTANT

From the arrival of the Portuguese in the late fifteenth century, there has been an easily traceable historical continuity in the presence of Christians and Christian communities in the subcontinent. As a great maritime power, Portugal established its trading posts along the Western coast of India, on the Bay of Bengal and in Sri Lanka, then known as Ceylon. The traces of their presence and tradition are visible in Goa, the Coromandel Coast, in Calcutta (now Kolkata), in the northern and southern parts of Sri Lanka. Although the Portuguese traveled the Bay of Bengal to the East, it was only since 1537 that they started settling down in this part of the subcontinent. Satgaon and Chittagong in present-day Bangladesh became important trading centers. In these maritime centers where missionaries also arrived, Christian settlements took root, and eventually spread into the hinterland. The first Church came to be established in 1601 at Diang, near Chittagong. Through the mission work of the order of Augustinians, Christian churches got established in Dhaka, Bangladesh, in 1628.

When the Portuguese arrived, they found in the West coast of India an already existent Christian community which right from its beginning was in connection with the

West Asian Christianity of Syria and neighboring regions. The Bishops came from West Asia and the worship of this community was held in the Syriac language. This community has been, characterized as “Hindu in culture, Christian in religion, and oriental in worship.”³

The mixture of political motives and the élan of maintaining the orthodoxy of faith led to a confrontation of the Portuguese with this community which broke with the Portuguese form of Christianity to follow its own course. This break led to the formation of Syrian Orthodox churches in India. The Portuguese on their part consolidated their presence in Goa since its conquest in 1510 and it would become a center for the whole of South and Southeast Asian Christianity. Their mission work was particularly intense in the Eastern Coromandel Coast of South India. During the same period, the Portuguese missionary work was carried on in Calcutta (now Kolkata), Karachi, in today’s Pakistan, and in Jaffna, north of Sri Lanka. The small Christian community of Portuguese times connected with Goa and Karachi has also spread out to different parts of the world and has made their presence felt among the South Asian immigrants. There are also records of a group of Armenian Christian traders who came to India and some of them settled in Calcutta and Madras (now Chennai) and other places.

The Protestant mission in the subcontinent goes back to the early seventeenth century, when Lutheran missionaries Bartholomäus Ziegenbalg (1682–1719) and his companion Heinrich Plütschau (1678–1747) landed in the Danish colony of Tranquebar in South India. This was the only available option then, since the British did not allow missionaries in their territories, but only chaplains for the spiritual care of the soldiers and of the British residents. These chaplains generally belonged to the Church of England. Tranquebar became a center of indigenous Christianity as these missionaries tried to understand and be part of the cultural world of the people to whom they preached and whose language they learnt, and to a great extent mastered.⁴ Ziegenbalg made the translation of the New Testament in Tamil—the first ever translation of the Bible in any South Asian language. The Tranquebar mission focused on education in the language of the people—quite contrary to the later development under the Anglicist influence to begin the modern English educational system.

Another center of mission activity in that period was Serampore, again a Danish colony close to Calcutta. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, at Serampore the well-known Baptist missionaries William Carey, Joshua Marshman, William Ward, Alexander Duff, and others engaged themselves in the study of South Asian languages and culture. William Carey was an important personality at Fort William College for matters Indian.⁵ In Bangladesh, Baptist Mission activities started in the early nineteenth century, much later than those of the Catholics. In Nepal, a Hindu Kingdom till recent times, the Jesuit missionaries entered in the eighteenth century on their way to Tibet and formed a very small community of Christians. For a long time, Nepal did not allow missionaries and has been avowedly against any conversion. Although Christian communities were growing in Nepal, with the abolition of monarchy and the introduction of democracy and secularism in 2006, they have greater opportunities for their religious manifestation.⁶

South Asian Christianity has the credit of having contributed to overcoming the historical divisions among the Christian churches—something that plagued the Western nations and led to religious wars. The common challenges and situations faced by the different churches in the subcontinent also led to greater ecumenical collaboration among them. The relationship among the churches went even a step further when three different churches joined together to form the Church of South India in 1947.⁷ The collaboration of the churches was also seen in the formation of the National Council of Churches in Sri Lanka and Pakistan. They represent today the united voice of Protestant churches.

A NEW SHIFT—FROM MISSION TO CHURCHES AND INSTITUTIONS

By the middle of the nineteenth century, there was a shift in the mode of the presence of Christianity in the subcontinent. Following direct missionary work, the churches became more and more institutionalized. As a result, many institutions and many forms of organized charity and social work came into being. Since then, the most significant form of the presence of the Christian churches has been through the educational institutions they have been running for the benefit of not only Christians but all religious traditions.

It was also the time when the new educational policy of English education was introduced by the British Raj. The churches took up this cause as an important avenue for their involvement and viewed it as part of its newly understood “civilizing mission.” This approach through education presented new opportunities for missionaries to interact with the upper strata of the society, even as a lot of Dalits were turning to Christianity in mass conversion. The educational mission involved creation of new structures and investment of human and material resources, which necessitated the establishment of structures. Here also begins a new phase of South Asian Christianity. Many educational institutions sprang up, and the churches spent material and human resources to build them up. The contributions of William Miller and William Skinner of the Madras Christian College, and Henry Heras of Bombay (now Mumbai) are unique. The motives for the establishment of schools and institutions of higher education were mixed. These institutions open to high caste people, the missionaries believed, would facilitate their conversion, and eventually the rest of the subcontinent. There was also the motive of “civilizing mission.” To be able to preach the Gospel meaningfully, people need to be civilized, which the educational institutions were supposed to achieve. Further, the opening of these institutions was meant to impart an education that would be holistic by attending to the character formation of the students and inculcation of moral values. The Christian educational institutions all over the subcontinent excelled in every aspect,

winning general respect among the people. Numerous such institutions could be named in India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, and Bangladesh.

There also came about organized medical mission as well as establishment of institutions for the care of orphans, widows, and so on. These institutions and works of charity gave a recognizable presence and a new profile to Christianity in the South Asian societies, all the more so, because they were not limited to those of the Christian community but were providing service to anyone in need, across religious, caste, and class borders. Vellore Christian Medical College and Hospital in Tamil Nadu stands out as a unique expression of Christian involvement in the field of healthcare. The expansion of such works, even after the political Independence of the subcontinent, was viewed by Christian thinkers and unbiased observers as contribution to nation-building.

SOUTH ASIAN CHRISTIANITY AND THE COLONIAL RULERS

The relationship between Christianity and colonialism, as in other parts of the world, is a subject matter of debate in the subcontinent with contrasting points of view.⁸ During the Portuguese period, missionaries followed the traders and rulers, and there was a certain patronage of Catholicism. Whereas in India the Protestant mission did not start until the end of the eighteenth century, in Sri Lanka, it started in an earlier period with the defeat of the Portuguese at the hands of the Dutch who entered into alliance with the local rulers. And during the Dutch period, there was a close relationship between the colonial powers and Protestant Calvinism. The state-support for Calvinism resulted in Catholics being persecuted and discriminated against.

During the British period, the situation became more complex. The East Indian Company, for example, did not allow missionaries into the undivided India (which then comprised the present-day Pakistan and Bangladesh as well) fearing that interference with religion could turn the anger of the people against the company. Until the early decades of the nineteenth century, only chaplains were allowed to take care of the spiritual needs of British residents and British soldiers. However, the evangelical revival that characterized the end of eighteenth-century England with such leaders as Charles Grant and William Wilberforce (who had won general acclaim as champion of the antislavery movement) pressed the British parliament, when the charter of East India Company came up for renewal in 1813, for the inclusion of a clause permitting missionaries. From that time onward, missionaries were allowed. However, the British supported only chaplaincy and the maintenance of churches through the creation of the so-called “Ecclesiastical Department” within the bureaucracy.

Whereas the British Raj was lukewarm toward missionary work, it found in the missionaries support for their social reforms such as abolition of *sati* (burning of widows on the funeral pyre of their husbands) and child marriage. This brought about the anger

of a section of the people both against the rulers as well as the missionaries. There was a general perception of collaboration between these two agents. But the reality was more complex. Even if the missionaries wished to get involved in the issues of the society, this was not possible for the non-British missionaries who had to make an oath of allegiance to the crown. They were simply expected to do the missionary work, and nothing more that would be socially and politically upsetting. This might explain partly certain ambiguities in their involvement in social causes and the lack of critical posture vis-à-vis the colonial government in their exploitation of the colonized South Asian peoples. On the other hand, the British missionaries of the Anglican Church, given the fact that they received support from the colonial government as its official church, entered into greater cooperation with the rulers.

One of the most significant events during the British period in the subcontinent was the War of Independence (1857) or the so-called “Sepoy Mutiny.” The revolt of the soldiers was due, among other things, to a simmering feeling that the rulers were interfering with the religions of the people, and that there was support by the regime for subtle enticement of the soldiers to Christianity. The rebellion caused the death of many Christians—both foreigners and Indians—in different parts of north India. This event led the British rulers to further distance themselves from the missionaries in the interest of maintaining the hold of the empire.

The relationship of missionaries to the British colonial rulers was ambiguous. If there seemed to have been close collaboration, as I noted, between the rulers and missionaries concerning social reforms—abolition of *sati*, child marriage, promotion of widow remarriage, and so on—they could not accept, prompted by the theology of the times, the way the rulers took up the patronage of non-Christian religions. In Sri Lanka—following the tradition of royal patronage of the religion in its history—the British offered to protect Buddhism. The clearest example of this understanding between the rulers and local Buddhist kings was the Kandyan Convention of 1818. According to this Convention, “the religion of Boodhoo, professed by the chiefs and inhabitants of these provinces, is declared inviolable, and its rites, ministers and places of worship are to be maintained and protected.” Such support on the part of “Christian” rulers greatly surprised the missionaries who were aggrieved at such colonial religious policies. Similar was also the case in regard to the British religious policies that supported the Hindu endowments and Hindu religious festivals. This became an area of rupture between the missionaries and the colonial rulers.

CHRISTIANITY AND SOUTH ASIAN RENAISSANCE

The colonial rule was a critical period for India and the subcontinent as a whole. It was also a period that brought in the thought of renewal and reform in the traditional society.

This mood of change and reform caused, on the one hand, the emergence of reactionary forces which, in the course of time, would lead to the founding of Arya Samaj and Hindu Mahasabha. But there was also another stream of response which took the form of dialogue and encounter. This latter stream is represented by Brahmo Samaj, which had as one of its goals the encounter with Christianity. The father of Indian modernity, Raja Ram Mohan Roy, along with Keshab Chandra Sen promoted this encounter. Ram Mohan Roy published a booklet called "The Precepts of Jesus," and Keshab Chandra Sen spoke of "Oriental Christ."¹⁰ Unfortunately, all this did not create any positive echo on the missionaries, some of whom assumed an apologetic tone, as could be seen in the response of William Carey, Marshman, and others to the work of Ram Mohan Roy.

In Sri Lanka, the renaissance of the country at the end of the nineteenth century partly overlapped with the renaissance of Buddhism.¹¹ This in turn merged with the resurgence of Sinhala ethnic identity. The encounter with colonial modernity in the field of politics, economy, culture, and so on led to this process. Buddhist religious revival was in great part a response to the missionary preaching and their denigration of Buddhism as idolatrous. Ironically, the Christian preaching that prevailed at that time also provoked Buddhist renaissance. One of the chief figures of this renewal movement was Anagarika Dharmapala (1864–1933). Part of this movement was also a reconception of the monkhood in Buddhism. The Christian missionary and priest offered a paradigm on which, at least partly, the Buddhist monkhood got modeled. There was an attempt to focus on doctrine rather than on ritual practices, which explains why this movement was qualified as "Protestant Buddhism." The extremist Buddhist-Sinhala position also had a strong anti-Christian tone, and there have been polemics between the Buddhists and Christians.¹² In recent times, the anti-Christian sentiments came out on the occasion of the visit of Pope John Paul II on January 20, 1995. The interreligious meeting organized on that occasion was boycotted by the Federation of Buddhist Organizations. This was a protest against what the pope wrote on Buddhism in his book *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*,¹³ in which he seemed to hold the kind of negative view of Buddhism held by missionaries in the past.

SOUTH ASIAN CHRISTIANITY AND NATIONALISM

In the relationship between the colonized people of South Asia and the rulers, some changes and development were taking place. Whereas, in the initial stage, the goal was to secure as much freedom and independence without challenging the colonial rule itself, slowly the move toward full independence and the overthrow of foreign rule caught the imagination of the national leaders, various groups, and peoples. Where do the Christians fit in this whole development? Here again the attitude of missionaries and Christians are characterized by ambivalence. Some segments of Christians and

missionaries were apprehensive about the resistance to the colonial government as they found this going against the established order and legitimate authority. On the other hand, there were Christians and at least a few missionaries who embraced the nationalist cause and struggle for full independence. The conflict and ambivalence of the Christian community in this matter could be gleaned in the Christian journals of the times. For example, *The Catholic Herald* published from Calcutta represented and reported the views of nationalist Christians, whereas *The Examiner* published from Bombay echoed the views of those critical of nationalists and those Christians who joined the Indian Congress Party in the nationalist struggle. The Catholic Union formed in the 1930s also supported the cause of Independence. In short, there was no single view or position of Christians and missionaries in regard to the struggle for Independence. In Jaffna, in the northern part of Sri Lanka, the YMCA called for a "Quit Ceylon" movement.

EFFORTS OF INDIGENIZATION OF CHRISTIANITY

A closer look into the history of Christianity in the subcontinent reveals that, contrary to the general impression of a cultural alienation, the Christian communities were in various ways interacting with the society of which they had been a part. The earliest example is that of Thomas Christians who understood and practiced their Christian identity in tune with the rest of the people and their culture. This integration has continued till our times. Indigenization became a crucial issue during the modern period of mission starting from the sixteenth century when the ambiguity of the question became evident. Whereas Roberto de Nobili (1577–1656) and a few other missionaries were in favor of assuming elements of the local culture into Christianity, this was opposed by other missionaries and subsequently also by the Roman Catholic authorities. Here it is important to note that the significance of this missionary method goes beyond indigenization; it also had political overtones. It signified dissociation from the close relationship of Christianity and colonialism as represented in the Portuguese Padroado system. It meant that Christianity in the subcontinent could function on its own and under local authorities of the kings, without requiring the patronage of the colonizers.

In the modern period, the indigenization movement was influenced by the nationalist movement and struggle for Independence. This also had its repercussion among the Christians and their internal organization. First of all, there was a shift from the idea of mission to a focusing on the creation of churches as communities of Christians with active participation. These communities and local Christian leaders were often locked in conflict with missionaries for greater autonomy in organization, independence in thinking, and in the maintenance of the churches. An expression of this was the movement created by some prominent Christians under the name of "Rethinking Christianity in India."¹⁴ A very important aspect of indigenization of Christianity was

the shift of focus from mission to churches. Whereas the missionaries tried to preach the Gospel to the people, the indigenous movement of Christianity spearheaded by the people of the region aimed at creating churches rooted in the soil with freedom, autonomy, and independence. One of the key figures in this movement was Bishop Vedanayagam Samuel Azariah of Dornakal (1874–1945) of Andhra Pradesh, India.¹⁵

What is important to note is that these high points of indigenization do not exhaust the actual history. In numerous ways in daily life, Christians and Christian communities have been in cultural interaction with the society. These could be gleaned through the literary creation of Christians following the local language tradition. To cite one example in the eighteenth century, the well-known Tamil Christian, Vedanayaga Sastriar created *Bethlehem Kuravanchi* following the Tamil Kuravanchi literary genre, portraying the story of male and female gypsies who appear in ancient Tamil literature. Such examples could be adduced from other parts of the subcontinent. Popular devotions among Christians have close resemblance to the Hindu, Buddhist, and Islamic customs and traditions, depending on the region. The indigenization could be observed in the way Pakistani Christians have adopted to Islamic cultural milieu by not introducing statues of Christ, the Virgin Mary, and other saints as is customary in other parts of the subcontinent, since this could be viewed as idol worship by the Islamic community.

Behind the program of indigenization was the conviction that Christianity does not belong to any one single culture, and that it could be at home in a universe of cultural plurality. This implied that the truths of Christian faith could be interpreted through the cultural and philosophical means and categories of the Indic civilization. In fact, from the end of the nineteenth century through the twentieth century, there are numerous efforts to develop a theology that is culturally rooted. Brahmabandhab Upadhyaya (1861–1907), a convert from Hinduism, spearheaded this movement. He attempted, for example, to interpret the Christian belief in the Trinity through the Hindu conception of *saccidananda*, which means the mystery of being, knowledge, and bliss as one single reality. His legacy was carried forward by the French missionaries Jules Monchanin, Henri Le Saux (Abishiktananda), and the British monk Bede Griffiths. Christian ashrams attempted to live Christian faith and to develop new forms of Christian consecrated life by adopting forms of Hindu ashram life. These Christian ashrams adopted numerous symbols and rites from the Hindu tradition. This movement has been supported by the development of indigenous theologies, arts, and architecture. The development of South Asian theology has grown to such an extent that it has drawn the attention in other parts of the Christian world. South Asian Christian theologies attempt to bring together in Christian reflection the concerns of social, economic, and cultural liberation with a positive and inclusive understanding of various religious traditions. The negative and exclusive attitude toward Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam at the height of colonial times gave way to a more positive and inclusive approach, thanks also to the contribution of Orientalism, which presented in a favorable light the riches of the subcontinent.

That said, in the past few decades the emergence of a strong Dalit movement within Christian churches has critically questioned this type of adaptation of Christianity,

since its representatives believe that Christianity is adapting to the high-caste Sanskrit culture of Hinduism. The opposition of the Dalit movement in general to Hindu tradition as the ideological backbone of caste oppression has made it skeptical of this type of contextualization of Christianity. Similar has also been the reaction of many Christian tribal communities, who claim their roots to primeval religious traditions and dissociate themselves from Hinduism. This has become an important issue of inner church discussions and debates.

In Pakistan, indigenization means adapting to a culture and religion that is Islamic. The mainline churches in that country try to emulate many Muslim practices such as strict Ramadan fasting especially during the Lenten season; veneration of the Bible similar to what Muslims do for the Quran. The Christian–Muslim relationship bears also on the veneration of Mother Mary, whose shrines the Muslims visit like that of *pirs* in Islam. The Pastoral Institute in Multan founded in 1970 has been doing pioneering work in the area of indigenization of Christianity in Pakistan.

Things seem to be a little different in Bangladesh. Although a Muslim country, the indigenization here has tended to adopt more to Bengali cultural practices (closer to Hindu ones) than Islamic customs and practices. This may be explained by the fact that the Bengalese linguistic and cultural identities of the people cut across religious boundaries, and in this sense the customs and traditions that Christians of Bangladesh adopt resemble Hindu ones.

A NEW RELATIONSHIP WITH NEIGHBORS OF OTHER FAITHS

Christianity is identified with an absolutist position when it comes to the relationship with other religious traditions. By and large, the conviction about the absoluteness of Christianity and its truths for the salvation of all led to zealous missionary enterprise in the subcontinent. Not a few missionaries set about to prove the Christian truth and demonstrate the falsehood of other religions which were named as “pagan.” All this affected the behavior of the missionaries and the attitude of Christians toward their neighbors. However, there has taken place significant changes in this absolutist and intolerant traditional Christian position. The change started perhaps with the Orientalists who made known the riches of the culture and the religious universe of Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and so on by translating some of the religious classics into European languages. Christian theology itself changed from an exclusivist position of not recognizing the value of other religions toward a more inclusivistic position, represented for example by the work of the missionary J. N. Farquhar, *The Crown of Hinduism*.¹⁶ As the national struggle for Independence played a role in the growth of indigenous churches, so too the spirit of that struggle had its reflection also in the South Asian Christians’ attitude to Hinduism, Buddhism, and other religions. Later, the inclusive and positive theological

position voiced by the Ecumenical Council of Vatican II in the Roman Catholic Church and the statements of the World Council of Churches (WCC) had their own influence on the promotion of interreligious dialogue and understanding. South Asian theologians have contributed to the development of a worldwide innovative theology of religions.

CASTE AND CHRISTIAN AMBIVALENCE

A common characteristic of the South Asian societies is the caste system that has endured millennia. It has been the central organizing principle of the societies of the region, and today it is at work in varying degrees in different parts of the subcontinent. Christianity which professes equality of all human beings, in principle, could not accept a system of caste that discriminates people on the basis of purity and pollution and puts them in a hierarchy of high and low. Here again the attitude and practice of Christians and Christian missionaries have been ambivalent. There are communities like the St. Thomas Christians of Kerala who right from the beginning adopted the caste system of the society and claimed high status and privileges in the society.

During the missionary period starting from the sixteenth century, the issue of caste divided the Christians, their attitude and approach. There were those who thought that caste is a social system and a cultural reality, and that Christians need not oppose it, but rather adapt to it. This attitude was further reinforced by the thought that challenging the caste system might jeopardize the cause of the Gospel, its preaching and conversion. The caste issue also created two strands of missionaries—one strand addressed its preaching to the lower castes, and the other to the Brahmins and other upper castes. Many missionaries were keen to preach the Gospel to the upper castes. They were guided by the thought that if the upper castes were converted, the conversion of lower castes to Christianity would follow automatically by way of trickle-down effect. Roberto de Nobili is the most well-known representative of the missionary for the Brahmins who adopted his lifestyle, dress, and external demeanor to that of a Brahmin Sanyasi or ascetic. Whereas Catholic missionaries from Portugal and Italy, accustomed to the feudal society at home, did not have much difficulty in adapting to the caste system, the Protestant missionaries, hailing from the European Enlightenment tradition, were the ones who generally opposed caste as something with which Christian faith could not compromise. Even more, this would lead the missionaries to favor those who are oppressed by the caste system as the addressee of their preaching, something that became very evident with mass conversion movements of Dalits into the churches in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

As for the Christian communities today, there exist, especially in South India—Tamil Nadu, Andhra, Karnataka, Kerala—many conflicts between middle- and high-caste Christians and the Dalits regarding participation in worship, representation, and sharing of power in the church. The caste issue in Christianity has also turned out to be a political one, and that is very evident in India. The Indian Constitution provides the

so-called reservation or an institutionalized policy of affirmative action for those of the Dalit community suffering from exclusion and social and economic disabilities for centuries and millennia. This reservation policy in educational institutions and in government jobs helped many Dalits to improve their situation. A point of great dispute is whether Dalit Christians are entitled to such privileges and reservations. As a matter of fact, through a presidential order of 1950 this has been denied to Christian Dalits because, as it is argued, caste is a Hindu institution and Christians professing equality of all cannot have caste. Moreover, it is also claimed that Dalit Christians, unlike their Hindu counterparts, have improved their lot educationally and economically. However, the Dalit Christians have argued that they suffer from the stigma of untouchability and are discriminated against just like other Dalits, and that their economic condition has not been different. There is at present a struggle to get the Dalit Christians enlisted with all other Dalit beneficiaries of government aids and reservation in jobs, in admission to educational institutions, and so on.¹⁷

In Sri Lankan Christian communities, caste may not be as rigid as in India, nevertheless, it is present. In general, the Buddhist culture of the island nation has contributed to weaken the caste-consciousness whose reflection can be found also in the Christian communities. Caste was more rigid among the Sinhala Buddhists in the region of Kandy with feudal chieftains governing them. The European influence broke to some extent the traditional caste barriers, but it was extant in the interior districts with less foreign influence. There are many instances where the missionaries were confronted with caste in their communities, in the schools they ran, and in other spaces. The reaction of the missionaries, like in the case of India, was very similar. There was a fear that any stiff opposition to caste might have a negative impact on their mission work. And so, barring some exceptions, most of them accommodated to caste as a social reality hoping that the gradual influence of Christianity would lead to its disappearance. It has been noted that the American missionaries working in the North of the island were critical and vehemently opposed to caste discrimination and use of caste-identifying marks. In Pakistan, as noted already, a large number of Christians belong to the group of “untouchables.” But there is a kind of caste distinction among them—between those who do polluting jobs and those who are settled down to do agricultural work and who also claim a higher status.¹⁸

DALIT AND TRIBAL CHRISTIANS OF SOUTH ASIA

Without any exaggeration it could be said that the Dalit and tribal Christians together form the overwhelming majority of Christians of South Asia. The conversion of these two groups in large numbers is of relatively recent origin—going back to the nineteenth and the beginning of twentieth century. The political, economic, and social situation

of the nineteenth century in the subcontinent resulted in large number of conversions from these groups to Christianity. With the advent of British industrialization and breaking up of the traditional economy to which Dalits were important contributors as agricultural laborers, there came about mass poverty, famine, and insecurity of life. Sections of Dalits found a new avenue by joining the British army. The long-standing caste oppression led another section of the Dalits in different parts of the subcontinent to turn to Christianity in search of a new identity and greater human dignity. The traditionally despised “untouchables”¹⁹ of Western Punjab in Pakistan who do the despised jobs of sweeping and scavenging were at the margins of the society. The Presbyterian missionaries from America worked among them. Many of them converted also to Islam and are known as Musalis, and to Sikhism, known as Mesbhihs. Not all Christians of Pakistan belong to the untouchable castes. Many Christians involved in the agricultural field and inhabiting along the irrigation canals built by the British claim to belong to Jat or Rajput high castes. The Roman Catholic religious order of Capuchins did a lot of mission work among them. Further, there are Christians in Karachi and other parts of the country who trace their ancestry to the Portuguese enclave of Goa.

As for mass conversion of the untouchables, it is not the case that all missionaries were happy about it. For, many of them, under the inspiration of liberal and Enlightenment ideals, preferred individual conversion. Second, they were apprehensive that the presence of the low castes and untouchables might drive off the upper castes from embracing Christianity. And so, there have also been instances of opposition by missionaries themselves to large-scale mass conversion.

As for the tribals of central and North India, they were oppressed in many ways as laborers in plantations and were exploited by traders, money-lenders, and others. They turned to Christianity with the hope of getting liberated. There is another group of tribals living mostly in the hill areas of Northeast India and Bangladesh who follow primeval religious traditions close to nature and its rhythm. They found a new and different identity by forming part of the Christian community. These Christian communities have been very vibrant and there has been a lot of vocation among them to Christian priesthood and religious orders. In some states of India like Nagaland and Meghalaya, tribal Christians are the majority population of the state, and they belong to different Christian denominations.²⁰ In Bangladesh, too, there are Tripura tribal Christians and Khasi tribal Christians, belonging to the same tribe of those in the state of Meghalaya in India. As minority ethnic communities, the tribal Christians of Bangladesh, like the Hindu minority community, have undergone a lot of difficult times through the changing politics in that country and lack of proper constitutional protection of minorities.

There are efforts to contextualize Christian life and worship in the tribal culture and tradition, and at the same time, there is also the accusation that Christianity has alienated the tribals from their culture, tradition, and history. This is a hot point of debate in present times. There is still ambivalence. The shift of tribal people toward Christianity happened through the involvement of missionaries who wanted to save this people from the land-alienation they suffered at the hands of the colonial state as well as of the elites. The introduction of the Permanent Settlement Act of 1793 and the Zamindari system

to increase revenue for the colonial regime meant alienation of tribal lands, following which the people migrated to other regions and were subjected to exploitation by land-owners and money-lenders. The involvement of missionaries like Constance Lievens (1856–1893) in the social issues of the tribals drew them toward Christianity. As for many tribes of Northeast India, the missionary preaching took place among them at the end of the nineteenth century and in the early decades of the twentieth century. Among other things, the affinity they found between tribal beliefs and Christianity led to their conversion in great numbers.

The Christian involvement among the Dalits and tribals has found strong opposition among some radical groups of Hindus, Muslims, and Buddhists, turning conversion into a critical issue in the relationship of Christians with peoples of other religious groups in the subcontinent.²¹ This is partly based on the fear of conversion that could be effected among these groups, and partly on the apprehension that these groups by changing their allegiance to Christianity would change also their allegiance to the caste or feudal kind of society, and one may lose the traditional control over them. In general, it may be said that there is ambivalence also in the case of Dalit and tribal Christians. On the one hand, their joining the Christian community has given them a new sense of identity and an experience of liberation. On the other hand, the Dalit Christians feel that their new identity as Christians has caused social and economic disadvantage.

As regards the tribal, as noted, there are critical questions about whether their tribal and cultural heritage has been enhanced or has suffered a decline through the intervention of Christianity. In Bangladesh where the national identity is strongly based on Bengalese linguistic and cultural identity, the tribal and indigenous people feel alienated. This is true also of tribal Christians. Moreover, the Muslims and Buddhists are often in conflict with the tribal Christians of Bangladesh. One of the reasons for discrimination against tribals—including Christian tribals—is the perception that they are immigrants and not really “Bhumiputras” (sons of the soil).

CHRISTIANS AS A RELIGIOUS MINORITY: THE POST-INDEPENDENCE ERA

The issue of Christians as a minority began to acquire greater relevance in the post-Independence era. The present demography of Christians in South Asia will help highlight its minority status. In India Christians as per official census of 2011, constitute 2.3%. However, as per the World Religious Database, Christians constitute 4.7% of the population. Although Christians are relatively a minority, in absolute terms they are a significant group of over 50 million people. There is a larger percentage of Christians in some areas and regions. In Kerala, for example, Christians account for 21.22% of the population. There are some states in Northeast India which have a significantly high

Table 2.1 Christians in South Asia

Countries	Total Population	Christian Population	%
India	1.2 billion	57,265,000	4.7
Bangladesh	164.4 million	739,000	0.5
Sri Lanka	21.5 million	1,841,000	8.8
Nepal	23.2 million	908,000	3.0
Pakistan	132.5 million	75,100	1.9
Maldives	380,000	1,400	0.4

Source: Todd M. Johnson and Brian J. Grim, eds., *World Religion Database* (Leiden: Brill, 2013).

Note: As per official Indian census, Christians are 2.3% of the population.

percentage of Christians. For the rest, Christians are small in number and scattered throughout the subcontinent. What is striking is the fact that in spite of the impression that Christianity is advancing by new conversions, the statistics show little evidence of anything of this kind. For, there has been no significant increase in the percentage of Christians in the subcontinent. According to the World Religion Database, in Bangladesh there are 739,000 Christians, which is about 0.5%, while the Hindus are the most numerous among the minorities with 9.5%. In Sri Lanka, Christians constitute 8.8% of the population over against 68.9% Buddhists, 13% Hindus, and 8.5% Muslims. Much smaller is the percentage of Christians in Pakistan, Nepal, and Maldives as table 2.1 shows.

The situation of Christians as a minority religious community has put them in a position of constant tension. On the one hand, they feel the need to safeguard their distinct identity; and, on the other, they struggle to integrate with the rest of the nation. Their struggle becomes even more when there is a general perception that Christianity is alien or foreign. Historically, as noted, the presence of Christianity goes back to about two millennia in the subcontinent, though the wider spreading of it took place only from the modern missionary movement beginning from the sixteenth century. One may imagine that the perception of foreignness could derive from the fact that the rulers in modern period were from Christian nations, and therefore Christians took side with them against national interest. This may not be true, since not only Christians but also people from other religious traditions—Hindus, Muslims, and so on—supported the rule of the British and sided with them. For, the colonial rule could not be maintained without the active collaboration of the people, especially its elites, who cut across religious borders.

As for Christian community, there was ambivalence in this matter. Whereas one section of the Christian community were concerned about the continuation of the British rule because of the insecurity that could result from their withdrawal, there was another group of Christians who were in the forefront in the national struggle against foreign rule. This included not only Christians of the subcontinent but also missionaries like

C. F. Andrews, a close friend of Gandhi. Moreover, a section of Christians of India opposed communal reservation policy, and when the new Constitution was framed they reiterated this opposition, since they trusted that the majority would not go against the interests of the minority community of Christians.

As for the difference in their belief, worship, and practices, the Indian subcontinent has always welcomed plurality and diversity, and it is difficult to see how the differences in these matters could characterize Christians as aliens. In fact we do not hear anything of this alienness of Christians till the British period. Many studies, like that of Susan Bayly, have shown how ordinary Christians followed very similar religious practices (popular Christianity) as they found in the environment.²² The sense of foreignness is then very difficult to explain. Some traces of it could be found probably in the formation of the Christian identity, at least in India, in the legal sphere. The plight of the Christian converts in the nineteenth century necessitated a separate legal definition of this group. For, the converts suffered civil disabilities as they were not accepted in their families and were refused also their legitimate inheritance. These Christians lacking a legal *locus standi* were referred to as the “*depressed classes*.” From the 1870s, courts in Madras Presidency, for example, defined Christian community according to British common law, and not as per local Hindu laws—a fact which contributed substantially to the view of Christians as “foreigners.”²³ Even today, the Christians have a separate marriage act; so also a separate law of inheritance. This continues to isolate them from the rest of the society. There has been in recent decades a lot of debate concerning the creation of a uniform civil code, which would abolish separate legal provisions for Christians and also *shariah* by which Muslims are governed. There have been arguments for and against such a proposal by people across religious boundaries. As for Pakistan, the view of Christians as foreign has some historical background. Since the new converts were abandoned by their family and clan, they needed protection. Hence, missionaries tried to establish Christian villages where the people could mutually help and enjoy trust and protection. The agglomeration of Christians in this way might give the impression of a “ghetto.”

Minorities in all the states of South Asia have been, in recent times, the object of violent attacks, and this is true also of Christian minorities. The situation in each country is different and they have political, historical, and economic factors behind them. The situation of Christians as a minority has been very problematic in Pakistan, for example. Here the discrimination is not on the basis of caste as on the basis of religion. Belonging to Christianity would be something like a structural equivalent of belonging to lower caste. Although Pakistan started as a secular state, due to political compulsions, there has taken place in that country a progressive Islamization. This had a negative impact on the Christian community which had to undergo many struggles. On the one hand, the churches of Pakistan are known for the many educational and healthcare institutions, which like in India and in other countries of the subcontinent, are sought after. On the other hand, the progressive Islamization has made the life of Pakistani Christians more difficult, especially through politicking and application of the so-called “blasphemy law” against members of the Christian community. Most dramatic has been the case

of Bishop John Joseph who took his life in 1998 in the court premises, Lahore, exasperated by the harassment of the blasphemy law. A Christian minister of Pakistan, Shahbaz Bhatti, was murdered in March 2011, for his outspoken views in favor of the minority community and his spirit of leadership.

When Bangladesh came into existence, it was guided by the principle of secularism. However, in 1977 there took place a change of Constitution that turned Bangladesh into an Islamic state. Following the election of 2001 when the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) came to power, the situation of minorities—Christians and Hindus—worsened and there came about internal displacement of minority groups who were forced to flee to other areas of the country. Unlike the Buddhist minority (o. 6%) concentrated in Chittagong Hills, Christians in Bangladesh are scattered throughout the country.

In Sri Lanka, the emergence of Buddhist religious nationalism had its repercussion in recent times on the Christian communities. In the ethnic conflict of Sinhalese and Tamils, there has also been a religious overtone with the general identification of the former with Buddhist tradition and the latter with Hindu tradition. The Christian community is composed both of Sinhalese and Tamils, and the ethnic conflict has caused some fissures and even internal conflicts within the churches, due to the perception that Christians of the Tamil area of North and Eastern part of the island supporter the separatist Tamil identity, whereas the Sinhalese Christians and their leaders have been viewed as standing for the cause of the unity of the nation.²⁴

Although the Indian Constitution speaks of religious freedom, in recent decades the rise of Hindu religious nationalism has caused a lot of concern in the Christian community. The violence that erupted in 1999 in the state of Gujarat and the riots in the state of Orissa (now Odisha) in 2008 have aggravated the situation of Christians and created a sense of insecurity among them. Similarly, there have been conflicts between Buddhist religious nationalists in Sri Lanka and Christians; between Muslim fundamental religious groups and Christians in Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. These conflicts have made the issue of communalism in the subcontinent more complex and diversified.

CONCLUSION

It may be proper to speak not of a single form of Christianity in South Asia, but of a plurality of Christianities. The churches differ from each other depending on the period of their origin, their connection to various churches and denominations in the West—and in the case of Syrian Christians the connection with West Asia. The forms of Christianity among the Dalit and tribal people again show different characteristics and concerns.

Although Christians are numerically a small minority, in the South Asian societies, the influence they wield is quite significant. Right from the times of missionaries, Christianity has made a unique contribution in the field of study of local languages and literature, in the field of education, healthcare, development, social welfare, and so on. Remarkable has also been its contribution to the cause of the tribal and the marginalized

of the society like the Dalits, though this has also become a matter of debate. Today the situation is fast changing, and Christians and Christian institutions are in a process of redefining their identity in response to the new challenges of the times and different aspirations of the people.

South Asian Christianity has been trying to indigenize itself, its life, theology, and personnel to the millennial culture and tradition of the subcontinent. Such efforts began in the sixteenth century and were intensified with national awakening and the struggle for Independence. On the other hand, Christianity in the subcontinent suffers also from the image of being “foreign.” Since the rulers were aliens, those who follow their religion were looked at as aliens in their own lands. But as history testifies colonial rule in any part of the world could not be maintained without the support of the elites. And the elites were not only Christians but also Hindus and Muslims. Similarly, those who opposed the colonial regime and struggles for Independence cut across religious boundaries. There were a number of Christians including some missionaries who challenged the colonial rule and its exploitation. Here is an area of South Asian history that needs to be deeply probed into.

There has also taken place within South Asian Christianity a new self-understanding, a remarkable development in terms of theology, change of attitude and appreciation toward other religious traditions, a re-envisioning of the traditional understanding of mission, conversion, and so on. This general openness of the mainline churches exists alongside with more fundamentalist views among some of the Christian sects who manifest a more antagonistic attitude than spirit of dialogue and understanding. Another less investigated area is the cultural interaction that took place through Christianity in South Asia.²⁵ The missionaries often played the role of mediators and transmitters of cultural elements from the West, and at the same time, they and their missionary reports about the culture and society in this region had a significant impact in the West itself. Some of the classical works and literature of the subcontinent were made familiar to the West through report and translation on the part of Christian missionaries.

The ambivalence relates also to the attitude of Christians and Christian missionaries toward the colonial rule. As regards the South Asian society where caste has been the major organizing principle, Christian missionaries have shown ambivalence—on the one hand, accommodating to it and, on the other hand, opposing it. The situation of ambivalence could be sensed also in regard to the minority position of the subcontinent’s Christian community. There is, on the one hand, the effort to reach out to the entire society across religious and cultural borders and across ideological orientations, and at the same time there is the compulsion to assert its identity and claim its rights.

NOTES

1. K. M. Panikkar, *Asia and Western Dominance* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1967).
2. As quoted in Celestine Fernando, “History of Christianity in Ceylon (1796–1903)” (special reference to the Protestant Missions), edited by Marshal Fernando, Ecumenical Institute for Study and Dialogue, Colombo, Sri Lanka, 2013, p.1.

3. Placid J. Podipara, *The Thomas Christians* (Madras: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1970). This quote is generally attributed to Podipara. But it would appear that this is a characterization originally made of this community by a Hindu scholar K. P. Kesava Menon.
4. Cf. Daniel Jeyaraj, *Bartholomäus Ziegenbalg: The Father of Modern Protestant Mission—An Indian Assessment* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2006).
5. Cf. J. T. K. Daniel and R. E. Heduland, eds., *Carey's Obligation and India's Renaissance* (Serampore: Council of Serampore College, 1993).
6. Cf. K. P. Adhikari, "Three Hundred Years of Christianity in Nepal," *Japan Missionary Bulletin* 46 (1991): 60–72, 152–64.
7. Cf. Bengt Sundkler, *The Church of South India: The Movement towards Union 1900–1947* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1954).
8. Cf. Elizabeth Susan Alexander, *The Attitude of British Protestant Missionaries towards Nationalism in India* (Delhi: Konark Publishers, 1994); Gerald Studdert-Kennedy, *British Christians, Indian Nationalists and the Raj* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1991).
9. Cf. Elizabeth J. Harris, *Theravada Buddhism and the British Encounter: Religious, Missionary and Colonial Experience in Nineteenth Century Sri Lanka* (London: Routledge, 2006), 12.
10. Cf. David Kopf, *The Brahmo Samaj and the Shaping of the Modern Indian Mind* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979).
11. I say partly, because in the struggle against the British for national independence (1948), not only the Buddhists but also Hindus and Christians took part making the process of independence much more complex than mere Buddhist-Sinhala nationalism that would later lead to "Sinhala Only Act" (1956) and majority ethnic chauvinism.
12. Recall here the document produced by the Buddhist Committee of Inquiry, entitled "The Betrayal of Buddhism" (1956), in which the Committee polemically takes a position against the threat by Christians. The Catholic Union of Ceylon responded to the points raised in this by another document entitled: "Companion to the Buddhist Commission Report" (1957).
13. John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope* (New York: Random House, 1994).
14. It is also the title of the book carrying the contribution of outstanding Protestant Christians of the times, *Rethinking Christianity in India* (Madras: Hogarth Press, 1938).
15. Cf. Susan Billington Harper, *In the Shadow of the Mahatma: Bishop V. S. Azariah and the Travails of Christianity in British India* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009).
16. J. N. Farquhar, *The Crown of Hinduism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1920).
17. Cf. Rowena Robinson and Joseph Marianus Kujur, eds., *Margins of Faith: Dalit and Tribal Christianity in India* (Delhi: Sage Publications, 2010).
18. Linda S. Walbridge, *The Christians of Pakistan* (London: Routledge, 2003).
19. This group of people has been referred to as *Chuhras*, a term avoided today by Christians because of its derogatory connotation.
20. Cf. Frederick Sheldon Downs, *Christianity in North East India—Historical Perspectives* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1983).
21. Cf. Sebastian Kim, *In Search of Identity: Debates on Religious Conversion in India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003).
22. Cf. Susan Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).
23. Chandra Mallampalli, *Christians and Public Life in Colonial South India, 1863–1937* (London: Routledge Curzon, 2004).
24. Cf. Neville Jayaweera, "The Role of the Churches in the Ethnic Conflict," Marga Institute, Colombo, 2001. For the developments of the situation of religion and society—including

CHAPTER 3

CHRISTIAN MINORITIES ON THE CENTRAL ASIAN SILK ROADS

SÉBASTIEN PEYROUSE

THE five states of Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan) have a population the large majority of which are Sunni Hanafi Muslims, but they also have sizable Christian communities. The presence of these later emerged almost entirely before the latter years of the twentieth century since it dates from the Tsarist colonial period and from the Soviet regime. Since the disappearance of the Soviet Union in 1991, Central Asia has faced the task of managing the complex relation between, on the one hand, the desire, shared by the political authorities and the population, to revalorize Islam as an element of national identity, and, on the other, a long tradition of tolerance which must be maintained if it is to avoid any inter-ethnic destabilization. These five states are all officially secular states, in which Islam has not been granted the status of national religion. Christianity in Central Asia, however, is in the process of changing quite radically: the former religion of Russian and Soviet colonizers, and defined by the national belonging of its members, it is becoming more autochthonous, thanks to the conversions of some Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, Uzbeks, Tajiks, and Turkmens. However, this proselytism, which is Protestant in the main, is also inciting restrictions on religious freedoms.

THE HISTORICAL ITINERARY OF CENTRAL ASIAN CHRISTIANITY

From earliest Antiquity, Central Asia has played a distinguishing role as a crossroads between civilizations. It has always been situated between several large empires and in this respect has enjoyed much religious diversity: Zoroastrianism, Manicheism, Buddhism, and Shamanism all peacefully coexisted here until the arrival of Islam

in the seventh century. The first Christians established themselves between the end of the second and the fourth centuries. Later Melkites, Armenians, Jacobites, and Nestorians fleeing the persecution unleashed in the Byzantine and Persian empires found refuge here. Their presence is attested to by the ruins of Nestorian churches in Kyrgyzstan today. Under the Mongol empire, the religious situation remained favorable to multi-confessional cohabitation as the empire's leaders manifested great tolerance with respect to the religions of the Book and did not conceal their interest in Christian theology.

During the same era, in the thirteenth century, the first Latin missions, motivated by the myths conveyed by the crusaders, in particular by the legend of Prester John,¹ were sent to Central Asia. Two Franciscans, John of Plano Carpini, sent in 1245 by Pope Innocent IV, and, seven years later, William of Rubruck,² emissary of the king of France, set out on the roads of Asia, going as far as the court of Genghis Khan in Karakorum. During the following century, the Dominican Thomas Mancasole successfully undertook in these territories a mission of a more diplomatic than religious nature and erected in Samarkand in 1329 the first Latin diocese in the history of Central Asia.³ Subsequently, the region came under the control of Tamerlane and his Timurid successors (fifteenth century), who, more out of political strategy than real religious conviction, engaged in a program of systematic Islamization, eradicating all the non-Muslim movements. Only Judaism survived, while Christianity was successfully wiped out for several centuries, despite some attempted incursions, which all proved fruitless. Historical testimonies evince the presence of Christian slaves of Russian origin that were taken during raids by Turkmen and Kazakh nomads and sold at the marketplaces of Bukhara and Khiva.

It was necessary to wait until the progressive advance of the Tsarist Empire in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries before Christian religion was again practiced in Central Asia. The presence of Russian colonists in the region followed, and sometimes preceded, military and political conquest.⁴ As with the Russian advance into Siberia, these colonies were first made up of Cossacks, those soldier-peasants, who were integrated into the Tsarist army, and established the first fortifications, annunciative of the establishment of the colonial power on the new territories. They were followed by peasants fleeing serfdom and the central authorities, in particular by Old Believers.⁵ Throughout the nineteenth century, peasant colonization, in parallel to military conquest, was regulated by central political power. In 1896 the number of Russian colonists more or less legally based in Central Asia was estimated at 400,000, but as early as 1916 the immigrant workforce had already reached one and a half million people. Although these peasants were principally Russian, and practiced Orthodoxy, the national diversity of the Tsarist Empire also led to the establishment of German, Polish, and Ukrainian communities: Catholic, Uniate, Lutheran, Mennonite, Baptist, Seventh Day Adventist, and Pentecostalist parishes all sprang up. Despite pressure exercised by the Orthodox clergy, who were disconcerted by their dynamism and vacillated about whether to engage in proselytism,⁶ these movements continued to develop throughout the region during the entire colonial era.

This first pre-revolutionary migratory flow was followed, after the events of October 1917, by many others that occurred up until the 1950s. They were facilitated by the process of industrialization in the 1930s, the relocation of factories and industrial centers from frontline zones to the Urals and Central Asia during the Second World War, and then by the Virgin Lands Campaign. This immense plan to develop the virgin lands of Kazakhstan, which Nikita Khrushchev launched in 1954, in fact triggered an inflow of two million mainly Russian, Ukrainian, and Byelorussian “volunteers” into Kazakhstan. Between 1939 and 1959, this influx of Slavs increased considerably: the number of Russians in the total population of Kazakhstan went from 20.6% in 1926 to 42.7% in 1959. In the 1959 census, Kazakhs only represented 30% of the population, being less than three million by comparison with four million Russians. In the 1989 census, the last Soviet census, Central Asia included significant minorities of Christian tradition: approximately 9.5 million Russians, more than 1.2 million Ukrainians, a little less than 1.2 million Germans, close to 240,000 Byelorussians, 320,000 Koreans, more than 80,000 Armenians, more than 65,000 Poles, approximately 55,000 Greeks, and so on.⁷ However, the census does not include any figures registering religious practice.

For the Christians of Central Asia, the Soviet regime involved a paradoxical political experience: they were at once part of an atheist regime that regularly denied their right to existence, and a religious minority in a region dominated by Islam. Moscow’s religious policy differentiated between the situations of different confessions depending on their degree of support for the authorities, on the image they held or did not hold of “national religion,” and on their links with coreligionists abroad. After some particularly difficult years under Stalin and the reprise of atheist campaigns under Khrushchev, the situation of the Christians stabilized during the two decades under Leonid Brezhnev (1964–1982): clandestine parishes multiplied, as did contacts with coreligionists, priests were more rarely sent to work camps, and sanctions that had been penal partly became administrative (fines, temporary closure of places of worship, etc.). The outcome of the seventy years of state atheism is a paradoxical one: local Orthodoxy experienced far fewer dissident groups or movements of the Catacomb Church than in the European regions of the USSR; the schismatic currents of Orthodoxy disappeared almost completely with the exception of a few parishes of Old Believers; and the Catholic and the Protestants organized significant spiritual resistance. Some groups such as the Baptists and the Adventists even managed to take advantage of the region’s isolation, by recruiting new members from other confessions. Thus, although the isolation of Central Asia presented an inconvenience for Orthodoxy, for the Protestants it sometimes turned out to be an asset.⁸ Moreover, after the dissolution of the Soviet Union the diminutive Catholic churches in Central Asia developed new organizational structures. In the follow-up to the Asian Synod in Rome in 1998 the Catholic churches in Central Asia became associated members within the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences (FABC).⁹

THE INCREASE IN DIVERSITY SINCE THE 1990S

At the end of the 1980s, each religion was granted a heretofore unknown freedom thanks to the Gorbachev-initiated perestroika, which the new Central Asian states then strengthened on a juridical level at the time of their independence at the end of 1991.¹⁰ Then, in each of the republics, began a period of construction or restoration of thousands of mosques, as well as of tens or hundreds of churches. Religious practice recovered part of the visibility it had lost under the Soviet regime. In this new context, each of the Christian confessions went about establishing their legitimacy before multiple actors: the political authorities, who were asserting state secularity; the Muslim institutions hoping for a greater recognition for Islam as the majority religion;¹¹ and the increasing diversity of other confessions. However, the development of Christianity in the region has nonetheless been significantly impeded by the massive exodus of the so-called European populations: in less than two decades, nearly four million Russians, several hundreds of thousands Ukrainians, Byelorussians, and Poles, as well as nearly 800,000 Germans quit Central Asia for their “ethnic homelands.”

Faced with this new situation, some confessions strove to preserve their standing by engaging in proselytism among the so-called European populations but also among the titular peoples of Muslim tradition.¹² Aided by missionary groups chiefly from the United States, Germany, and South Korea, the protestant movements proved the most dynamic. These included Baptists, Pentecostals, and Adventists, but also evangelical Christians and Presbyterian churches, as well as Methodists, who are very present among the Korean community in Central Asia.¹³ The Jehovah’s Witnesses also experienced very strong growth, registering nearly 15,000 members for Kazakhstan alone and 49 communities in Kyrgyzstan. The Grace-Blagodat’ groups among the Presbyterians and Novaia Zhizn’ (New Life) among the charismatics became the largest (each one counted several thousand members). Also to be noted is the presence of Mormons, who however only claim to have a few dozen members in Astana. But no figures are available, since the censuses do not ask any questions about belief and religious practice.

The new proselyte communities no longer think of themselves as ethnic groupings of persons united by national belonging and language. At the start of the 1990s, their chief goal was an “inside community proselytism,” which targeted already converted Protestant members whom the missionaries required a more in-depth religious education. Their second target included those persons converted to Christianity but who belonged to other confessions, in particular to Orthodoxy, and, to a lesser extent, to Catholicism, and indeed even to Protestant movements in decline such as the Lutherans and the Mennonites. The third—and most polemical—target was the Muslim population, in the name of the universality of Christianity. The Kazakhs, but also the Kyrgyz and the Uzbeks were the chief stakes of this Christian presence in Central Asia. These latter have seemed easier as targets because the majority of them are without any real

theological knowledge and practice a form of Islam that is tolerant and traditional. Thus among these proselyte movements there is a growing number of communities made up exclusively of natives, communities in which religious services are held in the local language (Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Uzbek, Uyghur, etc.), and in which the new celebrants are members of the titular nationalities.¹⁴

The Catholic Church, whose presence is not uniquely motivated by proselyte activity, finds itself in a paradoxical situation: some of its parishes are emptying as their members of Polish or German nationality leave or die, while other, more proselyte communities are developing by recruiting new members, mainly Russians, but also some of the titulars. However, the Vatican is seeking to keep up good relations with the states of Central Asia, in particular with Kazakhstan, with which it signed a Concordat in 1998 (the first of any such with a country of the former USSR), and does not encourage the converting of Muslims to Christianity. The Catholic Church has many places of worship throughout Kazakhstan, in particular in the northern and eastern regions where there are German and Polish minorities. It also has a theology seminary in Karaganda, where the See of the Bishop is also based, and an Apostolic Nunciature in Astana. As for the other republics, it has three registered churches in Kyrgyzstan (but thirty communities), a Cathedral in the Uzbek capital Tashkent, a church in Samarcande, a church in the Tajik capital Dushanbe, a parish in Kurgan-Tiube, and a diplomatic representation of the Holy See that serves as a place of worship in the Turkmen capital Ashgabat.¹⁵

The other Christian confessions, in particular Armenian Orthodoxy, Greek Orthodoxy, the Old Believers, and the Uniates, have not gained much ground since the states declared their independence in 1991: with a few exceptions (for example, an Armenian Church in Samarkand, Uzbekistan, a Uniate Church in Karaganda, Kazakhstan, and a church of Old Believers in Ust-Kamenogorsk, Kazakhstan), these movements have no recognized places of worship. Their active members often attend worship in the Russian Orthodox Church, since the services are not too different from their own, whereas the Uniates prefer to go to the Catholic churches. For these communities, religion continues to be an element that is structuring of national culture, a strong feature of which is the effort to maintain the national language, and rites and traditions linked to collective memory. Some Protestant currents, in particular Lutheran and Mennonite, find themselves in a similar situation: they live in withdrawn, ageing German-speaking communities which refuse to play the card of proselytism in order to survive. They therefore seem doomed to slowly vanish from the scene of Christianity in Central Asia as their members gradually disappear.¹⁶

Opposing these currents, the Russian Orthodox Church presents itself as the central pillar of Central Asian Christianity: it is the foremost non-Muslim confession and enjoys the support of the local political regimes. These latter appreciate its defense of the religious status quo, and its critique of proselytism, all points that are detailed in the creed defended by the Moscow Patriarchate, under whose authority it is. This church is viewed as an apolitical component of Russian culture in the region and a facilitator of pacific relations between Russians and titular nationalities. It plays an important role in the Russian community life. The relations with the Russian parishes and the

central institution of the Patriarchate are close. Institutionally, Central Asian Russian Orthodoxy is divided into two dioceses. The first is constituted by Kazakhstan alone, which is itself divided into several eparchies, including those of Almaty, which counts 103 parishes and 7 monasteries. A decision by the Saint-Synod led to the opening of a theology seminary as well as an Orthodox school in the former Kazakh capital, Almaty. The second, called the diocese of Tashkent and Central Asia, gathers together three other republics: about thirty Orthodox buildings are registered in Uzbekistan, fifty in Kyrgyzstan, half a dozen in Tajikistan. In October 2007 the twelve Russian Orthodox Church places of worship in Turkmenistan were taken away from the Uzbek diocese and transferred into a Patriarchal Deanery under the Patriarch in Moscow.

A refusal of proselytism is dominant in Orthodox tradition. This refusal is today upheld, although there are some priests who would like to see a more active policy of conversion developed for the newly opened religious market. Yet Orthodoxy is still considered by its members to be a national faith: knowledge of Russian, a Slavonic liturgy, ethnic belonging, and participation in the social and cultural life of the community are all elements considered to be as important to identity as belief itself. The Orthodox hierarchy of Central Asia encourages these folkloric and nationalistic tendencies, even if this withdrawal into Russian identity is penalizing in terms of practicing members and deprives it of the means to resist the dynamism of the other groups. Orthodoxy also requests it be given superior rights to the other Christian confessions, in the name of its historical pre-eminence in the region, something that the Protestants and the Catholics contest.¹⁷ It refuses to participate in Christian ecumenical activities, denounces the “competition” posed by Catholics and Protestants, and prefers to develop its ties to Islam and the local political authorities.

COMPLEX POLITICAL AND SYMBOLIC SITUATIONS

The Orthodox Church smarted at the religious freedoms granted at the beginning of the 1990s.¹⁸ In Central Asia as in Russia, the developing Catholic and Protestant movements were perceived as disloyal competition, in view of the financial support they received from abroad. The Orthodox Church was critical of opening up the religious market to competition and this fact has been the driving force behind its rapprochement with the Muslim Spiritual Boards, who are the representatives of official Islam in each Central Asian state. The Spiritual Boards and the Orthodox Church alike steadfastly insist on maintaining a strict separation between the titular nationalities, whose duty it is to be Muslim, and the European populations, whose duty it is to be Christian. The Orthodox Church holds this position all the more resolutely, since it considers itself to be one of the main victims of the Protestant movements, which have drawn from its ranks to swell their own. The ulemas and some sections of the Muslim population have

also made manifest their discontent with regard to Christian proselytism, reluctant to see the multiplying cases of apostasy. These tensions then led to the development of an alliance between the Muslim and Orthodox hierarchies. Refusing to engage in proselytism among the nationalities belonging by tradition to the other religion, they have both put pressure on the political authorities to restrict religious freedoms, sometimes going so far as to request the expulsion of so-called “foreign” movements.¹⁹

In each of the republics, the political authorities have variously responded to these calls. In Turkmenistan, the liberal legislation adopted under perestroika, and then strengthened after independence has, since 1995, been tightened, something that also occurred in 1998 in Uzbekistan. In both of these states, the Christian communities have experienced great difficulties in obtaining juridical recognition (registration at the Justice Ministry). The restrictions placed on religious education are extreme: strictly controlled and to this day impossible to practice; it is more and more often dispensed at the parental domicile, as it was in the Soviet period. In addition, there is almost no religious literature: shops in some recognized Orthodox churches sell mainly icons and ritual objects, but Bibles and other religious texts are hard to find. The Orthodox newspapers edited in Russia are not available, and foreign religious literature is generally confiscated by the police when entering the country. The members of Christian congregations encounter difficulties leaving the country to attend their own movement’s congresses. And the systematic control of all forms of expression and communication, such as the Internet, impedes all relations with other countries. In these two states, those of Turkmen or Uzbek origin who convert to Protestantism immediately expose themselves to severe pressure from their entourage and the authorities, in particular in the Uzbek regions of Khorezm and of Karakalpakstan. Many of them have complained of violence during police interrogations, which are aimed at making them apostatize, and there are regular reports of cases of torture.²⁰

In recent years, Uzbekistan has been marked by recurrent police raids in churches, houses of prayer, and the personal houses of believers, not to mention an increasing and systematic censorship of religious works, and hardening of pressures on proselytizing activities. The authorities have been accused many times over of practicing torture while interrogating individuals, whether for religion-related matters or otherwise.²¹ Religious activities of communities that are not authorized by the Interior Ministry remain strictly prohibited and religious instruction is extremely limited. The main authorized churches in the capital and the main cities function for the political authorities like a window-display designed to make their population and the international community believe in the existence of religious freedom, yet these same movements are increasingly repressed all throughout the rest of the country. No Christian activities, except for those of the Russian Orthodox Church, are, for example, permitted in Karakalpakstan.²²

In Turkmenistan, religious believers were led to hope that the new president, in power since the end of 2006, would facilitate religious revival; but no real changes have been instigated. The methods of control and repression against religion have indeed hardly changed. The second president Gurbanguly Berdymukhammedov has extended all regulations imposed by the Soviet regime and which were then maintained or enhanced

by Niyazov, in particular the obligation of every religious movement to register with the Ministry of Justice or else face criminal penalties. The number of authorized movements remains extremely small. The main body of religious control, the Committee for Religious Affairs, continues to appoint Muslim representatives and Orthodox clergy, who then refuse to register “competitor” movements.²³ The situation vis-à-vis religious education is equally difficult: only those training to become Orthodox priests have the “privilege” of going to Russia to study.²⁴

The banning of many religious movements is part of a more general policy of discrimination against all national minorities. Armenians are today unable to obtain official recognition and are limited to celebrating religious ceremonies in Russian Orthodox churches. The Catholic Church is the only one to have obtained official registration, which it did in July 2010. Many believers from minority religions have spoken out against the control and coercion, which they say continues to be as tight as, even sometimes worse than, under the Niyazov regime.²⁵ Many Protestants continue to be threatened with dismissal from their jobs as well as their children expelled from school. Police raids on places of worship or the domiciles of believers are common practice.²⁶

The legislation of the three other states has remained more liberal, even if the tendency is to make it more restrictive. In Kazakhstan, religion in general and Christianity in particular enjoy large freedoms, a situation that is favored by the presence of large minorities of Christian tradition (more than 40% of the population). However, several projects to revise legislation have been drafted since the second half of the 1990s.²⁷ In 2005, amendments to religious legislation, officially aimed at assuring “national security,” limited the room in which the Protestant movements have to operate. New bills presented in 2002 and 2009 aimed at restricting religious freedom in the country, but they were rejected by the Constitutional Council.²⁸ The great forums dedicated to opening dialogue between religions, organized by the Kazakh president Nursultan Nazarbayev in 2003 and 2006, have therefore taken place with the participation of neither the proselyte movements nor of those Muslim currents not recognized by the Spiritual Boards. This much-vaunted multi-confessionality is in reality limited to two principal partners, Islam and Orthodoxy, with the limited participation of certain privileged confessions (Catholicism) and religions (Judaism, Buddhism).

In 2010, Kazakhstan stopped any hardening of its religious legislation while it chaired the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), but its 2011 legislative reforms introduced a new wave of restrictions. The Kazakh president himself called for greater surveillance of all the religious communities. A new Agency for Religious Affairs was created under the prime minister to replace the Committee for Religious Affairs. This Agency explicitly claims to be advancing the concept “One nation, one religion,” noting the dominance of Islam and of the Russian Orthodox Christianity—as the two religions practiced by a majority of the population—while it urges the other denominations to cut down on their activities, in the name of social peace and the fight against terrorism and religious extremism.²⁹

In fall 2011, this ramping up of control over religion translated into the adoption of two new laws, neither of which was submitted to any real public debate. The laws constrain all

legal religious communities to re-register or face being closed down after a court deliberation, and ambiguously amalgamate religious freedom together with the risk of terrorism. They have come in for special criticism since the stipulated methods of registration are particularly vague, and leave the authorities all the room to decide on a case-by-case basis, in the most opaque fashion, which communities are permitted and which are banned. In addition, henceforth the activities of unregistered communities are prohibited, the censoring and monitoring of religious literature has been stepped up, and the permission must be obtained from the local and central authorities to build new places of worship.³⁰

The new presidential directives against religion have also led to several amendments of the criminal and administrative codes, one of the essential aims of which are to make it possible for the law enforcement agencies to conduct their actions of control and repression with total impunity. The police and KNB (National Security Committee) raids became increasingly frequent after the passing of the new laws in 2011.³¹ The set of these restrictions, which are based both on the new legislation and on administrative practices that overstep the legal framework, has made Kazakhstan a state in which religious liberty is largely undermined. The new laws have enabled the administrative authorities to have closed down a number of places of worship (Muslim as well as Christian), in particular in the penitential and social centers, such as those for handicapped persons or in hospitals. These restrictions and measures have provoked lively protest from the international community, in particular from the OSCE.³²

Kyrgyzstan still has a veritable diversity of Christian movements, including Protestant. New legislation is set to reduce the space of freedom they have enjoyed to date. Conflicts are multiplying between, on the one hand, the central authorities and practicing Muslims, and, on the other, proselyte groups, some of which are composed mostly or entirely of Kyrgyz. Some Protestant parishes have had hefty taxes imposed upon them, have been threatened with closure, and their members have been physically attacked. The management of religion, however, took a particularly authoritarian turn under the regime of Kurmanbek Bakiyev. In 2009, the Kyrgyz president signified his will to exert tighter control over the religious landscape of the country by transferring the State Agency for Religious Affairs, renamed for the occasion the State Commission for Religious Affairs, to the responsibility and control of the government.³³

In the same year, the pressures on religion reached a paroxysm with the adoption of a new law which imposes far stricter conditions on religious activities and broadly limits the freedom of belief and of religious practice. It demanded, for example, that all religious communities re-register before January 1, 2010, in accordance with much stricter criteria.³⁴ Indeed, legalization now requires the signature of at least 200 adult religious believers, who, in addition, must supply their name, address, passport number, and occupation, which many of them refuse to do for fear of intimidation and reprisals from the local authorities. This requirement inevitably led many communities to go illegal, as they were unable to gather the requisite number of members, especially in some of the country's isolated rural areas.

The law also imposes severe measures against proselytism, prohibiting anyone from motivating an individual to leave one religion or confession for another. All imported

religious literature must be validated by the authorities and is banned from being distributed in public places, in the street, or door to door. Lastly, in August 2009, a State Coordinating Council on the Struggle Against Religious Extremism was created and placed under the auspices of the Interior Ministry and the security services. This council, which includes members from the government but also from the Muslim Board and the Russian Orthodox Church, is a new instrument of coercion against religious minorities, in particular Protestant ones. It gives no clear definition of the extremism against which it is supposed to be working. Though Bakiyev's toppling in April 2010 provoked a wave of hope among believers, the country's instability in the months following have left the religious situation in the balance. Despite a relaxation of official pressures, in a number of cases the daily management of religion is left to the good will of the local authorities, which apply unwritten rules and continue to exert illegal pressures on the active religious population.

Finally, in Tajikistan, the conditions for Christian movements are relatively favorable on paper. However, in practice forms of opposition to the development of Protestant currents remain significant in a country that has known civil war (1992–97) and that in some regions has a powerful Party of Islamic Rebirth. In recent years, President Emomali Rahmon and his government have led a veritable offensive against religion, rendered official by a new law adopted in April 2009, replacing one adopted after independence that had already been submitted to several amendments. This law puts considerable restrictions on the right to practice religion and has provoked great concern as many of its paragraphs are subject to contrary interpretations. According to it, all religious communities were obliged to re-register before January 1, 2010, and each community had territorial restrictions imposed on its activities. The Tajik government targeted Muslims in the first place, having several mosques closed down and prohibited children from participating in any religious activity until 18 years of age. These measures have affected the entire community of believers, even though in 2011 the measure against minors seems to have been applied less to Christian movements. The latter, however, have been as equally affected by increasingly regular police controls, arbitrary detentions, and the banning of several communities. However, it is religious education which has come in for the most attention from the Tajik authorities, which have drastically tightened their control over it. Lastly, the censorship of religious literature has been beefed up—the prior agreement of the state is required for the production, import, sale, or distribution of all religious works.

The measures taken against religious freedom by the Central Asian political authorities are not aimed against Christianity as a whole, since Orthodoxy remains particularly well treated. In reality they aim to limit the expansion and the activities of a certain number of so-called nontraditional Christian currents, which are often qualified as sects. In this way, the political authorities have simply kept in place a classificatory system that was established under the Soviet regime: “traditional religion” is that of the eponymous people or of the principal religious minorities present in the country (Orthodox Church for the Russians, Lutheran Church for the Germans, Catholic Church for the rest of the Germans and the Poles, etc.) while the other religions, termed “nontraditional”

and often assimilated with sects, are said to threaten social stability, and even to undermine the independence of the republic. This system of classification is not based on any sociological research, but it does permit the authorities to marginalize any community seeking to evade the enforced control measures. Some Protestant movements, present since the Tsarist regime, are therefore tolerated, while those that have emerged since perestroika, as well as the confessions aided by foreign missionaries, are catalogued as foreign movements, and can be subject to severe pressures. Apprehensions toward the religious spectrum are not only common to all of the republics of Central Asia but also to all the states of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), with each having implemented it in a more or less restrictive manner.³⁵

Another observation, which is just as fundamental, is that the measures taken against religion are not part of a will to discriminate against Christianity to the benefit of the majority religion, Islam: on the contrary, they are generally directed against Islam rather than against Christianity, the reason being that, in Central Asia, the latter has no politicized currents. All the authorities have indeed attempted to control the evolution of the religious in order to avoid any politicization of Islam that would undermine the state, its structures, its borders, and which could lead to a reversal of the elites established since the 1970s and 1980s. These last ten years have thus been marked by veritable offensives against the so-called Islamic extremism, a term used to condemn not only every politicized movement but also any Muslim who refuses, in particular in Turkmenistan and in Uzbekistan, to submit themselves to the strict confines imposed by the authorities.

CONCLUSION

Thus, contrary to many states in West Asia, there is no discrimination in Central Asia against Christianity as a whole, since these five states fully recognize Orthodoxy, but there is discrimination against confessions perceived as foreign or as liable to undermine the religious status quo by their proselytism. Orthodoxy even enjoys the status of a sort of “official religion” of the still present European minorities. If in practice, Islam is granted certain privileges (for example, for the building of mosques), no Orthodox members would claim to be suffering from flagrant inequality, to have been treated as a *dhimmi*. The confessions that suffer discrimination do so not in relation to an officialized Islam, but due to apprehensions about what is perceived as “foreign” and “nontraditional.” In this framework, proselytism, in particular Protestant, is experienced as an outside attack and an undermining of national unity.

Religious alterity, then, in Central Asia as well as the entire former Soviet Union, continues to be subjected to a national identification. The case of Central Asia thus fits more exactly to the former Soviet setting than it does into that in the West Asia: there is less a systematic will to eliminate Christian practice than a policy of discriminating against non-native nationalities by not respecting basic rights such as religious freedom. In all the Central Asian states, in spite of legislative differences,

the Soviet framework still broadly prevails, in the sense that religion is officially separate from the state: however, this separation means that religion is absolutely unable to interfere in state affairs, while the state and its repression bodies have a growing, and sometimes considerable, power of control and of interference over religious activities.

NOTES

1. According to which, an Asian Christian prince is said to have become the master of Central Asia and to have permitted the West to attack the Muslims from the rear.
2. Jean Dauvillier, "Guillaume de Rubrouck et les communautés chaldéennes d'Asie centrale au Moyen-Âge," *L'Orient syrien* 2, no. 3 (1957): 223–42.
3. Jean Richard, *La Papauté et les missions d'Orient au Moyen-Âge (XIIIe–XVe siècles)* (Rome: École française de Rome, 1977).
4. Nurbulat Masanov, Zhulduzbek Abylkhozhin, Irina Erofeeva, and Alexandre Alekseenko, *Istoriia Kazakhstana, narody i kul'tury* (Almaty: Dajk-press, 2001).
5. The Old Believers are a current of Orthodoxy that was born after the Great Schism (*Raskol*), that is to say, the separation, in the seventeenth century, of a significant part of the faithful of the Russian Church. These latter refused to accept the reforms made by Patriarch Nikon concerning Orthodox service and liturgy. They were persecuted for a long time under Tsarism and instigated several religious and social revolts against the central authorities.
6. See Sébastien Peyrouse, "Les Missions orthodoxes entre pouvoir tsariste et allogènes: Un exemple des ambiguïtés de la politique coloniale russe dans les steppes kazakhes," *Cahiers du monde russe* 45, no. 1–2 (2004): 109–35. On the question of the Orthodox Church's proselytism in the colonial period, see Uyama Tomohiko, "A Particularist Empire: The Russian Policies of Christianization and Military Conscription in Central Asia," in Uyama Tomohiko, ed., *Empire, Islam, and Politics in Central Eurasia*, 21st Century COE Program Slavic Eurasian Studies, no. 14 (Sapporo: Hokkaido University, Slavic Research Center, 2007), 23–63.
7. See Sébastien Peyrouse, "The Russian Minority in Central Asia: Migration, Politics and Language," Kennan Occasional Papers, no. 297 (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 2007).
8. On the Soviet period, see Sébastien Peyrouse, "Christian Movements in Central Asia: Managing a Religious Minority in Soviet Times," *Acta Slavica Iaponica* 25 (2008): 135–61.
9. G. Evers, *The Churches in Asia* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2005), 571–80.
10. Mehrdad Haghayeghi, *Islam and Politics in Central Asia* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995).
11. Adeb Khalid, *Islam after Communism: Religion and Politics in Central Asia* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2007).
12. M. Elliott and S. Corrado, "The Protestant Missionary Presence in the Former Soviet Union," *Religion, State & Society* 25, no. 4 (1997): 333–51; M. Pelkmans, "Religious Crossings and Conversions on the Muslim–Christian Frontier in Georgia and Kyrgyzstan," *Anthropological Journal of European Cultures* 19, no. 2. (2010): 109–28.
13. Sun Park, *A Historical Study of Koreans in Central Asia: Missiological Implications*, Pasadena: Fuller Theological Seminary, Master thesis, September 2002; W. Choi, "An

- Appraisal of Korean Baptist Missions in Kazakhstan, Central Asia” (PhD thesis, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2008).
14. Sébastien Peyrouse, *Des chrétiens entre athéisme et islam: Regards sur la question religieuse en Asie centrale soviétique et post-soviétique* (Paris: Maisonneuve & Larose, 2003).
 15. More information is available on the Catholic website, <http://www.catholic-kazakhstan.org>.
 16. Author’s fieldwork observations, 1998–2005.
 17. Sébastien Peyrouse, “Christianity and Nationality in Soviet and Post-Soviet Central Asia: Mutual Intrusions and Instrumentalizations,” *Nationalities Papers* 32, no. 3 (2004): 651–74.
 18. Christopher Marsh, ed., *Burden or Blessing: Russian Orthodoxy and the Construction of Civil Society and Democracy* (Boston: Institute of Religion, Culture and World Affairs, 2004).
 19. Sébastien Peyrouse, “The Relationship between Church and State in the Post-Soviet World: The Case of Christianity in Central Asia,” *Journal of Church and State* 49 (Winter 2007): 97–115.
 20. See the Forum 18 website for more details, <http://www.forum18.org>.
 21. Human Rights Watch, *Nowhere to Turn: Torture and Ill-treatment in Uzbekistan*, vol. 19, no. 6 (November 2007).
 22. Felix Corley, “Uzbekistan: Two Further Short-Term Jailings, While Raids and Fines Continue,” Forum 18, July 14, 2010, http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=1467.
 23. Sébastien Peyrouse, “The Partnership between Islam and Orthodox Christianity in Central Asia,” *Religion, State & Society* 36, no. 4 (2008): 393–405.
 24. For more details on Turkmenistan, see Sébastien Peyrouse, *Turkmenistan: Strategies of Power, Dilemmas of Development* (Armonk, NY: Sharpe, 2012), 122–23.
 25. Field trip observations, April 2008; *Violations of Freedom of Religion or Belief in Turkmenistan: A Systematic Challenge to Human Rights Commitments* (New York: Open Society Foundations, 2010).
 26. See Peyrouse, *Turkmenistan: Strategies of Power*.
 27. R. P. Odoprighora, “Religious Freedom and Human Rights in Kazakhstan,” *Religion State & Society* 31, no. 2 (2003): 123–32.
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 32. European Union, OSCE Permanent Council 886, EU Statement on Kazakhstan, Vienna, November 3, 2011, PC.DEL/1035/11/Corr.1.
 33. Norwegian Helsinki Committee, *Broken Promises: Freedom of Religion or Belief Issues in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan*, Report no. 1 (2010), 35.
 34. *Ibid.*, 36.
 35. Peyrouse, *Des chrétiens entre athéisme et islam*.

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CHAPTER 4

“ON THE TRAIL OF SPICES”: CHRISTIANITY IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

*Common Traits of the Encounter of
Christianity with Societies, Cultures,
and Religions in Southeast Asia*

GEORG EVERS

INDIAN AND CHINESE INFLUENCE IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

SOUTHEAST Asia is the region of Asia lying east of the Indian continent and south of mainland China. It includes the countries of Myanmar (Burma), Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam, Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei, Indonesia, the Philippines, and East Timor. The countries of Southeast Asia have in common that, prior to their encounter with Western colonial powers and Christianity (at the beginning of the sixteenth century with the Portuguese in Malacca and the Spaniards in the Philippines), they were exposed to two strong cultural and religious traditions, namely the influence of India with its Hindu and Buddhist traditions, and those of China, with Confucianism and Daoism. Besides this strong influence of the cultural and religious traditions of India and China, the Southeast Asian countries have developed their own political, economic, cultural, and religious systems, often little known today, because many of them have been destroyed in the course of history. As regards Chinese influence on the region, it has been strongest in Vietnam, where Confucian values were highly esteemed, and in the secular realm, where the administrative system was modeled on the Chinese example. The role of the emperor of being mediator between the spiritual world of heaven and the world of everyday affairs became an important factor in the encounter

of Christianity with Vietnamese society and government. The newly won Christians refused to honor the emperor in the traditional way and were accused of being dependent on and directed by a religious power from outside.

THE COLONIAL LEGACY

From the sixteenth century onward, the history of Southeast Asia has been marked by colonial aggression and exploitation, first by Portugal and Spain, later by Holland and England, and in the twentieth century, by Japan and the United States. The extent of the rule of the colonial powers in the countries of Southeast Asia differed from country to country. For example, the Dutch domination over the Dutch East Indies, today's Indonesia, was restricted to control the major ports of northern Java, and only in the last stage did it extend over all of the Indonesian islands, with the exception of the Portuguese enclave of East Timor. Similarly, French rule over Indochina was restricted to a few strategic posts on the coast, and only gradually, during the last half of the nineteenth century, were the French able to gain control over the whole of Indochina. As regards the Philippines, the Spaniards never were able to exercise control over all the islands of the archipelago and despite repeated Spanish attempts to defeat the Muslim sultanates, most of Mindanao remained outside Spanish rule. The main motive of the European powers to come to these countries and islands was the search for the natural products, especially the spices. The Portuguese and Spanish traders succeeded in breaking the monopoly of the Muslim trade in the spice market and in establishing military and commercial strongholds to secure its continuity. Even after the countries in Southeast Asia gained independence in the second half of the twentieth century, the area remained the playground of the ideological battles of the Cold War. Vietnam was divided, and the struggle for reunification extended to the neighboring countries of Laos and Cambodia. Cambodia suffered the excesses of the Pol Pot regime (1975–79), because of its involvement in the ideological struggles in the area. After reunification of North and South Vietnam in 1976, the newly established Socialist Republic of Vietnam in 1978 sent its army into Cambodia to put an end to the bloody regime of the Red Khmer. The PR China reacted by a military invasion into the North of Vietnam in the so-called “education war” to teach the Vietnamese a lesson to respect Chinese interests in the area. In Malaysia and Indonesia, the governments used the threat of communist insurgence as pretext to suppress human rights. In 1965, General Suharto used the alleged attempt of a military coup by the Communist Party to establish military rule in Indonesia, and to kill or arrest thousands of members of the Communist Party which was then officially forbidden. Since the end of colonial rule in 1948, Myanmar (Burma) has been plagued by ethnic divisions. The ethnic minorities of the Karen, the Shan, the Mon, and the Chin tried to preserve their cultural and religious traditions against the attempts to build up a central state of national unity.

CATHOLIC MISSION TO SOUTHEAST ASIA AND THE *PADROADO*

The encounter of Christianity with the indigenous cultures and religions, starting in the sixteenth century, was shaped by the fact that the Christian missionaries were accompanying or following the European merchants and soldiers. The colonial masters welcomed Catholic priests and monks as pastoral agents for the expatriates and as missionaries to the local population. It is generally assumed that the earliest Christian presence in Southeast Asia was the Nestorian Christians, who came as merchants and travelers to the Malay Peninsula, Java, and South Sumatra. Other brief and sporadic contacts are reported by traveling Catholic adventurers or by missionaries on their way to or returning from China. The Portuguese had their first stronghold in Goa, which they had conquered in 1510. From there, moving eastwards, they were able to take Malacca in 1511 and in 1522 they established a fortress on the Moluccan island Ternate. After a first, but not lasting contact in 1521, when the Portuguese Ferdinand Magellan reached the island of Mactan, where he was killed in a battle with the local chieftain Lapu-Lapu, the Philippines islands finally came under lasting Spanish rule in 1565.

The first Christian missionaries to Southeast Asia were predominantly members of the Franciscan, Dominican or Jesuit orders from Spain and Portugal, assisted by members of other European nationalities from Italy, Germany, Belgium, and Austria. Due to the historical circumstances, the Catholic missionary activities directed toward Asia, were initiated and supported by the kings of Spain and Portugal who secured in treaties with the pope their right to the royal patronage (*padroado*) over the newly established churches in their territories. In 1494, Pope Alexander VI, in the treaty of Tordesillas, divided the newly discovered countries of Asia and America between Spain and Portugal, and entrusted the task of converting the pagans living in these areas to the kings of Spain and Portugal. On the one hand, the Spanish and Portuguese patronage (*padroado*) played a positive role because the Spanish and Portuguese kings provided free transport for the missionaries and took care of the local expenses. But at the same time the patronage meant, that the Spanish and Portuguese kings controlled the newly founded churches and its personnel, blocking also the establishment of a local clergy. Another negative factor was the constant quarrels between Spain and Portugal, who, due to their patronage privileges, were entitled to nominate all bishops, but often failed to do so. These negative effects of the royal patronage prompted the Holy See to look for a means of gaining control of the missionary activities and the newly established churches in Asia. In 1622 Pope Gregory XV founded the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith, and in 1658 Pope Alexander VII named the first apostolic vicars, who were no longer dependent on the Spanish or Portuguese patronage, but solely responsible to the pope. In the assignment specifying the task of the new apostolic vicars, they were given far-sighted directions and admonished to respect the customs and morals of these peoples, insofar as they did not contradict basic Christian precepts and teachings.

PROTESTANT MISSIONARY ACTIVITIES IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

Another most influential negative factor in the propagation of the Christian faith and religion were the divisions in Western Christianity. The political rivalry between the Catholic countries of Spain and Portugal and the Protestant countries of England and Holland was aggravated by the confessional diversity. In the seventeenth and eighteenth century, the Dutch East Asian Company (*Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie*) established their trading posts in Malacca and Indonesia, after having defeated the Portuguese and Spaniards. Different from the Spanish and Portuguese, the Dutch refrained from supporting Christian missionary endeavors in their territories, except when it favored their political intentions. The British colonial officials in Burma and Malaysia were also more interested in keeping good trade relations and safeguarding harmonious relations with the adherents of the traditional religions, than in encouraging missionary activities by Christian missionaries in their colonies. In the Philippines, Protestant missionary activities were prohibited as long as the Spaniards were the colonial masters, and Protestant missions were started only after the United States defeated the Spaniards and annexed the Philippines in 1898. The new enthusiasm for missionary work in the Protestant churches in Europe and North America in the beginning of the nineteenth century coincided with the wave of Western colonial and imperialistic expansion in Asia and in Africa. This impetus of Western colonialism and imperialism brought an economic, political, and social transformation for most countries in Southeast Asia. Even if it would be wrong to accuse the Christian missionary activities of having been part and parcel of Western colonialism, historically it is true that much of the Christian missionary activity happened during the heydays of the colonial enterprise. For outside observers it is not easy to distinguish the two because only too often the Christian missionaries were cooperating with the colonial masters, enjoying material and other privileges, and relying on military protection against local governments hostile to the missionaries. The relationship of the foreign missionaries with the respective colonial masters varied from country to country in Southeast Asia. In Indo-China, under French colonial control, Catholic missionaries were supported to a greater or smaller extent by the French authorities, which, on the other hand, prevented missionary activities by Protestant missionaries. In Indonesia, the Dutch religious policy was guided by the conviction that Indonesia was a Muslim country and consequently, the Dutch colonial administration closed certain areas in the Indonesian archipelago completely for the Christian mission. To avoid adverse competition among the different Christian mission enterprises, the Dutch colonial authorities in Indonesia took measures to ensure that Protestant and Catholic missionaries were not competing with one another in the same territory. British policy with regard to Christian missionary activity in their colonies in Southeast Asia was not uniform. In Singapore, Malakka, and Penang, the British authorities allowed virtually total religious freedom and put no

obstacles to Christian missionary activities. In the Malay Peninsula, however, the British masters allowed only the pastoral care of expatriate Europeans and missionary activity, only when it was directed toward the Chinese and Indian minority groups, but not to the majority Muslim population.

CHRISTIAN ROLE IN NATION-BUILDING IN SOUTHEAST ASIA AFTER THE PACIFIC WAR

The Japanese occupation of practically all of Southeast Asia during the Pacific War (1941–45) marked a caesura. With the defeat of the colonial powers by the Japanese military, the myth of the invincibility of the European colonial powers widespread among the native population in Southeast Asia came to an end. In the countries in Southeast Asia, occupied by the Japanese, all foreign missionaries—with the exception of German and Italian missionaries—were interned and their connections with their home bases were interrupted. The leadership of the local Christian communities and churches, which in most cases had been in the hands of expatriate missionaries, hastily had to be turned over into the hands of the local clergy. After the end of the Pacific War in 1945, the former colonies gained their political independence, but often only after a more or less extended military struggle with the former colonial powers. When in 1945, Sukarno declared the independence of Indonesia, the Dutch fought a savage war to regain control, which ended with the Dutch defeated and forced to leave in 1950. In the Malaysian peninsula, the British fought the communist insurgency, which delayed independence till 1957. Burma became independent in 1948, but was wrecked by internal struggle among the various ethnic groups, a conflict lasting till today. Also in Vietnam, the early declaration of independence in 1945 was met by the attempt of the French to hold on to colonial rule which led to the first Vietnam war and which ended after the French defeat at Dien Bien Phu in May 1954. In the Geneva agreement in the same year, Vietnam was divided along the 17th parallel: communists ruled in the North, and the South became the new home of thousands of Christians from North Vietnam who opted to leave. Laos and Cambodia also became independent in 1954.

The extent of Christian participation in the process of nation-building in the countries of Southeast Asia differs from country to country. The shape and the composition of the population in present-day nation-states in Southeast Asia are to a great extent the by-product of European colonial rule, which defined new geographical borders and united hitherto independent small kingdoms and sultanates. When speaking of the contribution of Christians to nation-building in the countries of Southeast Asia, one has to keep in mind that, with the exception of the Philippines and East Timor, the Christians always constituted a small minority. Furthermore, Christianity is considered to be a foreign import and the Christian converts often

are suspected by their compatriots to have been too close to the colonial masters. The contribution of Christians to the emergence of new nation-states in the region, therefore, was never of the same caliber as that of Islam in Indonesia and Malaysia, or Buddhism with regard to Burma. Another factor which hampered Christians from contributing their share to the nation-building in the countries of Southeast Asia is that the Christian communities often recruited themselves from immigrants and not from the local population. This is the case, for example, in Malaysia, a predominantly Muslim country, where the Christian community is of Chinese or Indian descent, with practically no members who belong to the majority Malays, who proudly call themselves the “Sons of the Soil” (*Bumi Putra*). In Malaysia “to be Malay” means to belong to the Muslim majority. In Cambodia, a predominantly Buddhist country, the Christian population consists of the majority of Vietnamese immigrants, a fact, which again makes Christianity a foreign implant. In Thailand, also predominantly a Buddhist country, the majority of Christians are of Chinese descent, while the indigenous Thai normally are Buddhist of the Theravada tradition. But, there are some positive examples of Christians having been actively working for independence and supporting the process of nation-building. This was the case in Indonesia, where Catholics were actively involved in the struggle for national independence. The five principles of the Pancasila—belief in God, nationalism, humanitarianism, social justice, and democracy—were introduced by Sukarno as a means to guarantee the basically secular character of the new state. From the beginning of the independence struggle, several Protestant and Catholic Christians were among the leading resistance fighters and made considerable contributions in achieving national sovereignty in 1949. Many Catholics joined the Indonesian military and fought for the new republic against the Dutch colonial forces. In the first governments of the newly founded Republic of Indonesia, the number of Christian ministers was considerably higher than their numerical strength would have warranted. Already half a century earlier, in 1898, the Philippines temporarily gained independence after having defeated the Spanish colonial power. The fate of three indigenous Catholic priests, Mariano Gomez, José Burgos, and Jacinto Zamora, who were executed by the Spanish authorities in 1872, sparked the Anti-Spanish revolution which brought an end of Spanish colonial rule over the Philippines in 1898.

CHRISTIANITY—A FORCE OF MODERNIZATION?

The countries in Southeast Asia were confronted with modernity “from the outside,” that is as a challenge which was not derived from their own traditions and developments, but which irrupted into their lives as external force. Integral human development can be understood as a concerted effort to provide the fundamental human needs as regards

food, clothing, living conditions, and medical care as well as educational facilities. This includes the respect of the human person and human rights. The process of modernization changed the lives of these societies in nearly all dimensions. It inaugurated a process of transformation which extended not only to the fields of technology and economy, but had its influence on politics, family life, culture, value system, and many other areas as well. Traditional norms and values often became obsolete and were superseded by new norms which disrupted traditional patterns of behavior and living in society. In Southeast Asia—as in other parts of Asia, Africa, and Latin America—Christianity often has played the role of being an agent of modernization in the fields of natural science, technology, industry, medicine, communication, education, literacy, the position of women, and respect of human rights. One has, however, to keep in mind, that the influence of Christian agents has been only one of the factors advancing the course of modernization. The most decisive factor was the colonial agents who built up the vast plantations of rubber, copra, and other commodities for the benefit of the European markets, and often with negative results for the local population. Many activities of Christian missionaries and churches in the social and medical fields, therefore, can be seen as efforts to remedy the damage done by the colonial masters. The varied activities of the Christian missionaries in the field of social activities brought relief to many poor and marginalized people in the different countries of Southeast Asia. During the time of Western imperialism and colonialism in the nineteenth century, Christian missionaries, advocating the so-called “social gospel,” were convinced that introducing the Western accomplishments in the fields of technology, science, medicine, and political organization into the countries of Southeast Asia would undermine the influence of the traditional religions and ultimately serve to overcome their influence completely. Western civilization was seen as a kind of “steam roller” flattening and destroying the other religious traditions which were considered to be outdated and moribund. Subsequent historical, political, ideological, and religious developments, however, proved these assumptions (most prominently expressed by the slogan of the first World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh in 1910: “*Evangelisation of the World in this Century*”) to have been preposterous, arrogant, and ultimately false. It can even be said that aggressive Christian missionary activities have awakened the old cultural and religious traditions to react against Western influence, either by adopting some of these impetuses or by going back to their own traditions to find new answers to the challenges posed by Western ideas. The example of Christian charity work and social activities often provoked the other religions to change their response toward social problems in their countries and their attitude toward the poor. Sometimes, the Christian influence is admitted, but more often, Buddhists or Hindus claim that their engagement in social activities has been prompted by digging into their own traditions and unearthing long-forgotten teachings in the social field. One of the strongest influences of Western ideas has been in the field of education. The various types of schools, set up and run by Christian missionaries, have reached far beyond the members of the Christian community by including also members of other religious communities. On the one hand, these Christian educational institutions were intended to be a tool of the missionary outreach, but at the same time they were instruments to prepare

the ground for changes in the traditional societies for Western ideas and ultimately the acceptance of Christianity. The opening of most educational institutions also for girls led to gradual changes in the situation of women, giving them the possibility to assert more strongly their position in the traditional societies. Christian missionary activities exercised another important influence in the field of developing and often preserving local languages in the countries of Southeast Asia. Given the central role of the Bible in spreading the Good News in missionary preaching to potential converts to Christianity, Christian missionaries in Southeast Asia have given high priority to translating the Bible into the local languages. These Bible translations into the local languages strengthened the vernacular languages, often providing them for the first time with a script and elaborating their grammatical structures.

THE STATUS OF BEING A MINORITY AND ITS IMPLICATIONS

In Southeast Asia, the Philippines and East Timor are the only countries in which Christianity is the majority religion. In all other Southeast Asian countries, Christianity is a minority religion, representing only a fraction of the local population. As regards the numerical strength of Christianity in Southeast Asia, it ranges from Christians constituting 87% of the total population in the Philippines and 18% in Singapore to about 9% in Vietnam and Indonesia, to 7.8% in Malaysia, to a modest 4.5% in Myanmar, and a diminutive 0.5–1% in Laos, Thailand, and Cambodia.

As noted earlier, in Southeast Asia the Christian communities are seldom homogeneous entities, but consist of members from different ethnic and national groups. Often the new converts do not belong to the indigenous population but are immigrants or the descendants of immigrants. Christian churches in Southeast Asia, therefore, often are considered by their compatriots to be foreign implants and copies of Western-type churches in their church structures, liturgies, and theology. Many churches in Southeast Asia have difficulty determining which religious and cultural tradition should be the reference in their efforts to inculturate the Christian message. Until the middle of the twentieth century, most Catholic churches in Southeast Asia were, canonically speaking, just “missionaries districts,” assigned to different religious congregations or entrusted to Apostolic Vicars. Most of the bishops and to a good extent also most of the local clergy were recruited from the ranks of foreign missionaries. Today, practically all bishops and priests in Southeast Asia are recruited from the soil, and the former missionary districts have become dioceses. The formation of local Bishops’ Conferences has created a new consciousness of the role of the local churches in Southeast Asia. During the last decades, new forms of “intra-Asian” cooperation between different Asian churches have developed, such as the foundation of the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences (FABC) on the Catholic side and of the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) among the mainline Protestant churches.

PENTECOSTALISM AND CHRISTIAN CHARISMATIC REVIVAL MOVEMENTS

In recent years, the number of Pentecostal and charismatic Christians has grown in Southeast Asia. Christian charismatic renewal movements have a wide-ranging appeal because they give people a sense of belonging and the possibility to express their own aspirations and longings for joy, liberation, security, and acceptance. In Southeast Asia, the greatest Pentecostal expansion has occurred in Indonesia and the Philippines, but there are also significant Pentecostal and charismatic groups in Malaysia, Singapore, and Myanmar. The case of Myanmar is particularly interesting because the country has been closed for foreign missionary outreach, and Pentecostalism has developed independently into an indigenous movement, particularly among the minorities of the Karens and the Chins. In Malaysia, the members of the Pentecostal groups are Chinese and Indian immigrants or their descendants. The biggest number of Pentecostal Christians in Southeast Asia can be found in Indonesia with 9.5 million adherents. The strong influence of pietism appealed to the cultural and religious worldview of the Javanese and other ethnic groups of the Bataks, Timorese, Ambonese, and Dayaks in Indonesia. In the last decades, due to their prominent missionary activities, the Pentecostal and charismatic churches have become the foremost target of the Islamist attacks against Christian institutions and persons in the country. As regards the Philippines, Pentecostalism was brought by American missionaries during the time of American occupation in the beginning of the twentieth century. Local forms of Pentecostalism developed in the second half of the twentieth century, such as the “Jesus Is Lord Church” founded in 1978 by Eddie Villanueva. The “El Shaddai” movement, founded by Mike Velarde in 1978, has a membership of at least half a million in the Philippines with branches in Singapore, Hong Kong, Middle East, United States, and Canada. The movement lives from the charisma of its founder, an attractive liturgy, effective communication, and the empowerment of the laity.

FROM CONFRONTATION TOWARD INTERRELIGIOUS COOPERATION

For many centuries, the Muslims had blocked the access to Asia for Christian merchants and missionaries from Europe, till the time, when in 1498 Vasco da Gama succeeded in finding the sea route via the Cape of Good Hope. For a long time, there existed a common understanding, shared by Catholic and Protestant missionaries alike, that the “other” religions—Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, Taoism, and the traditional religions—were “false religions” which were incapable of bringing their adherents to eternal salvation. For the missionaries, there was no doubt that the

representatives and ministers of these religions were bent on obstructing the work of the missionaries out of selfish and mean motivation. Therefore, given the absolute value of the Christian faith, which alone, according to them, contains the fullness of God's revelation, and relying on the old adage: *Extra ecclesiam nulla salus*, the motivation of most Christian missionaries was to "save these souls," which otherwise would go to hell. Today the optimism regarding the effectiveness and success of the Christian missionary enterprise in converting the members of the other religions has given way to the more sober, and factually correct insight, that the "other" religions not only have not disappeared, but that most of them have experienced a renaissance and become missionaries on their side. In the last decades, new insights into the theology of religions and the potential salvific role of the other faiths have led to a fundamental change in the attitude toward non-Christian religions within the mainline Christian churches. In the Catholic Church, the most far-reaching changes were achieved by the Second Vatican Council. The seminal insights of the Council were taken up by Asian theologians who developed their own way of looking at these religions "from the inside," by accepting them as part of their own cultural and religious ancestral heritage. The work of the FABC in the field of interreligious dialogue has brought about a remarkable change in relating to the other religions and led to new forms of cooperation with them. The minority situation of the Christian churches in Southeast Asia has the consequence that Christian activities in the social field can only be effective on a larger scale, when Christians engage in cooperation with members of other religions or ideologies. To respond to this need to look for cooperation beyond their own constituency, Christians have started "Basic Human Communities," where Christians and members of other religious groups live and work together for a betterment in society. In joining forces, they will be more effective in their social activities, and at the same time, they will learn to appreciate the special characteristics of each other's traditions. Some Christian groups, however, do not share these new theological insights into a theology of religions and refuse to enter into dialogue with these religions. These fundamentalist groups still defend the traditional positions regarding the other religions. Their missionaries, who often have only a rudimentary theological training, accuse all non-Christian religions of propagating idolatrous and erroneous teachings. The aggressive missionary activities by fundamentalist and evangelical Christian groups confirm the suspicion, widespread among members of the other faiths, that the new attitude of the Christians of entering into dialogue is not sincere, but only a means of achieving the old aim of conversion in a more subtle way.

ISLAM IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

Islam was brought to Southeast Asia by merchants from Arabia, Persia, and India only a few decades after the death of Muhammad in 632. For many of the islands of today's Indonesia and Malaysia, Islam became a unifying force. When in the end of

the fifteenth and beginning of the sixteenth century, Christian missionaries came into the region, following Portuguese and Spanish colonialists and traders, Islam was already well established in Malakka, in today's Malaysia, in Indonesia, and in the Southern Philippines. Islam in Southeast has shown a remarkable capacity of absorbing and integrating much of the popular religiosity of the indigenous population into its own faith and ritual practices. The traditional way of living and the customary law, the *adat*, based and rooted in ancestral traditions, remained influential in the everyday life of Muslims also. One of the characteristics of Islam in Southeast Asia has been that it was able to integrate the mystical traditions of a mixture of Hindu and Buddhist ideas as well as indigenous religious beliefs and cultural patterns in the popular religious practice of its adherents. Before Islam came into Southeast Asia, Hinduism and Buddhism had been widespread since the second century A.D. Today, Islam is the majority religion in Indonesia, which with more than 200 million adherents has the highest number of Muslims in the world. In Malaysia, and Brunei too Islam is a majority religion, whereas, in Thailand and Philippines it is the minority. Of late, the influence of Wahhabite Saudi Islam has been growing. The generous financial assistance for the building of mosques, Islamic centers, educational facilities, and modern communication media by the Saudis is aimed at a purification of the traditional Islam in Southeast Asia, which in the eyes of the orthodox Saudis is tainted by the introduction of additional elements taken from the traditional religiosity of popular religions, which are not in conformity with the true Islamic tradition. This growing tendency to concentrate on Islamic orthodoxy has had consequences for the relationship of Muslims with the members of other religions, and especially with the Christians. In Indonesia, where members of different faiths had been living in harmony, religiously motivated acts of violence have multiplied in recent years. The religious freedom of Christians to build churches and places for worship is obstructed by radical Muslim groups. The number of attacks against churches in Indonesia has been growing year by year as ever more churches are burned to the ground. A more recent development is the influence of radical Muslims advocating terrorist actions and the use of violence in defending the interests of Islam against all enemies of Islam. This radical form of Islam began to appear in Southeast Asia during and in the aftermath of the fight of the Muslim Mujahidin against the Soviet occupying forces in Afghanistan. After the first Iraq war in 1990–91, the network Al-Qaeda emerged as a terrorist group and has been responsible for various terrorist attacks in Southeast Asia, for example, the bombings in Bali in October 2002, the continuing violence in Mindanao, and other terrorist activities in Indonesia and the Philippines.

BUDDHISM IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

In Southeast Asia, Buddhism is the majority religion in Burma (Myanmar), Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, and Vietnam. In comparison to the well-documented

history of Buddhism in East Asia, the early history of Buddhism in the countries of Southeast Asia is relatively unknown due to the lack of historical sources. The historical data consist mainly of a number of statues, remnants of buildings which might have been temples and other archaeological findings, as well as a number of inscriptions in Sanskrit, Pali, and indigenous languages quoting Buddhist texts. Under the influence of Buddhist monks from Sri Lanka, the conservative form of Theravada Buddhism, based on the critical study of the Pali texts, became the dominant school of the Buddhist Sangha in today's Burma, Cambodia, Thailand, and Laos. Buddhism flourished in the two kingdoms of Pagan in Burma and Angkor in Cambodia (ca. 900–1450) of which the many temples and monuments, give witness. In Siam, now Thailand, the Chakri dynasty founded in 1782, made Buddhism the state religion. In Vietnam, under the influence of Mahayana Buddhism, in a combination of Zen-Buddhism and Pure Land Buddhism, has become the dominant school, often interacting with traditional forms of religiosity in a syncretistic way. In Indonesia, Buddhism of the Vajrayana or Tantric tradition was strong before 700 C.E. in Java, and under the Srivijaya Empire (seventh century to thirteenth century) in Sumatra. Witness to this strong Buddhist tradition is the temple complex of the Borobudur, which was built as a giant three-dimensional representation of Vajrayana Buddhist cosmology. Today, Buddhism is practiced mainly among the descendants of Chinese immigrants.

The relationship between Buddhists and Christians in Southeast Asia has undergone changes during the last decades. In the past, Christian missionaries considered Buddhism to be an obstacle for the spread of Christianity. In recent years, Christian groups have made attempts to enter into dialogue with Buddhists in Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia. Faced with the new attitude of dialogue, Buddhists were originally suspicious and only gradually they responded positively to overtures from the Christian side. In Thailand, the attempts to introduce religious and cultural elements from Thai culture into Christian liturgy were seen in Buddhist circles more as a threat than as an invitation to enter into dialogue. On the other hand, Christian impulses have influenced reform movements in Buddhism. Thus in Thailand, Ajahn Buddhadasa Bhikku (1906–1993) developed a form of socialism, called “Dhamma Socialism,” which clearly was influenced by Christian ideas, even if he claimed solely to be inspired by the original teaching of the Buddha. Christian influences can also be observed in other Buddhist reform movements in Southeast Asia, such as the “International Network of Engaged Buddhists,” which has the aim of coordinating various Buddhist efforts in the social and developmental fields. In Laos, first promising attempts were made in the field of Buddhist–Christian dialogue after Vatican II, but were stopped when the communists came to power in the country. Interreligious cooperation has never been rooted in the tradition of the Catholic Church in Vietnam. In its history, there were many incidents of confrontation between Buddhists and Christians, especially during the rule of the Catholic President Ngh Dinh Diem (1955–63). After reunification in 1975, cooperation between Buddhists and Christians, however, began in reaction to the restrictive religious policy of the communist government.

HINDUISM IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

Hinduism, together with Buddhism, and often in rivalry with one another, exerted an enormous influence on the countries of Southeast Asia and contributed greatly to the development of written traditions in that area. Indian merchants, seafarers, and in their entourage Hindu monks spread Hinduism throughout Southeast Asia. The kingdoms of Burma and Cambodia as well as Vietnam in the mainland and in the islands of Sumatra and Java were heavily influenced by Hinduism. The Hindu Majapahit Empire (1293–1500) in Java exerted its influence far beyond Java. In the early centuries Hinduism and Buddhism coexisted, as can be seen in the example of the temple complex of Angkor Wat. During the period of 400–1300 C.E., Hinduism in its Vaishnavite and Saivite forms was present in several countries of Southeast Asia. With the coming of Islam and later Christianity, Hinduism lost its influence and was reduced to small minorities. Today, in Indonesia on the island Bali, Hinduism remains the dominant religion with a high 93% of the population, and a small minority of 3% in Java, Sulawesi, and Kalimantan. In Singapore and Malaysia, Hinduism is the religion of many of the descendants of Indian immigrants. In recent years, Christians and Hindus have started to engage in dialogue and explore ways of cooperation on the island of Bali.

CONFUCIANISM IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

Confucianism has been exercising its influence in several countries of Southeast Asia, foremost in Vietnam, and Singapore less as an established religion, but more as the basis for ethical and human values, in leadership style and in business practice and ethics. In the context of political and economic reforms at the end of the twentieth century, politicians and philosophers have explored and controversially discussed the potential role that Confucian ideas and ethical standards could play in the task of modernizing society and economy. In Singapore, during the debate on the role of so-called specific “Asian values” in the 1990s, it was alleged that the positive development of the Singaporean economy and society was due to the influence of Confucian ideas and precepts, such as the high esteem of family, the proper conduct of personal relationships, the great importance given to education and learning, and a strong work ethic. Strong influence of Confucian ideas and behavioral patterns can be found among the millions of Overseas Chinese who have migrated to Southeast Asian countries. In Indonesia, Confucianism was recognized as one of the six official religions under Sukarno, but later under the rule of Suharto, Confucianism lost its status as a recognized religion and was banned in 1979. In 2006, Confucianism was reinstated as one of the officially recognized religions and allowed to operate in the open. Most of its adherents are descendants of Chinese immigrants. Within the Christian churches in Southeast Asia, Confucianism was seen

more as a corpus of ethical teachings and not so much as a religion. This attitude has changed, as can be seen in the statements of the FABC which in reaction to the latest revival of Chinese culture and philosophy in Southeast Asia, called for more attention to the teachings of Confucius.

TRADITIONAL RELIGIONS AND COSMIC RELIGIOSITY IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

In Southeast Asia, several million people belong to traditional religions and live a cosmic spirituality. Most of these religious groups do not have written Holy Scriptures, but pass on their religious heritage in oral tradition. The members of these traditional religions belong mostly to the tribal people who live outside the cities, often in remote and mountainous regions. Over the centuries, their numbers have been decreasing due to their contacts with the dominant religions of Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity. Since the nineteenth century, Christian missionaries have made great efforts to preach the Christian message to these peoples and often succeeded in converting them. In Indonesia, the adherents of tribal and traditional religions are officially not registered, but nevertheless still exist in great numbers. The official policy of the Indonesian government, obliging every citizen to become members of one of the six officially recognized religions, has forced the adherents of these traditional religions to opt for one of these and to forsake their own traditional religious belonging. Nevertheless, the adherents of traditional belief systems still number 39% of the population on the island of Sumba, and 18% in Kalimantan Tengah. In Laos, the number of adherents of animist religious traditions among the Meo tribal population is 24%. In Malaysia, most of the adherents of traditional religions are living in Sarawak where they constitute 35% of the local population. In Vietnam, too, the number of people belonging to the traditional or animist belief systems is high among the tribal population in the mountainous regions of Central Vietnam. In Thailand, where Buddhism for centuries has been the dominant religion, we find many practices and rituals connected with a belief in spirits and heavenly powers, common in animist traditions. Everywhere in the villages, but also in the modern cities of Thailand, spirit houses can be found, where people make daily fruit offerings to secure the protection of the spirits. The Christian missionaries in Southeast Asia considered the indigenous tribal population as their favorite addressees of the Christian message. In most cases, they did not respect the local religious traditions of the indigenous populations which they considered to be idolatrous practices and beliefs. Only recently in the follow-up of the new insights of Vatican II regarding other religious traditions has there been a change in the esteem of the religious myths, rites, symbols, poems, and proverbs of the indigenous population by the Christian churches. In seminars, conducted by FABC, the Christians are called to safeguard the cultural and religious heritage of indigenous peoples and to enter into

dialogue with them. These endeavors, however, often meet with the difficulty to find adequate partners for such a dialogue among the representatives of the traditional religions.

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CHAPTER 5

IDENTITY AND MARGINALITY — CHRISTIANITY IN EAST ASIA

EDMOND TANG

THE history of the Christian mission toward China encompasses four periods, all of which have had a negative end finally. The first encounter begins in the year 635 when Nestorian monks under the leadership of Alopen brought the Christian message into China and set up the first monasteries and churches in Xian, then the capital of the Tang dynasty. The Christian communities which were the result of their missionary efforts lasted till the tenth century and disappeared with the overthrow of the Tang dynasty. The sparse literary documents about the “Doctrine of the Light,” as Christianity was called at the time, give evidence to the strong influence of Daoist and Buddhist terminologies in the formulation of the Christian doctrine. A striking feature was the silence in these documents about Christ’s passion on the cross.¹ The history of this first encounter was not known afterwards for several centuries, and only revived when Jesuit missionaries in 1623 found the “Stele of Xian” which bore witness to this forgotten period of Christian missionary activities toward China.

The next attempt to preach the Christian message in China came in 1294 during the rule of the Mongols, when Franciscan missionaries, most notable among them John of Montecorvino, reached Kambalik, today’s Beijing. With the success of the missionary endeavors the number of Chinese converts grew and Pope Clement V appointed John of Montecorvino the first archbishop of Kambalik. With the end of the Yuan dynasty in 1368 however, the tiny Christian Church of Kambalik disappeared, leaving nearly no traces. The third phase begins with the arrival of the Jesuit missionaries Michaele Ruggieri and Matteo Ricci in China who reached China in 1583 and managed to get a foothold in Beijing. Besides the Jesuits, also Franciscan and Dominican missionaries succeeded in entering the Middle Kingdom. This period of the encounter of Christianity with China is overshadowed by the Rites Controversy (1610–1744), which ended with the decision by the Roman authorities forbidding Chinese Christian converts to take part in the traditional rites of ancestor veneration and which led to the prohibition of the Christian mission and the persecution of the Christians.²

The fourth period of missionary activities directed toward China starts with the opium war in the middle of the nineteenth century and lasts till the founding of the People's Republic of China. The narrow connection of the mission with the colonial and imperial powers was highly detrimental to the image of Christianity and has left deeply rooted anti-Christian prejudices till today. The anti-Christian attitude of the Chinese communists can be traced to this period.³

East Asia is best conceived as a series of overlapping circles of diverse peoples, civilizations, and religions, yet sharing a common heritage. It is connected to the West Asia and Europe via the Silk Road, and Buddhism reached the Chinese coast from South Asia. The modern nation-states that are known now as China (including Taiwan and Hong Kong), Japan, and the two Koreas are more recent developments. Geographical proximity aside, and despite their diversity, these countries do share a common cultural tradition in that they have all been shaped by Confucianism in values, politics, and social organization, although they are equally influenced by Buddhism of the Mahayana schools. That common tradition, however, shattered in the nineteenth century when their relative insularity was pried open by Western commercial and military expansion. The millennial order of these civilizations collapsed at the impact of the forces of modernity and the closed societies could not resist the superior technology and industry of the West, undergirded by powerful ideas of progress and destiny. In fact "nation" is a modern Western term signifying the acceptance of a new political reconfiguration, while previously the peoples in these lands thought of themselves only as dynasties and civilizations.

Faced with the challenge of the West, the East Asian countries developed very different responses, particularly in their reception of modernity, and in the process of constructing new national and cultural identities. The process had been turbulent and painful, with many casualties both in human and cultural terms. China went through two violent revolutions (1911 and 1949), with continuous civil war in between. It finally accepted a form of modernity by adopting communism, renamed by the Chinese communists "scientific socialism," which ruled the country for thirty years. The Cultural Revolution begun in 1966 with a campaign led by Mao Zedong who called for the destruction of the "Four Old," that is, old ideas, old culture, old habits, and old ethics. During the following nearly ten years of chaos, thousands of people lost their lives in the factional struggles. Educational institutions were closed, professors and students were sent to the countryside to work on farms, thousands of cultural objects were destroyed, and all forms of public religious life came to an end. When the nightmare was over, many survivors were without an adequate education or job qualification and constituted what has been called the "lost generation" of the Cultural Revolution. China finally accepted a form of modernity in "scientific socialism," which ruled the country for thirty years. Since the 1980s China has embraced capitalism to the fullest extent while maintaining a tight authoritarian regime under the Communist Party. This unholy alliance of two opposing ideologies is cleverly legitimized by the strange but pragmatically viable "Socialism with Chinese characteristics."

After nearly 250 years of isolation and strong restrictions of its relations to the outside world during the period of the policy of closed country (*sakoku*), Japan, in the reform

movement under the Meiji Emperor (1852–1912), took the road of fighting the West with Western methods and the result was a capitalist-militaristic state underpinned by feudal religion and loyalties. In only a few decades, Japan succeeded in building up a strong army and navy which in wars with China and Korea in the 1890s built its own colonial empire. In 1895, in the treaty of Shimonoseki, China was forced to cede the island of Taiwan, and in 1910 Korea became a Japanese colony. The military strength of the Japanese navy became apparent during Russo-Japanese war, when the navy of Tsarist Russia was defeated in the battle of Tsushima in 1905. During the 1930s, Japan extended its colonial empire further by conquering large parts of China and setting up the puppet state of Manchukuo in northeast China. In the first years of the Pacific War (1941–45), Japan succeeded in occupying temporarily Hong Kong, the Malay Peninsula, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Papua New Guinea, but was finally defeated and came under American occupation. Since then it has built a strong Western-style economy, but culturally it is still uncertain of its own identity or future. Korea, a vassal of China for centuries, and then a colony of Japan (1910–45), became the sad battleground during the Cold War and was split into North and South Korea. After military occupation in 1945, Korea was put under UN-control, but in 1948 two states, South and North Korea emerged which both claimed legitimacy. The Korean War (1950–53) led to the partition of Korea and continuous tensions till today, because no peace treaty was agreed upon. For decades, South Korea became a protectorate of United States in all but name. It now rebels against all three dominant neighbors with a ferocious nationalism. The North followed the Chinese model of development to the extreme, leading to extreme hardship for its peoples, reminding one of the period in China called the Cultural Revolution, running the danger of economic and political implosion.

The responses to these radical changes in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and the theologies they generated tell a fascinating and unique story in modern Christianity. The Christian religion has always been an ambiguous entity in these countries. On the one hand, it represented modernity. Against the slow-moving and recurring dynastic cycles, Christianity brought with it a sense of history, a linear concept of progress toward ultimate fulfilment. It pushed aside the collective identity characteristic of these cultures and emphasized individual responsibility for sin as well as salvation. It challenged the hierarchical social order by declaring the equality of all before a supreme loving God, something Buddhism had failed to do despite its egalitarian philosophy. More importantly, these were not only ideas. The diplomats and missionaries, representatives of this new religion, were incarnations of modernity, bringing with them modern technology, medicine, and education. Progress and optimism, individual dignity and responsibility, sin and destiny, these ideas put Christianity on the side of modernity.

It would not be right to say that Christianity was not attractive to the men and women in East Asia at a time of cultural crisis and soul searching. Indeed many had converted, both the elite and the masses but not on a scale sufficient to turn the tables and become a mainstream religion. The cultural barrier was breached but not broken down; below the surface of modernity, Confucian humanism was always there, and the contradictions between Western dualist metaphysics and Asian holistic anthropology were seemingly

irreconcilable. The dynasties were gone, but tradition remained. The old social order collapsed but the new nation-states were still built partly on traditional values. The fact that Christianity allied itself, at least in acquiescence, with the political and military power of Western colonial nations to advance its cause condemned it to be the “foreign religion.” For these and other reasons, Christianity has remained a minority in these lands, with the exception of South Korea. Even then Christianity there continues to struggle with its cultural marginality.

The following narrative is not a direct illustration of the issues mentioned above, but modernity, marginality, and identity are ideas that can summarize to a large extent the history as well as struggles of East Asian Christianity. In the following, I try to highlight some of the issues that are characteristic of a century of Christian existence in that part of the world.⁴

MAJOR THEMES AND CHARACTERISTICS

Nationalism and Indigenization

The first dominant theme for the Christianity in Eastern Asia is that of indigenization, the process of identifying with the local people and taking root in their cultures. This process, natural to Christianity throughout the centuries, took place in these countries gradually, as it did in China, during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. This mission period is overshadowed by the so-called “Rites Controversy” about the appropriate missionary method to be applied in dealing with the problem of ancestor veneration, the correct attitude to be taken by the new Chinese converts in regard to the custom of honoring the sage Confucius, and finally, the correct way of translating the name of God into Chinese. The negative decision by the Roman authorities in these matters became a major obstacle for the missionary endeavors and its failure thereafter. However, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, indigenization became a matter of political urgency.

The beginning of the twentieth century was a watershed in this history, especially in China. After years of conflict between the dynastic rulers and the local elite, on the one hand, and newly converted Christians, on the other, suspicion and inflammatory rumors reached a climax in the xenophobic Boxer Uprising (1898–1901). The fact that Christians advanced their rights with the support of foreign missionaries and their political sponsors meant that xenophobia was turned particularly toward Christians. During the Boxer Uprising, thousands of Chinese Christians and many foreigners were massacred before the movement was brutally put down by the joint forces of Western armies. The interpretation of these events is still contested today, and in itself is very revealing. While the Vatican canonized the “martyrs” of this period in 2000, the Chinese government took the view that Chinese Christians were more or less renegades, and the foreign missionaries should be seen as criminals. The perpetrators of the Uprising, in their misguided actions, were seen as forerunners of national resistance. However, for many

Chinese at the time of the Uprising, the shock of defeat and the shame over the futility of primitive outbursts of violence changed their attitudes radically. Anti-foreign feelings were still there, but simple xenophobia changed to a determined push for a modern nation, resulting in the Revolution of 1911 and the establishment of the first modern Chinese Republic.

In the aftermath of 1900, xenophobic hostility to Christianity went underground for a while. The power of the landed gentry was broken and mission work spread unhindered. In 1900 there were 2,000 Protestant missionaries in China, but by 1925 there were 8,000. Their strategy also changed, with more emphasis on the social gospel, building modern schools, universities, and hospitals. These in turn led to an increase in more urban-based and better educated Christians, slowly building up a critical mass to form a local Chinese church. On the other hand, although the leader of the Revolution, Dr. Sun Yat-sen, was a Christian, the movement he led was inspired by secular nationalism. Hostility to Christian expansion never completely went away and soon re-emerged. In the 1920s a new elite, not the landed gentry this time, but students and intellectuals turned against Christianity and foreign domination in the name of nationalism, science, and democracy. The resistance to Christianity continued throughout the twentieth century, culminating in the expulsion of missionaries and the suppression of Christianity under communism.

The urban Christians of the 1920s and 1930s were more conscious of the ambiguity of their being both Chinese and Christian, and became the pioneers of the new indigenous movement. In the beginning it took the form of an early “three-self movement,” meaning that Chinese Christians should be responsible for “self-support, self-management, and self-propagation” in the churches.⁵ The China Continuation Committee of the Edinburgh Conference of 1910 spearheaded this movement, which culminated in the National Christian Conference of 1922. The meeting produced a tangible ecumenical entity, the Church of Christ in China, with a significant degree of Chinese leadership. The National Christian Council was also a product of this period. Although the Chinese churches remained financially dependent on foreign missionary organizations, these two developments were part of a movement toward an interdenominational Chinese Christianity and gave the impetus to the search for a truly Chinese theology.

The process of indigenization in the Catholic Church was not as smooth. Theological conservatism meant the stifling of theological thinking and local leadership. An enlightened missionary, Vincent Lebbe (1877–1940), took on the Herculean task of lobbying the Vatican to establish a truly Chinese hierarchy. Rome was ready to recover the control of missions from the French government, and in 1919 Pope Benedict XV published his apostolic letter *Maximum illud*, which deplored the effects of European domination on the Catholic Church in China, as well as the prejudices of Western clergy. In 1926 six Chinese bishops were consecrated. Lebbe later acquired Chinese citizenship, considered a betrayal by his fellow missionaries, and went on to establish the first Chinese religious congregations.

In Japan, indigenization took on a clear political tone in this early period. A nationwide evangelistic campaign was launched in 1914, as a result of the Edinburgh

Conference in 1910, but most of the churches succumbed to a growing nationalism which required the churches to accommodate to state Shintoism. When the First World War broke out, thirty-two churches came together under government pressure to form the Nippon Kirisuto Kyodan (United Church of Christ in Japan), with the exception of the Holiness Church and the Anglican Church. This union, however, was less a sign of ecumenism than one of collective submission to the state. Many churches carried this “Shinto Christianity” to Korea, which became a Japanese colony in 1910. After the defeat of Japan in 1945, Japanese churches retreated into an existence away from political engagements. Efforts of indigenization were more focused on reconciling Christianity with traditional religious sentiments, and less with history or public theology. The emphasis on the psyche of the people produced interesting examples in the “theology of the pain of God” developed by Kitamori Kazoh (see later sections) or psychological introspection and scrutiny in novels and plays as in the work of Endo Shusaku, but the public role of Christianity was restrained and the churches remained at the margin of society.

The story of Korean Christianity, on the other hand, is an exception to the troubled stories in China and Japan. Its history is unique in that the first establishment of Christianity was not the result of foreign missions in the seventeenth century. The first Catholic community was formed first by Korean literati, who converted through the study of Christian literature in Chinese that they had discovered while visiting China with an official delegation in 1784. It was only after they had their own community that they invited missionary priests to come to serve them. In due course they suffered horrendous persecution by the Confucian state, which reinforced their sense of identity. Later, and perhaps more importantly, Korean Christians were active participants in the early twentieth-century nationalist struggles for independence from Japanese colonialism. Of course, present-day Christianity in Korea is the fruit of Western missionary activities, but the early history has given Korean Christians a pride and entitlement not available to churches in their neighboring countries. Nevertheless, indigenization and dialogue with traditional cultures remain an important challenge.

INDEPENDENT CHURCHES

A second theme, often overlooked in the history of East Asian Christianity, was the emergence of independent churches. While indigenization gathered pace among the “traditional” churches, a remarkable group of local Christian leaders deliberately dissociated themselves from these Western imports to establish autonomous local communities, rejecting Western denominationalism and their rigid theological systems. All of them had some disillusionment with the missionary movement and the models of church that they propagated.

After the 1900s missions to China and East Asia grew apace. However, it also resulted in importing the rivalry and theological debates in the West. Not all the

mission bodies supported a united Protestant Church in China or Japan and maintained their separate denominational activities. The split between “evangelicals” and “liberals” also threatened to pull the churches apart. In spite of the new ecumenical spirit, the missionary movement was probably more divided in the 1920s than they were before 1900.

It was in this atmosphere that independent leaders came to the fore, building Christian churches which were truly indigenous in ideas and leadership. The theology of these movements was generally conservative, but they were strongly proselytizing and often anti-ecumenical and anti-foreign. Some broke away from the traditional denominations, for example, in China Pastor Yu Guozhen and others broke away from the Presbyterians in 1906 to form the Chinese Christian Independent Church, which became a federation of over one hundred similar breakaway congregations in northern China. Other churches emerged entirely independently of the missionary movement, such as the Assembly Hall, also known as the Little Flock, led by Watchman Nee in the 1920s. It was strongly proselytizing, spreading to all parts of China. Independent preachers such as Wang Mingdao and John Song also established important congregations. The Pentecostal revival movements in America and in Wales also had their impact through individual missionaries. The True Jesus Church, founded in 1917 became the largest of the independent groups in 1930s, and the Jesus Family; a communitarian Pentecostal Church also became prominent in the 1920s. These churches form a large part of the “house churches” in China today and some of them established missions in Europe and North America.

In Japan, the most famous independent group was the Non-Church Movement (Mukyokai) founded in 1901 by Uchimura Kanzo. The movement rejected the scandal of denominationalism and rivalry between the mission churches and opted for a form of communion similar to the Quakers. It rejected “high theology,” ordination, and sacraments. Instead of a theology of the inner light, the Non-Church Movement emphasized Bible study and self-cultivation in the Confucian tradition. The movement was aimed at the educated elite who were concerned with the spiritual direction of the nation. The movement was influential at the time and was brought to Korea by students who studied in Japan, notably Kyo-Shim Kim. The movement, however, suffered from the lack of organization and a clear theological system for it to be sustainable, and today it is only a shadow of its former glory. Nevertheless its existence and early expansion testifies to an important aspect of Christianity in these countries. While the “churches” are diminished, the issues they raised are taken up in theological debates as to the proper ecclesial existence for Asian Christians.

COMMUNISM AND DIVIDED CHURCHES

Outside of Europe, it is in East Asia that communism thrived and became a dominant force. The period between 1900 and 1950 was one of tumultuous change for the

countries in East Asia: nationalism, nation-building, civil war, anticolonial struggle as well as social and cultural revolution, and then the Second World War. During this time, the churches were faced with multifaceted challenges, but none greater than the one posed by the triumph of communism in China and North Korea.

After the formation of the Chinese Republic in 1911, the churches began to respond to the growing nationalism and social movements in China, but their timid efforts were soon overtaken by events, first by the raging civil war between different warlords, then by the devastating Japanese invasion, followed by the triumph of communism. Rightly or wrongly, it was seen to be the answer to the twin aspirations of the Chinese people: to rid China of a century of humiliating foreign domination and to bring about the needed social and political transformations under a strong, united government.

In hindsight, one may say that the Communist Revolution which resulted in the setting up of the Peoples Republic of China in 1949 simply by-passed the churches. With the exception of a small group of Chinese Christians associated with the YMCA and YWCA, the churches were generally conservative and anti-communist. The first act of the new regime was to “invite” foreign missionaries to leave the country. Most Protestant missions acquiesced, but the Catholic missions resisted, resulting in many imprisonments and expulsions. Educational and medical institutions were taken over, and the churches were asked to sever their foreign links. Having lost their funding, traditional means of outreach and most of their leadership, the churches were left in disarray. The “Three-Self Principles” became a reality overnight, albeit imposed by the state. The weakened churches were then asked to abandon their denominations to join together under a new political instrument, the Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM), formally launched in 1954 by the first National Chinese Christian Conference. Church property and programs were surrendered to the TSPM which assumed the role of a supra-church.

Some disagreed with the TSPM and refused collaboration with the state out of ideological or theological reasons, such as Wang Mingdao and Watchman Nee, who became targets of the campaign to “clean up counter-revolutionary elements.” The structures of all the independent churches were dismantled completely, although many managed to survive sometimes underground, sometimes within the TSPM structures and were revived after the 1980s.

A similar organization for the Catholic Church, the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association (CCPA), was created in 1957 after a series of high-profile political campaigns. In order to fill the vacancies of bishops who were expelled or imprisoned, the Patriotic Association began to consecrate Chinese bishops in 1957. This was immediately condemned by the Vatican as schismatic. As with the TSPM, resistance to CCPA was crushed by political campaigns, in scenes reminiscent of the novel *Animal Farm*. Bishops, priests, and lay Catholics were put in prison after show trials until their release in the 1980s.

The price the churches had to pay in collaboration with the state was twofold. On the one hand, what is left of the church is only a shadow of itself, having lost its autonomy and identity. On the other hand, the dissenting churches were driven underground, creating a permanent split that was both political and theological. During the Cultural

Revolution (1966–1976) not only the Christians in the underground but also the “open churches” became targets of the Red Guards and all religious activities ceased. Only the underground churches continued to function in secret. In 1979, Deng Xiaoping introduced a period of reform and liberalization. Churches were reopened and religious activities were allowed once again and restricted and controlled religious freedom was reinstated. The Chinese Christians reorganized themselves into the double structure of the China Christian Council and the TSPM. Turning away from denominationalism attempts were made to become a post-denominational church by developing the China Christian Council into a united church. Even if these efforts failed in the end, some form of unified theology was developed and the Nanjing Jingling Theological Seminary was made into the national training center for the future male and female pastors. Other regional seminaries were set up in Shanghai, Chengdu, and other cities. The Protestant Christians became active also in the social field. In 1985 the Amity Foundation was set up as a nongovernmental organization in which Protestant Christians cooperate with people of other faith in the fields of education, medical care, and social activities. With the assistance of the United Bible Societies, the Amity Foundation has set up a modern printing press which developed into the biggest Bible printing publishing firm and in 2013 celebrated the printing of 100 million copies of the Bible. With the beginning of the reform policy under Deng Xiaoping restricted and controlled religious freedom was reinstated.

The Protestant churches launched the China Christian Council in 1980, with the ultimate aim of replacing the TSPM to run the affairs of the church, although this was never completely successful. The Catholic Church also formed the Chinese Bishops’ Conference, although this was not recognized by the Vatican. Nevertheless, a new spirit of optimism was ushered in, with churches being renovated or built, and the numbers grew, especially in the rural areas. By 1987 the numbers far surpassed the figures before the Cultural Revolution, especially the Protestant churches, and the government feared that a “Christianity fever” was taking over the country. Accurate statistical figures of the number of faithful in the Christian churches are difficult to establish. But according to conservative estimates the number of Catholic Christians has grown from 3 million in 1949 to 12–15 million today. Even more spectacular is the growth of Protestant Christians who numbered a mere 750,000 in 1949 and now are estimated to have reached 30 million, in more optimistic estimates, even 50 million and more.

Despite the new liberalization, the underground communities persisted. The underground Catholic Church still opposed the “open church.” Government crackdown was severe. In 1985 the Vatican gave secret permission to underground bishops to appoint their successors, leading to the formation of an “underground” Bishops’ Conference in 1988. To avoid open schism between the “open” and “underground” communities, the Vatican refused to recognize either conference. The tension eased in late 1990s with the Vatican’s call for reconciliation, and most bishops of the “open church” are now accepted by Rome.

Among Protestants, the underground church, often called the “house churches,” is not a unified community. There are distinct clusters and independent groups. There are

remnants of the Chinese independent churches that began life in the 1920s and continued to flourish today, such as the Little Flock and the True Jesus Church. Some are derivations and breakaway groups from the above, such as the Yellers. New groups also emerged in the 1980s led by independent preachers. Some of them manifest clear Pentecostal or charismatic leanings, sometimes independently, sometimes due to the influence by North American and Korean missionaries who operated secretly in China. More recently, attention was drawn to widespread student fellowships that exist in the university cities in China. The interest of intellectuals in Christianity is new, part of the so-called Second Chinese Enlightenment, a period of free debate in the 1980s and 1990s. Religion, instead of being perceived as the opiate of the people, has become an ally in the liberation of the "human," and a support for the spiritual quest of the people, free from state ideology and narrow technological and deterministic reason.

In Korea, the situation of the churches was no less dramatic when confronted by the advance of communism. After being liberated from forty years of Japanese colonization, the country was immediately thrown into the Cold War. In the north, under Kim Il Sung, the communist regime tightened its control over the population, triggering a massive exodus to the south. The churches were part of this exodus after hundreds of church leaders were killed. China intervened in the Korean War in 1952 against the United Nations forces and the stalemate resulted in the division of the country into North and South Korea. The Christian churches were brutally suppressed in the north, and all traces of Christianity disappeared until the Korean Christians Federation resurfaced in the 1980s with a small number of house churches.

UNIQUE CONTEXTUAL THEOLOGIES

While Christian churches were driven either south or underground, in South Korea the churches developed a hardline anti-communism. Conservative theologies came to dominance. For the period until the 1970s they were behind big evangelistic campaigns and led to successful church growth, although other factors such as rapid urbanization and migration also played their part. Because Christianity struggled alongside other nationalists against Japanese colonialism, it was not considered as foreign in the same way as in China or Japan, with church membership reaching 25% of the population, a unique phenomenon among Asian churches. It is only higher in the Philippines with 90.9% and Timor 85.5% which are results of colonial rule. In Korea, Christianity is well accepted as a mainstream religion, and both Catholic and Protestant churches command respect in society.

When the threat from the North was stabilized, the same patriotism and concern for the welfare of the people gradually turned against the military regimes that stifled democratic expressions in 1960s and 1970s, and the churches were once again at the forefront of the struggle for human rights and welfare of the workers. In 1972 President Park Chung-hee declared Martial Law across the country in order to maintain power.

The ideology of his regime was based on the concept of “national security” and the promotion of economic growth. Opposition forces were systematically described as “communists” and put down with brutal force. Many church groups stood up against the dictatorship and growing infringement of human rights, such as the Urban Industrial Mission, the Korean Student Christian Federation, the Christian Ecumenical Youth Council, the Catholic Farmers’ Union, the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace, and similar organizations.

A distinct contextual theology emerged in the movement and became widely known as Minjung theology, the most significant theological movement coming out of East Asia. The concept of *minjung* began its life in a new reading of history by Korean historians in the 1960s and 1970s, as it was seen by the oppressed. It was also a literary movement, with the experiences and language of the people who lived as underdogs at the bottom of society. The central theme of this theology is the experience of “*han*,” a Korean word meaning the grudge, the profound bitterness of the oppressed. Storytelling became a way of doing theology. As oppression became total, the press muzzled and publications forbidden, the expelled professors and court-martialed students met to tell stories of their experiences. Telling stories became their privilege form of communication and reflection.

From storytelling to the reconstruction of history from below through the self-definition by the Minjung, the distinct methodology of this new theology can be described as a theology of social biography. As a theological and missionary movement, however, Minjung theology today is at the crossroads. Although it allied with Christian grassroots militancy for a short period of time, and some “Minjung congregations” were formed, these never flourished into a significant movement to change the conservative stance of the majority of churches. In the end a theology built on a narrower political platform was not sufficient to answer the many and varied needs of the people. Moreover, since Korea returned to democracy, the movement has lost its visible enemy. The context also moved from the local to the global, and a more affluent society has turned its attention more to the problems of the environment, Korea’s cultural identity and the reunification of North and South.

A similar contextual theology was operating at about the same time in Taiwan, spearheaded by the Presbyterian Church. Its main grievance was the domination of the “mainlanders” who arrived in Taiwan with the Nationalist government after its defeat by the communists. Anti-communism and martial law led to the suppression and displacement of the local elite; local dialects and culture were forbidden. The Presbyterian Church, rooted in the Taiwanese population, gave voice to the aspirations of the “Taiwanese” to become independent from China. Nostalgia for land and home became the themes of a theology of liberation, called Homeland theology. As in the case in Korea, this theology was short-lived for similar reasons.

Space does not allow a full survey of the theological production in East Asia. In China Bishop K. H. Ting and his colleagues developed a theology of accommodation with nationalism and communism. Emphasizing that God is love which extends to all people and not only the “justified,” and that the salvation of Christ is cosmic, Ting’s theology

aimed at building a bridge between believers and the so-called atheists. He believes that the hostility of atheism was directed to the corruption of the church and its poor witness rather than the gospel. In that sense his theology is a response to the Chinese context, but it did not develop a strong popular base. In Japan, Kitamori Kazoh proposed a “theology of the pain of God,” drawing on the deep psyche of suffering in Japanese Buddhism and popular literary traditions. The *tsurasa*, the human willingness to bear pain for others, even someone who does not deserve love, is the symbolic witness to God’s “pain.” For Kitamori all suffering originates in humankind’s alienation from God, yet God in his wrath still embraces the worthy and unworthy alike.

A second distinct theological contribution from Japan is the attempt to integrate Zen Buddhist practices into Christian spirituality, pioneered by Hugo Enomiya-Lassalle (1898–1990) and Heinrich Dumoulin, Jesuit missionaries who studied Zen and in turn became Zen masters. They and those who came after, including the Japanese Dominican, Fr. Oshida, have completely transformed the understanding of spirituality for Christians in Asia as well as in the West. They have also opened up a new form of interreligious encounter, not so much through theoretical debate but through deep spiritual practice.

The contextual theologies mentioned above were not only products of their times but also witness to a fast-changing epoch. Some of them may not be as relevant today as they were when they were first developed but they remain a rich resource for understanding how Christianity has encountered the societies and cultures in East Asia.

SIGNIFICANT TRENDS

Religious trends are not always predictable because deep human needs and emotions, as well as undercurrents of societies and civilizations, change over time. Nevertheless, there are significant pointers and issues which are already emerging that may determine the future shape of East Asian Christianity.

“Religious Fever” in China

The term was coined not by Christians but by government officials in China in a policy document in 1987 in which the growth of Christianity in Henan province was described. This is significant because the province, although with a well-established Catholic community, did not have a sizable Protestant Church until the 1980s, and since then it moved to the front of the league table in terms of numbers, and the churches also took on a charismatic tendency not usually associated with evangelical grass-roots churches. Something happened which could not be explained by the usual sociological theories. Henan was not a province heavily worked by missionaries, so the flowers did not blossom from seeds sown before the Communist Revolution. There were few Christians

there to be persecuted during the Cultural Revolution, so the present growth cannot be attributed to the “blood of the martyrs.” A few Pentecostal missionaries did enter the province in the 1980s but for what reason were they successful there and not in neighboring provinces, while some of the new communities were formed entirely independent of outside evangelical activities.

If Henan is a puzzle waiting to be solved, there is no doubt about the phenomenal growth of Christian communities in China, both Protestant and Catholic. Statistics are flawed, varying from 50 million Protestants to over 100 million. For political, as well as practical reasons, the Chinese government commissioned a study covering all the provinces of China and came to a modest statistic of 26 million Protestant Christians.⁶ The results correlate with similar studies done by Chinese universities. Although the methodology of these studies has been heavily criticized by Chinese academics themselves, and any publicly sponsored survey would not be able to attain reliable answers due to obvious political constraints, the results still point to a significant upgrading from the previous official figure of 16 million. Tacitly, the Chinese government recognizes now that there is a large number of Christians that exist outside of the government-controlled institutions, and that the existence of the so-called house churches is not an “aberration.”

It must be pointed out that growth is not limited to the Protestant churches alone. The Catholic Church also increased significantly, as well as Buddhism and Daoism, although statistics are difficult to come by with these less institutional beliefs, but the crowds in temples on important feast days are no less than that of the Christian churches.

More important than the contested statistics are the reasons and meaning for this Christian growth. Various explanations have been put forth. Some would point to the broken society after the Cultural Revolution, when the message of love and fellowship strikes a particular cord. Others point to the ideological void after the collapse of communism, and the emptiness and superficial relationships resulting from a materialistic consumer society. Still others emphasize the return of human subjectivity after the demise of false collective consciousness of scientific socialism. A new theory suggests that Christianity could expand among the grass roots thanks to the draconian measures of the communist government against the folk religions, allowing Christianity to fill the vacuum. The latter points convincingly, to the “folk-religionization” of grass-roots Christianity in China. Indeed many of the grass-roots Christian communities manifest similar characteristics as popular religions.

Besides the revival of traditional churches and the emergence of independent house churches, the phenomenon of “intellectual Christians,” sometimes called “Cultural Christians,” should definitely be added as a major breakthrough of Christianity in China. The term “Cultural Christian” is controversial and few would identify themselves as such. It was coined to describe a group of people, mainly intellectuals in the 1980s and 1990s, who were attracted to Christianity but preferred to remain outside of the church. These “intellectual Christians,” as opposed to “Christian intellectuals” in other countries, became Christian in name, or sometimes in spirit, through the study of Christianity as a cultural tradition or ethos, but most of them, including those who were

baptized, shied away from the practicing churches, and preferred to live their religion in their hearts and in their intellectual pursuits.

The spread of Christianity among the grass roots is not new, but the attraction to intellectuals is unprecedented. Does it suggest that the cultural barrier to Christianity, experienced by the Jesuits of the sixteenth century, and confronted by missionaries in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is finally breaking down? Does it mean that due to the human tragedy and devastation during the Cultural Revolution, the Chinese people are realizing the human capacity to do evil on a cosmic scale, and therefore sin is no longer an unthinkable Western theological concept but an existential experience? If this is true, what will be its implication for the rooting of Christianity in Chinese mind and culture? And if Christianity reaches 7–10% of the population, and grows confident intellectually, what kind of influence will it assert in society and politics?

Pentecostalism and Mega-Churches

Around the world, Pentecostals are the most remarkable Christian group with highest numerical growth in world Christianity, namely from 0.2% in 1910 to 26.8% of the entire Christian population, with significant overlap with both Roman Catholic and Protestant communities (while during the same period the Roman Catholic Church and major Protestant denominations remain constant at 50% and 18% respectively, with the decline of Orthodoxy from 20% to 12%).⁷ In Asia, 27% of Christians are Pentecostals (Roman Catholics 100 million, Protestants 50 million, Orthodox 100,000, and Pentecostals 55 million). Of the 55 million Asian Pentecostals, a large number are found in South Korea, Japan, and China.

A lot has been written about the growth of Pentecostalism in Latin America and Africa, but academic attention to the phenomenon in Asia is only recent. While poverty, alienation, and empowerment are the main reasons given for its growth in other parts of the world, other factors need to be considered in East Asia. First of all, it is important to point out that Asian Pentecostalism has multiple origins: the revivals at Azusa Street in the United States as well as Keswick in England, not to forget that there are indigenous forms as well, such as those in China described in earlier sections. Second, Pentecostalism in South Korea, Japan, and to a large extent in Taiwan (and Singapore) is a middle-class phenomenon.

The Yoido Full Gospel Church in Seoul is a prime example. From humble beginnings the church has grown to become the biggest mega-church in the world with almost a million members. Every Sunday at its church in the rich Korean “Manhattan” there are several services with each catering to 25,000 worshippers. It has branches in different parts of the world, including Japan, Taiwan, and Hong Kong in the East Asia region.

Several observations are pertinent here. First of all, it puts to bed the myth of “inscrutable Asian,” be it a Chinese or a Korean. Collective expressions of grief are not uncommon among grass-roots communities, and the educated middle class too, usually in formal dress and ritualized behavior, is capable of public pouring out emotions of

sadness, shame, or joy. Pentecostalism has broken the cultural pattern associated with Confucian societies where propriety and inner calm are the accepted standard. Second, the growth of Pentecostalism and other charismatic forms challenges the traditional denominations, most of which have reached a plateau in Asia and are stagnating or in decline. Third, they cross denominational barriers—there are Catholic as well as Protestant charismatics. If the charismatic and Pentecostal churches continue to grow, and the signs in China indicate they will, at some point in time they will become the major denomination or movement in Asian Christianity, what will be the shape and form of Christian encounter with the cultural traditions in these countries?⁸

From “Identity of Theology” to “Theology of Identity”

In the twentieth century, the map of Europe has been redrawn after the collapse of the Soviet bloc. Germany is reunited but former Yugoslavia has been broken up, while Soviet satellite states have become independent. The Cold War, however, is not over in East Asia. Skirmishes happen regularly between North and South Korea. Taiwan seeks independence from China, but the latter threatens war if the “renegade province” crosses the red line. Hong Kong has been handed back to China but keeps a large dose of autonomy, having its own government, court, and currency, if only for fifty years. Behind the patriotic and ideological war of words, each protagonist is negotiating its own identity and destiny.

Inspired by the Kairos document in South Africa, some Korean theologians have turned their attention to peace and reconciliation as the new theological agenda for the peninsula. Unlike the divided opinion in Taiwan, unification has never been a contested issue; it is the terms and conditions and who can dictate them which are the obstacles. In many ways both North and South feel they have been victims of the global struggle for power, but neither is willing to compromise its ideology. Rejecting a simplistic anti-communism, South Korean theologians are working hard on a theology of shared identity as the basis for dialogue and reconciliation.

The question of identity is even more acute in Taiwan. For a long time the Presbyterian Church has been the unofficial spokesperson for the Taiwanese-speaking population and champion for independence from China. After martial law was lifted in Taiwan, the voices of opposition became stronger and the independence movement moved into mainstream politics. But as China opened up and embraced the market as the road to modernization, trade between the two territories increased many hundredfold and economic interests now play a large part in dampening the separatist movement. However, if politics can be compared to theater, we have only watched scene one and two, and the end is not yet in sight.

Between unification (Korea) and separation (Taiwan), Hong Kong is too small to choose. It had very little say in its being handed back to China, and the majority of the population did not see any future divorced from that of the latter. But the emotions were mixed. After decades of living the shame of the colonized (China and Taiwan never

stopped pointing that out), it now ran the risk of a second colonization by an alien, if not foreign political system. Reunification therefore mixes joy and anxiety, and how to find a third space and shared identity beyond binary opposition has dominated Christian thinking in Hong Kong.

There are three countries/territories and three different ambiguities, with each trying to find its own coping strategy. It is interesting to observe the change in the self-understanding of the Christian churches throughout this period. In the 1960s and early 1970s, with the drive toward the local church and indigenization, the theological trajectory can be described as one concerned with the “identity of theology”—Korean, Chinese, Taiwanese, and Hong Kong. In seeking to throw off the “foreign” label, churches in these places were looking for the how, where, and by whom is theology to be done in order to take root in the local cultures. Twenty years on, the concern has shifted to the identity of the peoples themselves whose cultural location must be determined, thus opening up a “theology of identity” and/or “shared identities.”

Multi-Religious Belonging

Our survey of the major trends will not be complete without reference to the unique multi-religious situation in East Asia, and the growing importance of interreligious dialogue. In 1974, the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC), meeting in Taipei, expanded this dialogue to include cultures as well as religions. Together with option for the poor, dialogue and service were seen as the two arms of evangelization in Asia. Except in China, where the religions were kept strictly apart by government policy, dialogue on all levels is taking place between Christianity and traditional religions, especially Buddhism which is going through a modern revival, responding very positively to society's weary of consumerism and developing ecological concerns.

Dialogue between Christianity and other world religions has been going on for decades, but the theoretical models have always originated from a Western and Christian center. All of them, exclusivist or pluralist, assume a Christian starting point and a certain degree of Christian uniqueness and incompatibility with other faiths. More recently this either/or model has been challenged from the existential experience of dual or plural belonging. Some Asian theologians have rejected this binary model and “suspended” doctrinal judgment in order to ask the question: Can one be Christian and Buddhist at the same time? The starting point is accepting a “real” experience of and relationship with both the Buddha and the Christ. Recently in Western scholarship there is a tendency to move toward a “confessional stance” (i.e., defining and accepting one's own religious identity clearly in the dialogue).⁹ In East Asia one's own religious experience is affirmed with the same rigor, but in this case the experience is multi-religious. In recent conferences of East Asian theologians, Korean and Japanese theologians found a common cause in rejecting Western models of interreligious dialogue, which they see as doomed to failure and always end in either exclusivism or relativity. In their eyes, a dualist metaphysics is at fault. What if multiple religious identity is a complex but authentic

reality? In which case, it would revolutionize existing theories of religion, religious experience, and the modalities of dialogue.¹⁰

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The above survey, presented through a series of thematic events or issues as in the rest of this Handbook, is a very selective picture of Christianity in East Asia. Hopefully, it succeeds at least in highlighting the exciting and diverse social and cultural encounters that the Christian religion has been engaged with. The theologies of liberation, dialogue with religions and cultures, and struggles with communism—any one of which would be sufficient to define the character of Christianity in a particular continent, have come together in East Asia in a short period of time, and the encounters are still going on. In the worst case scenario, they could result in a fragmented Christianity, but if successfully held together they may point toward a new paradigm of Christian existence in the future.

NOTES

1. Cf. Steve Eskilden, "Christology and Soteriology in the Chinese Nestorian Texts," in R. Malek, ed., *The Chinese Face of Christ*, Vol. 1 (Nettetal: Steyler Verlag, 2002), 181–218.
2. Cf. D. E. Mugello, ed., *The Chinese Rites Controversy: Its History and Meaning* (Nettetal: Steyler Verlag, 1994).
3. Cf. J.-P. Wiest, "Learning from the Missionary Past," in E. Tang and J.-P. Wiest, eds., *The Catholic Church in Modern China* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books 1993), 181–98.
4. This introduction will take a thematic approach. For statistics and analysis of countries and denominations there are many existing handbooks, notably *Atlas of Global Christianity 1010–2010*, ed. Todd M. Johnson and Kenneth R. Ross (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009).
5. Although it was the policy already of missionaries like Venn and the Presbyterians in the nineteenth century, the principles took on a sense of urgency after the 1900s.
6. However, the *World Religious Database* probably provides more realistic figures. See Appendix in this Handbook on *Christian Demography in Asia*.
7. Todd M. Johnson and Kenneth R. Ross, eds., *Atlas of Global Christianity* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010).
8. A chapter by Allan Anderson is devoted to the subject of Pentecostalism and charismatic movements in Asia in this Handbook.
9. See S. Martin Heim, *Salvations: Truth and Difference in Religion*, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995); Catherine Cornille, ed. *Many Mansions? Multiple Religious Belonging and Christian Identity*, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002); Gavin D'Costa, *Theology and Religious Pluralism*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986); and *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered*, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1990).

10. An example can be found in the 3rd Conference of East Asian Theologians held in Shanghai, May 2011, on the theme, "Is Asia Pacific?"

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PART II

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**CROSS-CULTURAL
FLOWS AND
PAN-ASIAN
MOVEMENTS OF
ASIAN CHRISTIANITY**

.....

INTRODUCTION

FELIX WILFRED

AFTER region-specific overviews in Part I, Part II enters into consideration of issues and questions across regions and across cultures in the understanding of Christianity in Asia. *Movement* is the keyword to interpret the seven contributions under this part. The opening article by Michael Amaladoss looks at the theological trends and movements. According to him, there is a common vision and shared perceptions which have brought together more and more closely the theologies pursued in different parts of the continent. The Asian integral vision permeating these theologies allows them to interconnect harmoniously the mystery of God, of human beings, and of the world. Asian theologies also share contextual sensitivity, deployment of certain common religious and cultural resources and traditions in theologizing, a spirit of pluralism, and so on. All these have an influence on the way Asian Christians do theology. He sees a paradigm shift in methodology. Instead of relying solely on conceptual elaborations and arguments, Asian theologies make abundant use of symbols, metaphors, and narratives in an attempt to be closer to life and experience-based. Asian theologies share also the spirit of dialogue with peoples of other faiths, and other Christian churches, which has its repercussion in the way theology is done and Christ is viewed and interpreted; so too the way God and the Spirit are experienced and understood, and the Christian scriptures are read. Amaladoss refers also to the liberational trends in Asian theology which have roots in the Asian traditions and histories and have its own forms and expressions—Dalit theology, Minjung theology, theology of struggle, theology of the homeland, and so on. He also speaks of emerging Asian public theology and the role of Asian art in theologizing.

When Christianity moves across cultures, new sets of problems arise, best illustrated in the work of translation and interpretation of the Bible. Archie Lee addresses this question with special reference to China. In China and in Asia in general the Bible has not been received as much as the Buddhist scriptures, for example; there has even been a hostile attitude toward the Bible, thanks to the closed canon it presents. In this regard, Lee notes: “In a sense it is ironic that the West has tried to force open the closed door of the Asian world with a closed canon. On the other hand, there have been attempts on the part of some Asian Christians to force open the biblical canon by including sacred writings from the Asian religio-cultural context into the received canon.” He raises the question as to what is the place of the biblical text in the context of multiplicity of texts in Asia. Further, the lack of cultural sensitivity in translation has caused a lot of

difficulties, starting with the translation of the name of God. Very revealing is also the case of the translation of the word “dragon” in the apocalypse as the evil power, which has caused a lot of embarrassment to the Chinese for whom for millennia the dragon has been in mythology and folklore a symbol of well-being, prosperity, and auspiciousness. Here was a failure in cross-cultural communication which had serious consequences in the relationship of Christianity to the Chinese people and to all those people under Confucian tradition. The author sees translation as a “con/textual and cross-textual negotiation.” He says translation is a process in which there is a dynamics of interplay and dialogue between the biblical texts and Asian religious texts. This contribution takes us to another theological level by discussing whether the cultural and religious resources of Asian peoples could serve a similar function as the Old Testament served vis-à-vis the New Testament. This is a question which has been discussed in China and India for many decades by theologians and scriptural scholars.

Ecumenism has been one of the most significant contributions of Asia to global Christianity. Aruna Gnanadason explores how the ecumenical movement came to be and has been flourishing all over the continent. To go back to history, along with various worldwide movements of the youth (young students, workers, etc.), the mission movement in Asia was an important impulse for ecumenical involvement. The legacy of mission movement for ecumenism could be seen in the continuing communication and cooperation among the churches in Asia. The author refers to the well-known church union movement in India leading to the establishment of the Church of South India (1947). At the institutional level, ecumenism is encouraged and promoted by such pan-Asian bodies as the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) and the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences (FABC), and practiced in the promotion of Asian theology across the various denominations, as it is happening through the Congress of Asian Theologians (CAT). If the missionary movement triggered the ecumenical movement, the worldwide ecumenical movement, especially with the experience and support of Asian churches, gave new impetus to dialogue with peoples of other religious traditions and cooperation with them in different areas of life. The ecumenical movement has also been able to bring Asian Christians together in responding to the various sociopolitical issues of the continent. One such example would be the ecumenical engagement with the issue of the “untouchables”—the Dalits of India. Gnanadason also highlights some of the still looming challenges to the ecumenical movement in Asia.

The following chapter goes into another pan-Asian movement—namely the missionary movement arising from some countries and carrying the Good News to other countries within Asia, and also to other parts of the world. This is a new phenomenon reflective of the demographic change of Christianity from the traditionally Christian countries to the global South. With the help of statistics, Sebastian Kim shows the growth and spread of the missionary movement from Korea, Philippines, India, and so on—both among the mainline churches and Pentecostal and evangelical churches—to other parts of Asia and the rest of the world. He also refers to more recent efforts in the churches for promoting mission in Asia through the agency of Asian Christians. The chapter refers to several church documents that have helped to

promote missionary movement from within Asia, including *Ecclesia in Asia* of Pope John Paul II. The author concretizes his presentation through three case studies—the first, relating to evangelical fundamentalist missionary orientation set by many Korean missionaries; second, the more inculturation and contextualization oriented mission practice in the internal mission from South India to other parts of the country; and third, the case of new “migration churches” emanating from Asia and trying to set their foot in the West.

In his contribution, Allan Anderson discusses the Pentecostal movement in Asia. He contests the prevalent simplistic historiography of this movement as if it were an expansion of the American-born Pentecostal movement of the early twentieth century into Asia. He shows that the charismatic movement in Asia has indigenous roots and has been at work during the long missionary period itself and has been very active in the nineteenth century as can be attested in the life of Pandita Ramabai and others. The statistics the author provides on the spread of the Asian Pentecostal movement are very striking. The author gives a good overview of the situation of the Pentecostal movement in different regions of Asia. He also discusses the Pentecostal movement among the Asian Catholics and concludes his presentation by highlighting some of the unique characteristics of the Asian Pentecostal movement.

Christianity in its traditional forms—Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant—adapted to the local cultures and contexts. Besides this process of inculturation and contextualization, there have been also forms of Christianity which were born in Asia, grew up and spread in different pockets of the continent. It is this which is referred to as “forms of indigenous Christianities.” Paul Joshua Bhakiaraj helps us distinguish these Christianities from other forms and points out why the indigenous movements of Christianity require a different methodology of study, since their focus is not so much doctrines and beliefs as the immediate experience; since they were born often as resistance to Western-imposed forms of Christianity; since they possess very specific characteristics according to the context of their existence. The rest of the chapter presents case studies of indigenous movements: the Mukyokai Movement in Japan, the True Jesus Church in China, Iglesia ni Cristo in the Philippines, and different indigenous movements in India. Bhakiaraj concludes that forms of indigenous Christianities in Asia have remained on the sidelines compared to the mainline churches and highlights the need to study and discover what the various indigenous forms of Christianities have to offer.

The final chapter of this part by Sharon Bong provides an overview of the Christian feminist movement in Asia. She begins with Asian feminist theology and shows how the very understanding of theology and its method is based on the experiences of Asian women. Asian feminist theology like the “theology of the womb” by Marianne Katoppo, the Dalit feminist theology, and Minjung feminist theology have helped to generate a unique Asian Christian feminist spirituality. Asian feminist theologians draw, critically though, from Asian cultural and religious resources, specially the neglected and marginal ones. Bong goes over various areas of theology and shows how they are approached by Asian feminist theologians to whom she makes ample reference. The last part of the chapter goes into three different Christian feminist movements at work in Asia.

CHAPTER 6

ASIAN THEOLOGICAL TRENDS

MICHAEL AMALADOSS

ASIA is a vast continent with many countries, cultures, ethnic groups, religions, and languages. There are also many churches in Asia. Is it then meaningful to speak of Asian theology? Should one rather speak of Asian theologies? While it is true that every country has its specificity and its theologians, it is also true that a common sense of Asianness has been emerging over the last fifty years. Perhaps this can be considered the most basic, if not the most important, trend in Asian theology. By Asia I mean here South, Southeast, and East Asia, leaving out West Asia and Central Asia. One reason is that the churches in this part of the world have been coming and working together in various ways. The other, more important, reason is that this part of Asia has a basic common cultural identity, in spite of its many differences.

From the Protestant side, the Association of Theological Schools in South East Asia was established in Singapore in 1957, and progressively it covered the whole of that area. In 1981 the name was changed to Association for Theological Education in South East Asia (ATESEA). In collaboration with the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA), which includes also South Asia, it launched its Program for Theology and Cultures in Asia (PTCA) with its *Asian Journal of Theology*, published since 1987. PTCA had a project of “Doing Theology with Asian Resources” leading to seminars and publications. The South Asians established the South Asian Theological Research Institute (SATHRI) in 1989, functioning under Serampore College, founded in 1818. But the South Asians were also involved in the PTCA. The Roman Catholic Church constituted the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences (FABC) in 1972 and held its First Plenary Assembly in Taipei, Taiwan, in 1974. The FABC started its Office of Theological Concerns in 1986, though its various institutes covering different apostolates had been theologizing since 1974 and had been publishing papers and common statements. The Congress of Asian Theologians (CAT) was founded in 1997 by the Protestants. Later, also the FABC started collaborating with it. It has had seven conferences so far (as of 2012). All this shows how the churches in Asia have been working together and developing a common approach and voice in theology. This also justifies the geographical limits of the “Asia” this chapter focuses on.

In this short chapter I am not attempting to offer any comprehensive summary of Asian theology.¹ I am indicating theological trends. Sometimes it may be a single person who is breaking new ground. I have no space to elaborate these trends which may get mentioned sometimes in a single sentence. One will have to go to the source referred to, to understand it more fully.

AN ASIAN WAY

At the level of culture one usually speaks of the “West” and the “East.” Their cultures are shaped by their religious background. It is customary to talk of the Prophetic religions of West Asia and the West (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) and the Mystical religions of the rest of Asia (Hinduism, Daoism, and Buddhism). While the abstract rationality of Greek culture, with its concepts and logic, is at the root of much of Western culture, a certain experiential, intuitive non-duality characteristic of Hinduism and Daoism and of the psychophysical meditative practices of Yoga and Buddhism mark the East. An Indian author, A. K. Ramanujan² has contrasted Western and Indian ways of thinking as “context free” and “context sensitive.” It is also customary to oppose the “either-or” of the Western way to the “both-and” of the Eastern way. The paradigm of the *yin* and the *yang* of Daoism is often evoked in this context.³ In a broad sense, while the West reaches out to the transcendent Absolute through the reality outside, the East looks inward. The Greek approach to reality is also dichotomous, distinguishing between God and creation, the divine and the human, the spirit and the body, the human and the cosmic. It leads to abstract conceptual systems that have to be applied to the realities of life, as it were from the outside. Such applications would be called practical philosophy/theology. The Asian way of thinking is holistic and integrated, experiencing reality as one and interdependent. It uses symbols that seek to seize reality imaginatively in its lived complexity. Unlike abstract universal and univocal concepts, symbols are earthy, plural, metaphorical, and polyvalent. A narrative method is more suitable to speak about life than a logical network of concepts. The story also stays close to life in its complexity. It is praxis-oriented rather than merely theoretical. After all, even the Bible is a great historical narrative with many stories that call for a decision. Because symbols and stories are plural, they are also dialogical and convergent. C. S. Song⁴ and R. Panikkar⁵ speak of the “third eye” to indicate such an intuitive vision into the real. This does not mean that Asians had no use for reason, concepts, or logic. Nagarjuna and Sankara⁶ were excellent dialecticians. But reason was subordinate to experience and concept to symbol. The Asian theology of the future will be a narrative theology, close to life in the world and contextual, not an abstract universal system. It will not be narrowly rational, but holistic, including the emotional, the imaginative, and the experiential. It will be pluralistic. Kosuke Koyama, C. S. Song, and Anthony de Mello⁷ have pioneered this narrative method, resurrecting traditional stories or referring to current ones. Retelling the story of Jesus may lead to narrating the way that God (Jesus) is present and active in our lives

today. Everyone, not only scholars, can tell stories. It is a popular, democratic process. This is a paradigm shift in methodology that has been taking place in Asian theology.

Asian theologians, from different countries, have pointed to such an Asian way of thinking as marking their own approach. Such contrasts between the East and the West should not be understood in exclusive terms, but in the manner of relative emphasis: more of the one than the other. When I speak of an Asian way of thinking and of Asian theological trends, I do not mean to say that similar trends may not be sighted elsewhere. Postmodern philosophical developments do lead some Western theologians today away from Greek logic and metaphysics and toward narrative and dialogue. Actually some of these theologians may be in dialogue with the East. But the Asian religio-cultural background that affects Asian thinking is something special. This specificity will become clearer as we discover the trends in Asian theology.⁸

A CONTEXTUAL THEOLOGY

Asian theology, like all theology, is contextual. There was a moment in mission history when the West implied that its own theology was universal and contextualization was seen as a sort of adaptation of the universal to a local cultural context. Kwok Pui Lan⁹ says, quoting Jonathan Culler, “Meaning is contextual but context is boundless.” But Asians, like African and Latin Americans, realized that the Gospel must become contextual by addressing the concrete problems of the context. It is the context that supplies the questions that theologians ask. Asians are worried about economic and sociopolitical inequalities, oppressions of various kinds, corruption, cultural and religious pluralism and the conflicts that it gives rise to, fundamentalism and communalism, conflict resolution and peacemaking, ecological destruction promoted by modern science, technology and consumerist ways of living, and more concrete oppressions of women, of indigenous peoples, and Dalits in South Asia,¹⁰ the Minjung (the common people) in Korea, and the Burakumin in Japan.¹¹ Asian experience, of course, is not all negative. Asians also appreciate the grandeur and beauty of the cosmos, observe the rhythms of nature and the seasons, experience the flow of energy that integrates the cosmos and the human, feel that reality is interdependent leading to community and to the harmonious flow of the *yin* and *the yang*, explore the power of art, especially music and dance, as well as of meditation and concentration that lead to personal and cosmic integration. These experiences provoke not only wonder and contemplation but also reflection and praxis leading to “cosmotheandric” harmony. At the same time, the limitations and impermanence of the human and cosmic realities they experience also provoke questions and reflection.

Asian theology is also contextual in the sense that it has Asian resources. Traditionally, the sources for Christian theology were limited to the Christian scriptures and tradition. But today the presence and action of the Spirit of God is recognized and accepted also in other peoples and their histories, cultures, and religions. So these too can be

resources for theological reflection, of course, in dialogue with the primary sources of the Christian tradition. The abundance of mythical narratives and ritual practices of the numerous folk-cosmic religions supplement the written scriptures of the meta-cosmic religions. The difference in the status of these resources is less important than the reality, truth, and experience they witness to. The Minjung theologians of Korea integrate the liberation struggles of their ancestors against the Japanese and Chinese colonizers as part of their “sacred” liberative history. Asian biblical scholars speak of cross-cultural hermeneutics through which the Bible is read and interpreted in the context of Asian religious experiences and scriptures.¹² The Indian theologians, for instance, suggested that the scriptures of other religions too can be considered inspired.¹³ A positive appreciation of other religions and their scriptures would make the interpretation of the scriptures not only cross-cultural but also interreligious. Indian theologians have produced a number of collections of texts from the Bible and other scriptures which facilitate a comparative exploration of common themes. Sebastian Painadath, an Indian Jesuit, for example, has been preaching retreats to Christians based on the *Bhagavad Gita*.¹⁴ This interreligious dimension will be explored further in the next section.

The Asian way also affects the manner in which the scriptures are read in Asia. In the postcolonial situation a subaltern reading of the scriptures shows how, in the past, a particular reading of scripture may have been used to justify and strengthen exploitative colonial structures. Such a distorted reading of the scriptures can also be used by local oppressors. A “hermeneutic of suspicion” helps the oppressed people to discover the truth that challenges the legitimation of such oppressive structures.¹⁵ Some Indian theologians have used the Indian aesthetic tradition (*dhvani*—resonance) to explore the symbolic dimensions of the Bible.¹⁶ The Bible is full of natural symbols like water, fire, etc. and symbolic stories and actions. Such poetic and symbolic texts can have a connotative meaning besides what is denoted directly by the text. Imagination and a certain connaturality with the experience evoked by the symbol are necessary to perceive this resonance. These efforts counter tendencies in scriptural interpretation that focus exclusively on the literal interpretation of the text by a historical-critical exegesis.

FROM CONFRONTATION TO DIALOGUE AND COLLABORATION

The aim of the missionaries from the West was to convert Asians to Christianity. The other religions were seen as false and superstitious. An actual experience of other religious believers, however, led the missionaries to a certain positive appreciation of other religions. These religions were seen as preparations for Christianity, which came as their fulfillment. But as Asians, rooted in their tradition get converted, they see what is positive in their own tradition and seek to relate it to their faith in Jesus Christ. Some of them even distance themselves from official Christianity. (This is, of course,

easier for Protestants than Catholics.) So there are people like Brahmabandhab Upadhyay, Sadhu Sundar Singh, Nehemiah Goreh, Pandita Ramabai, and so on.¹⁷ The Minjung theologians not only read their history of struggle for liberation as part of the history of salvation but also use Shamanic masque dances as liberative practices. Scholars interpreting the Bible cross-culturally dialogue with narratives and texts of their own cultural and religious tradition. Theologians reflect on such a positive approach in a systematic way. Raimon Panikkar explored the unknown Christ of Hinduism starting with the image of *Ishwara*. Swami Abhishiktananda and Bede Griffiths dialogued with the *advaitic* tradition of Hinduism. Seiichi Yagi¹⁸ seeks to integrate Christianity with Buddhist Zen. Aloysius Pieris¹⁹ proposes and practices a double baptism in Buddhism and Christianity. Stanley Samartha²⁰ proposes a pluralist Christology that allows a positive attitude to other religions and their savior figures. Even the evangelicals have felt the need to dialogue with other religions.²¹ The FABC, through its Bishops' Institute for Interreligious Dialogue and its Office for Theological Concerns, developed an elaborate theology of other religions. They are seen as facilitating salvific divine-human encounter. As such, peoples of other religions are co-pilgrims with Christians, journeying toward the Kingdom of God, the Church itself being only its symbol and servant. Christians can recognize and acknowledge the presence and action of the Word and the Spirit of God in other cultures and religions. Such recognition enables dialogue and collaboration with other religious believers and all people of good will in the promotion of human and spiritual values in the secular sphere and also in the common pilgrimage toward the Kingdom, perceived and experienced as cosmotheandric harmony. In this context, whatever special place Christians may give to God's self-revelation in the incarnate Jesus, God is reaching out to people in many and various ways. Although God—and God's Truth—is one, God's self-manifestations and humans' responses to them, conditioned by various social, historical, and cultural situations, are plural and different from each other, though there will be some convergence. Both theological reflection and religious praxis will have to be dialogical.²²

This means that much of what were thought of as topics for theological reflection in the past has to be reshaped. Faith and revelation are not limited to Christians only. God is the Father/Mother and Savior of all. The Word is enlightening everyone (cf. John 1:9). The Spirit blows where it wills (cf. John 3:8). The Church is only the symbol and servant or sacrament of the Kingdom of God. Feeding the hungry and clothing the naked may be more important than the faithful ritual worship of God (cf. Matt. 25:31–46). The Sabbath is for the humans, not the humans for the Sabbath. The goal and means of Christian mission has to be rethought. It will be the Kingdom of God as whose symbol and servant the Church will involve itself in dialogue and collaboration between people of different cultures and religions. The Church will continue to witness to Jesus and his good news and welcome people who wish to become his disciples. But they will not be an exclusive group. While Christians tell everyone the story of Jesus, they also have to listen to the stories of non-Christians. Such dialogue may lead some to claim a double religious identity, not at the institutional level, but at the spiritual and symbolic level

focused on a deeper unity-in-difference.²³ Indian theologians have also affirmed the possibility of mutual participation in the worship of other believers.²⁴

JESUS CHRIST

When such a dialogical approach to other religions and cultures is proposed, a traditional difficulty is the Christian belief that Jesus is the only savior. How do the Asians reconcile the tension between the many religions that facilitate salvific divine-human encounter and the unique role that Christians attribute to Jesus as the mediator of salvation? One simple answer is that Jesus is the only mediator. Religions do not mediate salvation. They only facilitate salvific divine-human encounter. Only God saves, not the religions. Another traditional answer is that, while Jesus Christ is present and active directly in Christianity, his saving activity is mediated in other religions through the Holy Spirit. The Spirit, of course, is the Spirit of Christ. Some Asian theologians offer tentatively a third answer. According to the Gospel of John, the Word also is present everywhere. Everything is created in and through the Word (John 1:3). The Word also enlightens everyone (John 1:9). This Word becomes incarnate in Jesus (John 1:14). Some theologians and exegetes affirm that, while Jesus is the Word incarnate so that whatever Jesus does the Word does in him, the Word can act independently of Jesus, before, during, and after the historical life on earth. Even in the incarnate Word, the Word and Jesus are not simply identified. They relate to each other in freedom so that humanity obeys freely the Word. While the Christians relate directly to Jesus in faith, people of other religions could relate to the Word, which they may experience through various symbols. The affirmation by the Council of Chalcedon that the human and divine natures in the one person of the Son of God should neither be separated nor confused seems to support such a distinction (not separation). The Word is present and active everywhere, though it is historically concretized in Jesus. So Jesus in his divinity is the savior of all, though in his human nature he relates to the Christians who know, love, and follow him. Some exegetes and theologians in the West too agree with this view. But it has great significance for Asian theology. While the Word is manifest in an incarnate way in Jesus, it can have other names and manifestations in other religions. What these manifestations may be cannot be affirmed *a priori*, but will have to be discerned carefully. Such discernment can be a task of dialogue. This is not the place to go deeper into the implications of this view. Suffice it to say that the Word and the Spirit provide a basic unity that can support a diversity of manifestations, one of which, Christians believe, is incarnate. The basic unity makes possible a mutual recognition in dialogue. Of course, the different manifestations cannot contradict each other. But they need not say the same thing. The fullness of Christ is in the future and will integrate all this rich diversity (cf. Col. 1:15–20).²⁵

While this theological reflection may be rather recent, in a practical way the Asians have enjoyed giving different names to Jesus, which brings out the different dimensions

of his personality transcending history. The New Testament itself gives him different names: Messiah, Son of Man, Light, Water, Door, Shepherd, and so on. Following this tradition, the Chinese have seen him as the Way (*Dao*) and as the Sage. The Confucian tradition speaks of him as the Ancestor. The Indians hail him as the *Avatar* and the *Adi Purusha* (primordial man). Groups struggling to liberate themselves from oppressive structures perceive him as the one who liberates them by identifying himself with them: the Minjung and the Dalit.²⁶

PLURALISM

This vision of the diverse manifestation of the Word in history opens a window to understand the Asian attitude to pluralism. The Western tradition would affirm that Truth is one; it cannot be many. The Asian tradition would agree that Truth is one. But its manifestations, conditioned by culture and history, can be many. Correspondingly, the human perception of Truth is also conditioned by the limitations of the person(s), their history, culture, and experience. Therefore, the perceptions of truth are limited and can be many. The ways in which we appropriate and live it can also be many. A univocal, objectifying logic can see pluralism only as relativism. When every individual sets up his/her own truth that is relativism, but the many ways in which truth can be perceived, appropriated, expressed, and lived are pluralistic, not relativistic. Pluralism through dialogue leads to convergence, consensus, and communion. That is why Asians see pluralism as richness. The many can become harmonious communion. When the West faces the phenomenon of the many, the tendency is to impose unity through hierarchical order. This approach is architectonic and static. The Eastern tendency would be to stress mutual interdependence and interaction leading to dynamism and harmony. The approach is organic and dynamic.²⁷ It is the dynamism of the *yin* and the *yang*, different, seemingly opposed, but interrelated and creative.²⁸

A THEOLOGY OF GOD

Although there are non-dual mystics like Meister Eckhart and apophatic theologians like Dionysius the Areopagite, the Western vision of God is largely biblical, seeing God as creator and king. Interpreted in Greek philosophical categories, God is seen as the cause of creation, standing apart from it. This is the vision of God communicated to the East by the missionaries. The Christian vision of God is also that of the Trinity: one Nature in Three Persons. Although Scholastic theologians will speak of the Three Persons as subsistent relations, in devotional practice they are treated like human persons. The Trinity is often invoked as the model of community. One of the first intellectual converts, Brahmabandhab Upadhyay saw the Trinity through the Indian image

of *Saccidananda*.²⁹ This term combines *Sat* (being or truth), *Cit* (consciousness), and *Ananda* (bliss). The unity of the Godhead seems to be better protected by this image than the One Nature/Three Person model. Later theologians like Swami Abhishiktananda also use this image to understand/experience the Triune God. It needs further exploration. The Greek tendency is to objectify/reify the real: one essence and three substances. St. Augustine did offer the analogical model of the three faculties: memory, understanding, and will. The Indian *Saccidananda* model needs further exploration.

From the point of view of the human relationship to God, both the qualified non-dualism of Ramanuja³⁰ and the non-dualism of Sankara have been used by Indian theologians. A. J. Appasamy focuses on the Ramanujan model and explores a devotional or loving relationship to God.³¹ The divine and the human are related as the soul and the body. The divine is the indweller—*Antaryamin*. The relationship is not exterior as that of cause to effect, but of total dependence in being and action. The non-dualism of Sankara affirms the dependence in such a way that only the Absolute is really real. The world's dependence is so total that it is almost unreal. Some would say that it is unreal. Swami Abhishiktananda³² and Sara Grant³³ explore Sankara's model. Non-duality is certainly realized in the relation of Jesus to the Father. Everyone is called to participate in this relationship. This is the vision evoked by Jesus on the last day of his life on earth when he prays: "As you Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us" (John 17:21). A similar non-dual approach is taken by S. Yagi³⁴ dialoguing with Buddhism. The union or oneness of the "ego" with a deeper "I" is something given in our very being. But normally we are not aware of it. We operate at the level of the "ego," which is different from the "I." We are liberated when we move away from the "ego" and realize our oneness with the deeper "I." This happens in Zen meditation. At this level God is not a "S/he," nor a "Thou," but an "I." Yagi shows us how this experience is found in Paul, not to speak of Jesus.

The basis of *advaita* or a-duality is being-in-relationship. This perspective of the *advaita* may help us better to explore the divine-human in Jesus and his relationship to the Father and the Spirit, as well as the relationship of ourselves and the world with the divine. The Latin theology of redemption cannot get beyond various transactional theories: redemption, expiation, propitiation, substitution, and so on. The Greek Fathers spoke more in terms of participation: Jesus uniting himself with humanity to make it divine. They called it divinization or *theosis*. An *advaitic* and relational perspective may explore this better than dichotomous, transactional theories.³⁵ Eventually, we have to seek, find, and experience God in the world, in others, and in the self.

THE SPIRIT OF GOD

Western theology is strongly Christ or even Jesus-centered. It thinks of God above in the heavens. Asian theology tends to focus on the God within—the *Antaryamin*, the divine in the "cave of the heart," the deeper "I." It is more comfortable with the indwelling

Spirit than with the Word, though the Word—*Vac*—is also an important image in the Vedas. The Spirit is more like the *Dao* that is unnamable, but pervades the universe. She encourages and empowers. The presence and activity of the Spirit is always and everywhere. She blows where she wills. Her presence can be recognized from the gifts that Paul lists: “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control” (Gal. 5:22–23). The Spirit is the principle of freedom and creativity (Rom. 8:12–17), diversity and unity (1 Cor. 12).³⁶ In the Latin Church there has always been a subtle effort to subordinate the Spirit to Jesus Christ and even to the Church. Charisms, of course, have to be discerned. But discernment need not involve subordination to authority, interpreted not merely as service and coordination, but as domination and control. The Eastern churches respect much more the autonomy of the Spirit, balancing legal principle with the “economy.”

Collaborating with people of other religions and all people of good will, the criterion for discernment of truth from error should be more the fruits and inspirations of the Spirit than the historical manifestation of God in Jesus Christ, continued in the Church. The Church may claim a special light, but no monopoly. While the Word focuses rather on the intellect, the Spirit touches more the emotions, the energy field, and the body. The Greek tradition distinguished the body from the soul. But it ignored the energy in between. Eastern methods of concentration focus on the energy field.³⁷ The Spirit also communicates her charisms to everyone, people and ministers, men and women, even children. The Spirit is the strong bond of unity-in-diversity. She prays in us and coordinates everything in our favor (cf. Rom. 8:26–30). She animates creation itself to join us in our quest for freedom (cf. Rom. 8:21).

Asian traditions of *sadhana* have experienced and experimented upon the field of cosmic and human energies. Like all things human and cosmic, it can be used or abused. The Spirit can use these energies to heal and to empower and to build cosmic community. The Asian traditions, with their experience of *pranah* (breath), *Qi* (energy), and *Dao*, can better explore the presence and action of the Spirit in the cosmos and in the humans. This gives the Spirit also an ecological dimension. Aloysius Pieris³⁸ suggests that the Spirit relates to the unnamable Absolute beyond “name and form” that some may even consider atheistic because it is beyond the traditional discourse of theism. Such an approach will enable Christians to dialogue with Buddhism with its goal of “emptiness.”

THE CHURCH AND CULTURE

Asian Christians have also shown a way forward in ecumenism. The united churches like the Church of South India, the Church of North India, and the attempts of Protestant Christians to develop into a united church in China have pioneered ways of church union. The Three-Self Movement of Protestant Christians in China, following the principles of self-supporting, self-propagating, and self-governing—may indicate the way toward the development of local churches. The Catholic Church is not as free to

become local and indigenous, though the very first assembly of the FABC stated this as a goal and much theological reflection is done on this question. Sebastian Kappen³⁹ has shown how Christianity offers an alternative both to conservative tradition and secularizing modernity. M. M. Thomas⁴⁰ has dialogued creatively with contemporary secular culture, underlining the secular meaning of Christ.

THE QUEST FOR LIBERATION

Apart from the few (economic) tigers, Asia is a continent of poor people. They are further oppressed by economic, political, and social domination by privileged groups. In such a situation, the Gospel has always been received as good news by the poor and it has empowered them to struggle for their liberation.⁴¹ Liberation theology is not new to Asia. For instance, Mahatma Gandhi has been considered a liberation theologian who fought for the political and social liberation of India, inspired by the Gospel and the *Bhagavad Gita*. He has certainly inspired the nonviolent approach involving forgiveness and love of enemies in some Asian (and other) liberation movements.⁴² Oppressive situations in Asia have given rise to many liberation theologies. The postcolonial situation after the Second World War encourages the poor to struggle for their rights. The Minjung theology of Korea is centered on the poor suffering mass of people who identify themselves with the oppressed Jews in Egypt and the poor mass of Palestine in the time of Christ. They see Christ himself as the Minjung, suffering and struggling with them. They set their struggle in the historical context of the earlier struggles of their ancestors from Chinese and Japanese domination. They use Shamanistic masque dances to give expression to their social criticism.

The Dalits in India are at the bottom of the hierarchical and oppressive caste system. They are marginalized socially, economically, and even geographically. They are considered ritually polluted and untouchable and denied access to common public facilities like wells and temples. "Dalit" is a name they give to themselves and it means "the crushed down." They have been developing Dalit theology during the last thirty years. They feel encouraged by God's option for the poor and oppressed Israelites in the Bible and identify themselves with them. They also see Jesus himself as a Dalit, marginalized and cast out of the city by his own people. They claim the risen Christ as their liberator. They are struggling to have their human dignity recognized. They are clamoring for social equality and participation in community life. They read the Bible from a subaltern point of view. A group of them is now engaged in writing a special commentary on the whole Bible. The Burakumin are the "Dalits" of Japan, socially marginalized. They also see the suffering Christ identifying himself with them in their quest for liberation.⁴³

The oppressed of the Philippines under the dictatorial military regime of Marcos developed a theology of struggle. It is a theology born of and promoting the struggle for political and economic freedom. What was special about it was the use of street plays, songs, and popular liturgies centered on the struggling, and suffering Christ to promote

the spirit of struggle among the poor and oppressed peasants and workers. It did facilitate a nonviolent revolution that overthrew Marcos and later Estrada.⁴⁴

The indigenous people everywhere in Asia are another group of people who are marginalized, oppressed, and exploited politically, economically, socially, and culturally. They seem more open to welcome Christ and his gospel. Christianity makes them aware of their oppression and encourages and empowers their struggle for liberation. Tribal liberation theologies tend to re-appropriate and reinterpret their traditional mythical narratives as stories of liberation. Their struggles focus particularly on the protection of their natural resources like lands, forests, and water from the rapacious inroads of the global industrial development machine.⁴⁵ In this way they are also defending their life in harmony with nature. This gives their struggle an ecological dimension. Earth and space become important categories in Tribal theology. Ecological movements are found all over the world today. What is specific to Asia is not only the protection of the quality of life but also the protection of nature itself. According to the *advaitic* tradition of India and the Daoist perspectives of China, the whole universe is alive: nature, the plants, the animals, and the humans. This is also at the root of a nonviolent approach to life in all its forms. Asian theologians are sensitive to this universal dimension of life. Ecology is linked to feminism as seen in the phrase Eco-feminism. Asian feminists are aware, as their sisters in the West, of the patriarchal domination and discrimination in society and seek to affirm their equality. But they are also sensitive to the peculiar situation of women in Asian societies afflicted by evils like child marriage, the marginalisation of widows, dowry, female infanticide, the migration of female workers as cheap labor, sex tourism, and so on. On the positive side, the maternal images of God in many Asian religious traditions, the dimension of *Shakti* or power as the goddess in the Indian tradition, the female-male reciprocity of the *yin* and the *yang* in the Chinese tradition, the perspective of the woman as the giver and nurturer of life in Asian cultures have given a specificity to Asian feminist theology.⁴⁶ An Indian theologian has seen the bleeding women as identifying themselves with the bleeding Christ. Christ has also been called “mother” by some Indian mystics.⁴⁷

A PUBLIC THEOLOGY

In the multi-religious context of Asia, the Christians have to collaborate with all people of good will in the establishment of a just society in which the ideals of the Kingdom like freedom and fellowship, equality and justice will be realized. In a secular context, the Christians could root these values in their own religious convictions and dialogue with people of other religions and ideologies to evolve a public overlapping consensus that can guide their common action for the promotion of these values in society. They should defend and promote not only individual human rights as in the West but also the political and socioeconomic rights of various groups in society, with a preference for the oppressed, the marginalized, and the excluded. The religions should have the freedom to operate in civil society, even in the public sphere, without

getting mixed up in politics. The Church has a tradition of identifying itself with the Kingdom of God, on the one hand, and at the same time of trying to dominate the sociopolitical sphere in the name of divine authority. It will have to learn to function in a democratic and collaborative way in the multi-religious societies of Asia. This has already started happening. Theological reflection in such a secular context is today known as public theology. It would necessarily be dialogical and comparative.⁴⁸

ART AS THEOLOGY

Since Asian theologies are not reduced to the conceptual dimension, the arts—music, dance, painting, architecture, and drama—going beyond mere illustration and ornament, are used, not merely to express spiritual experience, but to unveil the mystery and lead to praxis. Paintings of scenes from the Bible and the life Christ become *mandalas* that help to focus meditative concentration and lead to deeper understanding and spiritual experience. Pictures for meditation can also be thematic like Jesus as the way, the light, the seed/life, and so on. Ananda Coomaraswamy, an art critic, historian, and philosopher, once said that the two key expressions of the Asian artistic genius were the dancing God—*Nataraja*—as a perfect image of movement and dynamism and the seated Buddha as a perfect embodiment of peace—*shanthi*. The seated Jesus in meditation is commonly seen, while the dancing Jesus has started to make his appearance. These are not merely artistic, but also theological statements.⁴⁹ Music like the Indian *bhajans* leads to interiority and concentration, giving the divine an aural and emotional representation. Yogic and Zen meditation evoke and balance the energy field that mediates between the body and the spirit. Dramas like the *Pasyon* in the Philippines and the passion plays elsewhere become prophetic commentaries on society from the point of view of the gospel. The dance, both popular and classic, involves the body in worship, individually and as a community. Sacred architecture creates places, not only for worship and celebration but also for interiority and contemplation. The liturgy too need not always be celebrative; it can sometimes be meditative. While the West stresses the Word, Asia would put the emphasis on silence, breathing, posture, and gesture, evoking energy rather than thought. Christian medical practitioners in Asia have also started using the energy for healing. This would also be true of Charismatic prayer groups. This could lead to the development of a more holistic anthropology.

CONCLUSION

At the end of this rapid survey I may be permitted some reflections about the future of Asian theology. I think that, first of all, Asian theology must develop a vision of pluralism

and harmony. At the moment differences of all kinds are dividing people and leading to violent confrontations. The search would be how to accept differences and live them creatively so that pluralism can be richness and coalesce into harmony. The biblical vision of the Kingdom as the gathering up of all things in Christ (cf. Eph. 1:10) so that God will be “all in all” (cf. 1 Cor. 15:28) can dialogue with the project for harmony of the Chinese tradition and the mutual interdependence of all beings in the Buddhist tradition and can help us in our reflection and proposals for action. Second, while the various economic, social, and political structures of injustice, discrimination, and oppression lead to struggles for liberation, they should be nonviolent, reaching out even to the enemy and leading to community. Any community should be inclusive, reformative, and transformative. It will be a difficult process. But the Disciples of Christ are committed to creative nonviolence. This is the challenge of the Gospel. The Gandhian movements in India, Buddhist leaders like the Dalai Lama and the Vietnamese Thich Nhat Hanh, and the two nonviolent revolutions against their presidents Marcos and Estrada in the Philippines show us a way. Finally, harmony and nonviolence will find their support and inspiration in an experience of reality that is relational and non-dual, having its roots in the *advaita* of India, the *Dao* with its *yin* and *yang* of China, the “inter-being” or mutual interdependence of Buddhism, and the Trinity of Christianity (cf. John 17:21–23).

NOTES

1. John C. England et al., eds., *Asian Christian Theologies: A Research Guide to Authors, Movements and Sources*, 3 vols. (Manila: Claretian and Delhi: ISPCCK, 2004) offers a comprehensive picture. It also includes Australia. To support my statements I give references. A single reference will lead you to many other authors who have written on the same theme.
2. Cf. A. K. Ramanujan, “Is There an Indian Way of Thinking? An Informal Essay,” in McKim Marriott, ed., *India through Hindu Categories* (New Delhi: Sage, 1989), 41–58.
3. Cf. Jai-Don Lee, “Prospettive ecologiche in Asia,” in M. Amaladoss and R. Gibellini, eds., *Teologia in Asia* (Brescia: Queriniana, 2006), 126–52.
4. In the course of this chapter, names of Asian theologians, including sometimes foreigners working in Asia, will be mentioned to make it a little more concrete. But there is no space here to introduce each one. I request the reader to go to a collective volume like England et al., *Asian Christian Theologies*, for more information on them and their work.
5. Cf. Raimon Panikkar, *The Rhythm of Being* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2010).
6. Nagarjuna was a Mahayana Buddhist philosopher (ca. 150–250 C.E.) and Sankara was a Hindu philosopher (788–820 C.E.).
7. Cf. Anthony de Mello, *The Song of the Bird* (Anand, Gujarat: Sahitya Prakash, 1984).
8. Theological themes are interrelated. So, similar ideas may crop up in different sections. An overall view will certainly emerge at the end.
9. Cf. Kwok Pui Lan, “Discovering the Bible in the Non-biblical World,” in R. S. Sugirtharajah, ed., *Voices from the Margin* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 299–315.
10. Cf. Sathianathan Clarke, *Dalits and Christianity: Subaltern Religions and Liberation Theology in India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998).

11. Commission on Theological Concerns of the Christian Conference of Asia, ed., *Minjung Theology: People as Subjects of History* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1983). Teruo Kuribayashi, "Recovering Jesus for Outcasts in Japan," in R. S. Sugirtharajah, ed., *Frontiers in Asian Christian Theology: Emerging Trends* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1994).
12. Archie C. C. Lee, "Cross-Textual Hermeneutics and Identity in Multi-Scriptural Asia," in Sebastian C. H. Kim, ed., *Christian Theology in Asia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).
13. D. S. Amalorpavadass, ed., *Research Seminar on Non-Biblical Scriptures* (Bangalore: NBCLC, 1974).
14. *Bhagavad Gita* is a popular Hindu spiritual text.
15. R. S. Sugirtharajah, ed., *Voices from the Margin: Interpreting the Bible in the Third World* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991).
16. Francis X. D'Sa, "Dhvani as a Method of Interpretation," *Bible Bhashyam* 5 (1979): 276–94.
17. Robin Boyd, *An Introduction to Indian Christian Theology* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1969).
18. S. Yagi, "Christ and Buddha," in R. S. Sugirtharajah, ed., *Asian Faces of Jesus* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993).
19. Aloysius Pieris, "Two Encounters in My Theological Journey," in R. S. Sugirtharajah, ed., *Frontiers in Asian Christian Theology: Emerging Trends* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1994), 141–46.
20. Stanley Samartha, *One Christ—Many Religions: Towards a Revised Christology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1992).
21. Vinay Samuel and Christopher Sugden, "Dialogue with Other Religions: An Evangelical View," in Bong Rin Ro and Ruth Eshenaur, eds., *The Bible and Theology in Asian Contexts* (Taichung: ATA, 1984), 265–89.
22. FABC, *Theses on Interreligious Dialogue* (Hong Kong: FABC Papers, 1987), 48.
23. M. Amaladoss, "Theosis and Advaita: An Indian Approach to Salvation," *Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection* 75 (2011): 887–901.
24. Paul Puthanangady, ed., *Sharing Worship: Communicatio in Sacris* (Bangalore: NBCLC, 1988).
25. M. Amaladoss, "Other Religions and the Salvific Mystery of Christ," *Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection* 70 (2006): 8–23.
26. Jacob Parapally, "Gesù in Asia: Christologie nella teologia asiatica," in Amaladoss and Gibellini, eds., *Teologia in Asia*, 343–82.
27. Felix Wilfred, *On the Banks of the Ganges: Doing Contextual Theology* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2002).
28. Edmund Chia, "La teologia dell'armonia yin-yang," in Amaladoss and Gibellini, eds., *Teologia in Asia*, 459–92.
29. Boyd, *Introduction to Indian Christian Theology*, 69–73.
30. A Philosopher of the Vaishnavite School (1017–1137).
31. Boyd, *Introduction to Indian Christian Theology*, 110–43.
32. Swami Abishiktananda, *Saccidananda: A Christian Approach to Advaitic Experience* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2007).
33. Sara Grant, *Towards an Alternative Theology: Confessions of a Non-dualist Christian* (Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 1991).
34. S. Yagi, "I in the Words of Jesus," in Sugirtharajah, ed., *Voices from the Margin*, 330–51.
35. Amaladoss, "Theosis and Advaita."
36. Peter K. H. Lee, "Dancing, Ch' I and the Holy Spirit," in Sugirtharajah, ed., *Frontiers in Asian Christian Theology*.
37. Kwong Lai Kuen, *Qi Chinois et anthropologie chrétienne* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2000).

38. Aloysius Pieris, "Lo Spirito Santo e l'Asia," in Amaladoss and Gibellini, eds., *Teologia in Asia*, 383–410.
39. Sebastian Kappen, *Jesus and the Cultural Revolution* (Bombay: Build, 1983).
40. M. M. Thomas, *The Secular Ideologies of India and the Secular Meaning of Christ* (Madras: Christian Literature Society, 1976).
41. M. Amaladoss, *Life in Freedom: Liberation Theologies from Asia* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997).
42. Ignatius Jesudasan, *A Gandhian Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1984).
43. Kuribayashi, "Recovering Jesus for Outcasts in Japan."
44. Ferdinand Marcos and Joseph Estrada were presidents of the Philippines.
45. Wati Longchar, "Teologia Tribal," in Amaladoss and Gibellini, eds., *Teologia in Asia*, 76–105.
46. Virginia Fabella and S. A. L. Park, eds., *We Dare to Dream: Doing Theology as Asian Women* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1990).
47. Amaladoss, *Life in Freedom*, 40–43.
48. Felix Wilfred, *Asian Public Theology: Critical Concerns in Challenging Times* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2010).
49. Masao Takenaka and Ron O'Grady, eds., *The Bible through Asian Eyes* (Auckland: Pace, 1991).

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CHAPTER 7

SCRIPTURAL TRANSLATIONS AND CROSS-TEXTUAL HERMENEUTICS

ARCHIE C. C. LEE

THE BIBLE'S JOURNEY AROUND THE WORLD

THE Bible's journey to Asia has been characterized as a rough and unhappy one, taking several detours on its way. It is something to ponder as the Bible in fact originated in Palestine in West Asia and took shape in the Greco-Roman and Latin worlds. Except in the case of the Orthodox environment, the Bible was brought westward, following largely the expansion of empires and the extension of imperial powers. It penetrated the religious and cultural terrains of Continental Europe, the British Isles, and the so-called new world of America. It contributed to theological formulations of the Church, but unfortunately its interpretation in concrete pastoral praxis in parishes and congregations has largely been limited and bounded by the Church's doctrinal understandings. So much so, many Christians nowadays read the Bible mainly through the superimposed doctrines and beliefs without really reading the text itself and listening to what it really says. A good example is found in the theology of *creatio-ex-nihilo* and the concept of original sin of humankind which overshadow the interpretation of Genesis 1–3. If we look at the fate of the text from the Early Church onward, undoubtedly, the Bible has shaped the local cultures and itself has been shaped by the religio-cultural configurations in the new habitat, or en route in its continual journey around the world.

THE BIBLE IN THE CONTEXT OF MULTIPLICITY OF CANONS IN ASIA

Bible translation has been an indispensable part of Protestant Missionary Movement in Asia which accompanies the consolidation of the missionary work and the growth of the Asian churches. The early history of Bible translation into Asian languages presents interesting stories of hard work, difficulties, and breakthroughs.¹ The Bible has traveled and entered China several times in the long history.² There are three major periods: beginning with the Nestorians from Persia in the year 635, followed by the Jesuit Missions of Matteo Ricci in 1583, and the Protestant missionary movement initiated by Robert Morrison of the London Missionary Society in 1807. The Bible was translated in the first two periods only partially for apologetic purpose, for teaching, spiritual meditation, and liturgical readings. With the hard labor and perseverance of Robert Morrison and his colleagues, the whole translated Chinese Bible came into existence for the first time and was printed in 1823.³ It means that the Bible was made available in the Chinese language and could be read for the first time by Chinese folks in their own language in the early nineteenth century. However, in contrast to the case of the Buddhist scriptures, the circulation of the Bible among Chinese has been very limited and restricted. Its status as a recognized sacred book has been undermined and even denied. It is still being looked at not only as a foreign book but also as belonging to what is traditionally condemned as heterodoxy by the political authority favoring Confucian orthodoxy.

Asian translations of the Bible had to struggle with the political context of Asian peoples who experienced foreign domination and tragic humiliation of gunboat diplomacy and unequal treaties. Resistance from Asians to the “good news” brought by the missionaries was widespread in the midst of political defeat and cultural domination. Translation of the Bible into the vernacular was helpful to rid off its image as a “foreign book” of the colonizers, but it has not completely wiped away the negative sentiment and the hostility of some Asians against the Bible. Still a lot remains to be done by Asian Christians to reinterpret the Bible contextually, taking into account the Asian realities.

It is generally observed that when the Bible came to Asia, it already had a closed canon in the specific sense of having a fixed and conventional doctrinal interpretation attached to most of the passages which served as proof text for the various doctrines of the churches. In a sense it is ironic that the West has tried to force open the closed door of the Asian world with a closed canon. On the other hand, there have been attempts on the part of some Asian Christians to force open the biblical canon by including sacred writings from the Asian religio-cultural context into the received canon. Many conscientious Asian Christians have come to the realization that more should be done in the future to read the Bible cross-textually both in scriptural translation and in biblical interpretation.

There is a very interesting question often raised by Chinese Christians: Why should Asian Christians adopt the Old Testament as the foundation for their faith and theology

when Asians possess sacred texts which might be equally, if not even more, valid and relevant as preparatory to the specific revelation of the New Testament?⁴ A similar question has been raised also in India, and Indian theologians had an entire research seminar on “Non-Biblical Scriptures” which, among others, dealt with the question of the inspiration of non-biblical scriptures and the question of relating Indian scriptures to the Old Testament.⁵

A radical proposition is to replace some of the books or the whole Old Testament (e.g., the Law of Moses, the Former Prophets or Historical Books) with indigenous texts. There are other Asian thinkers who propose adding other non-Christian sacred writings as part of the Old Testament Canon. The core of the issue lies in the dominant perception of the Old Testament as “a peculiarly nationalist book of one people and in some special way a western product, typical of European thought.”⁶

George Ch’ien Hsu, a Chinese Christian in the 1920s writes, among other issues on the Bible, about the contrast between the two Testaments of the Bible.

Jesus came and by his teaching changed the Jewish religion and established Christianity by means of his death upon the cross. Nevertheless, much of the old Jewish faith and tradition has crept in, and is incorporated into Christianity even until now. Can we therefore confidently assert that we have Christianity in its original purity?⁷

The assumption of an original Christianity without the Jewish element is, to say the least, controversial. Such a pure “non-Jewish” Christianity does not exist at all. Hsu’s question challenging the authority of the Old Testament and his wish to do away with it is further articulated in his following formulation:

Can we believe that the Bible is a revelation from God? Is it not a fact that the two books—the Old Testament and the New, are not of equal importance, or authority? When the New Testament appeared, did not the Old Testament disappear? Then again, can we assert that the books selected to make up the Old Testament are the most essential?⁸

Indeed, the value and the role of the Old Testament have been undermined in Chinese Christianity through such views as that of Hsu. For many, the books in the Old Testament are not to be regarded as of equal importance as those in the New Testament. The debate persists and surfaces again in Hong Kong. The Chinese journal *Ching Feng*, on the occasion of its 54th anniversary of publication (2012), carried a few articles on the issue as discussed in the 1970s. It is in the context of discussing the shape and nature of Chinese theology that the debate is revisited. Xie Fuya, a Christian intellectual who takes great interest in the issue of indigenization of Christianity in Chinese culture, first puts forward his thought on a four-division Chinese Bible consisting of the Old Testament, the New Testament, Confucian Books with an appendix on selected Daoist and Buddhist writings.⁹ A Taiwan Christian scholar responded enthusiastically to the

debate in his articles and proposed to have “two Old Testaments.”¹⁰ The issue on doing away with the Old Testament is a sensitive one raising suspicion about anti-Semitism and Marcionism.¹¹

Both in the Protestant and in the Catholic tradition of India, there have been similar discussions on the role of the Old Testament and on the possibility of the use of other religious scriptures.¹² Some of the debates are reactions to the “missionary impositions”¹³ of an evolutionary perspective on the Hebrew religion which was supposed to have advanced from the stage of animism to that of polytheism, then to humanism and ended up in the legalistic stage.¹⁴ India and its “idolatrous” practices were condemned as being at the early stage of the evolutionary process. R. S. Sugirtharajah expounds this kind of approach and claims that “the missionaries in the colonies benefited from some remarkable resemblances between the beliefs and practices of biblical Jews and those of ‘the uncivilized races.’”¹⁵ Some Indian theologians challenged such claims of the missionaries devaluing Indian civilization and its religions. They viewed their scriptures and classical religious traditions in relation to Jesus and the New Testament. Pandipeddi Chenchiah (1886–1959), for example, put to the missionaries a critical question: “Why should there be only one path to the Jesus and not two, one from Old Judaism and the other from Hinduism?” He further stated, “I can pick up material for an Old Testament in Hinduism, making selections in the light of what Jesus said and did. That was exactly what early Christians did and later Hindu converts ought to do.”¹⁶

The debate on the canonicity of the Bible is a real issue in the Asian context. The deep respect for the Classics in China and India and the strong legacy attached to the ancient cultural heritage have presented a certain obstacle to Asians accepting readily the Bible in general and the Hebrew Bible in particular. It is a problem both to the illiterate, who have been deprived of the literary traditions, and those who are well-versed in them. To the former, the Bible may be the first book they come to possess. The latter intellectuals have to deal with a Bible that comes to them as a new text in the context of a multiplicity of other texts that go to define their identity and vocation as a scholar. In both cases, one has to cross over to the biblical text and read it through the Asian lenses. It should be noted that in recent years there has been an increasing appreciation of the Hebrew Bible among Asian Christians both in the Catholic and in Protestant circles.

To sum up, there two factors that have affected the journey and the destiny of the Bible in Asia. The first is the sociopolitical circumstances out of which it emerged. The colonial era during which the Bible reached the shores of Asian countries has aggravated its relationship to the Asian peoples. Second, the Bible arrived in lands with an ancient as well as continual history and in possession of many other texts of classical and scriptural status. In brief, the complex dynamics of the Bible in Asia can be characterized by the image of a journey undertaken by the Christian canon from the West to the East, meeting with other unfamiliar religious canons. What made matters worse was that the missionaries maintained a vision of an absolute superiority of the Bible over all native texts and religious traditions. As a result of all this, there has taken place an alienation of the Bible from the indigenous culture and from the concrete sociopolitical realities of the Asian context.

The purpose of the above analysis is not to portray any negative and anti-Western picture of the journey of the Bible in Asia. What is aimed at is rather to study how the Bible could be transformed into really an Asian document in which the Asian peoples could find embodied their earnest aspiration for freedom, justice, and salvation. Translation will then be the rereading of the Bible in light of the reader's experience and an exercise in correlating the suffering and hope of the People of God in biblical times with the Peoples of God in Asia in their ongoing struggles of everyday life where they encounter the divine.

TRANSLATION AS CON/TEXTUAL AND CROSS-TEXTUAL NEGOTIATION

Bible translation involves a process of negotiation between the *textus receptus* and the indigenous texts embedded in the host culture with its vernacular languages and texts. The word-pair "text" and "context" has become popular in biblical studies and translation of the Bible for some time now. Many Asian biblical scholars are not quite satisfied with the simple dichotomy in the "text-context interpretive mode." The text-context paradigm has its apparent limitations as it does not take into serious consideration the reality of plurality of scriptures as mentioned above and the coexistence of diverse religious communities in Asia. Current practice of contextual biblical interpretation in most cases still tends to privilege the mono-textual status of the Bible in search for meaning in a new context. The idea of "putting the Bible in context" in the "text-context interpretive mode" usually assumes not only that the text is universal but also that the context is void of any texts of significant scriptural status. It is therefore suggested that a new term "con/text" be coined for the comprehension of biblical interpretation and Bible translation in Asia, taking seriously both the Bible and the many "texts" of Asian context. The coined term may illustrate the dynamics of specific hermeneutical strategy and point to the fact that context is richly impregnated with a diversity of texts that have shaped people's being and identity and their sense of vocation and mission in this world. In short, context is not just a setting in the intersection of time and space but comprises a conglomeration of texts. There are certain basic religious elements embodied in the Asian texts that should have great impact on reading and translating the Bible.

Asia is not simply a locus for the contextualization of the Bible for its better communication to the non-biblical world, but rather a continent full of texts, texts of scriptural status and classical dignity. The long history of honor ascribed to these texts does not permit anyone to view them simply as "pagan" and "idolatrous." These texts are not mere literary writings in their formal existence. They are foundational texts that resist being written off. They are not museum pieces, but living texts infused with the religiosity and spirituality of the people, notwithstanding some oppressive elements and negative factors that have gone into them in the long history of their formation and establishment.

These texts survived in the minds of learned intellectuals; they are embedded in the vernacular expressions of the ordinary citizens and preserved in folk festivals and daily practices of the people. For Asian Christians coming to the newly acquired textual tradition of the Bible, it is natural to begin first to understand and learn about the biblical text by way of the native cultural texts they are already in possession of. The religious-symbolic system, the core values of society and the ethical codes of their own cultural configuration are the media through which Asian Christians will come to terms with the Bible. These have long been embedded in the Asian languages and in the cultural ethos.

Translation and interpretation are the major factors that have transformed the Bible and its readers. In the process of interpreting and translating the Bible into Asian languages, a variety of crossover and transformation has inevitably come into play. Christianity is, no doubt, a translated religion with a book that is rendered into and read by most people in a language other than the original languages of Hebrew and Greek.¹⁷ It is also obvious that interpretation is an integral part of the translation process which also makes translation possible. It opens up the text by creating a platform upon which negotiation between the original language and the target language is facilitated. The proposed conception of “con/context” and the method of cross-textual hermeneutics in biblical interpretation are strategies deployed in the process of interpretation and translation. When reading the Bible (Text B), Asians understand it through their own texts (Text A) and move from Text A to Text B and from B to A. Only in the genuine interface and interaction of the two texts can the meaning for their lives be engendered. The eventual product of translation is the result of the meeting of the two texts and merging them into a “con/textual” whole.

It would appear, once the Bible is translated into the local language, the indigenous texts of that particular language get resurrected, no matter how hard one may try to keep them from appearing in the sacred text of the Bible. For example, the Buddhist terms for the netherworld and confession of sin appear in the Chinese translation of the Bible, as for example, *yinjian* for the underworld in the Protestant Bible and *chan-hui* for confession in the Chinese Catholic Bible. The Asian texts creep into Bible translation and interpretation in various forms—literarily as well as conceptually. Native readers somehow easily recognize them. These Asian texts constitute not only the “pre-understanding,” but they are also active agents and catalysts in the process of translation and interpretation.

As a classical case of translation as con/textual negotiation and cross-textual reading, consider the naming of the biblical God in the Asian languages. Naming God is not at all a simple issue of translation. Missionaries, both Catholics and Protestants, when bringing the Gospel to Asia, encountered this issue which remained a troubling question for several centuries. The question has been: What is the most appropriate term to render the biblical God, *Elohim* in the Hebrew Bible, *Theos* in the Greek, and *Deus* in Latin, into the target languages?¹⁸ The issue is not the lack of a term for the divine in Asian languages. In fact, there are many and varied ones. Every Asian name is historically, culturally, and religiously loaded and each one of them echoes

differently Asian religious belief in the deities and spirits. Missionaries who were theologically motivated to defend the introduction of a totally new God, of whom “the pagan” Asians have absolutely not the slightest knowledge, would insist on a new name or just a generic term for God in the local language. Other missionaries, who were convinced of the universality of God who does not need to be carried over to Asia by human agents, would opt for traditional Asian names of God to designate the biblical God.¹⁹ The core issue is, therefore, not really one of Bible translation, but rather of theological assumptions regarding religious pluralism and the cultural attitude held toward the “other”: Do the pagan people possess any knowledge of the biblical God? In the missionary enterprise, naming God involves first and foremost adopting an attitude toward the so-called “pantheistic religions” and “pagan cultures.” On the whole, missionaries and scholars who participated in the debate assumed a unified name and understanding of God in the Bible. The assumption is largely doctrinal. The reality is that there is a plurality of names of God in the Bible and there are ambiguities in naming God.

I have once supervised two graduate students who worked with aboriginal Christians in their context. The tribal Sediq Christians of Taiwan translate God as *Utux Tmnum*, the weaving creator God, as found in their myths and mythology and the Sabah Kadazan/Dusun Christians employ *Kinorigan*, the name of the High God in their tradition to refer to the Christian God. People bring to bear upon Christian theology their own pantheon and mythology. Hence the complexity of the matter in theology and biblical translation as to whether the translator should use a local term or create a new one. This is an issue faced by many Asian Christians including those from Japan, Korea, and Myanmar. The situation of Indonesia and Malaysia in the Islamic cultural context is further complicated by the political dimension of using *Allah* to refer to the biblical God.

In the case of China, the whole debate began with the so-called “Term Question” in translating the name of God into Chinese which arose with the Catholic Jesuit Missions in 1632 and Protestantism since 1840. The Catholic discussions ended in 1740 with the papal decree to endorse *Tianzhu* (the Lord of Heaven). The Protestants, however, and not so surprisingly, did not accept the Catholic term and could not agree on one uniform and standardized term. The two major groups which advocated different terms then went their separate ways. Up until today, the Bible is still printed in two Protestant versions with different names for God: *Shangdi* (The Lord on High) for one and *Shen* (Gods and Spirits) for the other.

Peter Lee, a Hong Kong Methodist scholar, writes about the quest for a Chinese name for the divine in a general historical survey, stretching from the Nestorians who arrived at Chang-an, the capital of the Tang Dynasty (618–907) in 635; to the Jesuit Missions in the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644); and to the nineteenth- and twentieth-century Protestant missionary movements.²⁰ Lee observes that the missionaries went to the classical texts to search for a Supreme Being worshipped by the Chinese and debated whether the scores of names found there (be that *Tian*, *Shangdi*, *Tianzhu*, *Tianzhuan*, *Shangzhu*, etc.) could be applied to the Christian God.²¹ It is rightly pointed out by Lee that while the existence of a plurality of names reflected the fact of life in the religious world of China,

the Protestant missionaries strived to enforce a single absolute and exact name for God in Chinese which does not exist.

Recent discussions on whether there was in China a High God *Di* or *Shangdi*²² also turn out to be inconclusive. Robert Eno questions the common assumption of a concept of a Supreme God and asserts that *Di* or *Shangdi* “may have been employed rarely as a generic or corporate term, never implying the concept of a single supreme deity.”²³ In his analogies, *Di* is portrayed in anthropomorphic terms as corporate ancestral deities, possessing powers over both natural deities and human affairs.²⁴ *Di* was never a High God in Shang religion, but, according to Eno, with the conquest of Shang by the Zhou people, which led to the unification of the country, there arose the need to universalize authority. This finally led to the merger of the two elements into the one concept of *Shangdi*. The corporate ancestors of *Di* of Shang and the *Tian* of Zhou resulted in the formation of a single deity of ethical authority that directed and dictated dynastic history and politics.²⁵

COPING AND SUBVERTING THE OTHER IN THE MISSION FIELD

In the field of Bible translation in China, there is the grave issue of equating the Western image of dragon with the Chinese notion of “*long*.” The impact of the mismatch of terms has been tremendous with its consequences even up till today. All Chinese-English and English-Chinese dictionaries without exception convey this mistranslation. Among Chinese communities, the “*long*” is understood as a beneficial mythic creature, combining the most miraculous parts of many animals. Chinese people believe that the dragon brings blessing and prosperity to humanity. In Chinese art and paintings, stories and songs, films and television documentary series, the image of the dragon is forever popular and often used. The much-loved popular song, “The Descendants of the *Long*” reads like this:

A dragon there was in the ancient East. China was her name.
A people there were in the ancient East, descendants of the dragon they were.
Under the feet of the huge dragon I have grown up, to be a descendant of the dragon.

The dragon holds a remarkable position in the history and government of China. It also enjoys an ominous eminence in the affections of the Chinese people. It is frequently represented as the greatest benefactor of humankind. It is the dragon which causes the clouds to form and the rain to fall. The Chinese delight in praising its wonderful properties and powers. It is the venerated symbol of good.²⁶

This notion of the Chinese “dragon” (“*long*”) as an ominous, fabulous, and beneficent mythic animal is, according to Doolittle, incomprehensibly caricatured as “dragon” in the Western tradition which conveys a characterization of a devilish evil creature

representing the Satan and anti-Christ in the Book of Revelation. In China, “*long*” is the royal symbol of the Emperor, and the image of the king of “*long*” is always used in praying for rain.²⁷

In times of drought the bestower of rain, the dragon is oftentimes the object of prayer, both on the part of the emperor and the people, for a supply of the needed element.²⁸

When Morrison translated the Bible into Chinese and had it printed in 1823, he adopted the character “*long*” for the word “dragon” in the Bible. There are altogether thirty-three appearances of the character in his translation. It was acknowledged by him that he made use of the King James Version (KJV), among other translations, as the authorized text in addition to the *textus receptus*.²⁹ The KJV adopts the word “dragon” in thirty-four verses in both the Old and New Testament. Checking all the thirty-four cases of “dragon” in KJV, Morrison’s Bible has rendered thirty-three of them³⁰ into “*long*.” It is most likely that Morrison’s Chinese Bible follows KJV to render “dragon” for the Hebrew words *leviathan* and *taninim* as well as the Greek “*dragon*.”

Two and half centuries earlier when Matteo Ricci did his “Portuguese–Chinese Dictionary” in 1583–88, the Chinese mystic animal “*long*” was still ambiguous in his understanding. He therefore used “a huge snake-like insect”³¹ to designate it without equating it with the English word “dragon.” He rightly perceived “*long*” as a royal symbol representing prosperity and hence adopted another Chinese character “*jiao*” for the rendering of “dragon.” *Jiao* is truly imaged as an evil and destructive animal in Chinese. But in Morrison’s Chinese dictionary, the rendering of the Chinese “*long*” into the English “dragon” is well-established.

The effect of this rendering in the Chinese-Western cultural contacts has been immeasurable. Protestant missionaries capitalized on the mistranslation and came up with an oppressive Christianity with the biblical God taking on a long fight against the evil and devilish Chinese culture and religion. God was conceived and presented as entrusting the missionaries the mission to destroy Satan presumably dwelling in China and embedded in its cultural configurations. This translation exerted great cultural impact in the Western conception of Chinese civilization and the self-identity of the Chinese in the East–West encounter. The consequence of rendering the Chinese “*long*” with “dragon” became evident in the Beijing Olympics of 2008. People observed the disappearance of the Chinese “*long*” from all publicity. The Chinese authority warned against its use and rejected the Chinese “*long*” in order to avoid any negative image of China on the part of the Western world. The fact is that the Chinese “*long*” is totally different from the usual Western concept of dragon in terms of its notion, nature, function, and cultural significance.

There were many devout missionaries who were either ignorant of Chinese culture or who simply were of the conviction that the Chinese dragon symbol and myth were evil. They therefore took upon themselves the “holy” task of destroying everything that was associated with dragons. The God introduced by the missionaries was a slayer of the dragon which is clearly stated as anti-Christ in the Book of Revelation (12:3, 4, 7, 9, 13,

16, 17; 13:2, 4, 11; 16:13; 20:2). This has created many incidents which affected the peaceful coexistence of Christians and non-Christians. It is worthwhile to quote the following paragraph written by a Chinese Christian scholar to illustrate the problem:

Misconstruing that the signs and emblems of the dragon are that of the devil or Satan, therefore, anything bearing the signs of the dragon, such as cups, bottles, vases, pots, bowls; including expensive furniture, all these pictures and calligraphies bearing the signs of the dragon have to be smashed, calling it “never to return eternally.” If using the linen bedding with dragon designs, this will be regarded as “you sleep cuddling with Satan.” Some even say, “This is the reason why you are sick in bed unable to get up,” “Your spirit is too low.” A husband who has come home after joining the dragon dance celebration of his working unit is rejected by his wife from entering the house, claiming that he was dancing with the devil. The local preacher even sided with the wife and the matter comes to an end only after the husband is forced to “confess” his sin. . . . Furthermore, all the mishaps in Chinese history are relegated to the adoration of the dragon in Chinese culture; in ancient China, all kinds of wars, all kinds of disasters, and that modern China is still incomparable to the prosperity of the Western world has all been regarded as the result of worshipping the dragon but not believing in Jesus, which is God’s punishment of China.³²

To sum up, the dragon-serpent in the Bible has nothing to do with the Chinese “*long*.” The former is the great sea-monster in the mythology of the ancient Near East, which is a symbol of chaos and evil. It is presented as the opponent of the creator-god in the context of creation theology; whereas, the latter is a symbol of prosperity. The equation of the two has been an unfortunate misinterpretation in the history of China’s encounter with Christianity in general, and the translation of the Bible, in particular. Quite a number of Chinese Christians are still troubled by the devilish conception of the Chinese “dragon.” The translation of the “dragon” of the Bible into “*long*” has opened up a wide space and set up the platform for discourses of the demonization of Chinese culture and subverting the other in the mission field as not only pagan, but utterly demonic and satanic. This special case of translation taken from the Chinese Bible was aimed at illustrating an important issue of translation in Asia. Not only that translators of the Bible should be sensitive to the Asian religious and cultural heritages; they should take efforts to cross over to the cultural world of the text and try to understand the subtle nuances. The translation process is incomplete without hard negotiation between the two texts.

CONCLUSION

The rich Asian scriptural traditions constitute the lens through which the Bible is to be read meaningfully and translated relevantly. These traditions may enhance our comprehension or may act as cultural barriers. Nevertheless, in no way should they be ignored and put aside. They can draw our attention to the textual lacunae otherwise unnoticed when the Bible is read alone. The adoption of Asian terms in Bible translation, including

the names of God in different Asian languages, has opened up space for cross-textual reading. The multi-textual context must be duly acknowledged in translating and interpreting the Bible in Asia. The con/textual negotiation is proposed for transforming the Bible from a foreign book into an Asian scripture. We recognize that the consequence of the phenomenon of Bible translation is that Christianity is a religion “without a revealed language” which “may claim exclusive monopoly of the message.”³³

For genuine transmission across cultures, the interactive negotiation process in Bible translation should always be in place. Both the transmitters and receivers come into the communication mode with back and forth interpretation and adjustment, realizing the adaptability of the Word of God. It must be duly acknowledged that the beauty of reciprocity of the two cultural traditions involved in translation is facilitated by the cross-over efforts initiated by the Asian readers. For Asian people, conversion to Christianity will inevitably entail a radical alienation from the social practice and cultural riches, if the biblical God is presented as one who is against Asian culture, characterized and demonized as the dragon, or the Satan.

It would be a great challenge to Christianity in Asia if translation of the Bible takes seriously the plurality of religious texts and traditions of the Asian peoples. The complexity of translation would involve cross-textual reading of the biblical text and the religio-cultural constellation of Asia. The Bible will then certainly be enriched and shaped to address the daily realities of the people of Asia. Translators should not merely be translating the doctrinal affirmations of the Christendom, but be aware of the conglomeration of different facets of the worlds of the Bible and the sociopolitical horizons from which religious aspiration and political struggle of the peoples of Asia are realized.

NOTES

1. John Stirling Morley Hooper, *Bible Translation in India, Pakistan and Ceylon* (Bombay: Oxford University Press, 1882 and 1963); William Wright, *Growth of the Bible in Japan* (London: J. Thompson Printer, 1895?); George Heber Jones, *The Bible in Korea; or The Transformation of a Nation* (New York: American Bible Society, 1916).
2. Marshall Broomhall, *The Bible in China* (London: British and Foreign Bible Society, 1934; repr. San Francisco: Center for Chinese Materials, 1977). The most recent comprehensive study of the history of translation of the Bible with emphasis on the Chinese Union Version is by Jost Oliver Zetzsche, *The Bible in China: History of the Union Version: or the Culmination of Protestant Missionary Bible Translation in China* (Sankt Augustin: Monumenta Serica Institute, 1999).
3. The Chinese Bible was claimed to be completed and printed by Joshua Marshman (1768–1837) outside of China in Calcutta, India, a year before that of Morrison. Since in Chinese both of the two translators have the same surname “Ma,” their translations are commonly referred as the “Two Mar Renditions.” Will H. Hudspeth, *The Bible and China* (London: The British and Foreign Bible Society, 1952).
4. A similar question has been asked on various occasions in the development of Protestant Christianity in China. An English expression of it with a defense of the value of the Old

- Testament is found in B. B. Chapman, "The Old Testament in China," *The Chinese Recorder* 63 (1932): 38–41.
5. See D. S. Amalorpovadass, ed., *Research Seminar on Non-Biblical Scriptures* (Bangalore: NBCLC, 1974). At the turn of the twentieth century, the Indian convert Brahmabandhab Upadhyay (1861–1907) voiced similar views.
 6. Chapman, "The Old Testament in China," 88.
 7. George Ch'ien Hsu, "What the Chinese are Thinking about Christianity: Some Modern Discussions of Bible Themes," *The Chinese Recorder* 53 (1922): 241.
 8. *Ibid.*, 242.
 9. Xie Fuya, "On Revision of the Chinese Bible," *Ching Feng* 28 (1971): 1–3; and "On the Issue of a Chinese Bible—After Reading Deutsch's Paper on 'Is Cultural Heritage Equal to the Old Testament?'" *Ching Feng* 31 (1971): 1–2.
 10. Hu Zanyun, "Two Old Testaments—Initial Proposal for Constructing Chinese Theology, III" and "Further Discussions on the Two Old Testaments," *Ching Feng* 31 (1971).
 11. John Barton, "Marcien Revisited," in Lee Martin McDonald and James A. Sanders, eds., *The Canon Debate* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2002), 304, 344–45, 354.
 12. Regarding the OT replacing or read in parallel, see Amalorpavass, *Research Seminar on Non-Biblical Scriptures*.
 13. R. S. Sugirtharajah adopts this terminology to characterize missionary interpretation of the Bible as it is applied to downgrade Indian culture. See "Text and Testament: The Hebrew Scripture in Colonial Context," in R. S. Sugirtharajah, ed., *The Bible and Empire: Postcolonial Explorations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 151–61.
 14. Henry A. Lapham, *The Bible as Missionary Handbook* (Cambridge: W. Heffer and Sons, 1925), 46. The reference is made by Sugirtharajah, "Text and Testament," 151.
 15. Sugirtharajah, "Text and Testament," 151.
 16. D. A. Thangasamy, ed., *The Theology of Chenchiah with Selections from His Writings* (Bangalore: Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society, 1966), 162. Quoted by Sugirtharajah, "Text and Testament," 162–63.
 17. Lamin Sanneh, "Christianity Reappropriated: The Bible and Its Mother Tongue Variations," in id., *Whose Religion is Christianity? The Gospel beyond the West* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 95–130.
 18. James Legge, *The Notions of the Chinese Concerning God and Spirits, with an Examination of the Defense of an Essay on the Proper Rendering of the Words Elohim and Theos into the Chinese Language*, by William J. Boone (Taipei: Cheng wen, 1971).
 19. See the following articles by Archie C. C. Lee: "Naming God in Asia: Cross-Textual Reading in Multi-Cultural Context," *Quest: An Interdisciplinary Journal for Asian Christian Scholars* 3, no. 1 (2004): 21–42; "God's Asian Names: Rendering the Biblical God in Chinese," a web publication on SBL Forum, November 2005, <http://www.sbl-site.org/Article.aspx?ArticleId=456>; "The Politico-Cultural Dynamics of Rendering the Biblical God in Asia," *Humanities: Christianity and Culture* 37 (March 2006): 75–89; "The Names of God and Bible Translation: Engaging the Chinese Term Question in the Context of Scriptural Interpretation," *Journal of Theologies and Cultures in Asia* 5 (2006): 1–17.
 20. Peter K. H. Lee, "Naming the Divine: The Christian-Chinese Cross-Cultural Experience," *Ching Feng* 39 (1996): 77–93.
 21. *Ibid.*, 91.

22. The two terms function indistinguishably in the Chinese Classics and the oracle bones inscription. See Robert Eno, "Was There a High God Ti in Shang Religion?" *Early China* 15 (1990): 1–26.
23. *Ibid.*, 1.
24. In the oracle bones inscriptions, there are about thirty occurrences of Di ordering rain. *Ibid.*, 5 n. 13.
25. Anthony Yu, *State and Religion in China: Historical and Textual Perspectives* (Chicago: Open Court, 2005).
26. Justus Doolittle, *Social Life of the Chinese: With Some Account of the Religious, Government, Educational, and Business, Customs and Opinions* (Taipei: Cheng-Wen Publishing Company, 1966), 2:264.
27. *Ibid.*, 1:292; 2:117, 120.
28. *Ibid.*, 2:265.
29. Zetzsche, *The Bible in China*, 38, 200.
30. Except Isaiah 27:1.
31. Sher Shiueh Lee, "中國「龍」如何成為英國的「Dragon」?" [How did the Chinese 'long' become the English 'dragon?'], *Dushu* 5 (2007): 61.
32. Zhao Zhien, "聖經觀與「龍」的問題" [The Bible and the problem of dragon], *Jinling Shenxue Zhi* 3 (2006): 64.
33. Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture*, revised and enlarged ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2009), 120.

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CHAPTER 8

THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE ECUMENICAL MOVEMENT IN ASIA TO WORLD ECUMENISM

ARUNA GNANADASON

THE following quote throws some light on the present state of ecumenism:

“There is a widespread perception that there exists a crisis in the ecumenical movement. Expressions like ‘ecumenical winter,’ ‘lost in the fog,’ etc. are heard. Many say that the movement is at the crossroads. There seems to be a decline in ecumenical impulse. The underlying loss of ecumenical motivation is bound up with a growing uncertainty of ecumenical orientation. There is a disturbing ambivalence about ecumenical accomplishments. There is a felt need for a rethinking of the ecumenical enterprise against the background and manifold and complex challenges. There are calls for a ‘new ecumenism.’”¹

WHAT WAS THE IMPETUS FOR THE ECUMENICAL MOVEMENT?

The prayer of Jesus Christ, “that they may all be one” (John 17:21) has been the guiding principle on which ecumenism was born and continues in the search for unity of the churches. The term “ecumenical” is derived from the Greek term “*oikoumene*” referring to the whole inhabited earth. As an ecumenical movement, it refers to the whole Christian Church—of the churches coming together into unity to realize Christ’s vision and prayer. This the churches seek, through interdenominational organizations and a commitment to stay in dialogue so as to transcend divisions and schisms that have developed over the centuries on such issues as traditions, doctrines, church practices in mission, worship, and the nature of presence in the world. The quest since the inception of ecumenical expressions was to strengthen the voice and witness of the churches in a world that needs reconciliation

and peace both within the Christian community itself and with other communities in the world. Of this worldwide movement, the Asian ecumenical movement is a part.²

Ecumenical cooperation and joint action has been a hallmark of the life of the churches in Asia in recent decades. Christians, who are a minority in most Asian countries, have recognized the need for working together if they are to have an impact on Asian societies. There have been many positive experiences that the churches in Asia have had in their search for unity and ecumenical action. There are records of important dates and descriptions of institutional ecumenical formations that emerged during the past decades, in response to the political, social, and cultural challenges at each period in history, right from the times when the majority of the churches in Asia were still in formation. This chapter does not intend to go over the detailed history of all Asian ecumenical ventures or deal with their contributions to global ecumenism, but instead it will seek to analyze some of the challenges the churches face and how this situation has created greater ecumenical cooperation today.

To begin with, let me highlight some of the benchmarks in the history of ecumenical cooperation. On the world level, the following ecumenical organizations were established in the second half of the nineteenth century: the World Young Women's Christian Association (1854); the World Alliance of Young Men's Christian Associations (1844); and the World Student Christian Federation (1895); all of which brought Christian young people together, inspired by Christian convictions and a passion to take the Christian message to all parts of the globe. Their aim was originally not focused on bringing the denominationally separated churches into unity. However, these important global movements did give the impetus for the formation of ecumenical organizations notable among which was the World Council of Churches (1948).³ After Vatican II,⁴ the Roman Catholic Church opened itself to strengthening ecumenical relations. In the pre-Vatican II era, Rome had held that unity could be achieved only when the rest of the churches returned "to the one true church." Such a position, of course, made ecumenical discussions difficult till Vatican II opened the way for ecumenical cooperation and for unity talks.⁵

MISSION HISTORY AND THE ANTICIPATION OF THE ECUMENICAL MOVEMENT

Historians, theologians, and missiologists all affirm the missionary movement's contributions to the growth of Christianity in Asia and of its institutional life. Perhaps the most significant contribution of the missionary movement was in the area of conversion to Christianity of the oppressed and marginalized groups for whom allegiance to the Church meant social mobility in the context of social, cultural, religious, and ritual discrimination.

The missionary movement in Asia can be said to have impacted the ecumenical movement in two ways which in fact contradict each other. First, it brought to

Asia inherited denominational identities thus affecting the ecumenical spirit of the churches. Many critique the European brand of Christianity with its denominationalism. Way back in 1967, C. H. Hwang from China portrayed the situation in these words:

The sad thing is that, before becoming first a confessing Church in the missionary situation, the younger churches were prematurely projected into a “confessional” situation which was not their own, before they became a Community of Christ they were told to become a Presbyterian, Lutheran, Methodist or Anglican church. They were divided without even being able to know why.⁶

Second, ironically it is that same missionary movement which played a pivotal role in nurturing cooperation and unity among the churches. An important landmark in mission history is the World Missionary Conference, which was held in Edinburgh in 1910. This was the first major truly ecumenical effort wherein different denominations, with their own mission work in different parts of the world, including Asia, came together to reflect on the possibility of increased cooperation and unity in their efforts. This set a trend for ecumenical relations and cooperation. In Edinburgh 1910, Asian presence was insignificant in numerical strength, but the clear and challenging voice of Asia was heard. Among them, V. S. Azariah of India spoke passionately on a new understanding of inter-church cooperation where partnership and friendship rather than paternal relationships should be the governing principle. He, with other Asians, made strong pleas for autonomy and for an Asian brand of Christianity, with the possibility for local forms of worship and spirituality. This struggle to move away from the missionary-based denominationalism has been evident throughout Asian church history. Cheng Jingyi, a 28-year-old pastor from China, urged the conference not to be afraid to allow the Chinese Church to sustain and manage its own life, as it tries to build a nondenominational identity.⁷

M. M. Thomas, recognizing the inevitable link of the churches with Western culture because of the years of colonial rule in different parts of Asia, affirmed that Christians in Asia are called to critical engagement with the national aspirations of Asian nations as churches together and has urged that “Christians need not be apologetic about their connection with western culture.” He went on to say, “Christians have to be apologetic about their uncritical approach to western culture. Today, when our national goals are western, we are not able to critically evaluate them in the name of Christ...our contribution to ‘secular’ ecumenism depends on our having a ‘Christian’ ecumenism ourselves.”⁸

SOME UNIQUE INITIATIVES OF UNITY AMONG THE CHURCHES

In keeping with the spirit of Asian voices in Edinburgh in 1910, there have been unique forms of cooperation and of organic unity among the Asian churches. Perhaps

the most important expression of this was the birth of a nondenominational church in China. The National Christian Conference in 1913 in Shanghai was the first really representative gathering of Protestant Chinese Christians in China, and it declared that the future of Chinese churches should be in “unity, Chinese/indigenous and holiness.” In the early twentieth century, practical attempts were made to achieve unity. However, due to the strong denominational influence by the foreign missions and missionaries, as well as the unsteady social and political situation in China during the war against Japan and the civil war, it was impossible to achieve this goal. In 1950, Chinese Christians initiated the Three-Self Patriotic Movement, and through the principles of self-governance, self-support, and self-propagation of the gospel, they set out on an independent road to build Chinese churches, and turned away from the old image of Christianity as a “foreign religion.” The Three-Self Patriotic Movement was an interdenominational Protestant movement, and the majority of Chinese Christians welcomed and threw themselves into it. The first united form of worship was held in 1958.

However, it has to be noted that while some Roman Catholic clergy became part of the Three-Self Movement, the Catholic Bishops in China opposed it and published a critical review of it. They made it clear that they considered the movement to have been introduced from outside and could therefore not be considered a voluntary movement of Chinese Catholics. As an outcome of this stand, in several places, Catholics who joined the movement were excommunicated and priests who became active in it were expelled. While it is not clear what is meant by “outside influence,” one can, nevertheless, presume that the Catholic Bishops disapproved of it because it was a largely Protestant-driven movement.⁹

In India, church leaders gathering at the Tranquebar Conference in May 1919 planted the seeds of unity for the formation of the Church of South India, which was finally inaugurated in 1947 by merging together Anglican (Episcopal), Congregational, Presbyterian, and Methodist denominations. It was another first for Asia when a church that had maintained the historic succession of the episcopate succeeded in entering into full communion with non-episcopate churches. This union of churches posed a challenge to the churches in the West, which had not succeeded in uniting. The formation of the Church of North India in 1970 was the next step in visible organic unity.

Subregional cooperation among the churches such as the efforts at cooperation between the churches in China and Taiwan; between China, Taiwan, and North Korea and between North and South Korea deserve to be mentioned. The churches have always kept lines of communication and solidarity open in spite of political barriers. One such example is what is now referred to as the Tozanso Process as it was initiated in the city of Tozanso in Japan. In 1984, the churches of North Korea and South Korea with churches from Japan and the United States met (and have since been meeting regularly) to reflect on ways to stay in contact and develop mutual solidarity.

THE BIRTH OF ECUMENICAL VENTURES IN ASIA

The Edinburgh Mission Conference and events that followed on the global scene truly set on track the spirit of ecumenism in Asia, fuelled by missionary zeal and by the desire for unity among the churches, for partnership in mission and for autonomy from their parent mission bodies. The origins of the East Asia Christian Conference (EACC), which later was renamed Christian Conference of Asia (CCA), can be traced back to the International Missionary Council, which was held in Tambaram, India, in 1938. This and similar gatherings provided opportunities for the churches to come together and question their disunity, to recognize that they are a minority in most of Asia, and to strive for the efficacy of more coordination of their mission activities, so as to make a mark in their nations. On the request of the Chinese and Indian church representatives, an East Asia Regional Committee was set up which led to the First Assembly of the EACC in 1957 in Prapat, Indonesia. The progress of the movement was so fast that at the Second Assembly of the EACC held in 1959, in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, thirty-four churches and fourteen national councils of churches or Christian councils participated. In 1973, at its Fifth Assembly in Singapore, it was renamed Christian Conference of Asia, with a more centralized office and structure.

The impulse for a Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) can be traced back to 1970 when bishops from the Catholic churches all over Asia came together in Manila on the occasion of the papal visit of Paul IV to the Philippines. They decided at that point to set up a formal and permanent organization to ensure continuing cooperation among the national level bishops' conferences. But it remained a voluntary association in which membership was open to individual conferences. FABC has continued to play a key role in fostering solidarity among Asian churches for the welfare of the church and society in Asia—unparalleled in any other part of the Catholic Church. The Asian Synod of 1998 held in Rome demonstrated the special Asian way in developing theological ideas and pastoral conceptions.¹⁰ An office of Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs was set up by the FABC in the early 1970s. Despite its positive ecumenical collaboration, FABC, however, seems to have given greater attention to inter-religious dialogue.

The global youth movements, mentioned earlier, had also their impact on Asia and they gave birth to ecumenically formed regional and national youth and student organizations which recognized that “Christian unity is the first fruit of the unity of all.”¹¹ The Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA), the World Student Christian Federation (WSCF), the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students (IFES), and All Indian Catholic University Federation (AICUF) are some of the active movements in Asia inspiring ecumenical engagement and joint action.

In recent decades, the Christian Conference of Asia and the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences have cooperated along with other ecumenical bodies in Asia and have taken up for common engagement important issues such as interreligious dialogue, inculturation, and the role of the laity. The participation of the CCA at the Asian Synod of Catholic Bishops in Rome in 1998 strengthened the continuing cooperation. The setting up of a committee on the Asian Movement for Christian Unity (AMCU) with equal participation of the CCA and the FABC is another sign of progress. AMCU has met in 1996 (Hong Kong), in 1998 (Indonesia), in 2000 (Chiang Mai), in 2007 (Kuala Lumpur), and in 2010 (Bangkok). This has been an important instrument for joint work in ecumenical formation and joint staff meetings for reflecting together on the priorities for the churches in Asia. Since 1993, an Asian Ecumenical Committee (AEC) with representatives from the CCA and the FABC has also met regularly; with the AMCU it has provided opportunities to manifest the "unity that is already within us." One of its stated goals is to help ensure that all denominations (here including the Roman Catholic Church and other evangelical/Pentecostal churches) are drawn into closer cooperation for the development of concrete responses to Asian realities.

The Congress of Asian Theologians (CAT) brings together a large body of theologians across the churches for common study and reflection on issues of greatest importance for the life of Asian Christianity and its mission. The theologians have met already several times under the aegis of the CCA's program on theological concerns. This Congress of Asian Theologians met in 1997 (CAT I) in Suwon, Korea; in 1999 (CAT II) in Bangalore, India; in 2001 (CAT III) in Yogyakarta, Indonesia; in 2003 (CAT IV) in Chiang Mai, Thailand; in 2006 (CAT V) in Hong Kong, China; in 2009 (CAT VI) in Iloilo City, Philippines; and in 2012 (CAT VII) in Seoul, Korea. These ecumenical gatherings of theologians have been sponsored by the CCA and FABC along with other subregional associations on theological education—the Association of Theological Education in South East Asia, the South Asia Theological Research Institute and the program of Theology and Culture in Asia; with the World Council of Churches partnering the events. CATs have been developed not only as "a 'programme' but a continuing structure of cooperative theological work in Asia that is devoted towards the development and enrichment of Asian theology and Asian theologians."¹²

In the post-Second World War period, which coincides with the decolonization of several Asian nations, the churches in Asia—Protestant, Orthodox, and Roman Catholic—have attempted to become authentically Asian, by moving away from being mission churches under foreign administrations, governed by expatriate bishops and clergy into becoming local, autonomous churches with mostly indigenous clergy and leadership, and reducing their dependence on mission boards and aid agencies for their survival. Of course, challenges remain. For example, in many countries where Christians are a minority, in the context of increasing religious fundamentalism (which includes also the influx into Asia of Christian fundamentalism) does pose occasional threats to the growth and development of Christianity as an authentic Asian religion and to the ecumenical movement too.

CHRISTIANITY IN THE MIDST OF MANY RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS—IMPACT ON ECUMENICAL RELATIONS

In Asia, the missionary movement encountered religions with strong spiritual histories as well as well developed theological and philosophical schools of thought, written scriptures of profound depth with sages and saints. And yet, many of the missionaries judged the religions they encountered as pagan and as superstitious, and in some places engaged in an aggressive suppression of religions and cultures of the Asian peoples. However, there were notable exceptions such as Robert de Nobili (1577–1656), a Jesuit who immersed himself in studying Hinduism, Sanskrit, and local customs. He lived in the city of Madurai, Tamil Nadu, dressed like a Hindu *sanyasi*. Of course, his intention was to reach, with the Gospel message, the upper caste intellectuals in India. There was also his compatriot and fellow Jesuit Matteo Ricci, who took a similar “positive” approach to local religions when he went to China in 1582.

From the earliest times, the theology of religions that accompanied the missionary enterprise held the view that other religions did not have a salvific value of their own, and therefore, it was the responsibility of the Christians to bring the saving knowledge to them all. A change in this perspective toward other religions was brought about by the ecumenical movement. It was the global ecumenical movement, with the participation of a few Asians, which broke through such limited understandings of the relationship of Christianity in relation to other religious traditions in Asia. The ecumenical movement in Asia has contributed significantly by providing leadership and theological freshness to ecumenical discussions on dialogue and cooperation with peoples of other faiths. After Vatican II’s affirmation of a new approach to other religious traditions, according to Ariarajah, “Asian Roman Catholic theologians began to make considerable advances both in rethinking Christianity for plurality and in rebuilding Christian relations with others.”¹³ He also notes that almost all the major meetings that framed the ecumenical agenda of interreligious relations were held in Asia.

The issue of conversions has been a contested ecumenical theme in the global arena, particularly in the context of interfaith dialogue and relations. In South Asia, for example, “Dalit conversions from Hinduism has been an important form of Dalit dissent. The conversion weapon has been dexterously used by Dalits against the upper castes ‘whenever they have been subjected to limits of their endurance in the area of social discrimination as well as economic exploitation.’”¹⁴ Many Dalits and other oppressed groups realized that by turning to Christ who was seen as liberator and a symbol of acceptance and love, they could put behind them the discrimination and humiliation experienced under Hindu caste structure.

John C. B. Webster, who looks at church history in India through a Dalit lens writes:

Dalit Catholics sought to become more integrated into their Church and community, whereas Protestant Dalits tended to assert their autonomy vis-a-vis the Protestant elites and ally themselves more closely with the wider Dalit movement. Both faced considerable caste conflict within their respective churches throughout this period. David Mosse showed some of the later consequences of this Catholic position in examining Dalit Catholic activism since the 1980s. This was led by Dalit priests who had personally experienced caste prejudice during and following their training and so focused their resentment, as did other Dalit Catholics, primarily on the “institutionalized caste discrimination within the churches” rather than caste Hindu society. The Church responded by identifying itself as “a Dalit Church” and making Dalits a priority, a policy which garnered Dalit sympathy in the face of Hindutva attacks. This in turn helped to broaden the Dalit Catholic activist agenda.¹⁵

Through conversions Dalits gained a new sense of power to resist discrimination. Dalit theology has provided new challenges to the ecumenical movement as it is built on a movement of Christians who seek unity beyond denominational boundaries and even religious boundaries.

To the Dalit resurgence one can add the movements of aboriginal and indigenous peoples in all parts of Asia, the Burakumin of Japan, and Koreans living in Japan—all of whom are making their mark by challenging inherited ecclesial and theological paradigms. Thus, they pave the way for new forms of ecumenical partnership and unity in dialogue and relationship with other religions.

CHANGING TIMES—NEW CHALLENGES

Today there is an urgent need for the global ecumenical movement to redefine itself in the context of the diminishing power and influence of the institutional churches in the West, and disenchantment with religion in general. Added to this are the tensions faced by the Eastern churches due to geopolitical changes following the collapse of the Soviet bloc, as well as internal power struggles within them. The increasing neo-liberal economic and political policies of governments and the growth of the political and religious Right are also having its impact on the churches, forcing them to “let go” of many of their initial commitments to justice and partnership with the global South.

This Western situation has definitely had a bearing on the Asian churches, which too have not always been strong enough to assert an alternate vision or to survive in the face of reducing financial and personnel support. Confidence of Asian churches in their strength and creativity has been eroded in the past few decades;

so too their ability to contribute to global Christianity. The issues of justice, human rights, ethnicity and minority issues, women and youth are all global in their dimensions and have their specific configuration in Asian societies. They remain permanent challenges to Asian ecumenism. To these need to be added the contribution to peace and reconciliation the ecumenical movement could make today and fostering of interreligious dialogue. Many of these challenges have been high on the agenda of Asian ecumenism from its origins, but now need to spur Asia on into the world scene.

EMERGENCE OF SUBALTERN VOICES

A sign of hope for the birth of a “new ecumenism” is in the coming to life of subaltern voices in Asia. For example, the Dalit movement in India and Dalit theology lead us to a fresh understanding of unity. Peniel Rufus Jesudason notes that one of the pioneers of Dalit theology, Arvind P. Nirmal, called for a movement “away from the idea of imperial unity. . . . to relationality that will respect the integrity and differences of many and yet keep them related to each other.”¹⁶ Such a challenging understanding of unity would question the way in which the churches and the ecumenical movement have defined unity, especially the dominant discourse of organic unity as a goal.

Asian churches are still by and large caught in the stranglehold of a colonial past and forms of institutional ecumenism that emanate from the West. But the agency of subaltern communities to break through these bastions of conservatism is evident in the new movements; so too in the writings and the theological challenges coming from these communities. This is an important contribution from the Asian ecumenical movement, to Asian society and to the global ecumenical movement:

Asian ecumenism has time and again. . . . asserted that ecumenism is not about overcoming diversity and difference but celebrating diversity, and being able to live with differences guided by the values of openness and inclusivity. To that extent, it has opted for theologies arising out of struggles for life. Minjung Theology in Korea, Dalit theology in India, theology of Struggle in the Philippines, theology of Homeland in Taiwan, Asian Feminist theologies, theology of Tribal peoples as well as many indigenous and contextual theologies, are but a few to mention.¹⁷

The questions Asia needs to raise are simple: Are the many institutional and organizational forms of ecumenism needed any longer? While they did serve the churches well in the past to forge solidarity and partnership within the region and across the world, how relevant are they today? Are they able to serve the churches in their quest for unity and to usher in a transformed world of justice and peace?

ECUMENICAL SPIRIT INSPIRED BY SOCIAL GOSPEL

It is important to record also the many efforts by groups of Christians, most often working with peoples of other faiths and outside the frame of the institutional church or ecumenical organizations, toward new understanding and forms of unity. Some of these include the Fellowship of the Least Coin, a movement of prayer and action for reconciliation and peace started by an Asian woman and which is now global in its spread but stays rooted in Asia and presently has its headquarters in the Philippines; the Asian Women's Resource Centre and its journal *In God's Image* presently with its office in Jojakarta, Indonesia; the Asian Commission on Human Rights with its headquarters in Hong Kong; DAGA, a documentation service with its headquarters in Hong Kong; EASY Net (a web-based network of youth and students in Asia); and more recently the Life and Peace network based in the Philippines, to name just a few. The Asian Commission of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians has also played a key and vibrant role in nurturing an alternative theological voice in Asia to challenge old colonial mindsets in theological education and theological writings. These are some significant ways in which Christians in Asia have offered leadership in a bid to contribute to transforming Asia but also the global society. These many ways to a new ecumenism are signs of hope for Christianity in Asia and for them to make a mark on the world stage.

NOTES

1. Ninan Koshy, *A History of the Ecumenical Movement in Asia*, Vol. 1 (Hong Kong: CCA, 2004), 24.
2. Cf. Nicholas Lossky, Jose Miguez Bonino, et al., eds., *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement*, 2nd ed. (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2002).
3. Ruth Rouse and Stephen Charles Niell, eds., *A History of the Ecumenical Movement, vol. 1, 1517-1948*, 3rd ed. (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1986).
4. The Second Vatican Council, known as Vatican II, addressed relations between the Roman Catholic Church and the modern world. It was the twenty-first Ecumenical Council of the Catholic Church. It opened under Pope John XIII on October 11, 1962, and closed under Pope Paul VI on December 8, 1965, and paved the way for increased ecumenical relations and cooperation on the global level and at the Asian level.
5. Virginia Fabella, "The Roman Catholic Church in the Asian Ecumenical Movement," in Ninan Koshy, ed., *A History of the Ecumenical Movement in Asia*, Vol. 2 (Hong Kong: Christian Conference of Asia, 2004), 116.
6. As quoted in Harold E. Fey, ed., *A History of the Ecumenical Movement*, 2nd ed. (Geneva: WCC, 1986), 72 f.

7. Brian Stanley, *The World Missionary Conference, Edinburgh 1910, Studies in the History of Christian Missions* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 108 f.
8. M. M. Thomas, *The Common Evangelistic Task of the Churches in Asia: Papers and Minutes of the EACC, Prapat, Indonesia* (Rangoon: EACC, 1957), 82 f.
9. Cf. Georg Evers, *The Churches in Asia* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2005), 105.
10. Cf. *ibid.*, pp. xxii–xxiii.
11. Hans Ruedi Weber, *Asia and the Ecumenical Movement* (London: SCM Press, 1966), 111.
12. Koshy, *History of the Ecumenical Movement in Asia*, 1:285.
13. Wesley Ariarajah, “Christianity and People of Other Religious Traditions,” in Koshy, ed., *History of the Ecumenical Movement in Asia*, 2:139–43.
14. Peniel Rufus Jesudason, “The Diversity and Dialectics of Dalit Dissent and Implications for a Dalit Theology of Liberation,” in Sathianathan Clarke, Deenabandhu Manchala, and Philip Vinod Peacock, eds., *Dalit Theology in the Twenty-first Century: Discordant Voices, Discerning Pathways* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2010).
15. John C. B. Webster, “Dalit Christian History: Themes and Trends,” a paper presented at the Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, 2009.
16. Jesudason, “The Diversity and Dialectics of Dalit Dissent and Implications for a Dalit Theology of Liberation.”
17. From the report (unpublished manuscript) entitled, “Living Together in God’s Justice and Peace!” shared as a proposal for the WCC 10th Assembly in Busan, South Korea, in 2013. The Korean Assembly Planning Committee (KAPC) for the 10th Assembly of the World Council of Churches, in partnership with the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) and WCC’s Asia Desk, convened a Theological Consultation in Seoul, Korea, from November 10 to 12, 2010, from which originated the above-cited report.

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CHAPTER 9

INTER-ASIA MISSION AND GLOBAL MISSIONARY MOVEMENTS FROM ASIA

SEBASTIAN KIM

ANDREW Walls¹ initiated the discussion of the “shift in the centre of gravity,” which he identified as the lands and islands of Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Pacific, and this theory was followed by many scholars examining the changing dynamics of global Christianity. Recent discussions on the changes of demography have focused on the following three aspects of the relationship between churches in the global North and the South. First, there is recognition of the numerical growth of non-Western Christianity and the rapid decline of church-going in Western Europe. The mode and reasons for this growth in the global South, varies from place to place but evangelical and Pentecostal (-charismatic) movements are playing the major role in this new phenomenon. Second, as a consequence of the first, there is an acknowledgment that the “centre of gravity” of Christianity has shifted away from the West and that the new forms of Christianity will inevitably influence the churches in the West, changing the “traditional” form of Christianity as a whole.² The third aspect of this change is that missionary movements from the churches in the global South are increasing so that it is no longer “mission from the West to the rest,” but mission from everywhere to everywhere as the participants of Edinburgh 2010 conference declared in their “Common Call”: “We are called to rejoice in the expressions of the gospel in many nations all over the world. We celebrate the renewal experienced through movements of migration and mission in all directions.”³

The scope of this chapter does not permit discussion of missionary movements from the global South as a whole, but only from and within Asian continents, though some of the later discussion inevitably involves the continents of Africa and Latin America as well. Asia refers to nearly one-third of the world’s landmass and nearly two-thirds of the world’s people but “Asian” does not refer to a shared cultural or historical identity. The incredible diversity of the continent is illustrated by the fact that all the “world religions” originated in Asia, including Christianity. Nevertheless the peoples of Asia have

interacted with one another for centuries and many aspects of culture have been shared across boundaries, not least religious culture. The vast majority of countries in Asia are still regarded as “mission fields” in a traditional sense, but as in the case of India, there are significant missionary activities across cultures within national boundaries, and also through migration of Asian Christians in other parts of the world.

CONTEMPORARY MISSION ACTIVITIES FROM AND ACROSS ASIA

The *Atlas of Global Christianity* (2009) provides a visual demonstration of changes in Christianity and missionary movements worldwide from 1910 to 2010. In 1910, there were 62,000 missionaries from Europe and North America and 300 missionaries from Asia (about 1,000 from the global South). In 2010, there are about 400,000 missionaries⁴ worldwide and two-thirds of those are from the West. But now there are 126,200 from the global South (47,100 from Asia, 20,700 from Africa, and 58,400 from Latin America). In Asia, the nations sending the most missionaries are South Korea, 20,000; India, 10,000 (mainly cross-cultural missionaries within India); China, 5,600; and the Philippines, 6,000 (mainly migrant workers). The overwhelming majority of Asian missionaries are working in Asia but significant numbers also go to Europe and North and South America.⁵

There are an estimated 10,000 Indian cross-cultural missionaries mainly working within the national boundaries and 711,000 national workers. The India Missions Association, the main Protestant body for missionary work, states that there are 235 indigenous organizations and 150 missionary training schools. There are also about 500 missionaries who are mainly working in the neighboring countries of Nepal and Bangladesh.⁶ Nearly half of the Korean missionaries are working in Asia. The reasons suggested for the rapid increase of missionaries are the growth of Korean churches in the 1960s and 1970s, which resulted in mission growth in the 1980s; the globalization of Korean society and lifting of restrictions on overseas travel and residence since the late 1980s; and the surplus of Christian ministers and church workers graduating from seminaries and other Christian institutions.⁷ Both Hong Kong and Singapore provide hubs for mission work across Asia and beyond. The Hong Kong Association of Christian Mission facilitates missions overseas with thirty agencies, fifteen denominations, and many congregations which are sending out about 400 missionaries overseas. Christian publishers and the Bible Society actively distribute the Bible both within China and among Chinese diaspora communities. Various national and international Christian Radio programs (FEBC, TWR) and TV programs in Hong Kong provide access to the Christian message for the wider audience across the region.⁸ Singapore plays the role of the center of mission administration in Asia by hosting regional head offices of various mission organizations. In addition to long-term work, there are also

numerous short-term mission trips involving several thousand Christian young people. The Singapore Centre for Global Missions and Fellowship of Missional Organisations of Singapore (FOMOS) are key organizations. There are estimated to be 8.1 million Filipinos abroad (4 million in Asia) working as nurses, engineers, and domestic servants and 225,000 seamen, which is the largest number from any nation. This provides a rare opportunity for them to be involved in various forms of personal evangelism often in countries in which Christian mission is restricted such as the Muslim world.⁹

CONCEPTUAL SHIFT TOWARD MISSION FROM THE GLOBAL SOUTH

The above statistics demonstrate the significant increase of missionary activities of Asian missionaries who are working within and outside national boundaries. The change of demographic of world Christianity also calls for changes in mission theology and strategy in global contexts, and this in turn shapes the practice of missionary endeavor. Over the last century or more, mission conferences have provided a forum for discussion of the changing situation in mission. In particular, ecumenical conferences on mission have consistently called for radical change in the relationships between churches. At Edinburgh in 1910, V. S. Azariah led the way by decrying paternalistic relationships and asking the Western churches to “give us friends.” At Tambaram in 1938, Hendrik Kraemer urged a brotherly relationship between “older churches” and “younger churches.”¹⁰ This idea was developed at the following conference in Whitby in 1947 by the motto, “Partnership in Obedience.” As Stephen Neill explains, “the full spiritual equality of the younger Churches . . . was now no longer a discovery: it was simply taken for granted as one of the postulates of thought.”¹¹ Perhaps the most significant landmark for this shift of thinking was articulated in the WCC Conference on World Mission and Evangelism (CWME) in Mexico in 1963, on the theme of “Witness in six continents.” Although there was insufficient discussion on developing a theology or strategy for this concept during the conference, which was more focused on crossing the frontiers that separate beliefs and non-beliefs, nevertheless it was a significant move to break away from the traditional one-way direction of sending and receiving nations by affirming that the “missionary movement now involves Christians in all six continents and all lands. It must be in common witness of the whole Church, bringing the whole Gospel to the whole world.”¹²

The missionary endeavor from the global South is also pertinent among evangelicals as it is stated in Lausanne Covenant (1974) in the section on churches in evangelistic partnership: “We rejoice that a new missionary era has dawned. The dominant role of western missions is fast disappearing. God is raising up from the younger churches a great new resource for world evangelization, and is thus demonstrating that the responsibility to evangelise belongs to the whole body of Christ.”¹³ This was reaffirmed in

Manila Manifesto (1989), which advocated the “internationalisation of missions” and predicted that “the number of Two-Thirds World missionaries will soon exceed those from the West,” although this proved rather too optimistic.¹⁴ The Third Lausanne Congress in Cape Town (2010) reiterated the significance of partnership: “We rejoice in the growth and strength of emerging mission movements in the majority world” and appealed for “work for true mutuality of North and South, East and West, for interdependence in giving and receiving, for the respect and dignity that characterizes genuine friends and true partners in mission.”¹⁵

In the context of Asia, two important steps should be mentioned: the apostolic exhortation *Eccelesia in Asia* was released during Pope John Paul II’s visit to India in November 1999 in the midst of Hindu opposition to Christian activities relating to conversion. It began by emphasizing that the Church in Asia will “cross the threshold of the Third Christian Millennium marvelling at all that God has worked from those beginnings until now” and went on to pray that “*a great harvest of faith* will be reaped in this vast and vital continent.” The Pope further reminded the bishops of Asia that evangelism was their “absolute priority” (EA 1 & 2). Among evangelicals, the Global Consultation on World Evangelization (GCOWE), which took place in Seoul in May 1995, was a significant challenge particularly to Asian churches to take the responsibility of world evangelization in general and of the Asian region in particular. The participants also witnessed 80,000 Korean students dedicating themselves to the world mission at a meeting organized by “Mission Korea” at the Olympic stadium on May 20.¹⁶

MORATORIUM OR FOR MUTUAL INTERDEPENDENCY?

Although the idea of “mission in six continents” is widely accepted in ecumenical mission theory and there has been rapid increase of missionaries from the global South, in reality financial dominance by the global North in mission was perceived as a major obstacle for this partnership in the 1970s. The churches in Asia tried to address this problem in various ways. A proposal for a moratorium or cessation of foreign missionary work was put forward by three executives of the Christian Conference of Asia in a study document in 1974 entitled “Let My People Go.” It stated: “Only a deeper identification with the responsibilities and priorities of mission will give clarity and freedom of judgement as to what the selfhood and mission of the Asian church requires.”¹⁷ This document reflects the problems of the churches in the South caused by the trends in mission of their particular time and context. The proposal certainly brought a heated discussion among the participants and others, but the idea of a moratorium did not elicit positive reactions from churches and mission organizations in Asia. However, it does show a deep concern for self-expression, self-reliance, and self-identity. The problem of dependence on overseas support in mission should not be overlooked and needs

careful consideration. However, the moratorium approach has serious shortcomings such as difficulties in practical implementation and the undermining of the theological conception of the global church as the body of Christ and mutually supportive fellowship of believers.

Rather than call for a moratorium, many who are involved in mission advocated mutual interdependency in contemporary mission practice. Vinay Samuel laid down a challenge in the early 1990s: “If the gospel is to be truly liberating in the contemporary world, we need to go beyond . . . to being ‘in Christ,’ where there is no East and West, North and South, yet all one in him.”¹⁸ Mutual interdependence has several presuppositions. First, we acknowledge the biblical images of the household of God and the body of Christ which is the global church. Therefore, we share what we have with each other: financial resources, personnel, experiences, and so on. As Rene Padilla puts it, “interdependence comes with a deeper understanding of the nature of unity in Christ and of the situation in which other members of the body of Christ live.”¹⁹ Second, both North and South should have an attitude of learning from and accepting help from one another. Both must acknowledge that, in Christ, God has given gifts without partiality to all local expressions of the body of Christ and so we need each other in order to experience the full manifestation of the Body of which Christ is the Head. Third, we all have a responsibility to exercise those gifts and to create an environment in which others can exercise theirs. Fourth, both sides need to respect each other in their limitations and difficulties and try to build each other up, to be sensitive to the needs of the other and willing to respond to them.

In order to implement the mutuality of obligations, both sides need to make a special effort to achieve a relationship which is theologically sound and practically builds up the body of Christ. Then mission “becomes a two-way street, a constant exchange, a perennial learning” and furthermore, “mission awareness and mission cooperation are understood in terms of mutuality.”²⁰ In this regard, John Mbiti strongly challenged the ignorance of the West of the theological heritage of other peoples: “and how can there be true theological reciprocity and mutuality, if only one side knows the other fairly well, while the other side either does not know or does not want to know first side.”²¹ Also in connection with theological reciprocity, Rene Padilla pointed out that “life in community cannot be conceived in terms of situation in which one section of the church is always on the giving end while another is always on the receiving end.”²²

The Apostle Paul describes the global church as “the body of Christ,” and the Apostle Peter describes it as “the household of God.” The reality of the diversity of its members is implicit in both images. But the gist of the concepts of “body” and “household” is that, in Christ, worldly distinctions fade away and unity and true partnership remain. In his mission, Paul set a model for mutual interdependence of the Christian Church—particularly in his raising of a collection for the Jerusalem churches. These biblical precedents challenge us on the verge of the twenty-first century, when global inequalities loom larger than ever, to move toward mutual interdependence, setting a new model for the contemporary world. In the words of David Bosch, “we need new relationships, mutual responsibility, accountability, and interdependence (not independence!)”²³ The recognition of

the body of Christ as the model and catalyst for transformed global relationships has far-reaching practical implications for the churches of both the South and the North.

ISSUES IN INTER-ASIA MISSION AND GLOBAL MISSIONARY MOVEMENTS FROM ASIA

The increasing numbers of missionaries from Asia seem set to continue and this is a positive contribution to the global church from Asian Christianity. However, this changing situation also presents some difficulties and raises some concerns. Patterns of Asian initiated missions can be described under three aspects: missionary activities across national boundaries, cross-cultural missionary work within national boundaries, and missions among migrant workers in hosting nations or mission through migration to other nations. Although most Asian churches are involved in all three aspects of cross-cultural mission, I would like to discuss the three cases with reference to South Korea (mission overseas), India (cross-cultural mission), and Asian migrant churches in the West (“new mission church”).

Fundamentalist Approaches to World Mission from South Korea

The rapid growth of the Christian population and the economic growth of South Korea in the latter part of twentieth century encouraged South Korean churches to send many of their young missionaries all over the world (to an estimated 175 countries). Korean missionaries are known for their great sense of duty, dedication, and personal resourcefulness, which qualities have been informed by “national pride and a deep sense of divine calling and responsibility for the salvation of the world.”²⁴ Koreans also developed a theology of “repaying the debt of the gospel” which Koreans received from foreign missionaries and their sacrifice. It should be noted that over 73% of Korean overseas missionaries are directly involved in evangelistic and spiritual works, which reflects the evangelical and conservative tendencies of the missionaries. According to a recent survey, more training is needed for Korean missionaries on character building and community-life training, and they require in-depth study on local contexts.²⁵ However, even more seriously, there have been calls for Korean missionaries to show “humility, cultural sensibility and genuine willingness to work together across denominations, nationalities and ethnicities,”²⁶ and they have even been accused of practicing “a form of reverse colonialism.”²⁷

This critical assessment of the fundamentalist approach of some Christian groups to mission is well articulated by Sung-Gun Kim who discusses the “Korean Christian Zionism” of some nationalistic and aggressive forms of mission activities as a mixture of “evangelical fundamentalism and ideological religious nationalism.” He regards

the nature of these groups as a combination of pre-millennial eschatological expectations influenced by American missionary movements, “Korean Christian triumphalism” resulting from the rapid growth of the Protestant churches in South Korea, and national pride drawn from economic success and Korea-centrism in the context of post 9/11.²⁸ There have been several recent incidents involving large missionary campaigns in very sensitive areas: the “Jerusalem Jesus March” took place on August 7–11, 2004, and was attended by 2,500 South Korean Christians in the holy city; a group of 927 Korean Christians went to Afghanistan in August 2006 for a “peace march,” although they were deported by the Afghan government; the Korea World Mission Conference, an umbrella organization among Korean congregations in the United States and the Middle East Mission Organization co-organized a “Back to Jerusalem” march in July and August 2007, aiming to visit Jerusalem as well as 440 Arab villages for evangelism (KWMC 2007). These incidents were serious in themselves, but it was the kidnapping in July 2007 of twenty-three Korean short-term missionaries from Saemmul Church that drew the attention of world media. The incident ended tragically with the execution of two members of the team and the freedom of the others involved the payment of a large amount of money by the Korean government. This incident drew much criticism both from within and outside the Korean Protestant churches and demonstrated cultural and religious insensitivity and an aggressive attitude to missions by some Christian groups. Although these groups do not represent the majority of missionaries who are carrying on missions in cross-cultural contexts in an appropriate and sensitive manner, nevertheless, there are still strong fundamentalist approaches to mission among evangelical churches in South Korea, and this is a key issue for Korean churches to deal with as they are increasingly leading missionary movements from Asia.

Conversion and Inculturation in Cross-Cultural Mission in South Asia

In India, missionaries from one part of the country, especially the South, move to other parts—North India and the North East, culturally very different regions from where they hail. Indian cross-cultural missionaries face the difficulties of interacting with various cultures, languages, and religions, but there are two major areas of concern regarding their mission practices and theology: overcoming the problem of conversion (the relationship between Christian community and wider religious community) and promoting the “inculturation” of Christianity (making Christianity acceptable and relevant to South Asian culture and society). The traditional understanding of conversion as manifested in leaving one’s birth community and joining the Christian community leads to serious difficulties in the life of the converts in South Asia, particularly in India, where change of religious community has major implications for relations with the wider Hindu community. Hindu leaders oppose Christian conversion as incompatible with Indian philosophies and social practices, and they have countered it by legislation and by the re-conversion of Christian

converts. In particular in the 1930s, M. K. Gandhi made his strong objection to Christian conversion activities part of his political agenda in his struggle against the British Raj because he feared mass conversions would increase communal disturbances. During and after Independence, the discussion about conversion was focused on the inclusion of the freedom to “propagate religion” as one of the fundamental rights in the Indian Constitution Assembly (1947–49). Hindu objections to Christian missionary activities led to a public inquiry into missionary activities by the government of Madhya Pradesh in 1954. The resulting “Niyogi Report,” completed in 1956, was highly critical of converting activities, particularly the conversion of tribal peoples, and of the activities of foreign missionaries. Subsequently, Hindu objections to conversion were concretized in three main ways: by the introduction of Hindu “personal laws,” which were disadvantageous for caste Hindus who converted to another religion (1955–56); by the limitation of social benefits for converts to Christianity from Scheduled Caste backgrounds (1950s); and by the passing of the “freedom of religion acts” in various states (1960s and 1970s). The evangelistic emphasis on calling for radical conversion and Hindu objections to this missionary activities continue to be a bone of contention and Indian churches struggle to find appropriate ways and means for this problem.²⁹

Since the time of Roberto de Nobili, who mastered Sanskrit and other Indian languages in order to convey the Christian faith by means of Indian philosophy and lived like a *sannyasi* (Hindu holy man) among the Brahmin caste, there have been various attempts at inculturation to make the gospel more acceptable in India. Certain forms of inculturation aim at bridging the gap between Christian doctrines and Hindu philosophy by actively employing Sanskritic religious concepts into Christian thinking. In late nineteenth-century Bengal, Brahmabandhab Upadhyaya advocated the idea of Indian Christians being “Hindu-Catholic” in the sense of being Hindus in culture and Christian in faith, and suggested that the Christian doctrine of the Trinity could be related to the definition of Brahman as Being, Consciousness, and Bliss.³⁰ Also following classical philosophy, in 1964 Raimon Panikkar published his book, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism* in which he argued that Christ is already present in Hinduism as *Ishvara* (the Lord).³¹ The “Rethinking Group” of Madras at the time of Tambaram Missionary Conference in 1938 suggested basing the “Indian Church” on the model of *ashram* and rejecting the Western form of hierarchical and traditional churches.³² There have been numerous significant developments in theological thinking on relating Christianity to Hinduism by various Indian theologians and missionaries and the need for inculturation poses an ongoing challenge for mission in the multi-religious and multicultural contexts of South Asia.³³

“Migrant Churches” or “New Mission Churches” from Asia to the West?

Dana Robert identifies the twenty-first century as one of globalization which meant “multi-directional migration and cross-cultural networking replaced the unidirectional

form of early capitalist volunteerism” and identifies migration especially as a significant challenge in mission.³⁴ Peter Vethanayagamony convincingly argues that migrant churches often maintain their “ethnic identity, conservative spiritual and theological orientations” in their Christian lives in a different environment but some of them also discover their new role of fulfilling the missionary mandate in the hosting nation. He holds this up as a new form of mission from the poor and marginalized and not being “intertwined with imperial power and economic exploitation.” However, especially in the West, he writes, churches are often “confused as well as enriched” by the presence of immigrant churches. He suggests that the churches should accept the changing context with “humility and new form of missionary engagement.”³⁵ Recent ecumenical documents also emphasize the need for Christian hospitality among immigrants in their nations as part and parcel of mission. This is also relevant to Christians in more affluent countries of Asia which also receive large numbers of immigrant workers from other parts of Asia.

In Europe, which is experiencing the rise of these new churches and missionary activities from non-Western countries, there is a concern that adaptation to the new situation should be made by both historic churches and new mission churches. One of the most significant conferences regarding migrant churches was organized by the United Evangelical Mission in Germany, May 16–17, 2000, on the theme of “From Reverse Mission to Common Mission” (*Von der reversen Mission zur gemeinsamen Mission*). The invitation letter to German Christian leaders for the conference states that Christians from Africa and Asia bring their spirituality and this enrichment leads the German churches to a new impetus to missionary commitment. The report highlighted that mutual discovery and dismantling of prejudices was much discussed among the participants. In their letter to African and Asian communities in Germany, the participants committed themselves to learn what it means to follow God’s mission by working together in unity and calling for a “common mission” instead of “reverse mission.”³⁶

Among the papers, Dietrich Werner distinguishes the nature of the “New Mission Churches” (*Neue Missionskirchen*) formed by immigrants from traditional Western missions in the following ways: they are socially marginalized and powerless groups who are experiencing their own dislocation and alienation; they do not come with cultural superiority; and there is no strategic alliance between civilization and evangelization as in the case of European colonial mission. He also asks the German churches to accept the presence of mission churches in the spirit of ecumenism; to explore a “theology of receiving” and “theology of hospitality” within a new understanding of theology of mission; to develop a culture of ecumenical cooperation and resource sharing; and to move from mission to foreign churches to ecumenical equal partnership. He also raised some key areas for developing mission theology in the context of Germany: the need for an appropriate term for the mission churches or immigrant churches; the ecclesiological question of whether to develop ethnic and culturally homogeneous communities or cross-cultural and open communities; the means of being a Christian community in the German context of modernity and enlightenment; and the need to develop a shared mission strategy for historic churches and new mission churches.³⁷

CONCLUSION

The dynamics of Christian missionary movements from Asia are received by global churches with both enthusiasms as a new impetus for the twenty-first century and cautious concern for authentic and lasting partnership between the churches in Asia and the West. Some key concepts have been identified in this chapter for meeting the challenges of this new era. First, global mission should be understood and carried out as a manifestation of being in the global body of Christ, which exhibits the interconnected and interdependent relationships of mutual partners. The suggestion of a moratorium was a radical attempt to address the problem of financial dependency of the churches in the South in mission but sharing of gifts and resources from both the North and the South has prevailed. Second, there is a consensus that there should be common mission rather than reverse mission. The latter might imply the attitudes of moral superiority and triumphalism and employment of aggressive approaches to mission by some fundamentalist mission groups. In particular, the situation of global migration calls for hospitality from Christians of the hosting nations as a part of God's mission. Third, for the shared identity and purpose for authentic mission in a new context of globalization of mission, those who are engaged in mission should acquire a greater sense of humility, cultural sensitivity, and willingness to work together. Churches in Asia have a great opportunity and potential to participate in God's mission in Asia and in different parts of the world, and in order to be faithful witnesses, the Asian churches are called to continue to uphold sincere humility, hospitality, and partnership.

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CHAPTER 10

PENTECOSTALISM AND CHARISMATIC MOVEMENTS IN ASIA

ALLAN HEATON ANDERSON

INTRODUCTION

PENTECOSTALISM was undoubtedly the fastest growing global religion of the twentieth century, having grown in just over a century to possibly 600 million today, who would identify with it in one of its many different forms. Pentecostalism has made an impact upon almost every country on earth. In its simplest sense, the term “charismatic” here refers to ecstatic forms of Christianity defined in terms of special gifts given by the Holy Spirit. Thus, for convenience “Pentecostal” will usually be included in this term in this article, but “Pentecostalism” will refer to both. Most charismatics, especially in Asia, are also generally regarded as being “evangelical” in theology, that is, embracing a literalistic approach to the Bible as the Word of God and believing in a personal, radical conversion, practicing moral chastity or “living a holy life,” and being active in personal evangelism.

The Pentecostal movement began in the early 1900s in several different places as a simple, spontaneous, and emotional form of Christianity, claiming that the “gifts of the Spirit,” as recorded in the New Testament book of Acts, including such phenomena as glossolalia (speaking in tongues), healings, and various “signs and wonders,” were occurring again, and that the church was being restored in an end-time revival that would culminate in the second coming of Christ. After an initial slow start, in the 1950s and 1960s the growth of Pentecostalism began to accelerate and develop into many varieties, differing according to historical, religious, and sociocultural contexts, but recognizable as having “Pentecostal” characteristics.

Since the 1960s, Pentecostalism has expanded rapidly in Asia through “classical” Pentecostal denominations with Western origins and independent Asian churches.

It now pervades every part of Christianity, both Protestant and Catholic, through the “charismatic movement” that began in older churches at that time. In some Asian countries affected by revival movements, like India, Korea, and China, distinct forms of Pentecostalism have existed for a long time (although not always given this label), and these have affected the character of the denominational Pentecostalism and the charismatic movement that came much later.

In recent years, the charismatic experience has become a prominent characteristic of many forms of Christianity worldwide. Scholars write of the “Pentecostalization” of Asian Christianity and of “the rapid spread of the Spirit-oriented forms of Christianity in Asia.”¹ Vibrant independent charismatic churches are found all over South, Southeast, and East Asia, bustling with activity showing their creativity not only in church planting and evangelism but also in a remarkable variety of social improvement projects. According to the *International Bulletin for Missionary Research*, Christianity formed about 9% of the total population of Asia in 2012, some 359 million people.² The *Atlas of Global Christianity* stated that by 2010 Asia had the largest number of “renewalists” (their term for what are termed “charismatics” here) of any continent of the world. Asia, Africa, and Latin America together have some three-quarters of all the charismatics worldwide. There were an estimated 180 million “renewalists” in Asia, compared to 79 million in North America, 156 million in Latin America, 163 million in Africa, and only 32 million in Europe.³ Furthermore, at least one-third of the Asian Christian population is charismatic, a proportion that continues to rise steadily. Much of the growth in Asian Christianity has taken place in particular countries like China, South Korea, South India, the Philippines, and Indonesia, and usually among charismatics. China and India have joined Brazil and the United States with the largest numbers of charismatics of any country in the world.⁴ Because of the movement’s vastness and diversity, this chapter will only be able to give snapshots of the Asian charismatic movement in those places where most information is available.

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW: SOUTH AND SOUTHEAST ASIA

The earliest charismatic revival in Asia was probably the one associated with the Tamil evangelist Arulappan, at Christianpettah in Tamil Nadu, India in 1860–65, when speaking in tongues, prophecy, and other spiritual gifts were manifested, meeting with some resistance from CMS missionaries. In the 1905–7 revival that occurred at Pandita Ramabai’s Mukti Mission in Pune, India, young women baptized by the Spirit saw visions, fell into trances, and spoke in tongues. Significantly, Ramabai understood this revival to be the means by which the Holy Spirit was creating an indigenous form of Indian Christianity. Although not directly bringing about new Pentecostal denominations, the Mukti revival had far-reaching consequences resulting, inter alia, in the

beginnings of Pentecostalism in North India and its spread to Chile in South America through news of the revival reaching Methodist missionaries there.

The independent Ceylon Pentecostal Mission (CPM) was founded in 1921 by Alwin R. De Alwis (ca. 1890–1967) and Ramankutty Paul (1881–1945), an Ezhava from the lowest caste hierarchy of Kerala. Ramankutty Paul returned to India in 1924 to establish the CPM there with headquarters in Madras (Chennai), where the name changed in 1984 to the Pentecostal Mission (PM). The first faith home (a commune where members live together and dispose of all their private possessions) was established in 1933 in Tuticorin, but it soon spread to other parts of India, Sri Lanka, and Malaysia, to which missionaries were sent in the 1930s. The PM is an exclusivist sect where celibacy is encouraged for the increase of spiritual power, and Indian music is used. Most independent Indian Pentecostal denominations have strict rules for members but none as strict as the PM, including dressing only in white traditional dress and opposition to all forms of jewelry, taking medicine, and the ordination of women. Celibacy is enjoined on all full-time workers who live in the faith homes, where compulsory prayer begins at 4 a.m. and strict obedience to the chief pastor, the head of the movement, is enjoined. After Paul's death in 1945, sole leadership passed to De Alwis, who remained chief pastor until 1962, when the son of Ramankutty Paul, Freddy Paul became chief pastor. From the PM came a whole string of secessions, including the Apostolic Christian Assembly, the Apostolic Fellowship Tabernacle of India, and the Maranatha Full Gospel Mission.

K. E. Abraham (1899–1974), formerly a Syrian Orthodox schoolteacher and ardent nationalist, was baptized by immersion in 1916 by K. V. Simon, leader of an Indian Brethren separatist group known as *Viyojithan* ("Separatist"). Abraham joined the Pentecostal movement in 1923 through the ministry of C. Manasseh and influenced the emergence of Indian leaders thereafter. He worked with Robert Cook first in the AG [Assembly of God] and then in the Malankara Pentecostal Church of God, until separating from him in 1930. The reasons for the break with Cook are not clear, but were connected to Abraham's own leadership aspirations and nationalist sympathies. Although there were many Indian Pentecostal preachers, no Indians had been ordained until Pastor Paul of the CPM visited Kerala and ordained them. The two existing Pentecostal denominations were controlled by foreign missionaries, and the break revolved around the issue of funding for church buildings, which the missionaries controlled. Abraham emphasized the autonomy of the local congregation and stated that foreign missionaries were "non-biblical and non-apostolic."

Abraham was fiercely nationalistic and "stood for national leadership, national churches, national missionary organizations and national administration."⁵ After three years with the CPM, Abraham together with other Kerala leaders K. C. Cherian, P. T. Chacko, and P. M. Samuel founded the Indian Pentecostal Church of God (IPC), which planted its first congregations in Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, and Karnataka. In Kerala, Pentecostal leadership has been dominated by people of Syrian Christian background. The IPC had the first of many schisms in 1953, when P. J. Thomas formed the Sharon Fellowship, formally registered in 1975. The IPC, with the Christian Assemblies of India and the Assemblies (Jehovah Shammah), are the largest independent Indian

Pentecostal churches, but there are growing, newer churches like the New Life Church and the Filadelfia Fellowship Church of India.

Pentecostalism is now found all over India. According to the *World Christian Encyclopedia*, over half of India's 62 million Christians in 2000 were charismatic.⁶ Its controversial growth in North India's Hindu heartlands in the latter part of the twentieth century has come about largely as a result of the work of South Indians. Scores of graduates from South Indian Pentecostal theological colleges are sent out annually to plant churches in North India, causing concern for Hindu extremists as conversion rates rise—especially among so-called “Tribals” and Dalits. The Believers' Church, founded by K. P. Johannan in 1993 and now with Episcopal governance, started as a Pentecostal missionary society called Gospel for Asia fifteen years earlier. This organization has expanded rapidly and runs Bible Colleges across India training preachers to plant churches.

In Udaipur, Rajasthan, the Filadelfia Fellowship Church of India (FFCI) runs the Filadelfia Bible College with some 120 students and staff with PhDs in theology from British Universities. FFCI is the largest Pentecostal Church in Rajasthan, founded by Thomas Mathews (1944–2005) of Syrian Christian background in Kerala, who left Kerala in 1963 at the age of 19 to be an independent missionary in Rajasthan, confronting an unfamiliar culture and language. Mathews established an independent congregation in Udaipur called the Rajasthan Pentecostal Church. In 1977 they started a printing press to print Bible studies and devotional books in Hindi, a regular magazine called *Cross & Crown*, and the Native Missionary Movement in 1979. The Filadelfia Bible College started in Songarh, Gujarat, in 1981, moving to Udaipur the following year and into a new, much larger property in 1985, where there is now also a secondary school. An adjacent property was later purchased which since 1998 houses a primary school. All these projects were financed by Indian believers, including those who had migrated to the West. Mathews himself completed a PhD in English literature at Mohanlal Sukhadia University, Udaipur. By 2011 FFCI had an estimated 1,400 congregations in sixteen Indian states and in Bhutan and Nepal, with over 300,000 members, the majority being “Tribals” (especially Bhils). Although Mathews died prematurely, the denomination was well organized and continued to grow. Various community projects including orphanages, schools, medical clinics, and vocational training were established in places where FFCI operated. Pentecostalism is clearly the fastest growing form of Christianity in what will soon be the most populous nation on earth.

SOUTHEAST ASIA

In Southeast Asia, the greatest Pentecostal expansion has occurred in Indonesia and the Philippines, but there are also significant Pentecostal and charismatic minorities in Myanmar, Thailand, Malaysia, and Singapore. The case of Myanmar is extremely interesting, for no Western missionary has been allowed to operate there for almost four

decades, and Pentecostalism has developed independently into an indigenous movement, particularly among the interior tribal minorities, the Karens and the Chins. There was a very different situation in Malaysia, where Western Pentecostal missionaries have operated vigorously and continuously since the 1930s, and Pentecostalism has expanded mainly among the Chinese and Indian minorities—most evangelical Christians in Malaysia are charismatic. There are between 9 and 12 million Pentecostals in Indonesia, a country with a Muslim majority, which makes the “Indonesian Revival” following the overthrow of Sukarno’s government in 1965 unique. Substantial numbers of Javanese, due to political circumstances, became Christians between 1965 and 1971, in what possibly constituted the greatest ever turning of Muslims to Christianity.

In the Philippines, Pentecostals have grown considerably and are regarded as a serious challenge to the majority Catholic Church. David Martin writes that sociologically the Philippines may be likened to Latin America, with a former Catholic colonizing power and rapidly growing Pentecostalism. There are also distinctly indigenous Filipino movements of a Pentecostal character, such as the Santuala movement among the mountain peoples of Luzon. In addition, large new charismatic churches have been established, the largest being the Jesus is Lord Fellowship founded by Eddie Villaneuva in 1978 and the Bread of Life Ministries begun by Butch Conde in 1983.

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW: CHINA AND KOREA

The expansion of Pentecostalism in East Asia is extraordinary. Classical Pentecostal missionaries were active in China and Japan as early as 1907, but these made little impact and there were only about 5 million Christians in China at the time of the exodus of Western missionaries in 1949. Today, China has probably the largest number of charismatics in Asia. From 1908 to 1917 a former English teacher in Hong Kong, Mok Lai Chi (1868–1926) edited the first Pentecostal newspaper outside the Western world. Mok was a deacon in the American Board Mission, superintendent of a Sunday school, and secretary for the local YMCA, where he had done evangelistic work among dock workers. He met and joined Albert and Lillian Garr, American Pentecostal missionaries from Azusa Street in 1907, interpreted for them in the Mission and was baptized in the Spirit. His four-page Chinese broadsheet *Pentecostal Truths* was printed and freely distributed throughout China and overseas, 15,000 copies being printed per issue by 1915. Mok was leader of the Apostolic Faith Mission, the mission associated with the Garrs, later called the Hong Kong Pentecostal Mission. By April 1909, teams of Chinese workers were going out into the surrounding countryside taking copies of *Pentecostal Truths* and tracts with them; by the end of the year, the first two Chinese missionaries were sent out to Hebei province in northern China. The influence of Mok, and his paper, extended far beyond the confines of British Hong Kong.

Mok believed that it was the Chinese who should evangelize China, but they needed teachers to train them in a Bible School, and English teachers to help in the school.

In 1910 Mok's paper explained (in Chinese) the relationship with the missionaries, declaring:

Hong Kong Pentecostal Mission is a Jesus church founded by Chinese themselves, not a branch of any foreign churches planted in my nation. Many genuine New Testament believers from many countries around the world always have correspondence with us. We love each other from our hearts and support each other.⁷

By 1913 this was a totally independent Chinese church experiencing steady growth. Mok was involved in itinerating activities throughout the areas around Hong Kong and was instrumental in founding other congregations in the area, one commencing in 1917 in Sun Yat Sen's birthplace Zhongshan, in which Mok held conventions, and existing today as the Yunfeng Pentecostal Church. After Mok became ill in 1923, leadership of the Mission passed to his long-time co-worker Sung Teng Man, a civil servant and father of the present superintendent S. H. Sung, a businessman who took over after his father's death in 1958. The Mission opened two branch churches near Macau in 1916 and 1924, a branch in Kowloon in 1928, and one in Canton in 1934. Mok died in Hong Kong in 1926, but his Pentecostal Mission still exists today with two "Pentecostal Tabernacles" in Hong Kong and one in Vancouver, Canada. The first Chinese leader of a Pentecostal Church in China and undoubtedly a very influential pioneer in his own right, Mok Lai Chi made an enormous contribution to early Pentecostalism in China.

In pre-Communist times independent charismatic churches were flourishing in China. The True Jesus Church (TJC) was the largest and most successful independent church to arise in early twentieth-century China. Wei Enbo (ca. 1876–1919) was a member of the LMS [London Missionary Society] and a silk trader who was reported healed from tuberculosis after encountering a Pentecostal mission in Beijing in 1916. His contact with foreign missionaries was short-lived, and after a divine revelation he baptized himself by facedown immersion, took the name Wei Baoluo (Paul), and founded the International Assembly of the True Jesus Church (TJC) in 1917 in Beijing. Wei was stridently anti-foreign, preached about impending doom for Western Christendom, and attracted many followers from existing churches.

Zhang Lingsheng (1863–1935), who had received Spirit baptism, through an Apostolic Faith missionary in Shanghai in 1909, succeeded Wei after his death in 1919 from the tuberculosis he had been "healed" from, by which time the church had over a thousand members. It appears that Zhang had met Pentecostal missionaries who had convinced him of Oneness (non-Trinitarian) doctrine; the first foreign Pentecostal missionary in the region, Bernt Berntsen and his influential periodical *Popular Gospel Truths* became Oneness in 1919. Zhang in turn had persuaded Berntsen to keep Saturday as the Sabbath, which he began to propagate from 1916. Zhang was to leave TJC in 1929. The TJC was a radically anti-foreign, exclusivist church that owed much of its early growth to the efforts of its preachers, including the Confucian scholar Gao Daling in Shanxi, and (Barnabas) Zhang Dianju (1882–1961), who travelled the length and breadth of South China on foot, reporting many signs and miracles, establishing churches and baptizing

thousands. After the incident in Shanghai in 1925 when British troops fired on unarmed protestors, their virulent anti-Western message became even more attractive. By 1929, the TJC was found throughout China, Taiwan, Singapore, Malaysia, and Hong Kong, its main attractions being deliverance from demons and opium addiction, and the healing of the sick with holy water.

The TJC had also suffered several secessions, but by 1949 there were over 700 congregations with over 100,000 members in eighteen provinces. But the new government's opposition to religious sects had increased and in 1958 it was banned and was only able to recommence openly in 1980. During the Cultural Revolution, the church in mainland China, forced underground, grew rapidly. There could be at least 3 million TJC members in China today. The international leadership of the church is presently administered from Taiwan (where it is one of the largest churches), but political tension between Taiwan and the mainland means that the church remained isolated and lost influence, especially with the recent rapid growth of house churches.

One of the missionary couples recruited for the Pentecostal cause in China was Leslie and Ava Anglin, Free Baptists who in the period following their Pentecostal conversion established a community called the House of Onesiphorus in Tai'an, Shandong. With workshops, schools, and an orphanage with almost 500 destitute children in 1925, their self-supporting community influenced Chinese Pentecostal communities, in particular the Jesus Family founded by Jing Dianying (1890–1957) at Mazhuang, Shandong. Jing and others established a Christian Savings Society in 1921, a cooperative store, attempting to meet the needs of the socially marginalized, followed by a silk reeling cooperative in 1926. Jing's contact with the Anglins led to his Pentecostal experience there in 1924 and expulsion from the Methodist Episcopal Church. Jing worked briefly for the House of Onesiphorus but in 1927 formed the Jesus Family, which grew with little contact with Western missions. Members renounced the world and their allegiance to natural families, committing themselves totally to the community; private ownership was forbidden; members had to live simply, work hard, and contribute to the community after the pattern of the Early Church. Family homes were established throughout China and by 1949 there were 127 self-supporting communities with over 10,000 members engaged in several different trades and educational courses.

Although the Family first supported the Communist revolution in keeping with its own egalitarian principles, in 1952 Jing was arrested on several charges including imperialism and anti-communism, and the Family was officially dissolved and repressed, Jing himself died of cancer five years later. The movement continued incognito and in 1977, meetings resumed in Mazhuang, the old meeting place was restored by 1984, and a double-floor hostel commenced in 1988. Most Christian groups in central Shandong are of Family background, and their influence remains in other provinces. The Family suffered further repression in 1992, with several key leaders imprisoned and buildings demolished.

In 1929 a remarkable Pentecostal revival occurred in Shandong in the wake of the anti-Christian movement and the chaos created by warlords and revolution at this time. Initiated by a Norwegian independent missionary with Pentecostal leanings, Marie

Monsen, the revival exploded among Lutherans, Baptists, and Presbyterians after the creation of a grassroots Chinese Pentecostal movement called the Independent Chinese Spiritual Gifts Society (SGS). Initiated by the Nanjing Pentecostal Nathan Zhaorui Ma and organized by Presbyterians Yang Rulin and Sun Zhanyao, the SGS set out specifically to promote the practice of gifts of the Spirit, and emotional and ecstatic outbursts, speaking in tongues, “holy laughter,” prophecies, healings, exorcisms, and public confessions were common in their meetings. It spread through the province and as missionaries distanced themselves from it, Presbyterians in particular were affected. It was reported that two-thirds of Presbyterian pastors had joined the movement, but it soon spread to all the Protestant churches in the province. The revival reached other provinces like Henan, Manchuria, and Szechuan and was also influenced by the Jesus Family in Shandong. By 1936 SGS had organized itself into a separate denomination and opened its first church buildings in Qingdao and Jinan. The movement did not flourish during the Japanese occupation and subsequent civil wars, and although it continued to influence Chinese Christianity, many of its members joined the Jesus Family and it was finally dissolved in 1958.

Independent Chinese churches were characterized by both Pentecostal tendencies and conservative theology, characteristics that remain at the heart of Chinese Protestantism—especially, but not exclusively, those many groups that refused to join the government-recognized Three-Self Patriotic Movement. It has been estimated that half a million Chinese Christians lost their lives in the persecution that took place between 1950 and 1978, half of them during the Cultural Revolution that began in 1966. Many of these would have been members of the churches described here. All foreign missionaries left; and the result was that during these three decades Christianity became an underground Chinese religion with an apocalyptic emphasis. Many of the characteristics of the revivalist movements in pre-Communist China continued in the movements that emerged after 1980.

China is experiencing an unprecedented rise in Christian conversions dubbed “Christianity fever” since the end of the Cultural Revolution and Deng Xiaoping’s rise to power in 1978, and the subsequent relaxation of severe religious restrictions. The Chinese Protestant population was less than a million when Mao Zedong came to power in 1949—today 80 million is a credible estimate. The remarkable growth of Christianity in China is in no small part due to the efforts of the pioneers who established a vibrant Chinese Christianity that was not dependent on Western missionaries or organizations for sustenance. If recent reports are accurate, the majority of these Chinese Christians have charismatic inclinations. The house church movements are widely diverse, but are characterized by being, both revivalists and fundamentalist. Although, Western terminology is difficult to use after many decades of isolation and operating in secrecy, many, if not most of these churches exhibit charismatic features and have been influenced by Pentecostalism.

The growth of Pentecostalism in South Korea has been dramatic and well documented, not only in terms of charismatic churches but also in the “Pentecostalization” of Korean Protestantism, by which, most Protestants are affected by a charismatic

emphasis. Korean Protestantism has had a history of revivalism, the most notable being the Wonsan revival of 1903 and the “Korean Pentecost” that commenced at Pyongyang in 1907. Preachers whose ministries were accompanied by miracles and healings (especially Presbyterian pastors Kil Sun Ju and Kim Ik Du and Methodist minister Lee Yong Do continued the revival until the 1930s. This was clearly a “charismatic” movement, and classical Pentecostalism only arrived in Korea in 1928 through an American missionary from Japan.

Progress was at first slow, but the most remarkable growth took place under the ministry of David Yonggi Cho and his mother-in-law Jashil Choi, who began a small tent church in a slum area of Seoul in 1958 with five members. This grew until by 1982 when classical Pentecostals became the third largest Protestant group in South Korea with over half a million members, half of whom were in Cho’s single congregation. The relationship between “indigenous Pentecostalism” and the revival movements in “mainline” Korean Protestantism demonstrates that the categories and paradigms used to discuss Pentecostalism in the West are inappropriate in Asia.

CATHOLIC CHARISMATIC MOVEMENTS

Although there were reports of charismatic gifts within Catholicism throughout its long history and particularly in the lives of its saints, the momentous changes instituted by the Second Vatican Council in 1962–65 caused a new emphasis on the Spirit. There, Pope John XXIII had prayed that the Council might be a “new Pentecost” for the Church, and the Catholic Charismatic Renewal (CCR) sees itself as the fulfilment of that prayer. In 1967 the Catholic Church entered the charismatic renewal for the first time in its modern history. Catholic charismatics worldwide, but especially in countries like the Philippines, India, Brazil, and many parts of Africa are now well over 100 million, and there are at least as many Catholic charismatics in the world today as there are classical Pentecostals. Encouragement from successive popes since has fostered steady growth and formal organization within the Church.

The CCR is especially strong in India (perhaps 5 million) and in the Philippines (at least 11 million). The CCR in India commenced in 1972 when two priests who had returned to India from the United States as charismatic began prayer groups that spread from Mumbai to other parts of India. India has a National CCR Service in Delhi that publishes a monthly magazine *Charisindia*. The Divine Retreat Centre in Muringoor, Kerala, is one of the best-known centers of the CCR in India, founded in 1987 by Father Matthew Naikomparambil. Since 1990 weeklong healing and evangelism meetings draw between ten to twenty thousand people every week. Its claim to be the largest Catholic retreat center in the world is plausible, and the Centre is now headed by Father Augustine Vallooran with a team of priests.

In the Philippines, the Catholic charismatic movement of El Shaddai commenced in 1981 as a radio program and is led by layman Mariano (“Mike”) Velarde (b.1939), called

the Servant Leader and popularly known as “Brother Mike.” It is the largest of all national CCR movements with at least 9 million members. This indigenous Filipino movement is characterized by large weekly, emotional Sunday services with half a million in attendance, and there is an emphasis on healing and prosperity with rituals invoking the power of God to inhabit inanimate objects like handkerchiefs, checkbooks, and even tea leaves. The movement opened a 10,000 hectare complex in Metro Manila in 2009, inaugurated by then President Gloria Arroyo, and accommodating 35,000 worshippers with an overflow crowd of 200,000. This entrepreneurial movement that sits uneasily within Catholicism has considerable political and economic power. Its unorthodox ways—for Velarde’s style and oratory can hardly be distinguished from those of American prosperity preachers—have brought tension between it and the Catholic hierarchy in the Philippines and Velarde has been severely criticized by prominent Catholic leaders. But like similar movements in Latin America, Velarde has helped stem the tide of conversions from Catholicism to Pentecostal churches in his country. His emphasis on social and political conservatism, yet promoting a prosperity gospel, seeks to marry religion and economic resourcefulness. One estimate put the number of Filipino charismatics at 20 million, or 26% of the total population in 2000, the highest proportion anywhere in Asia, the majority being Catholic charismatics.⁸

ASIAN CHARACTERISTICS AND CONTEXTUALIZATION

One of the questions that is seldom addressed in the study of Pentecostalism is the way in which it encounters ancient Asian cultures, as in the case of Korea, and tribal cultures, such as in the Philippines, India, and Myanmar. The question of how Korean Pentecostalism interacts with traditional shamanism and Confucianism is a fascinating, if controversial one. Perhaps one explanation that can be ventured is that Pentecostalism is a culturally indigenous form of Korean Christianity interacting with and confronting these older religions and philosophies. Korea also has the phenomenon of mass urbanization, and the charismatic churches have provided places of spiritual security and personal communities for people unsettled by rapid social change. Although these factors might account for the remarkable growth of charismatic movements in Korea, Harvey Cox has suggested two more underlying factors: “For any religion to grow in today’s world it must possess two capabilities: it must be able to include and transform at least certain elements of pre-existing religions which still retain a strong grip on the cultural subconscious” and “it must also equip people to live in rapidly changing societies.” He says that these two “key ingredients” are found in Korean Pentecostalism.⁹

One wonders how many of the new generation of Asian charismatic scholars will begin to move away from the North American theological paradigms thrust on their forebears by a Western mission education and engage in an Asian charismatic theology

that takes both the transformation of ancient Asian religions and their inclusion seriously. The charismatic tendency to demonize ancient religions is not helpful and creates unnecessary conflict. The many and various forms of Asian Pentecostalism certainly represent a truly remarkable expression of Christianity that will be viable for a long time to come. The voices of these new Asian scholars are an important contribution to understanding Pentecostalism in Asia; they open new vistas in research and orientation, and set parameters for the future study of Christianity in the world's largest and most diverse continent.

There are gaps in knowledge. I have only scratched the surface of the vastness of Chinese Christianity where Western categories mean little. There are meaningful expressions of Christianity in Taiwan, Thailand, Vietnam, Nepal, and the former Soviet countries of Central Asia, about which little is known. The questions surrounding the existence and role of a conservative and rather exclusivist form of Christianity in a religiously pluralistic society have hardly been touched on, such as its appearance in a Buddhist context like Thailand. The diachronic and synchronic relationships between the earlier revival movements and the present-day charismatic Christianity are still unclear, as is the question of origins. Charismatics in Asia have yet to come to grips with the particular role the "freedom in the Spirit" has given them to formulate, often unconsciously, a theology that has meaning for people in different life situations. Charismatic theology is not usually written, academic theology, but is found in the preaching, rituals, and practices of churches that have contextualized Christianity in such a way as to make it really meaningful to ordinary people. This is "enacted theology" or "theology in practice."

One of the main reasons for the phenomenal growth of Pentecostalism in the past century has been its remarkable ability to adapt itself to different cultural contexts and give authentically contextualized expressions to Christianity. Pentecostalism is inherently adaptable: the vibrancy, enthusiasm, spontaneity, and spirituality for which charismatics are so well known and their willingness to address the problems of sickness, poverty, unemployment, loneliness, evil spirits, and sorcery has directly contributed to this growth. Pentecostalism has taken on a distinctive form in Asia, very different from that found in the West. Observers who have tried to emphasize the "American" nature of Pentecostalism throughout the world or the "Americanization" of Christianity in Korea and elsewhere often miss this important fact. Creative innovations and the selective transformation of "foreign" symbols are constantly occurring, and naturally, a synthesizing process takes place as new forms of Christianity interact with older religions.

For example, the prayer mountain movement in Korea is well known. Mountains and hills as places of spiritual retreat and pilgrimage have been a characteristic of Korean religions for centuries. Beliefs in the mountain as the place to which God descends, are not only part of Korean tradition but are also ideas fully at home in the Old Testament. Buddhist temples are usually built on mountainsides, and most Korean cemeteries are found on hills outside the residential areas. Traditionally, the many mountains of Korea were believed to be places where good spirits lived, and both shamans and ordinary pilgrims would receive power from the particular spirit on each mountain. At the risk of

oversimplification, the prayer mountain movement may be said to be a culturally relevant form of Christian practice that reflects the ancient spirituality of Korean people. There are now many hundreds of Christian prayer mountains, mostly charismatic, all over South Korea.

Charismatics in Asia proclaim a pragmatic gospel and seek to address practical needs. In varying degrees, charismatics in their many and varied forms, and precisely because of their inherent flexibility, attain a contextual character which enables them to offer answers to some of Asia's fundamental questions. A sympathetic approach to national life, struggles, and culture and the retention of certain ancient religious practices are undoubtedly major reasons for their attraction, especially for those numbed by the effects of urbanization. At the same time, Asian charismatics confront old views by declaring what they are convinced is a more powerful protection against shamanism and a more effective healing from sickness than the ancient rituals had offered. Healing, guidance, protection from evil, and success and prosperity are some of the practical benefits offered to faithful members of charismatic churches. The undeniable contribution made by Asian charismatics to alter the face of worldwide Christianity has enormous repercussions.

NOTES

1. Harvey Cox, *Fire from Heaven: The Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality and the Reshaping of Religion in the Twenty-first Century* (London: Cassell, 1996), 214.
2. Todd M. Johnson, David B. Barrett, and Peter F. Crossing, "Christianity 2012: The 200th Anniversary of American Foreign Missions," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 36, no. 1 (2012): 28–29.
3. Todd M. Johnson and Kenneth R. Ross, eds., *Atlas of Global Christianity 1910–2010* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 103.
4. David B. Barrett, George T. Kurian, and Todd M. Johnson, *World Christian Encyclopedia*, 2nd ed., Vol. 1 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 860.
5. Sara Abraham, "Indian Pentecostal Church of God and its Indigenous Nature," in Roger E. Hedlund, ed., *Christianity is Indian: The Emergence of an Indigenous Community* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2000), 457.
6. Barrett et al., *World Christian Encyclopedia*, 360.
7. *Pentecostal Truths* 3:10, 1, trans. Connie Ho Yan Au, 1910.
8. Barrett et al., *World Christian Encyclopedia*, 594.
9. Cox, *Fire from Heaven*, 219.

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CHAPTER 11

FORMS OF ASIAN INDIGENOUS CHRISTIANITIES

PAUL JOSHUA BHAKIARAJ

TWO MILLENNIA OF CHANGE

IF in the first century, the disciples of Jesus Christ were quizzed about the prospects of the new religious movement they were part of, perhaps little would they have imagined that it would, over the following two millennia, develop into a major world religion with adherents around the globe. What began as a small Jewish sect has now over two billion adherents.¹ Neither would these first disciples have had any inkling of the cultural diversity and multiple expressions of faith that it would come to grow as it dug roots into the various contexts it began to reside in. Everywhere it went Christianity influenced and was influenced by its engagement with local host cultures and peoples. In its numerical, geographical, cultural, and political dimensions, to mention just a few, Christianity has been transformed noticeably over the two millennia of its existence.

It is only relatively recently that scholars have gradually come to recognize the significance of these transformations. The diversity of Christianity that is currently seen around the world is being appreciated as something that is indeed tied to its very nature. If in the Christian foundational belief of incarnation God came to dwell among humans, then the same divine expresses itself in particular human categories of language and culture. By extension such a process of indwelling is then applied to all other border crossings that the faith undergoes. If Jewish culture and religion were the human framework that hosted and conveyed divine reality, as expressed in the Old Testament and leading up to and in Jesus, then faith in that God could equally express itself in the frameworks of other languages and cultures that it met as it travelled the world.² Indeed Christianity is at a stage when it is not seen as a monolithic religion whose beliefs and practices are defined conclusively by any one cultural idiom, but rather it is being recognized as many

Christianities. Numerous are the ways in which that principle of incarnation continues to be worked out in the specific contexts of the world.³ This is not to say that contemporary Christianity has little semblance to first-century Christianity, nor that it is devoid of a coherent essence that is true and valid whatever the particular historical or cultural setting be. To be sure, the essence of the faith is as secure and comprehensively understood today across the world in numerous churches and movements, though clearly some movements/churches have been seen to depart from such an understanding, as discussed below. The point is that over the two millennia significant changes have been effected and the Christian faith is expressed in diverse ways around the world. Indeed, “in terms of language and ethnic groups affected, as well as the variety of churches and movements involved, Christianity is [perhaps one of] the most diverse and pluralist religion[s] in the world.”⁴ And if its scriptures are to be taken seriously, as Christianity crosses ever new geographical, linguistic, and cultural frontiers, so will it take on characteristics of its host cultures and peoples.

CLARIFYING NOMENCLATURE

One way in which that incarnational principle is at work may be seen in the many indigenous forms of Christianity that have developed across the world, including Asia.⁵ What is meant by “indigenous Christianity”? According to dictionaries, the term “indigenous” refers to that which naturally exists in a place or country rather than arriving from elsewhere. Strictly speaking, therefore, Christianity can be indigenous only to Palestine. That is where its origins lie; that is where it was born out of its Jewish matrix. Does talk of indigenous Christianity therefore imply strict adherence to the Jewish form of the faith that was practiced by the first disciples? While there were some movements which attempted to incorporate Jewish practices into their spirituality that is not necessarily what is meant by indigenous Christianity here. That the Jewish template does not represent the plumb line for all expressions of Christianity is a philosophy and practice enjoined in the scriptures themselves (for example, see Gal. 2:11 ff.). Does indigenous then refer only to the churches established in ancient times by the apostles and their immediate descendants? Undoubtedly as Christianity moved east, early on in its life, it established its long-standing presence in Asia, much before the propagation of the faith by Southern and Western European agents.⁶ One example may be the many ancient Orthodox churches across the region which, among other things, display a clear identification with the respective contexts of Asia. Clearly these churches can be seen as indigenous, in that they are firmly rooted in the local soil. However, while recognizing their rootedness in the local soil, they are referred to, both by themselves and others, as Orthodox churches.

Clearly then the term “indigenous” requires qualification. In the relatively small number of studies that have been undertaken, a wide range of terms have been used to refer to such churches/movements: “folk religion,” “christopaganism,” “syncretic

cults,” “vernacular Christianity,” “independent churches,” “Indian/Thai/Chinese instituted churches,” “Chinese house churches,” and so on. In this chapter, the expression “Asian Indigenous Christianities” (AICs) is employed. The descriptor “Asian indigenous” seems to provide the needed qualification. It points to those churches/movements that originate in Asia and possess a peculiar Asian character and shape. The term “Christianity” implies that such an Asian character and sensibility is put in service to the God of the Bible. Whatever the name and shape they take, it is assumed that AICs represent a unique blossoming of the seed of the gospel that was sown in Asian soil now bearing Asian flowers and fruits. While standing alongside the three major sections of the Church, Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant, where clearly a fecund and influential process of indigenization/inculturation/contextualization is evident, these AICs are identified as locally born, locally grown, and hence referred to here as indigenous approaches of devotion and service to the God of the Bible. Attended to here are movements/churches that are distinct from and independent of the three mainline sections. That AICs represent a distinctive approach to Christianity is being recognized and their significance is appreciated more widely. It is being recognized that this is a subject that requires greater attention and ongoing critical study.⁷

STUDYING INDIGENOUS CHRISTIANITIES

The question, how one may study these movements/churches, then arises. Three reasons seem to stand out as to why the study of AICs will need to adopt a methodology suitable to its subject: (1) their distinctive approach to spirituality; (2) their sociopolitical context; and (3) their engagement with their host cultures. First, in contrast to the study of some forms of Christianity where perhaps it is the official doctrine, official church history, hierarchy, and institutional structure that guide their study, here it is the palpable and immediate experience of God, mediated through their emphasis on a variety of spiritual practices that seem to represent its dynamic, and therefore seen as an appropriate, window into the movement. It is this immediacy of spiritual experience that will need to be accorded primacy, just as Harvey Cox realized when studying Pentecostalism.⁸ While AICs do adhere to doctrines and hierarchy does perform its role, sometimes rather authoritatively and prescriptively, nonetheless it is their distinct spirituality that draws and retains its members and hence represents a vital dimension of its life. Second, one will do well to understand that AICs are not born in a sociopolitical vacuum; on the contrary, many of them are creative answers to some weighty questions that the conflation of Western imperialism and Christianity, for example, throws up. Many AICs can be seen as forms of resistance to practices and patterns of Christianity that Westerners brought to Asia. In its place they desired to create an indigenous Christianity, which was as much a sociopolitical statement as it was a spiritual one. Third, it is the diverse religio-cultural contexts that AICs engage with which requires adequate attention. For example, in Korea, it has been observed that behind the success

of Christianity lies its ability to fuse elements of traditional shamanism with faith in Christ.⁹ In India, it has been their ability to allow the Bhakti tradition as an undercurrent for fresh Christological and pneumatological expressions that both appeal to people and dig roots deep into Indian soil.¹⁰ Studies of AICs will therefore need to respect this poly-dimensional character. A suitable way forward may ideally be, particularly if sufficient space and time is available, to adopt a polymethodic approach, proposed by Ninian Smart.¹¹ This polymethodic approach could accord all such dimensions the due weight. However, given the space constraint, such an in-depth polymethodic approach may not be possible here. It is hoped that the brief case studies offered here will provide, as much as possible, insights into aspects of their history and the nature of the phenomena they represent, and will serve to whet one's appetite for deeper polymethodic studies of AICs.

SELECT CASE STUDIES OF ASIAN INDIGENOUS CHRISTIANITIES

Japan—Mukyokai Movement

I first visit Japan where though the penetration of Christianity has been noticeably limited one may find a number of indigenous movements/churches. One important example is the Mukyokai (Nonchurch) movement led by Kanzo Uchimura (1861–1930). This “church” is considered the “fountain head of indigenous Christianity,” both because it is the “most widely known and respected expression of Japanese Christianity” and also because of what it has engendered over the course of time.¹² Following family tradition, Uchimura grew up attending a Samurai class where he was drenched in *bushido*, the way of samurai, and then attended the Sapporo Agricultural School. Here he became a follower of Christ and was baptized in 1878.¹³ This was followed by a formative period when he led a small assembly of Christians while simultaneously working for the government. A growing recognition of the inappropriateness of Western Christianity for Japan was further corroborated during this period with some not-so-pleasant exchanges with Anglican and Methodist church leaders. Further, personal disappointment because of a failed marriage urged Uchimura to get away for a while. He traveled to the United States and studied at Amherst College. Although he later enrolled at Hartford Seminary, he did not remain there very long, as he was rather disillusioned by his teachers, the theology they taught, and the deep divisions among denominations. However, his encounter with the Quaker and Puritan movements influenced him, so much so that some consider the latter as the father and the former the mother of the Mukyokai movement.

After his return and employment as a teacher, Uchimura launched the Mukyokai, which did not adhere to traditional Western forms of institutional Christianity but rather sought to create an indigenous expression of devotion to Christ, adopting a *juku* or school model. Here “church” members, who paid fees for lectures and subscriptions

for publications, would spend all of Sunday being tutored in the Bible by the leaders, who were neither ordained nor held any office, as the priesthood of all believers was stressed. Charismatic leaders who felt called voluntarily took this movement around Japan, where its followers included educated and highly placed Japanese. The Mukyokai held on to the doctrine of salvation by faith in Christ but did not adopt the sacraments, as this seemed to detract from the emphasis on faith. To this, pacifism and stress on the doctrine of the second coming of Christ were added. As Uchimura's publishing in the *Christian Intelligencer* and preaching around Japan urged, the spirituality of Mukyokai was really an attempt to create a Japanese version of the "true ecclesia," an ecclesia whose vitality did not reside in its institutions but in the deep devotion and spirituality of its followers of Christ. Uchimura felt that the Protestant Reformation was really an "arrested movement" which ought to be taken to its logical goal by the Mukyokai. "We need another Reformation . . . without a trace of ecclesiasticism in it—a fellowship, not an institution—free communion of souls, not a system or an organisation. Practically it will be a churchless Christianity, calling no man bishop or pastor, save Jesus Christ, the Son of God."¹⁴ This Japanese "non-church" expression of Christianity, that respected Japanese traditions including Bushido and Buddhism, and sought to complement them, came to be seen, negatively as a Japanese answer to the Western political structure of Christianity and its hierarchy, and positively as a Japanese spiritual response to Jesus Christ's person and message. Uchimura longed and worked for a time when "Christianity will be presented . . . not as a foreign religion by foreign missionaries, but as a Japanese religion by Japanese messengers."¹⁵ The Mukyokai was therefore an effort to build Christianity on Japanese foundations and to be spread by Japanese agents.

Korea—The Legacy of the Prayer Mountain

In Korea, one readily recognizes the significant spread of Christianity over the last century. The beginnings of Christianity in Korea goes back to an indirect contact with it at the time of a Japanese invasion under the leadership of General Knishi Yukinaga, who happened to be Christian and had a good contingent of Christians in his army. The Jesuit priest Gregorio de Cespedes accompanied the invading army as a chaplain. Although mission was not directed to the general Korean population, however, many prisoners of war taken to Japan were baptized. Direct contact with Christianity came about with the scholars accompanying the Korean legation to Beijing, where they encountered Jesuit missionaries from whom they got books presenting Christianity. On their return, these scholars went into a deeper study of Christianity and some of the scholars got baptized, and preached the Gospel to others, giving birth to a Christian community in Korea. There was persecution of Christians in the subsequent Korean history. However, since 1907, a Christian revival has swept the region.¹⁶ Indeed, besides its internal dynamic, patterns set in place then (like in-depth Bible study, ardent prayer with repentance, and expressive worship) continue to play a determinative role in contemporary Korean Christian spirituality.¹⁷ Perhaps one group among

whom such practices are evident today are the Pentecostal churches that abound in the nation. One example of this legacy is the prayer mountain. Officially called the *Osanri Choi-Jashil Prayer and Fasting Mountain*, it is furnished with numerous *kidowon* or cubicles dedicated entirely to prayer and fasting by individuals. The 1907 revival is also seen as a catalyst for the indigenous nature of what one observes today. Indeed part of the appeal of Christianity in general and Pentecostalism in particular is its ability to give a fresh and meaningful expression to aspects of the Korean beliefs, spirit, and condition. The strength of Pentecostalism in Korea is its ability to integrate belief in *Hananim* (one supreme God), *sintoburi* (integrity between life and practice), the role of religious specialists, *han* or suffering of the Minjung people, and last but not least nationalism.¹⁸ Indeed, “Korean society today has been of assistance rather than an obstacle to Christian evangelism by providing the preconditions for a special type of Christianity to prosper. The perennial revival meetings held in the cities and on the mountains, where the secluded “prayer halls” (*kidowon*) are located, remind [one] of the shamanic performance practiced only in a massive and refined way.”¹⁹ The spirituality that Rev. Yonggi Cho (b.1936), senior Pastor of the 750,000 member church in Seoul, propounds through his “Five-fold Gospel” and “Three-fold Blessing” is a case in point.²⁰ Recognizing that his people had been through a tremendous amount of suffering meted out by foreign oppressors coupled with the disillusionment that local resources offered little at testing times such as this, Rev. Cho preached and practiced a “full-gospel” that attended to body, mind, and spirit. He insightfully diagnosed that hope was in short supply and through his gospel preaching sought to provide it to his people. In so doing he effectively assumed the role of a spiritual leader, a shaman, and led his people forward. If the warm reception of this spirituality is anything to go by, he has been successful in creating an identity that is firmly rooted in the gospel of Jesus Christ yet issuing in a distinctly Korean blossom.

China—The True Jesus Church

The next port of call is China. Although some hold that St. Thomas traveled from India to China in the first century A.D., historically Christianity was first introduced in A.D. 635 when Nestorian Christians from Persia came to build monasteries and churches with the support of the Emperor of the Tang Dynasty,²¹ as the inscriptions of the stele of Xian testify. Since then, Christianity has experienced varying fortunes, sometimes favorable and sometimes less so. More recently, of course, China’s formal embrace of communism in 1949 seemed to arrest Christianity’s growth. Or so it was thought. While communism has clearly shaped this nation, it is becoming clear that Christianity is not a spent force. Rather the rapid growth and development, despite strict regulatory practices of the state, suggest that Christianity plays an increasingly significant role.²² Besides the Protestant Three-Self Patriot Movement and the Catholic Patriotic Association, churches officially recognized by the state, Chinese indigenous and house churches are a significant feature of this religious topography.

One major example is the True Jesus Church. The True Jesus Church began in 1917 in Beijing under the leadership of Wei Baoluo (1877–1919; who was previously known as Wei Enbo).²³ Christened as the “Restored True Jesus Church of All Nations,” Wei felt that he was called to set right the deviations the church was subjected to around the world. Barnabas Zhang and Zhang Lingsheng soon joined Wei in this endeavor and succeeded him in 1919, when he died. Influenced by the anti-foreign sentiment current then, the True Jesus Church clearly set out to be a Chinese church, even though strands of Pentecostalism are evident. A set of unique beliefs and practices were instituted that sought to reclaim the “true” church of Jesus and ensured it remained a distinct and indigenous movement enjoying appeal among the Chinese. These include: the role of the Holy Spirit in the Christian’s life with the necessary manifestations of speaking in tongues and the practice of healing; emphasis on Jesus as the only Savior, though they did not believe in the Trinity; water baptism that signifies repentance and forgiveness of sins that is to be administered face down in running water; foot washing ceremony signifying the importance of community; holy communion; and strict observance of the Sabbath on Saturday, and not Sunday. About ten years into their life, they had spread out to Hong Kong, Taiwan, Malaysia, and Singapore, and by 1949 there were over 700 churches with over 100,000 members. In 1949, when they were banned, they took to underground. With the less stringent political atmosphere they came out into the open in the 1980s and due to their church reform they have been growing since, even spreading across the world.

Philippines—Stirrings of Ecclesiastical Independency

I now travel to the Philippines, the only country in Asia where the majority population is Christian and, for the most part, belongs to the Roman Catholic tradition. It is within this tradition that ironically the first stirrings of ecclesiastical independency are found. Clearly motivated by the struggle for Philippine independence, a movement of church independence grew among the clergy during the late years of the nineteenth century. Among other things, the excesses of foreign priests and the failure to raise a cadre of Filipino priests were gnawing away the fortunes of the church. Despite repeated entreaties to the pope, little changed. As foreign clergy began leaving the Philippines, Father Gregorio Aglipay (1860–1940) assumed leadership and organized his Filipino colleagues, supported by President Aguinaldo’s Revolutionary Government, which offered an umbrella, outside the official hierarchy, for Filipino clergy. As the political revolution gradually disintegrated, this indigenous ecclesiastical effort also began to crumble. However, in 1903, with backing from the Democratic Labour Union led by the journalist Isabelo de los Reyes and a church council that was formed, Father Aglipay was consecrated as Bishop and in so doing independence from Rome was declared. The *Iglesia Filipina Independiente* (IFI) was thus launched as a Filipino Church, with a large number of clergy and laity migrating en masse into it. In 1906, after a court ruled that its property was to be handed back to Rome, many returned with their parishes and property to the Roman Catholic Church. The IFI turned to the American Unitarians for help,

but infighting and war conspired to keep the movement bogged down. When Aglipay died in 1940, its fortunes looked bleak until it merged with the American Episcopalians, after they adopted orthodox beliefs. Today the church, commonly called the Philippine Independent Church, is one of the largest denominations in the nation.²⁴

Iglesia ni Cristo is another Filipino church that deserves mention, not only because of its large numbers but also because its branches are to be found in many countries. The movement began in 1914 under the leadership of Felix Manalo (1886–1963), who hailed from a Roman Catholic background yet was exposed to a number of Protestant denominations. It must be noted that during his formative age, the Philippines had just come out of Spanish rule and was then governed by America. That these two phases of colonial rule undoubtedly had their effect on Filipino society, culture, and religion is evident in Manalo's resolve, after spending three days praying alone in a closet. He emerged with a desire to begin a new church based on scripture, and led, not by a foreigner, but by a Filipino. Manalo strongly felt that it was to be a Filipino church and provide a mechanism to express a distinct Filipino spirituality. Indeed the Iglesia ni Cristo is thought to be the only true church, in contrast to the apostate churches around the world, and Felix Manalo is viewed as God's "angel from the East," who is mentioned in Isaiah 41 and in Revelation 7. The first chapel was built in 1915 and in four years its membership grew to 1,500. Conservative estimates suggest that currently there may be about 2 million members. They teach that the Bible is their authority and only Felix Manalo and his appointees can teach from it. They hold to an older Unitarian belief and stress that in order to be saved from sin one is required to become a member. Baptism is given only to adults. At their churches, identifiable by their distinct architecture, women and men use separate entrances and likewise sit separately. The teaching of the Bible by authorized ministers is emphasized at meetings held twice a week. Missing these services is considered a sin. Outreach is actively practiced, which is assisted by their monthly magazine *Pasugo*. They are active politically and vote only for the candidates prescribed by the leaders.²⁵ Clearly a popular movement, the Iglesia ni Cristo's origins and subsequent growth appear to be a unique expression of a religiosity shaped by Christianity and molded by historical processes and local contexts.

Indigenous Churches—Cases from India

I finally move to India where a colorful variety of indigenous Christian movements/churches are found. An early example is the National Church advocated by Lal Behari Dey (1824–1892). His close association with the Free Church of Scotland alerted him to its unsuitability for India, both in terms of engendering Indian Christian spirituality and in terms of its treatment of Indian workers. Political and spiritual concerns therefore coalesced into his vision of a National Church. In this he sought to merge Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox together and establish a united Indian voice in matters Christian. Although he was not successful, his efforts led in turn to the launching of the "The Calcutta Christo Samaj" in 1877 by Kali Charan Banerji and J. G. Shome. This was conceived as a parallel movement to the Hindu reform movement flagship institution,

the Brahmo Samaj. It was envisioned as a united church that would gather all Christians in its fold, where use of the Apostolic Creed and free worship would be encouraged along with adult baptism and the celebration of Communion. Due to various factors, including political and even pressure from leaders of some mission churches, the Christo Samaj was finally dissolved in 1894.²⁶

Another example is the Bible Mission of Bro M. Devadas (1875–1960), begun in 1938.²⁷ Devadas, who had been brought up in a Lutheran home and worked as an evangelist and teacher in the church, was closely aware of Western patterns of devotion to Christ and its rigid institutional structure; yet he rebelled against them. After he claimed that he received a vision from God, Devadas launched out to build an Indian church for Indian people to worship in Indian ways engaging with Indian realities and led by Indian leaders. In such a church, the role of the Holy Spirit in the lives of the believers, as they go about their daily lives, giving them power to overcome the designs of the evil spirits, was to be central. The Bible was given importance as was the preaching of the leaders, who lived by faith. They led the people in holy and victorious living as they looked forward earnestly to the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. The oral tradition that the members came from facilitated the discovery of song as a means for devotion and instruction. Devadas scripted a large number of songs that drew on the old *bhakti* tradition of South India to express loving devotion to Jesus Christ. His was doubtless a devotion to Christ but employing a *bhakti* idiom. It thus ensured deep roots in the populace. Since his death, the Bible Mission has grown into a large movement, as evidenced in a newspaper report: “Major events organised by Congress and Telugu Desam Party [two national political parties] at Bible Mission grounds opposite Acharya Nagarjuna University along National Highway No. 5 will be dwarfed going by the arrangements being made for the Bible Mission Annual Conventions from Tuesday. More than seven hundred thousand people are expected to attend the three-day annual event.”²⁸

LOOKING BACKWARD, LOOKING FORWARD

In the whistle stop tour, the variety of AICs observed has been both fascinating and instructive. They are fascinating because of their multilayered and complex characteristics. AICs clearly deserve to be observed patiently and studied critically. They are instructive because they warn against treating Asian Christianity as a Western import possessing few roots in the soil of Asia. Many AICs are clearly expressions of an indigenous impulse that grows from Asian soil and brings forth Asian fruits and flowers. This all too brief chapter I trust will have displayed the vitality of AICs and highlighted their deep engagement with the history, religions, and cultures of their contexts. Since these AICs often exist outside mainline Christian networks and associations, which are in most studies the representative samples of Asian Christianity, they are not visible and hence confined to silence. Yet no one can doubt that here are significant Asian blossoms that invite a closer look.

NOTES

1. For more details, see David Barrett et al., eds., *World Christian Encyclopaedia: A Comparative Survey of Churches and Religions in the Modern World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).
2. This point is expressed well in Andrew Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of the Faith* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996), and Lamin Sanneh, *Whose Religion is Christianity? The Gospel beyond the West* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003).
3. For example, see Peter C. Phan, ed., *Christianities in Asia* (Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011).
4. Lamin Sanneh, *Disciples of All Nations: Pillars of World Christianity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. xx.
5. See, e.g., Steven Kaplan, ed., *Indigenous Responses to Western Christianity* (New York: New York University Press, 1995).
6. See the discussion in T. V. Philip, *East of the Euphrates: Early Christianity in Asia* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1998).
7. See Sanneh, *Disciples of All Nations*, p. xxii.
8. This emphasis is akin to Harvey Cox's observation about the Pentecostal stress on experience alongside doctrine in his *Fire from Heaven: The Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality and the Reshaping of Religion in the 21st Century* (London: Cassell, 1996), 71.
9. See David Chung, *Syncretism: The Religious Context of Christian Beginnings in Korea* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001).
10. See Solomon P. Raj, *A Christian Folk-Religion in India: A Study of the Small Church Movement in Andhra Pradesh, with Special Reference to the Bible Mission of Devadas* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1986).
11. Ninian Smart, *The Science of Religion and the Sociology of Knowledge* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973).
12. Mark R. Mullins, *Christianity Made in Japan: A Study of Indigenous Movements* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1998), 54–55.
13. For more details of his life, see Hiroshi Miura, *The Life and Thought of Kanzo Uchimura 1861–1930* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 15 ff.
14. *Complete Works of Uchimura Kanzo* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1981–84), 31:132, quoted in Mullins, *Christianity Made in Japan*, 59.
15. *Complete Works of Uchimura Kanzo* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1925–26), 29:521, quoted in Mullins, *Christianity Made in Japan*, 66.
16. For a detailed analysis, see Young-Hoon Lee, *The Holy Spirit Movement in Korea: Its Historical & Theological Development* (Oxford: Regnum, 2009).
17. *Ibid.*, 33. Also see Lee Young-Hoon, "The Korean Holy Spirit Movement in Relation to Pentecostalism," in Allan Anderson and Edmond Tang, eds., *Asian & Pentecostal: The Charismatic Face of Christianity in Asia* (Oxford: Regnum, 2005), 509–26.
18. See Jeong Chong Hee, "The Korean Charismatic Movement as Indigenous Pentecostalism," in Anderson and Tang, eds., *Asian & Pentecostal*, 551–71.
19. David Chung, *Syncretism: The Religious Context of Christian Beginnings in Korea* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), 178.
20. David Yonggi Cho, *The Holy Spirit, My Senior Partner* (Altamonte Springs, FL: Creation House, 1989).

21. On the history of Christianity in China, see Phan, *Christianities in Asia*, ch. 8; a more detailed treatment can be found in Samuel H. Moffett, *A History of Christianity in Asia*, vol. 1, *Beginnings to 1500* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1998), ch. 15.
22. In Barrett et al., *World Christian Encyclopedia*, estimates of the Christian population are pegged at around 90 million. More conservative estimates peg it at around 45–50 million. If current trends continue this is going to climb up and by 2020, for example, Christians could amount to a significant and influential number. For a more popular description and analysis of contemporary Christianity in China, see David Aikman, *Jesus in Beijing: How Christianity is Transforming China and Changing the Global Balance of Power* (Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing, 2003).
23. See the discussion in Deng Zhaoming, “Indigenous Chinese Pentecostal Denominations,” in Anderson and Tang, eds., *Asian & Pentecostal*, ch. 19, 437–66. Also see Daniel Bays, “The Growth of Independent Christianity in China, 1900–1937,” in Daniel H. Bays, ed., *Christianity in China: From the Eighteenth Century to the Present* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996), ch. 17, 306–16.
24. See Francis H. Wise, *The History of the Philippine Independent Church* (Quezon City: University of Philippines, 1965).
25. For more details, see Leonard A. Tuggy, *Iglesia ni Cristo: A Study in Independent Church Dynamics* (Quezon City: Conservative Baptist Publishing, 1976).
26. For more details, see Kaj Baago, *Pioneers of Indigenous Christianity* (Madras: CLS, 1962).
27. A detailed study may be found in Raj, *A Christian Folk-Religion in India*.
28. *The Hindu*, Sunday, January 25, 2009. “One Lakh” is the Indian term for one hundred thousand.

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CHAPTER 12

GENDER, SEXUALITY, AND CHRISTIAN FEMINIST MOVEMENTS IN ASIA

SHARON A. BONG

THE publication of *Compassionate and Free: An Asian Women's Theology* by Marianne Katoppo from Indonesia in 1980¹ is a historical landmark that arguably charts the beginning of Asian Christian feminist thought. What then has the trajectory of Asian feminist theologies been in the past three decades? In this chapter, I show, in the first section, the ways in which Asian feminist theologies have impacted on theology and its methodology, anthropology, Christology, pneumatology, and spirituality in Asia. In the second section, I review Christian feminist movements which inform and nourish different Asian feminist theological approaches. These movements could be clustered in accordance with the type of feminist response they typify: “inclusion/addition” approach followed by organizations such as the Women’s Desk of the Federation of Asia Bishops’ Conferences (FABC), the Regional Women’s Committee of the World Student Christian Federation Asia-Pacific Region (WSCF AP), and the Women’s Commission of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT); the “deconstruct and transform” approach exemplified in the work of Asian Women’s Resource Centre on Culture and Theology (AWRC) and Ecclesia of Women in Asia (EWA); and finally, the “critique, reject and start again” or the “go back to the drawing board” approach with regard to queer theologizing from Asia.²

ASIAN FEMINIST THEOLOGIES

Theology

Asian feminist theologies are a theology that is embodied. It starts theology from the lived experiences of those located at the margins, whose bodies are marked by differences that matter—sex, ethnicity, religion, class, and sexuality. A theology that is embodied arises

from the varying degrees of women's agency in encountering systemic gender-based violence in local/global contexts; it is articulated through cries, pleas, and invocations that are written on the body and spirit of Asian women. Asian feminist theologizing finds expression in an Asian feminist spirituality,³ "theology of the womb,"⁴ Dalit women's theology,⁵ and in Minjung theology.⁶ All these foreground praxis. Elizabeth Tapia of the Philippines, for example, redefines theology as "God-praxis"; it is "not only a theoretical exercise. It is a commitment and participation in people's struggle for full humanity, and discernment of God's redemptive action in history. It is theology-in-action."⁷ Minjung theology seeks to alleviate *han* (anguish in the face of oppression) of the Korean people, Dalit theology embraces the abject bodies of Indian society, and the "theology of the womb" reclaims the vulnerable yet resilient sacredness of a woman's body that is defiled but yet resists, broken yet heals, and has suffered yet rejoices. Chung Hyun Kyung's "democratized theology"⁸ is an insistence on a theology that accords epistemic privilege to the politically, economically, socially, culturally, and spiritually marginalized.

Methodology

Asian feminist responses to the above formulation of indigenous theologies manifest themselves in revaluations of the scriptures. Informed by Fiorenza's "hermeneutics of suspicion," Kwok Pui-Lan advocates a departure from both a "Eurocentric positivist approach" and a "historical-critical method of interpretation."⁹ This new departure would stretch the limits of objectivity (as value-free or apolitical), the logic of deduction and orthodoxy to a personalized exegesis that is predicated on lived realities of men and women. She calls for the demystification of the "politics of biblical authority" and promotes the "dialogical imagination of the community of women and men who read the Bible [and who should] appropriate it for their own liberation."¹⁰ Asian feminist theologies, as such, involve a reclaiming of rich Asian cultural and religious heritage. To this end, Asian feminist theologians engage in identifying for theological enquiry resources such as storytelling, drama or plays, songs, art, socio-biography, poetry, and mask dances.¹¹ In this connection I could speak of a "multifaith hermeneutics"¹² that affirms religious pluralism. Such a hermeneutics helps, for example, to resuscitate the mystical pragmatism of Korean Shamanism;¹³ the veneration of Guanyin (Kwanyin), Goddess of mercy as Holy Spirit;¹⁴ Goddess Ina, as mother-God appropriated for the worship of Virgin Mary in the Philippines; and the holistic, ecologically centered indigenous spirituality and orientalized pneumatology in the practice of Zen.¹⁵ Such "multifaith hermeneutics" foregrounds the negotiations of Asian feminist theologians in dialogue with other world religions and spiritualities.

Theological Anthropology

Asian feminist theological reflections on the human condition stretch the limits of Christianity as an eschatological faith. As Mary John Mananzan of the Philippines observes, "to conscientize is truly a serious business because the price of awareness is

anguish.”¹⁶ The “awareness of anguish” is not confined to one’s private crisis but acutely stimulated through our compassion and interconnectedness with all those who suffer and struggle. In accordance with God’s divine will in conferring a hermeneutical privilege to the biblical poor, Asian feminist theologians manifest a preferential option for the disenfranchised, particularly, disenfranchised women and girl-child, in order to deconstruct the “systemic sin”¹⁷ of gender-based violence, political and religious fundamentalism, societal stratification, and inequitable distribution of global resources. Solidarity with the oppressed and oppressed women, in particular, serves as a prerequisite for the authentication of Asian feminist theologies.

Christology

The redemptive figure of Jesus Christ as human and God is central to Asian feminist theologizing. A “Christological transformation” is evinced through the use of “religio-political symbols” to encapsulate unique images of Christ in accordance with the experiences of Asian peoples, leading to an Asian, not merely Asianized Christ.¹⁸ Jesus is thus legitimized as a co-sufferer and liberator of Asian people. “Jesus as Shaman,”¹⁹ for example, highly resonates with the indigenous spirituality of Koreans where the majority of shamans are women invested with political and spiritual powers.²⁰ For Korean Minjung women, Christ Jesus in vanquishing sin and death through his redemptive suffering on the cross becomes particularized as a “[Korean] priest of *han*.”²¹

Asian feminist theologians have an affinity with a Savior they continue to embrace as creator, comforter, and healer. Katoppo, for example, resuscitates the divine female which is signified by the womb (“*rechamim*” which translated means God’s mercy with allusions to gestations), and that is the basis of her “theology of the womb.”²² For Gabriele Dietrich of India, women’s menstruation is analogous to Christ’s life-giving blood, shed on the cross. That not only consecrates the discharge of blood but also redeems women from being viewed and treated as defiled and polluting agents.²³ This is a courageous perspective, given the prevalent sexuality taboos in Asia. The celebration of women’s sacrificial blood as intimately connected with Christ’s blood becomes sacralized as “a holy Eucharist through which the renewal of life becomes possible.”²⁴

Pneumatology

Asian feminist theologians have also reclaimed the Holy Spirit. Chung Hyun Kyung’s image of the Holy Spirit is derived not only from her Western training as a systematic theologian but also from “[her] gut feeling, deep in [her] people’s collective unconsciousness that comes from thousands of years of spirituality.”²⁵ Both her invocation to the Holy Spirits and concomitant sermon presented during the 7th Assembly of

the World Council of Churches, Canberra, 1991, were considered provocative and as an unorthodox display of syncretism. Her affirmation of and affiliation to indigenous spirituality was witnessed through her dramatic prelude (a dance with Australian indigenous peoples), her inclusive assemblage of spirits encompassing “Han-ridden spirits,” “ancestors spirits” which she divines as “icons of the Holy Spirit,” and most contentiously through her reclamation of Guanyin (Kwanyin), goddess of compassion and wisdom of the East, as the foundational essence of the Holy Spirit.²⁶

The feminization of the Holy Spirit is evident in Katoppo’s “theology of the womb” premised on “[her] life-giving breath (*ruach*)” and “*rechamim*,” literally, “movements of the womb (*rechem*).”²⁷ C. S. Song draws from Katoppo’s “theology of the womb” in conceptualizing a “theology of commitment,” a “theology of liberation,” and “theology of hope.” For as he notes, the “theology of the womb enables us to appreciate blood relationship and kinship as pivots of the inner structure of the human community [where the] womb is the infrastructure of the community created and redeemed by God.”²⁸

Spirituality

An Asian spirituality of, for, and by Asian people is, as Aloysius Pieris articulates, “not only an orientation toward a God . . . but also toward a cosmic involvement, manifesting the popular spirituality of the poor with whom Jesus identified himself.”²⁹ It is fundamentally a spirituality that necessitates the politics of difference and identity. This is a spirituality that is vibrant and transformative—one that is “concrete and total,” “creative and flexible,” “prophetic and historical,” “community oriented,” “pro-life,” “ecumenical, all embracing,” and “cosmic, creation-centered.”³⁰ It embraces indigenous spiritualities and is critical of dominant structures of oppression in its apocalyptic vision of equity, solidarity, and peace. This spirituality is therefore, as Yong Ting Jin of Malaysia reflects, committed to actualizing “a new lifestyle,” “a new exercise of power,” “a new theological reflection,” a “new faith community,” “a new pattern of relationship,” and essentially “new ways of being church.”³¹

Doing theology with an Asian feminist spirituality is tantamount to “doing theology with a third eye” as expressed by C. S. Song. According to him, a theology bereft of “a third-dimensional insight . . . is a flat theology . . . coloured strongly by western thought, forms and lifestyles.”³² Much of Asia today still experiences some form of colonialism, for instance, internal colonialism (in the form of military regimes of governance, socioeconomic inequities, political and religious fundamentalism, sectarianism, ethnocentrism, discrimination based on sex, gender, and sexuality) and neo-colonialism (political, economic, social-cultural, religious schisms exacerbated since 9/11). Asian feminist theologizing, informed by Asian spirituality, provides a site of theological inquiry into the question of praxis. In fact, Asian feminist theologies prophetically herald “new ways of being church” and approximate true partnership in bridging sexed, gendered, ethnic, political, religious, or ideological and sexual divides to realize God’s eschatological promise to beget a heaven on earth for all as all are created in God’s image.

CHRISTIAN FEMINIST MOVEMENTS

Asian Christian feminist movements, following Beasley's "feminist responses to misogyny,"³³ can be grouped into three according to their responses to the divergent encounters with ecclesiastical, clerical, theological, and doctrinal sexism in Christian thought and practice.

Inclusion/Addition Approach

This first response involves the view that a gendered analysis has been omitted from "malestream" theologizing. Hence, feminists seek to reclaim women's voices and experiences that have hitherto been silenced or where self-representation has been lacking. This is done, for example, by organizations such as the Women's Desk of the Federation of Asia Bishops' Conferences (FABC), the Regional Women's Committee of the World Student Christian Federation Asia-Pacific Region (WSCF-AP), the Women's Commission of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT), and the Asian Church Women's Conference (ACWC), established since 1958. The contribution of these feminist theologians, who operate from within the center rather than the margins, is inestimable. The ACWC's first Young Women's Forum held in October 15, 2010, in Bogor, Indonesia, was titled, "Breaking Silence: Young Women's Unspoken Experiences in Asian Churches and Society." Within the WSCF-AP, "gender justice" is part of the mission statement of the Regional Women's Committee. Women Doing Theology Workshop of the WSCF-AP was held in November 13–19, 2007, Seoul, South Korea, with the theme, "Women and Sexuality: Transcending Boundaries and Embracing Inclusiveness." It aimed to "break the culture of silence and taboos on sexuality, particularly female sexuality at home, society and religious institutions/church" through a feminist reading of Judges 19 (a Levite's concubine, who was offered to men, was violated then dismembered into 12 parts). Extra-textual hermeneutics at the workshop included exposure programs to camps for sex workers and House of Sharing (Comfort Women). The Women's Commission of EATWOT offers feminist theologizing on biblical, pastoral, anthropological, ethical, and ministerial concerns.³⁴

The common identifier among these organizations, ACWC excepting, is the adjunct status of a Women's Desk or Women's Committee or Women's Commission. This may risk ghettoizing women's issues as peripheral to mainstream theologizing. The mainstreaming of gender issues (as impacting men and women) in Christian theology in Asia remains an arduous task. Significant contributions were made by feminists who inhabit these largely masculinized spaces and this includes Asian feminist theologians who are part of regional and global entities such as the Association of Theological Education in Southeast Asia (ATESEA) and Catholic Theological Ethics in the World Church. The

point, however, is that in these initiatives, “most of traditional thought [is left] relatively intact.”³⁵ On the one hand, the FABC Office of the Laity and Family now recognizes the “use of feminist critique and inclusive language” and women’s rights language. It reviews the status of the women’s movement in the church in Asia, and recognizes and affirms the contribution of women in the life and mission of the church. It also helps the church in Asia to uphold the dignity of women and open greater opportunities for their presence and action in the church.³⁶ On the other hand, it seems to hold the position of the complementarity of the sexes and is closed to dialogue when it comes to women’s ordination.

Deconstruct and Transform Approach

A second type of response involves the view that “it would be impossible to develop a theoretical framework completely uncontaminated by past perspectives or by the history of male domination.”³⁷ Feminist responses, therefore, seek to critically interrogate these “past perspectives” in order to deconstruct them, to engender transformative changes, and explore new ways of becoming church and doing theologies. The work and publications of the Asian Women’s Resource Centre on Culture and Theology (AWRC), Christian Conference of Asia and Ecclesia of Women in Asia (EWA), exemplify this kind of response. In building “communities of peace,” Hope S. Antone in her message from the Women’s Forum I, held on March 26–31, 2005, in Chiang Mai, Thailand, laments that “the contributions of Asian women in doing theology are still not taken seriously. Our method is not only contextual and transformative; it is also integral and inclusive. . . . We, women, are called by our faith to condemn patriarchy and empire. In this light, we commit ourselves to *collectively transgress* the boundaries of structures set by patriarchy and the hegemonic control in church and society.” The CCA has also initiated an internship program for indigenous and Dalit women in Asia. And Women’s Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme for Vision and Empowerment (WEAVE) in East Timor is designed to empower church women with skills of peace building in conflict-ridden societies. In this second kind of response, the structural sin of systemic violence and disempowerment of women are addressed. Instances of this could be seen in feminist theologizing published in the *CTC Bulletin* (bulletin of the program area on faith mission and unity, theological concerns) of CCA.

The AWRC has set an example in advancing feminist theology and praxis. It has done this through feminist theology workshops organized from 2004 to 2009 on key concerns such as feminist leadership embodied in an “Asian feminist *ekklesia*,” re-visioning power, Christology in a multi-religious and multicultural setting, critical feminist biblical interpretation, and celebrating women’s sexuality. The AWRC came into existence in 1988 in Hong Kong and is now based in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. *In God’s Image* (IGI) is a feminist theological journal that exhibits extra-textual hermeneutics through the lens of art, drama, and poetry, and the contributions in this journal are invaluable resources (see the section on further reading).

The Ecclesia of Women in Asia (EWA), conceived and instituted in 2002, is an academic forum of Catholic women theologizing in Asia. This body of lay and religious women is committed to “the formation of inclusive and just ecclesial communities and societies by doing theology from Asian women’s perspectives and by the recognition of Asian Catholic women as equal partners in the life of the Church.”³⁸ Its feminist ethos is embedded in its objectives: EWA “encourages and assists Catholic women in Asia to engage in research, reflection and writing from a feminist perspective towards doing theology that is inculturated and contextualized in Asian realities; builds on the spiritual experience and praxis of the socially excluded; promotes mutuality and the integrity of creation; and dialogues with other disciplines, Christian denominations and religions/faiths.”

The theologizing of EWA is both evolutionary and revolutionary. The papers presented at the first, second, third, and fourth biennial conferences of EWA have been published, and they are: *Ecclesia of Women in Asia: Gathering the Voices of the Silenced* (Monteiro and Gutzler 2005), *Body and Sexuality* (Brazal and Lizares Si 2007), *Re-imagining Marriage and Family in Asia* (Bong and Joseph 2008), and *Feminist Theology of Liberation Asian Perspectives: Practicing Peace* (Gallares and Lobo-Gajiwala 2011).³⁹ EWA and its publications not only make visible Asian Catholic women’s theology but also Asian feminist theology. These publications offer counter-discourses to the rhetoric and practice of the Catholic Church in reinstating women’s lived experiences, women’s bodies and sexualities in relation to self, others, the environment, and God. EWA eschews the binary of Western colonizer/Asian colonized by recognizing and drawing from the rich reserves of not only an “Asian” heritage of philosophy and thought but also “Western” ones by deploying feminist-postmodernist theoretical concepts.

Critique, Reject, and Start Again Approach

This third response involves the view that “traditional political theory [or theology] is [so] utterly bankrupt in the light of present [feminist] perspectives” that it is irredeemable to “‘fix’ traditional thought”; hence the need to “go back to the drawing board” approach.⁴⁰ This response is the most radical as it dismantles not only the binary of sex/gender but also what Butler in *Gender Trouble* terms as the “heterosexual matrix” or ordering of sex/gender/desire, where,

The heterosexualisation of desire requires and institutes the production of discrete and asymmetrical oppositions between ‘feminine’ and ‘masculine’, where these are understood as expressive attributes of ‘male’ and ‘female’. The cultural matrix through which gender identity has become intelligible requires that certain kinds of ‘identities’ cannot ‘exist’—that is, those in which gender does not follow from sex and those in which the practice of desire do not ‘follow’ from either sex or gender.⁴¹

Cultural intelligibility within the production of the “heterosexual matrix” means that if one is born female, it follows that she ought to be gendered feminine and desirous of the opposite sex, and if one is born male, it follows that he ought to be gendered masculine and desirous of the opposite sex. Butler, through deconstructing not only gender but more problematically sex (as inherently gendered), enables a further destabilizing of identity where sex/gender/desire need no longer be asymmetrically aligned. This leads to her seminal thought of “gender performativity,” the proliferation of sex-gender-desire matrices as embodied in female masculinities desirous of women, male femininities desirous of men, and essentially queer bodies and sexualities of gay, lesbian, bisexual, intersex, and transgender (GLBTIQ) persons. Queer theologizing from disparate Asian/feminist theologians exemplifies this response.

Noble (New Zealand), formerly with WSCF-AP, theologizes from the doubly vulnerable yet empowered standpoint of “queer indigenous.” He notes that “queer” is “now used as an inclusive and empowered term claimed by gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered people.” He has also redefined the “indigenous.” Where the term previously “meant being a victim of colonial oppressor” he now uses it, “to illustrate the juncture of who we are and the space to explore, critique, and celebrate who we are.”⁴² Applying Linda Tuhiwai Smith’s “decolonising methodologies,” he asks “how do we reconcile our queer identity with our Christian faith?” Yuri Horie, a lesbian minister of the United Church in Christ of Japan (UCC-Japan/Kyodan) and representative of the Ecumenical Community of Queer Activism (ECQA), advocates that “lesbian/gay Christians in Japan have the right to act against heterosexism (the discrimination of those who do not comply with heterosexualised desires).”⁴³ She does so by redefining “power” as not only homophobic exclusionary power directed towards GLBTIQ persons but also the “power of [GLBTIQ] to act against homophobia, i.e. empowerment.” She highlights ecumenical safe spaces for GLBTIQ persons in Japan such as the Ecumenical Community for Queer Activism in Kyoto (since 1994) and the Tokyo-based “Kirisuto no Kaze” (Christ’s Wind) gathering (since 1995). The *In God’s Image* (2010) of AWRC is titled, “Beyond Right and Wrong: Doing Queer Theology in Hong Kong.” This issue (volume 29, number 3) features queer theologizing with contributions from Yip Lai-Shan’s “A Proposal for Catholic Lesbian Feminist Theology,” Davy Wong Mei-fung’s “Just and Right Intimate Relationships from a Queer Theological Perspective,” Josephine Leung’s “A Feminist cum Queer Reading of Liturgy,” and Rose Wu’s “Reconciliation for Hong Kong’s Christian Community.”

In conclusion, queer/feminist theologizing that makes visible the systemic sin of homophobia and exclusionary practices holds churches accountable in righting these wrongs not only of homophobia but also sexism and ethnocentrism as these are often corollary institutionalized oppressions. Where much of Asian feminist theologizing is heterosexualized, given the due emphasis on gender-based violence experienced by women in Asia, queer theologizing in the twenty-first century is a clarion call for the Church to reinstate the inherent dignity and sacredness of all human persons, created in the image of God, regardless of their sexualities. In doing so, Asian churches can then claim Christianity as an Asian heritage in continuing God’s salvific plan for humankind.

NOTES

1. Marianne Katoppo, *Compassionate and Free: An Asian Women's Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1980).
2. Chris Beasley, *What is Feminism Anyway?* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1999), 5.
3. Mary John Mananzan, ed., *Woman and Religion: A Collection of Essays, Personal Histories and Contextualised Liturgies*, rev. ed. (Manila: Institute of Women's Studies, St. Scholastica College, 1992).
4. See Katoppo, *Compassionate and Free*.
5. Monica Jyotsna Melanchthon, "Dalit Women and the Bible: Hermeneutical and Methodological Reflections," in Kwok Pui-Lan, ed., *Hope Abundant: Third World and Indigenous Women's Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2010), 103–22.
6. Chung Hyun Kyung, *Struggle to be the Sun Again: Introducing Asian Women's Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1990).
7. *Ibid.*, 100.
8. *Ibid.*
9. Pui-Lan Kwok, "Racism and Ethnocentrism in Feminist Biblical Interpretation," in Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, ed., *Searching the Scriptures: A Feminist Introduction*, Vol. 1 (London: SCM Press, 1993), 103.
10. *Ibid.*, 102–3.
11. See Chung, *Struggle to be the Sun Again*, 104.
12. See Kwok, "Racism and Ethnocentrism in Feminist Biblical Interpretation," 110.
13. Lee Oo-Chung, "The Traditional Religion of Korea," in *Faith Renewed: A Report on the First Asian Women's Consultation on Interfaith Dialogue, November 1–8, 1989, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia* (Hong Kong: AWRC, 1989), 35–37.
14. Chung Hyun Kyung, "Come Holy Spirit—Renew the Whole Creation," in Michael Kinnamon, ed., *Signs of the Spirit: World Council of Churches Official Report Seventh General Assembly, February 7–29, 1991, Canberra, Australia* (Geneva: WCC publication, 1991), 46.
15. See Mananzan, *Woman and Religion*, 70–71.
16. *Ibid.*, 66.
17. Aruna Gnanadason, "Women's Oppression: A Sinful Situation," in Virginia Fabella and Mercy Amba Oduyoye, eds., *With Passion and Compassion: Third World Women Doing Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1994), 69–76.
18. See Chung, *Struggle to be the Sun Again*, 62.
19. *Ibid.*, 64.
20. See Lee, "The Traditional Religion of Korea," 36.
21. See Fabella and Oduyoye, *With Passion and Compassion*, 112.
22. See Katoppo, *Compassionate and Free*, 66, 82.
23. Gabriele Dietrich's position is summarized in Chung, *Struggle to be the Sun Again*, 66–69.
24. *Ibid.*, 71.
25. Chung, "Come Holy Spirit," 46.
26. *Ibid.*, 38–39, 46.
27. Marianne Katoppo, "The Concept of God and the Spirit from the Feminist Perspective," in Ursula King, ed., *Feminist Theology from the Third World: A Reader* (London: SPCK/Orbis, 1994), 40.
28. See Katoppo, *Compassionate and Free*, 140.

29. Aloysius Pieris, "Two Encounters in My Theological Journey," in R. S. Sugirtharajah, ed., *Frontiers in Asian Christian Theology: Emerging Trends* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1994), 141–46.
30. See Chung, *Struggle to be the Sun Again*, 92–96.
31. Yong Ting Jin, "New Ways of Being Church," in Fabella and Oduyoye, eds., *With Passion and Compassion*, 101, 104–7.
32. C. S. Song, *Third-Eye Theology: Theology in Formation in Asian Settings* (Guildford, UK: Lutterworth Press, 1990), 10–13.
33. See Beasley, *What is Feminism Anyway?* 5.
34. A. Murniati and M. Perera, eds., *Drink from Our Own Sources: Creative Ripples* (Maggoa, Sri Lanka: St Vincent's Press, 2005).
35. See Beasley, *What is Feminism Anyway?* 5.
36. From FABC, "The Bishop: Harbinger of Hope—Bishops, Women, Gospel and Communion," May 12–16, 2008, <http://www.fabc.org/offices/olaity/docs/Final%20Statement%202008.pdf>.
37. See Beasley, *What is Feminism Anyway?* 5.
38. See EWA website, <http://ecclesiaofwomen.ning.com>.
39. See Evelyn Monteiro and Antoinette Gutzler, eds., *Ecclesia of Women in Asia: Gathering the Voices of the Silenced* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2005); Agnes M. Brazal and Andrea Lizares Si, eds., *Body and Sexuality: Theological-Pastoral Perspectives of Women in Asia* (Manila: Ateneo De Manila University Press, 2007); Sharon A. Bong and Pushpa Joseph, eds., *Re-Imagining Marriage and Family in Asia: Asian Christian Women's Perspectives* (Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia: SIRD, 2008); and Judette A. Gallares and Astrid Lobo-Gajiwala, eds., *Feminist Theology of Liberation Asian Perspectives: Practicing Peace* (Quezon City, Philippines: Claretian Publications, 2011).
40. See Beasley, *What is Feminism Anyway?* 5.
41. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 23.
42. Paddy Noble, "Queer Indigenous Perspective of Violence and Healing," *CTC Bulletin* 25, no. 3 (December 2009): 73–80.
43. Yuri Horie, "Power in Relation to the Structure of Heterosexism," *CTC Bulletin* 20, no. 3 (December 2004). Available at: <http://cca.org.hk/home/ctc/ctc04-12/ctc04-12n.htm>

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PART III

ASIAN
CHRISTIANITIES
AND THE
SOCIAL-CULTURAL
PROCESSES

INTRODUCTION

WONG WAI CHING ANGELA

IN his *The Protestant Ethics and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Max Weber has most forcefully argued that religion, rather than dependent on economy or culture, is an independent variable in the social process. Religion, in this case primarily Christianity, is not merely a result of the social system but an essential factor contributing to the organization of social structures and the formation of social life. Since the European Enlightenment's rejection of religion as a heteronomy imposed on human conscience, Weber's position is like what Anthony Giddens would call reflexive modernity, trying to complete the cycle of separation and return to acknowledging the fact of religion.

In Asia, religion has never been cut off from societies as that of the modernity project in the West. Until today religion occupies an important position in the respective societies in both urban and rural areas and in the culture as a collective and the individual as a deep psychical state. The scene of religion and society has been much complicated, however, by the violent entrance of Christianity into the region during the colonial years from the sixteenth to twentieth century. Even if Christianity in Asia has a history that can be traced back to the precolonial era, it has never been taken seriously in Asian countries until the colonial invasion when it came with canon and gunboat. This last specific "channel of entry" constituted the fundamental problematic of Asian Christianity and has woven into the region some unique complexities and contradictions in its social and cultural processes. In effect, the inconspicuous tinge of imperialism and the inevitable image of "foreignness" of Christianity have contributed to the most rigorous struggle of Asian Christians in coming to terms with their peripheral identities between East and West, modernity and tradition, and monotheistic exclusivity and pantheistic multiplicity. In short, Asian Christianities have been an essential part of the social and cultural processes of Asia in every aspect of its societies including decolonization, the emergence of the nation-state, nationalism, modernization, democratization, education, the development of the civil societies, and the formation of political subjects and cultural identities. Despite its problematic entry from the sixteenth century, Christianity has not only become an essential fabric of Asia's religious tapestry but also a not insignificant factor shaping the emergence of Asia's contemporary social, economic, and political landscape.

As outlined in each of the following chapters, Christianity in Asia has manifested much continuity with and points of departure from Western Christianity since particularly the nineteenth century. In Jun-Li's chapter on "Christianity and Education in Asia," he introduces how Christianity saw its continuity in Asia in terms of the missionaries' introduction of modern values to the Philippines, Japan, and China through the churches and Western education, as well as scientific knowledge and technologies through industrialization and urbanization. In Julius Bautista's chapter on "Caveats to Christianization: Colonialism, Nationalism, and Christian Identities in Southeast Asia," he points to the process in which the creation of the new nations and trade ports in Southeast Asia resulted in both a degree of rationalization of governance and a large extent of disintegration of precolonial communities, ethnic minorities, and varied indigenous traditions of culture. At the same time, in Ahmad Fauzi Abdul Hamid's account of the "Sociopolitical Developments in West Asia and Their Impact on Christian Minorities in the Region" where Muslims are the majority, Christianity departs from its form and organization in the West as it continuously responds to issues arising from the regional and national contexts and rises to the struggle among manifold, and sometimes, contradictory, identities of Christians living in a largely non-Christian world. Similarly, Wong Wai Ching Angela highlights in her "Modernity and Change of Values: Asian Christian Negotiation and Resistance" one of the other most ambiguous aspects of modernity via Western Christianity in the value of human rights and democracy. Together with Felix Wilfred's chapter on "Christian Social Engagement in Asia," their two chapters review how, on the one hand, the minority churches in Asian countries have often been trapped by the rule of the new nations and sided with the establishment against genuine development of democracy, and how, on the other, Christian belief in God's creation of humanity with dignity and respect has often been the driving force behind social action in ecumenical organizations such as FABC and CCA to precipitate the advancement of democracy. Both Po Ho Huang in his "Christianity and Political Democratization: The Case of East Asia" and Gemma Tulud Cruz in her "Christianity and the Cause of Asian Women" follow up on the same ambiguous achievement in Christianity. While Huang argues that Christianity in East Asia and Singapore came as a mixed import of both curse and blessing of which converts have to fight off the self-imposed power of superiority of its imperialistic association and to lift up its vision of love and justice in the process of nation-building, Cruz traces the struggle of women through the double patriarchies of Christianity and Asian cultures to keep in touch with the core liberation messages of Jesus Christ and the various indigenous traditions of Asia.

The encounter with Christianity in Asia has also been the site of cross-cultural exchanges and the defining point of contact for people in migration. In the early period, European and American missionaries relocated themselves to Asia for the initiation of various kinds of ministries and social commitments, and in reverse, native Christians sought opportunities to study abroad for their different missionary and vocational calls. More recently, missionary exchanges and people's migration take place increasingly between Asian countries. Migrants relocated in one or the other Asian cities constitute transient communities alongside with the older settlers

and further complicate the population of the Asian cosmopolitan centers. The result is not only the drastic changes that occurred between the sending and receiving churches that are now both Asian but also increasingly globalized effects circulating among the home and the Diaspora Christian communities within and without Asia. The recent convergence of Christians across countries and regions has produced hybrid communities of all sorts ranging from conservative evangelicalism to new age spirituality. Rudolf Heredia's chapter "Religious Disarmament: Rethinking Religious Conversion in Asia" warns us of the increasing intolerance to the resulting plurality and calls for an active engagement in interreligious as well as intrareligious living. While Christian insistence on the monotheistic exclusivity has frequently provoked anguish and hostility from their non-Christian neighbors in countries such as Indonesia and Pakistan, Jude Lal Fernando's "The Role of Christianity in Peace and Conflict in Asia" reminds us of the need and the efforts in the ecumenical faith community to continuously strive to risk themselves to serve as the instrument of peace at places of severe conflict such as Myanmar and Sri Lanka. Asian Christianities are therefore windows to the many possibilities of living the faith in a contemporary world with ever-changing social and cultural meanings.

In the end, the central question for Asian Christianities in the formation of the social and cultural processes of the region is the quest for the Asian resistant subject. Not only must Christianity become fully immersed in Asian societies as an integral part but also it must fulfill the long-standing aspiration of Asian Christians to become useful to the advancement of equality and justice in the new nations. The identity of an Asian Christian is therefore not about the historical and geographical location of a Christian but rather the subjective consciousness and commitment to a cultural and theological stance that takes the context and the predicament of people in Asia as their primary ground of faith practices. Asian Christianities are expected to be as much an invaluable factor in the region's social and cultural processes as an agent of change.

CHAPTER 13

MODERNITY AND CHANGE OF VALUES

Asian Christian Negotiations and Resistance

WONG WAI CHING ANGELA

MODERNITY is both a designation for the period after the sixteenth century and also for the ethos of a whole new era, departing from the days of the Middle Ages leading to the twentieth century. In the West, it is usually characterized by the thought of the great philosophers such as René Descartes (1596–1650), Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778), and Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), who privileged the notion of the autonomous human subject and defended the humans as moral agency. Built on the confidence of human reason, a whole set of epistemological positions was developed around the universal character of knowledge and truth. The result was a projection of a grand narrative of progress and civilization advancing to the final revelation of the universal Truth. Analyzed from socioeconomic perspectives such as those of Karl Marx (1818–1883) and Max Weber (1864–1920), modernity has best manifested itself in the institutions of industrialization and capitalism, state and military surveillance, and technology and communication, which together define a radically new form of existence and a whole set of different values of life.

In Asia, modernity was “received” with much ambivalence. It was defined by industrial capitalism as much as colonialism, both of which have shaken the foundation of Asian societies in all respects—politically, socioeconomically, culturally, and even psychologically. Programs of modernization in terms of commerce, science, medicine, education, and religion were “transported” to Asia by the European colonizers and Christian missionaries from the sixteenth century. Railroads and telecommunication began to set in the colonial ports in the nineteenth century, along with the teaching of European values in the missionary compounds and schools in cities of India, Ceylon, Burma, Malaya, and Singapore. Despite some internal tension and resistance from the churches, modernity packaged as Western civilization began to introduce to the colonized territories the

notions of enlightened reason and progress and has given rise to as many opportunities as problems in Asian Christianity and religions today.

INDUSTRIALIZATION IN ASIA

The industrial revolution which started in the eighteenth century began in Asia via the expansion and development of colonial rule. Following the forced opening of the trade ports of Shimoda and Hakodate to American trade in 1854, Japan began to promote technological and industrial development during Meiji Restoration in the 1870s and has risen to Asia's leading economic power since the seventies. China's history of industrial development is arguably different from the rest of Asia with its iron work and steel industry recorded in as early as the third century B.C. From the twelfth to the eighteenth century, China was believed to have enjoyed one of the most prosperous industrial and commercial economies in the world. However, the extensive industrial growth in Europe was made possible by its acquisition of low cost labor (including African slaves) and its accessibility to inexpensive raw materials from the colonies. And with China's resistance of capitalism during the Cold War, rapid industrialization in the modern scale took place only after the 1950s. Similarly, India adopted a restrictive policy toward the growth of the private sector from 1950s to the 1980s. It meant that the economy was run with very few big industrial producers and was dependent largely on domestic consumption, which resulted in monopolistic pricing and a stagnant market. Major industrial growth in India took place only in the 1990s after the government shift to liberalization policy under the pressure of the international market.

Apart from Japan, East Asia emerged as the subregion witnessing the fastest rates of industrialization beginning in the late twentieth century. It benefited mainly from the existence of relatively well-structured societies, strategic locations, heavy American and foreign investments, a low-cost skilled and motivated workforce, a competitive exchange rate, and low custom duties. For example, in the case of South Korea, the largest of the four Asian "tigers," industrialization began with the manufacturing of value added goods in the 1950s and 1960s and quickly moved into the more advanced steel, shipbuilding, and automobile industry in the 1970s and 1980s. Its focus on the high-tech and service industry since the 1990s has made South Korea a major economic power in Asia. This model was subsequently copied by the Southeastern Asian countries such as Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia. Some more recent industrial growth in the countries in Southeast Asia and Indochina is largely attributed to a huge wave of offshoring industrial models. In other words, factories and tertiary sector corporations originating in the Western countries and East Asia redeployed their production activities to countries such as Vietnam and Cambodia where the workforce was less expensive and much less collectively organized.

Industrialization no doubt is the most significant marker of a modern society, given its influence on almost every aspect of life. On the one hand, rapid industrialization and

the sweeping expansion of capitalism changed the foundation of economic logics and therefore the values of the society. The Ford model of industrial production aimed at high productivity and ever increased economic growth took over the traditional family or community based model of production. Production of goods was no longer made for immediate use but for mass consumption in the national and world market; goods are valued for their exchange value rather than utility. Rather than depending on the perfection of personal art and traditional skills in the production process, mass manufacture depends on the application of assembly lines with strict impersonal division of labor, each taking care of the production of only parts and not the whole. In order to assemble the production lines, a large number of laborers were taken from villages to work in the factories and workshops in the cities, and subjected to severe monitoring of time and movement. Work ethics in terms of rules and disciplines in the work place have been developed in the urban centers through the social and cultural processes of individualization, differentiation, and commodification. In short, industrialization changed the whole way of work and life including the needs and desires for goods, the idea of leisure and work, and the radical shift from rural to urban living.

On the other hand, the opening of trade ports in India, Japan, China, and along the Southeast Asian coastlines signified the hegemonic transportation of the modernity project of the West to the East in the name of the “civilization mission.” Along with the European acquisition of the coastal cities in Asia, missionaries were sent to the colonies for the pastoral care of the military, servicemen, and merchants of their respective countries. Taking with them their “white man’s burden” to civilize the “primitive peoples” of Asia, they consciously or unconsciously played the role of mediators of Western modern values. Besides pastoral work, many of them served as the local linguistic expertise, cultural translators, and most of all, as founders and teachers of Christian schools in the colonized territories. The Society of Jesus, for example, played a significant role in the transmission of knowledge, science, and culture to China between the sixteenth and seventeenth century. Matteo Ricci (1552–1610), an outstanding member, was considered one of the emperor’s most valued and trusted advisors, introducing to China Western mathematics, cartography, and other modern technology including the compilation of the first Portuguese–Chinese dictionary, which initiated the transcription of Chinese words into Latin alphabet. As the Christian missionaries expanded their missions to the colonial territories as the “civilized” educators, they dispatched to the native population “modern knowledge” with its deeply embedded Western values. Despite conflicting positions back in their home countries, many missionaries brought with them an ideological challenge in many forms, including the scientific worldviews of the European Enlightenment, humanistic critiques of religion, racial theories of European superiority, and the triumphalistic Gospel teachings of Christianity. The impact of the institutionalization of “modern knowledge” in Christian schools in various Asian countries over the last few centuries has constituted an important part of our understanding of modernity in Asia today.

For the Asian churches, despite their adoption of the Christian faith from the missionaries and their mother churches in America and Europe, they have not received

or rejected the authority and practices of modern values wholesale. Rather, they have adapted and accommodated them in accordance with various contexts and circumstances. Among the many intricate features of modernity, in the following pages, three will be highlighted in our discussion on Asian Christian negotiation and resistance; first, the opportunities and problems of the new nations; second, the social engagement in the reconstruction of the local and rural communities; and third, the negotiation between traditional and modern values.

OPPORTUNITIES AND PROBLEMS OF THE NEW NATIONS

The birth of the nation is a modern problem. The development from local kingdoms, regional aristocratic families, and tribal communities to the model of the nation-state has never been straightforward or complete. Nation-states as understood in the present sense have proliferated only in the West from the eighteenth century. “Nation” refers generally to the political, geographical, and cultural entity with which a people identified. However, such a people has never been unified in terms of culture, language, ethnicity, or history except by a central political mechanism which declared its power of control over the people and resources within a partially consensual and partially imposed territorial border. According to Benedict Anderson, the nation is by nature a community imagined into being, first, through the state’s unceasing efforts to forge a political entity over a diverse population by means of the invention of national emblems and events; and second, through the vast growth and circulation of printing materials in terms of newspapers and books, distributed to the far ends of the “metropolis” and overseas territories. The formulation of the world as “us” (the nationals) and “them” (the colonized or the “aliens”) through the world news and the travel journals during the colonial period was particularly important in the establishment of pride and identity in the peoples of the European nations.¹

In Asia, many of the borders of the present countries were drawn up arbitrarily according to the territory boundaries of former colonial powers: Britain took over most of South Asia, and together with France, divided and ruled over what were formerly occupied by Spain and Portugal in the Southeast Asia in the nineteenth century. Catholicism in the Southeast Asian region was carefully divided into Spanish, French, and Portuguese spheres of interest during the eighteenth century in order to ensure the respective powers of control. Originally, a region of cultural convergence of mixed influences from China, the Indian peninsula, and its Islamic neighbors, was dominated for the first time with the arrival of the European colonizers since the sixteenth century, by a religion and “a culture” which asserted its existence through high-handed political control. By the end of the colonial era, the political and cultural landscape of the region had changed abruptly with imposed political lines slashed through natural groupings of

whole communities: the Khmer population was divided into Cambodia and Vietnam by France, a unified tribal “family” was separated by the new Thai-Laotian border, and Malaysia and Indonesia were carved out by Britain with the Dutch ruling in one place and the British in another.

The modern idea of an independent nation with sovereignty over its people and resources was therefore particularly attractive to the peoples of the colonized world. Despite his own domination of the peoples of Central Asia, Vladimir Lenin’s (1870–1924) thesis on the rights of nations to self-determination, nationalism arose in the colonized territories of Asia as an ideological tool against colonial exploitation. The “new” nation, in this sense, was perceived as a political vision that would unify people’s struggles against foreign domination and aggression and that it would replace the structure of colonial power at the end. In other words, the anti-colonial movement had been the main motor behind the rise of nationalism and the processes for Asian nation-building. It has also been the key instrument for achieving modernity in Asia in terms of the acquisition of political sovereignty, self-determination, and independence, on the one hand, and the people’s desire and pursuit of liberty, equality, and freedom in the new society, on the other. Interestingly, Christianity played a dual role here—first, as partner to colonial governance (which is what happened to the earlier missionaries) and later as bearer of aspiration and hope for an egalitarian society for the newly independent nations.

Independence was earned through harsh confrontations between the colonizers and the colonized peoples in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in Asia. Many Christian leaders took an active role in many of these battles and in the subsequent national programs of reconstruction. For instance, in the Philippines, Catholic priests had been involved in the native revolution against Spanish exploitation of the local population since the nineteenth century. In 1903, Gregorio Labayan Aglipay, a former priest and a national activist left Roman Catholicism to set up the Philippine Independent Church as a national church for the advocacy of people’s rights and interests. In China, Christian leaders such as K. H. Ting and Y. T. Wu called for Christian immersion in the establishment of a self-reliant church and joined the united national front in building a new socialist China. In India, M. M. Thomas, one of the pioneering ecumenical leaders, asserted the crucial role that Asian Christianity must play in the denunciation of imperialistic and triumphalist theology of the Western churches and in urging immersion into the common struggle for the conditions for true human living.² The corresponding call to the Asian churches to unite and become independent from the Western missionary churches gave birth to the Asian ecumenical movement in the formation of the East Asian Christian Conference (now the Christian Conference of Asia, CCA) in 1958 and later, the official constitution of the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences (FABC) in 1972. For FABC, the goal was to collaborate with other Christian churches and communities in Asia for the development of the people’s rights to freedom, justice, and peace. And for the CCA, three major objectives were outlined for the development of Asian Christianity: the consolidation of national unity, the promotion of political democracy, and the planning of economic progress. In other words, these conscious Christians of

Asia have directly taken the project of modernity into their ecumenical agenda. They have done this not simply as nationalists but because of their conviction that political and economic serfdom under imperialism is contrary to Christian principles.

However, there were many problems faced by the newly independent nations from the beginning. The colonial legacy left many formerly occupied territories with contradictory effects. It has created opportunities for the emergence of the urban middle class in the national centers but caused the disintegration of the traditional societies in the surrounding and the peripheral areas. It has privileged the rise of the national elitist groups and caused internal displacements and migration in the general population and the erosion of the ways of life in the local rural communities. It has highlighted scientific progress and development at the expense of folk wisdom and moral structure. Ideologically, it has increasingly given way to the emphasis on individualism, opportunism, entrepreneurship, and competition for personal success over community loyalty, the traditional virtues of honesty, and satisfaction in sufficiency. For the intellectuals in India, Japan, and China, the dominant political debate in the nineteenth century had to do with whether “Westernization” should be rejected wholesale or accommodated on the “outer” or “utility” level—as opposed to the “inner core” or the “essential”—of the indigenous culture. This debate resulted in the contradictory call for modernization for material advancement, on the one hand, and preservation of indigenous culture and heritage, on the other. National leaders such as Rammohan Roy (1772–1833) of India, Liang Qichao (1873–1929) of China, and probably a little less so, Fukuzawa Yukichi (1835–1901) of Japan argued these issues. Nation-building turned out to be a much more complex and frustrating process than was originally projected in the anti-colonial movement in the beginning.

In the discussion of the West, modernity differentiates itself from the pre-modern period by the tighter control of the state and social surveillance by way of the central political mechanism of the nation-state. The best exemplar for it was the organization and deployment of the military from the colonial centers to the colonies for defense and governance. When the colonial governments began to recruit natives into the colonial military and the police force, surveillance and control became more divisive as well as intrusive in the colonies. But as the tide of nationalism escalated in the twentieth century in both the “metropolis” (the colonized centers) and the newly independent (formerly colonized) nations, measures for national security and military defense were further legitimized as part of the state’s necessary instrument. The exertion of state control through surveillance and the enforcement of law and order, including the legitimacy of the use of violence, showcased “effective” governance and provided the model for the establishment of national governments in the newly independent countries in Asia.

After national independence, state surveillance first instituted by the colonizers was soon taken over by the newly established national governments. Many problems created by the colonizers have become the burden of the national governments. Because of the unbalanced development between the urban centers and the rural villages, and uneven resource distribution between different linguistic groups and ethnicities, economic and political disparities were widespread. Topped by the consequence of the colonial policy

of divide and rule, extensive communal conflicts, ethnic rivalries, regional disputes, and rural uprisings arose in many South Asian and Southeast Asian countries. In the name of national unity, considerable efforts were made to legitimate the state's authority and power by means of the invention of one "national" history, one tradition, and a unified culture (religion) over many others. For many countries in Asia, independence wars against foreign aggressors soon turned into internal battles aimed at suppressing different ethnic, linguistic, religious, or other peripheral sectors. In the cases of Sri Lanka, Burma, Indonesia, and Malaysia, for example, the national governments have resorted to ever greater technocratic elitist and military control of the political system.

The continuous reality of pervasive poverty and misery among the masses of people in Asia was taken seriously by the theologians of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (with both Catholic and Protestant members) who criticized the national governments for failing to build a people-oriented and self-reliant economy after independence. The call for modernization was therefore joined with the request for a just Asian society. Because of their social and religious commitments, leaders of the Minjung churches of South Korea, the people's churches in the Philippines, and the Presbyterian Church of Taiwan (who defend the Island's rights to self-determination) had suffered political suppression under military governments throughout the 1970s. These progressive churches of Asia have contributed not only to the mobilization of the peoples for democracy but also participation in the systematic reflection on the meaning of citizenship, human rights, social justice, and solidarity with the poor in the modern nations of Asia. In this regard, they have been an important modernizing force in pursuit of a political "ideal," that is, the establishment of a political system that would incorporate into it the modern values of participation, freedom, and efficiency. As Christians, the churches are looking forward to taking part in the new forms of political life in Asian society as well-informed and responsible citizens.

CHRISTIAN SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT

Modernity as a mode of thought has mostly been characterized by its progressive visions and ideologies. The "grand narrative," as it came to be so identified, is in the best sense an emancipatory project. Based on the confidence of human reason, the first and foremost target of liberation was to demystify all unquestioned authorities in the past, including monarchies, traditions, and religions. Crystallized in the motto of the French Revolution's call for equality, liberty, and fraternity, enlightened reason is believed to be the source of progress in modern knowledge and society. Translated in the economic sphere, modernity is represented in the modernization of trade and industry across the globe. Facilitated by colonialism from the sixteenth to twentieth century, liberal economy (privileging individual political freedom and the principle of *laissez-faire*) emerged as the dominant system confronting the traditional models of trade and commercial activities in Asia. In response, a socialist alliance of resistance to

colonialism and neocolonialism (characterized primarily in terms of economic dominance) was initiated among the socialist parties of Indonesia, Burma, the Philippines, Pakistan, Ceylon (Sri Lanka), and India. It was marked specially by a joint declaration in the Bandung Conference in 1955, an event that paved the way for the later development of the Non-alignment Movement in resistance to the bifurcated power competition between the Soviet Union and the United States. At home, the contest between capitalist and socialist economies has deeply affected the political and social development of the young (or in the case of East Asia, the recovered independent) countries in Asia.

Nevertheless, the ideas of equality, liberty, and fraternity have not been entirely taken over by the project of economic progress. With the emphasis on human reason and progress, the project of modernity has embedded in it a universal moral-political agenda. It is manifested usually in programs of democratization and socialist revolutions that called for freedom, equality, and social liberation. The contest between the liberalists and the socialists continues in the dispute over the United Nations Charter on human rights. The former understands human rights in terms of individual political freedom, and the latter defends people's rights as socioeconomic justice. The two however converge in Asia in the general concerns for the subaltern movement of workers, peasants, and women and the movement of other social and political outcasts struggling for social transformation. The introduction of trade unions, peasant cooperatives, women's organizations, and other nongovernmental organizations into the new societies and national politics has therefore been a prominent part of the formation of the people's movement and civil society in Asian countries.

In the postwar period, Asia saw the triply destructive effects of colonization, economic exploitation, and national conflicts in the production of extensive displacement of peoples and migration of workers in the twentieth century. The religious and racial conflicts orchestrated by the British colonialists in the Indian subcontinent in the mid-twentieth century, for instance, led to the exodus of millions of Hindus and Muslims from the newly independent India and Pakistan. The increasing globalization of national economies has continued to force people to migrate from the rural villages to the urban slums and from less affluent Asian countries to the modernized countries such as Hong Kong, Taiwan, Korea, Singapore, Malaysia, and Japan. Political oppression, social devastation, and genocide occurred in both the capitalist economies such as the Philippines and Sri Lanka and socialist countries such as China, Burma, and Cambodia. As the exploitation and discrimination of the underclass and the migrant workers become more rampant, concern for them has been developed into a major work of focus in the ecumenical councils and committees in Asia.

As partial subscribers and contributors to modernity themselves, the Asian ecumenical leaders had taken for granted liberal values, such as the freedom of the individual and the rights of people, and in their concerns for the general poverty and material deprivation in the Asian population, expressed a strong passion for social justice. Despite the subtle ideological tension between the liberals and the socialists, both streams of thoughts have been absorbed into the ecumenical agenda for the pursuit of a democratic and just Asian society. As far as the economic system is concerned, the socialist vision

of an egalitarian society for the underprivileged class and the oppressed people has provided a strong imperative for Asian Christian thinking and action in their respective national contexts. Initially they endorsed state planning regarding land reform, industrialization, and community development. But at the same time they were critical of the serious social problems generated in the process; therefore they advocated the rights of workers, peasants, and women. Theologically, Asian Christians have incorporated the insights of Latin American liberation theology into its Christian stance for the defense of people's rights to be the subject of history and the preferential option for the poor as opposed to the Western-capitalist model of competition and the survival of the fittest. In a conference on "Ecumenical Dialogue of Third World Theologians" in 1976, Carlos H. Abesamis, S.J., of the Philippines stated it plainly that salvation today meant total human development. That is, it has to be built on concern for human dignity, human rights, human sufferings, human life, and the transformation of the social order in the Asian context.³

In response to the drive for modernization in terms of rapid economic growth and development in most Asian nations from the 1960s to 1970s, Asian Christians represented by the two ecumenical bodies, CCA and FABC, have endorsed a series of interventions through action and reflection in the work for Christian social engagement. As soon as CCA was constituted, the Urban Rural Mission (URM) was initiated as one of its program priorities to focus on the workers, the urban poor, the rural poor farmers, the women workers, the Dalit people, the cultural and the ethnic minorities, the tribal communities, and the migrant workers in 1960s. At about the same time, 1969, some Asian bishops set up an informal secretariat chaired by Bishop Julio X. Labayen of the Philippines to address the need for Asia-wide social action. And, in 1971, in response to the continuous worsening of social injustice, the CCA collaborated with the FABC Office of Human Development (OHD) to form the Asian Committee for People's Organization (ACPO) for the training and support of community organization for self-determination and empowerment on the grassroots level. Through these programs, the Asian Christian leaders aimed to bring about social justice, to provide equal opportunity for the free development of the individual, to raise the standard of living, and to secure the general welfare. As the national elites (including some Christian elites) collaborated with the transnational corporate power of Western capital in the name of modernization and permitted extensive exploitation of workers and natural resources in many Asian countries, these above mentioned Christian leaders took side with the social minority groups and criticized the governments for failing to keep their national integrity.

Because of the emphasis on human rights and the rights of the marginalized and underprivileged, women's consciousness of their own rights and the equality of the sexes emerged. Originally started as part of salvation work aimed at immoral heathens, Women's Work, as it was called, aimed to liberate women from the brutality of oriental tradition and customs such as foot binding in China and *sati* in India. In the first Asian Women's Forum before the CCA Assembly at Penang in 1977, women asserted their equal position in search for full humanity. Although progress on full recognition

of gender equality is still slow, women's rights and the critique of gender discrimination has since been placed on the agenda of the Asian ecumenical movement. In 1979, the concern for Asian women workers was initiated by a consultation of Catholic Justice and Peace Commissions in Tokyo and another collaborative effort between CCA and FABC resulted. OHD and URM together networked with the various Catholic and Protestant workers groups in the various Asian countries for training, data collection, organization, and advocacy for the rights of women workers. Later in 1984 the women advocates organized the women workers to form the Committee for Asian Women (CAW) for continuous engagement with the cause.

With the Gospel of Jesus Christ interpreted as the Gospel of redemption of the whole human race and of the whole created world, the ecumenical leaders urged the Church to discern how Christ is at work with the contemporary changes in Asia. Disillusioned by national elitist politics, the rights of the marginalized groups such as Minjung, Dalits, indigenous people, and women were emphatically underlined and "people" were affirmed as subjects of history longing for justice and liberation. The Korean feminist theologian, Sun Ai Lee Park, argues that the context for Asian Christian social thought is a humanizing one. Asian Christians are to respond to people's crises, sufferings, aspirations, and demands, and to immerse themselves in national liberation movements, labor movements, and for her, also in the Korean unification movement, all for the sake of building a new world order. That is, the goal is a violence-free and just world that is both life-centered and creation-centered.⁴ In the struggle for social justice, Christians put their faith in the liberating power of Christ who leads them to transform the existing unjust structures of state, economic order, and society, so that the poor and the oppressed may fully participate in the total life of society.

For the less politically conscious Christians of some Asian churches, modernity in terms of capitalist economy is rather well adapted into their life and work in the new era. In East Asia, for example, primarily Korea and marginally in Japan and China, Protestantism is seen as allied to science and progress. The changes of the modern society brought by industrialization in terms of its complex division of labor, and the growing sense of individuality has in effect reinforced the evangelical faith that preaches personal salvation and the promise of heavenly reward for the elected. The urban experience in terms of isolation, homogeneity, and artificiality in the modern city is replaced by a sense of security and identity found in evangelical missions propagated by the churches. In the face of rapid changes, the evangelical churches serve as an oasis for the urbanites, for emotional release and spiritual cleansing. In a more aggressive sense, Protestantism in the Weberian sense contains an essential ethos for the pursuit of wealth, economic success, progressive values, and thus not necessarily against capital commodification. Indeed, religious entrepreneurs who have to fight individually in the market for their personal affluence and material prosperity found evangelicalism and Pentecostalism to be important vehicles for negotiation and adaptation to modern capitalist life. The emergent theology of prosperity in Korea and other newly industrialized Asian cities reflects another role of the Christian churches, that is, a place for the Christian elites to secure a sense of a moral cause and "spiritual" support in the midst of

a hostile competitive environment, and at times of failure, to be assured of God's providential consolation.

In contrast to modernity's preference for science and reason and its prejudice against religion and faith, the prevalence of evangelicalism and the rise of Pentecostalism and charismatic Christianity in modern societies are arguably alternative modernities, in that they are able to hold together personal release and discipline, emotion and control, participation and authority in the same religious space. They are considered to be the systems of beliefs and values most adaptable to capitalist economy and modern technology, merging success with Christian faithfulness and therefore eliminating any conflict of conscience. Furthermore, they also testify to the growing open market of "religious preferences" for the individuals of diverse class backgrounds, as well as the success of religious adaptation to the various aspects of culture. Some evangelical and Pentecostal churches in Korea, Hong Kong, and Singapore are also the first ones to make the best use of new communication technologies for the establishment of mega churches and large-scale evangelical campaigns. Compared to the Asian Christians who are critical of the modern market economy, the evangelical, Pentecostal, and charismatic churches represent more willing adaptations of modernity in religious terms.

OTHER MODERNITIES: NEGOTIATION BETWEEN TRADITIONAL AND MODERN VALUES

As previously mentioned, modernity was set apart from traditional values by its emphasis on human rationality and progress. On the individual level, while the person of "tradition" is believed to be obliged to act in accordance to an exterior law above reason, that is, the knowledge of the divine will and the established practices of the related community, the modern individual relies solely on reason for moral judgment and action. If the truth for the member of a traditional religious community can only be found in God or some other transcendent value, the truth for the modern individual is to be found at the end of a rigorous reasoning process. The ambition of the modernity project, and its resultant tension with religion, lie exactly here: it competes with religion for its authority over human action and its claim to the knowledge of truth. As such, modernity marks a radical shift, from the centering of life in religion to that of human reasoning. And rather than seeking divine sanction for truth and action, modernity places religion at the center of rational scrutiny, in defense of human autonomy against traditional authority.

On the social plane, religion has been categorized in opposition to the "secular" modern society including its culture, economy, and politics. In distinction from the pre-modern era where religion was the center around which knowledge and every life form were organized, religion has become private and personal in the modern times. As a matter of fact, a "modern" society is characterized by the degree of its success in

confining religion to simply a specific kind of knowledge for the religious, cut off from policy decisions regarding public life. The separation of religion and state, so to speak, is held up as the golden rule, as compared to the “archaic” and “backward” vision of a unity of the two. Religion, being just one branch of knowledge, instead of its center, is at best considered as a system of morality for guidance of personal behavior in the midst of a scientific and secularized world. As such, religion is not only demythologized and stripped of its sacred halo but also circumscribed of its influence in the public realm. In this light, the rise of religious fundamentalism, apart from its respective national political contexts, can be understood as a reaction to modernity in its attempt to reinstate divine authority in public life. However, the effects of modernity on Christianity can be contradictory. On the one hand, Christianity has been a part of European and American imperialism and has acquired the status of the universal Truth. Through colonialism, it has implanted a zealous evangelical faith in the colonized communities over and above their respective indigenous religions and cultures. As a consequence, a hierarchy of religions has been created: there are religions of true versus false and superior versus inferior. With the demonstrated military and economic power of the Western colonial countries, Christianity was believed to be the only true, monotheistic religion with superior moral reason and therefore also as representative of a modern, progressive, and civilized way of life. All non-Christian religions were classified into categories of polytheism, pantheism, animism, or shamanism and grossly degraded as archaic, non-rational, superstitious, morally inferior, and signs of cultural backwardness.

On the other hand, given the challenge of modernity, Christianity has to seek ways to negotiate with a whole range of modern values including equality, freedom, and toleration in terms of its emancipation imperative, and individualism, capitalism, and market force in terms of its liberal economic drive. Not the least, with the waning of religious authority in the modern society, Christianity, like all other religions, has been challenged to face the existence of alternative systems of truth claims including that of secular ideologies. Ironically, in the process where Christianity resists the capitalist promotion of individual success over caring for others, competition over cooperation, material gains over spiritual well-being, it actually finds alliance with other religions for the building of a common front against capitalist materialism and monetary greed. In short, the challenge of modernity have provided Christianity and Asian religions the exigency to seek cooperation and to dig deep into their respective traditions for renewed resources for negotiation and resistance to the neoliberal economy that dominates Asia and the world.

Over the past century, modernization of religions took many different directions. All of the above—anti-colonialism, nationalism, industrialization, market economy, socialist revolutions, individualism, and so on constitute important imperatives for change. In the case of Hinduism, with the complication of its meaning, the British colonialists in the late nineteenth century were attacked on every front from theology, ritual practices, and morality to caste norms, by Christian missionaries. Crude depictions of Hindus and Indian culture as idolatrous and demoniac had instigated hostile resentment and had driven some Hindu scholars to participate actively in the protest against

British imperialism. Adapting to the Protestant challenges, Hindu reformers such as Rammohan Roy gradually developed more systematic historical and scientific interpretation of scriptures and doctrines and called for the reform of superstition, caste discrimination, and the suppression of the practice of *sati*. Some reformist organizations such as the Ramakrishna Mission were instrumental in the modernization of education, hospitals, and hospices services with Hindu principles. For some national leaders such as Mohandas K. Gandhi (1869–1948), the modern adaptation of a reformed Hinduism could be a useful vehicle to bring changes in equality and democracy.

Being the oldest of the world's missionary religions and probably the most accommodating, Buddhism has adapted to a wide range of different environments including that of diaspora communities. Its greatest challenge in modern times has been its survival under the communist rule in China, Mongolia, Vietnam, and North Korea in which Buddhist institutions were accused of being parasitic on society, with the result that the communities of monks and nuns were disbanded. As they rebuilt themselves after the political crisis, Buddhists in Vietnam and Thailand increasingly engaged in society, calling for active response to immense social sufferings and for nonviolent confrontations with the ruling authorities. "Engaged Buddhists" formed many organizations contributing to the alleviation of poverty and promotion of rural development in Sri Lanka, participation in political activism in Japan and Myanmar (formally Burma), and advocacy for the ecumenical collaboration with other religions for the common good in Thailand. The most recently formed International Network of Engaged Buddhists led by Sulak Sivaraksa, a Thai lay activist, has continued to foster connections among different Buddhist schools and other religions and to seek new interpretation of the Buddhist teachings.

While Muslim civilization still commands abundant resources for progressive development and modern understanding and interpretation of Islam, social change in modern times has upset the delicate balance of power among political Islam's varied cultural streams. The latter has given a disproportionate influence to a small number of believers committed to some ideological and totalizing interpretation of the faith. And yet, despite the polarization of extremist positions in the Islamic Arabs on the one side and the American Christian fundamentalists on the other, moderate Muslims in Turkey, Iran, Malaysia, and Indonesia are calling for a broader, pluralist reformation of Muslim politics; they have succeeded in building up mass support for it. As the desire for further economic progress and better equitable political participation are taking ground in many Asian Islamic countries, their success is still dependent on the individual state's ability to transcend the conservative ideological campaigns and to balance the influence between state and religion in the interests of a modern understanding and interpretation of Islam.

All religions have to some extent adjusted to the fast-growing capitalist economy. Modern Hinduists, Buddhists, and Muslims reinterpreted their religious precepts to permit accumulation of wealth. For instance, some Hinduist reformers reinterpret their teachings to adapt to India's new economic and political realities by merging the values of working hard, living honestly, saving rationally, and promoting altruism with the

teachings of Vedanta for self-discipline. In another case, Japanese economists have not only reinterpreted Buddhism's Noble Eightfold Path to affirm "Rightful Livelihood" in the acquisition of wealth but also have begun to explore alternative ways of management and economic development that would go with the Buddhist spirit. Besides, through the Buddhists' active participation in the economic planning and development in Mongolia, Buddhism is playing a leading role in the reconstruction of the region's post-soviet political reform as well as the movement for the restoration of the much degraded environment and cultural heritage. Indeed, the concerns for environment have been taken up as one of the key areas of reflection and action by all major religions in Asia.

Indeed, the meeting of, and in the various contexts, cooperation among different religions is one of the most important modern developments. On the side of Christianity, not counting the Nestorian Christians in China in the seventh century and the early efforts of indigenization of two Jesuit priests, Matteo Ricci in China and Robert de Nobili (1577–1656) in India in the seventeenth century, major development toward interreligious dialogue took place only after the postwar period. Whereas the Indian theologian, P. D. Devanandan brought the concept of "dialogue" forefront to the third assembly of World Council of Churches in New Delhi in 1961, the Asian Catholic theologians contributed in carrying forward enthusiastically the openings of *Nostra Aetate* ("Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions") and *Lumen Gentium* ("Dogmatic Constitution of the Church") for input to Vatican II. After a series of colloquia and seminars through the 1970s to 1980s on each side, a joint CCA-FABC consultation on "Living and Working Together with Sisters and Brothers of Other Faiths in Asia" was organized in 1987. The consultation concluded with the conviction of living together in a multicultural and multi-religious world with emphases in threefold: (1) that all are created equal and therefore free; (2) that the future of humanity is so bound together as to require mutual recognition, respect, and cooperation; and (3) that peace can only happen with the free pursuit of harmony. Such conviction not only represents the fruits of many years of dialogue among Asian Christianity and religions but also lays a solid foundation for the collaborative resistance to the marginalization of religious values in the modern world.

The various religious efforts in negotiation and resistance to the hegemony and homogeneity of Western modernity together contribute to a challenging conception of multiple modernities. In fact, the articulation of other modernities or multiple modernities has emerged as a counter discourse against the singular version of modernity that was built on the secular, scientific, and liberal economic model. Rather than negating or adopting Western modernity wholesale, Asian modernity calls for the exploration of alternative avenues for social, economic, and political reforms that can be rooted in traditions at home. There is no doubt that Asian religions shall play an essential role in such a process, as they together represent the richest pool of cultural and spiritual resources for it. For Asian Christianity, the only exit from its imperialistic past and the way forward to grounding itself in the Asian soil is to humble itself in front of the truth claims of multiple religions and to work together with them for the building of a better and just society for the well-being of all.

NOTES

1. Cf. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed. (London: Verso, 1991).
2. M. M. Thomas, "The Challenge to the Churches in the New Nations of Africa and Asia," in his *Towards a Theology of Contemporary Ecumenism* (Madras: Christian Literature Society, 1978), 76, 79.
3. Carlos H. Abesamis, S.J., "Doing Theological Reflection in a Philippine Context," in Sergio Torres and Virginia Fabella, eds., *The Emergent Gospel: Theology from the Underside of History* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1978), 122.
4. Park Sun Ai Lee, "Asian Women in Mission," *International Review of Mission* 81 (1992): 280.

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CHAPTER 14

CHRISTIANITY IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

Colonialism, Nationalism and the Caveats to Conversion

JULIUS BAUTISTA

CHRISTIANITY is the world's largest religion, having quadrupled in number over the last century to 2.1 billion adherents.¹ While there are no indications that this number will decrease, much academic discussion has placed emphasis on the signs that the global distribution of the faithful is shifting rapidly from the global North to the global South. While over the last millennium two-thirds of Christians lived in Europe, about 70% of Christians now live in the non-West—in Africa, the Americas, and the Asia-Pacific—thus constituting a “southern shift” of Christianity that shows no signs of abating.

Although some might use examples from Southeast Asia to corroborate this demographic redistribution, on a purely statistical level it is misleading to think of the region as an exemplar of this southern shift. The 124 million Southeast Asian Christians make up only 5.6% of the total world population of Christians, and even in the region itself, are but a small proportion of the religious mosaic.² A deeper analysis of the statistics is even more telling. Around two-thirds of Southeast Asian Christians are Catholics, about 90% of whom live in only two countries: the Philippines and Indonesia. While most Christians in the world (90%) live as religious majorities in their countries, in Southeast Asia only in the Philippines and, very recently, in East Timor, do Christians make up the biggest faith.³ The statistical minority of Asian Christians is remarkable given that European missionaries have been engaged there for over thirteen centuries since Nestorian missionaries arrived in China in the early part of the Tang Dynasty. This may give credence to the assumption that the influence of Christianity has never been formidable enough to disrupt the overall preeminence of other world religions, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Islam, which are the dominant faiths in the Asian region.

The situation has never been that simple, however, and statistical profiles, while telling, reveal only part of the story. Demographics will tell us little about the texture and contours of Christian belief in the region, and about the historical circumstances under which the faith exerts considerable cultural, social, and political influence on Asians more broadly, regardless of their creed. A portrait of Asian Christianity must be drawn by depicting the persistence and vitality with which the purveyors of Christianity sought to spread the faith, often under the most tumultuous of circumstances. The various strategies of resistance, negotiation, and acquiescence that were exerted by Asians themselves in ways that numbers alone cannot adequately reflect must also be taken into account. On this score, it is worth quoting Moffett whose observation about the population of Asian Christians in the 1900s still holds true today: "Add all the Christians together and in 1900 still they were little more than a scattering of sand along the beaches of Asia's then 950 million people. But they were not sand; they were 'the salt of the earth,' and on any plate or planet a little salt goes a long way."⁴

The story of Asian Christianity, particularly in Southeast Asia, is an important chapter of the larger story of world Christendom. While numerically small, the faith has inspired major social and political change in the region, both in the colonial and postcolonial period. The objective of this chapter, then, is threefold. First, I shall discuss Christian missionary activities in the context of the European colonial enterprise in Southeast Asia from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries. Second, I discuss how Southeast Asians negotiated the experience of conversion in light of prevailing social, political, and economic conditions. I conclude by giving an account of how the faithful in the contemporary period have responded to the mandates of citizenship within the nation-state, by seeing Christianity as an integral part of their identity politics.

THE COLONIAL AND MISSIONARY APPARATUS

The early propagation of Christianity in Southeast Asia can be thought of in three waves of European and American colonialism. In the first wave, the Portuguese brought Roman Catholicism from the early 1500s to Malacca and parts of Eastern Indonesia, and then by the Spaniards to the Philippine Islands from the mid-1500s. In the next wave, the Dutch missionaries propagated Protestantism in the East Indies (Indonesia), thanks also to the fact that Malacca was conquered by Dutch colonial military forces from the Portuguese in 1641. The third wave saw British missions in Malaya and Burma in the 1800s, and the Americans taking over from the Spaniards in the Philippines toward the turn of the twentieth century.

A key feature of all three is the entanglement of clerical agendas with the military/administrative and mercantile mandate of colonial missions. Indeed the earlier colonial forays in Southeast Asia were subject to the Papal Bull of Tordesillas (1494), which

demarcated and codified the exploratory and imperial parameters of Spain and Portugal. Clerics were included in expeditions as a matter of policy, particularly when doing so had been found to be conducive to facilitating smooth local relations. French trading companies sought financing from the religious orders, who in return sought the capacity to proselytize beyond the trading ports. Clerics even took on administrative and military duties, as was the case with Spanish clerics in Mindanao or Portuguese missionaries in Timor. Clerics were instrumental in the transition from largely trade-focused expeditions to a full-fledged colonial regime, as was the case with the French in Indochina.⁵ As a result, Christian identities in Southeast Asia were frequently subject to the strong influence of colonial policy.

On the other hand, while there was a great degree of collusion between the colonialists, traders, and missionaries, one also has to be aware of the limits of collaboration, and indeed of the conflict between them. In Portuguese Malacca, for example, early Jesuit missionaries such as Francis Xavier were often critical of the social and moral excesses and depravities perpetuated by soldiers and colonial officials. In the Dutch East Indies in the early colonial period, the conversion of native populations was relegated to secondary priority when it was thought to impede commercial trading relations with local Muslim elites. As opposed to their French and Spanish counterparts, who were intent on spreading actively the Christian message in the local vernacular, the distribution and translation of the New Testament was forbidden by the Dutch at one point so as not to offend the Muslim majority in Java.

In spite of the variation in colonial policies toward the spread of the Christian message, from the local perspective, colonialism and missionary activities were so intimately entwined that it was difficult to specify, or even differentiate, the colonial trading and administrative mandate from the religious. In this respect, conversion to the Christian faith came to be seen in many parts of Southeast Asia as a conduit toward one's participation in colonial society, whether through trade, political favor, or military support as I will show later in this chapter.

INTREPID MISSIONS AND LOCALIZATION

Persecutions of missionaries and their expulsion from the "Great Empires," particularly China and Japan, presented some formidable challenges to all missionary orders. Having said that, the hostility toward missions in East Asia also had a somewhat positive effect as a spillover of missionaries from those places would direct their efforts to Southeast Asia, as was the case with the first Jesuits in Annam in Vietnam in the sixteenth century. As the faith became more established in places such as Malacca and the Philippine islands, proselytizing missions were sent from there to Japan and China, and also to Vietnam. Missionaries had to face volatile and hostile situations in the proselytizing endeavors. These required missionaries to maintain an intrepid zeal combined with adaptive and creative strategies in their engagement with local communities, particularly given the limited manpower and scarcity of resources.

In this vein, customary laws and local cultural beliefs were seen as elements toward a “contextual ecclesiology,” which was a means of conveying the message of Christ in a way that corresponded, at least allegorically, to indigenous life worlds. Preaching in the vernacular, for example, was not just a contingency measure but an explicit strategy toward effective conversion. Among the missionaries who took on this approach was Francis Xavier (1506–1552), who played an important role in spreading the gospel all over Asia, most notably India and Japan. His missionary activity also brought him to Malacca and parts of eastern Indonesia of Ambon, Ternate, and Morotai, where he laid the foundations for a permanent mission. Using the local vernacular, either through translation or by some language guidance, was a crucial aspect of his evangelism, whether in Japan or in the Malay world. After his departure, there was an estimated 300,000 Christians in Japan by around 1600, while the 10,000 Catholic converts in Southeast Asia in the 1560s increased to five times that number by 1590.⁶

Following in the footsteps of Xavier was Alexander de Rhodes (1591–1660), a French Jesuit missionary who labored in Vietnam. He also placed emphasis on linguistic proficiency and is reported to have preached in the local vernacular within the first few months of his arrival. The Vietnamese use of Romanized script is largely attributed to his influence. Wary of his progress, however, the Vietnamese imperial regimes expelled Rhodes, first from Nguyen lands, and then from the Trinh-controlled north. Returning to Rome in 1649, Rhodes continued to lobby for sending missionaries to Vietnam. Although he failed to convince the Portuguese rulers and the Pope, he was supportive for the formation of the first secular missionary society in 1659, which engaged in missionary activity throughout French Indochina including today’s Cambodia and Laos. In addition to this, the written output of Rhodes—particularly the *Histoire du royaume de Tunquin* (History of the Kingdom of Tonkin) and the *Dictionarium Annamiticum Lusitanum et Latinum* (Vietnamese–Latin–Portuguese dictionary) published in Rome in 1650 and 1651, respectively—meant that he had a lasting influence on the propagation of Christianity in the region. In the same vein, missionary Jean-Baptiste Pallegoix (1805–1862, bishop since 1838), authored historical works on Siam and worked on a dictionary of Thai–Latin–French–English.⁷ The production of early written texts, such as the *Lagda* and *Doctrina Christiana* in the Philippines, was likewise testament to a written vernacularization of the Catechisms and the Bible itself.⁸

Protestants also demonstrated the same approach of spreading the word in a way that related to local culture and customs. Great effort was expended in the localization of the Christian message itself in order for it to penetrate into worlds often hostile to the imposition of foreign ideas. The Dutch missionary Joseph Kam (1769–1833), for example, went to Batavia (today’s Jakarta) with the support of the London Missionary Society, which placed him as a minister for the Moluccas. Arriving in Ambon in 1815, Kam adapted native cultural patterns to the Christian message. He is known to have given instruction and said prayers in traditional Malay, and organized the integration of native sounds and rhythms into church services. From Ambon, he sent out missionaries to evangelize in the Minahasa peninsula and West Papua, laying the foundations for the

establishment of a heartland for nearly half of the Christians in the Dutch East Indies. By 1837, Moluccan Christians numbered 35,000 baptized converts.⁹

Similarly, Ludwig Nommensen (1834–1918), a German Lutheran missionary arrived in Sumatra in the middle of 1862, determined to preach in the Northern inland territory of Silindung, which was still independent of Dutch administration. A medical practitioner, he gained favor with Bataks on the coast and committed himself to learning their language. In the immediate years of his arrival, and in defiance of resistance from datu-priests and local shamans, Nommensen was largely successful in winning the trust of the Bataks through establishment of schools and medical facilities. He also translated the New Testament into the Batak language in 1878. By the time of his death, the Batak Church had more than 150,000 members, with 34 indigenous pastors and 788 teacher-preachers. As the “grandfather of Batak Christianity,” Nommensen is credited as having laid the foundations for the Huria Kristen Batak Protesten (HKBP) church, one of the largest church denominations in Asia.

In no other place in the Far East has the establishment of the faith been as comprehensive as in the Philippines, which remains to this day the numerically largest Christian nation in Asia. Since the arrival of the first Spanish missionaries in the 1520s, the numbers of converts grew from around 100 baptized Filipinos in 1569 to as many as 250,000 converts out of a total population of 700,000 in the early 1590s. Spanish Roman Catholicism in the Philippine Islands had God at the apex of an institutional edifice in which temporal and spiritual authority emanated down to the Spanish king and onto the Spanish priest as “agents” of that authority. The Spanish were effective in instituting a system of geographical organization which made conversion to Christianity a prerequisite to being allowed residence within the *pueblo*, where converts could benefit from colonial protection and patronage. It was within the *pueblo* that the authority of God’s power was constantly emphasized as being above and superior to that of local sorcerers and spirits, who nevertheless persisted throughout the entire duration of the colonial period.

Timor which became a Portuguese colony has had just as long a legacy of Christian missionary work as the Philippines. As early as 1515, there was considerable trading activity there due to the abundance of sandalwood resources. The Church in Timor effectively functioned as the administrative arm of Portuguese colonial power. This was a foundation which, over the next 250 years, saw the establishment of over fifty churches in the Solor-Timor region.¹⁰

CAVEATS TO CONVERSION

Colonial and missionary sources will attest to success stories in the effort to spread the Word. For example, in 1532, the Moluccan King Tabarija was accused of treason and exiled to Goa by the Portuguese. There, he was acquitted of the charges, but was nevertheless prevented from returning to the islands. Yet in spite of this kind of treatment,

after long discussions about the faith, Tabarija reportedly accepted the Christian faith, changed his name to Dom Manuel and took on the trappings of a Portuguese nobleman. So committed was he to the new faith that he bequeathed one of his possessions, the island of Ambon, to his Portuguese benefactors and, upon his death, to the King of Portugal.

There are other similar examples of what would seem to be “genuine,” conversions like this throughout the region. Successful conversions, however, cannot be seen in terms of doctrinal persuasion alone but must be placed in the context of the broader sociopolitical circumstances of the time. At least in the initial period, the majority of conversions occurred not because of dissatisfaction with their former faith but because Christianity offered material benefits that could enhance one’s social, political, and economic position. Two examples, from the Philippines and Indonesia, are particularly demonstrative of these caveats to conversion.

In the Philippines, the landing in Cebu of the Spanish expedition of Portuguese explorer Ferdinand Magellan is typically depicted in artwork and literature as the event that brought about the first baptism in the archipelago. The memoirs of the expedition’s chronicler, Antonio Pigafetta, depict a tearfully solemn and moving ceremony in which the local ruler, Rajah Humabon, and his wife, overwhelmed to tears, accepted not only the faith but the icon of the Santo Niño (Infant Jesus), the very same one that is enshrined in Cebu’s basilica today.

A reading of the event in the context of the political-geographic situation at that time, however, reveals a more nuanced picture. Pigafetta narrates clearly that Humabon and his court had earlier been given a demonstration of European armory and firepower. Along with this was a declaration from Magellan himself that Humabon would enjoy the military assistance of the Spanish against his rival, Rajah Lapulapu, in nearby Mactan Island. After that mass conversion, Humabon and his men watched from the sidelines as Magellan, who was convinced of Spanish military superiority, brought about sixty men in an attack against Lapulapu’s thousands of warriors. Magellan himself was killed on Easter Sunday, April 27, 1521, while the remaining survivors were then invited by Humabon to a banquet, only to be ambushed and killed for their failure to deliver on their promised victory.¹¹

This incident frames “conversion” to the faith in Southeast Asia in a new light. Was Humabon’s acceptance of Christianity sincere, given that it was made in the context of immediate political and material gain? For Humabon, baptism was, rather, a ceremony that consummated a politico-military alliance for temporal dominion over his rivals; not ultimate salvation of his soul. Just as Europeans intervened in the machinations of local politics to gain an economic and political foothold, so too did local rulers manipulate the process of conversion to their own ends.

This kind of situation was not peculiar to the Philippines. As in Cebu and Mactan, the kings of Ternate in Eastern Indonesia, who had established an Islamic sultanate from the fifteenth century, sought to enforce centralized control over the islands against rival chieftains. The arrival of Black Portuguese ships, while often seen with some trepidation among the local population, was welcomed by the ruling chiefs who were aware

of the prospect of co-opting outsider's military and economic might toward their own geo-political interests. Sultan Hairun of Ternate, in spite of having clashed with Portuguese traders in his economic and political dealings, had befriended the missionary Francis Xavier and even expressed a willingness to convert to Christianity. However, the prospect of conversion, like that of Humabon, was not unconditional. It was premised upon the caveat that he would be able to maintain his harem of many wives. Yet this was not because Hairun wanted to maintain a life of indulgence and vice. The harem was a sign of his prowess according to native Moluccan custom, and which enabled him to form alliances with neighboring influential families.

The example of Hairun and Humabon encourages us to consider the caveats to conversion to the faith. While it is true that conversion to Christianity could offer an entry point into more powerful sociopolitical positions, it was in some respects also disempowering. Some of the faith's fundamental requirements—such as monogamy, non-retribution for killing, humility, monotheism, and the rejection of idols were all at odds with traditional methods of acquiring power and maintaining social status. But it does suggest that those among the local ruling elite who did convert were pragmatists weighing up the potential benefits with the possible losses in social status, rather than passive acceptors of the Christian message. In this respect, conversion was perceived as a political act, made to foster favorable relations among consenting peers, each of whom presented the other with material and temporal advantage. To see it simply as an internal subjective transformation would be an underestimation of this very crucial motivation for conversion.

Conversion did not always mean actual apostasy. Conversions were entry points into colonial society, offering with it the opportunity to engage in trade and/or the acquisition of political and military favor. This was not an altogether unreasonable expectation, given that missionaries and colonial administrators drew very definitive geographical boundaries to demarcate the converted from pagans and heathens. In the Philippines, conversion was often the prerequisite for residence within the Spanish *pueblo*, where locals were able to benefit from the protection and patronage of the colonial administration. Similarly, many Javanese thought of Christianity as the religion of Europeans, and conversion provided a way that one could *masukbelanda*, or enter productively in commercial, social, and even political intercourse with Dutch colonial society. Becoming Christian was synonymous not only with entry into colonial society, it meant being modern and civilized, along with its symbols and trappings—medicinal hygiene, clothing, European comportment, and association with colonial commercial agents.

CAVEATS TO INDIGENIZATION

The fact that conversion was often not complete and total was not lost upon the clergy. They were acutely aware of the weakness of conversion and did in fact consider it a testament to their continued mandate in the region. However, their efforts were often

hampered by problems of manpower and resources. The shortage of clergy in some of the more far-flung regions of the colonies, like in Timor in the East Indies or the Visayas in the Philippines, meant that the Church was not able to institute a surveillance regime that ensured the “pure” adherence to the faith. Often this meant that expressions of conversions were only made in the context of formal sacramental participation or in the presence of clerical authority. In most parts of Southeast Asia, this necessitated the establishment of a corps of indigenous clergy. Just as we should appreciate the caveats to Christian conversion in the region, we should also rethink and expand our notions of indigenous clergy.

To be sure, the establishment of a corps of lay catechists was an important aspect of spreading the gospel, particularly under conditions in which ruling elites were increasingly resistant to the spread of the faith. When De Rhodes was evicted from Vietnam for a final time in 1646, he remained adamant that the future of the faith in the region lay in the missionary capacity to train local clergy toward self-sufficiency. His efforts led to the appointment by Pope Alexander VII of Francois Pallu as the Apostolic Prefect of Tonkin and Pierre Lambert de la Motte as his counterpart in Cochin-China. Ordination of local converts occurred in Vietnam, in the context of their success in spite of great odds and persecution, as early as 1669 under de la Motte who, with Louis Deydier, ordained seven Tonkinese catechists to the Priesthood. By the end of the seventeenth century, De Rhodes reported that there were 300,000 Catholics in Tonkin, increasing by as many as 15,000 every year.¹² This contrasts with the relatively late ordination of local clergy in the Philippines. Only a very small number of locals, including Mestizos were accepted in mission-run seminaries for ordination during the first 200 years of Spanish colonialism.

But this does not mean that locals did not act as proclaimers of Christian knowledge and practice. It was not just the message itself that was significant but also the charisma of those who took it upon themselves, legitimately or not, to proclaim the Word and offer themselves as alternatives to the clerics as interlocutors to divine authority. There were movements that focused on extraordinary “holy men” throughout Southeast Asia, whose utterances, sermons, prophecies, and proclamations resonated equally strongly with traditional animist beliefs as they did with the Old and New Testaments.

One such holy man was Dios Buhawi in the Philippine island of Negros who in 1887 had attracted a significant following when word of his prophecies and special powers spread. While he was not officially endorsed by the religious authorities, there was every indication that Buhawi was a pious and devout member of the faith, who partook in the sacraments, and who directed his efforts primarily at the Catholic faithful. Buhawi pointed to the onset of a new era, heralded by natural calamities, epidemics, and famines. In many cases, holy men such as Buhawi had powers of healing, invulnerability, and command of the elements, and in that respect wielded a power that was far more potent than that of the priest or cleric.

Like Buhawi in the Philippines, men such as Sadrach in Java could be thought of as traditional holy men trained in Javanese and Islamic traditions in *pesantren* (Islamic boarding schools) in the countryside of central Java. A charismatic figure Sadrach encountered Christianity through the preaching of Dutch missionaries, and in 1867

he was baptized in Batavia by the famous lay preacher Frederik Lodewijk Anthing. By the late 1800s, he had successfully amassed a following by propagating his brand of Christian piety, which would not merely be a blind following of doctrine, but a thoughtful integration of the gospel with local Javanese customary beliefs and practices. He established a Christian center in Karangjoso, in the southwest, from where he headed an independent church. This church, however, was one in which Christian teachings were taught alongside *ngelmu*, or local knowledge/wisdom. The 5,000 or so members of his church considered him to be a powerful teacher, who wielded powers of healing with the use of Christian incantations and formulae. On that score, it was considered by some Protestant missionaries as heretical, and even threatening to the colonial order.

Locals did in fact have the capacity to act as conduits to the divine in a way that was not necessarily premised upon ordination by religious orders. One side effect perhaps of the influence of local gurus and holy men, coupled with the pragmatic and selective way in which Christianity was adopted by the local populations, was the notion that traditional culture and Christian conversion could exist side-by-side. Once implanted in Southeast Asia, the universalizing faiths became incorporated with preexisting belief and practice systems, such as ancestor worship, propitiation of spirits, healing, veneration of deities of the natural environment, and ideas of material power and potency.

RESISTANCE TO MISSION

Christianity in Southeast Asia faced formidable resistance as missionaries began to make progress in gaining converts. French missionaries had been successful in converting as many as 68,000 Vietnamese by 1848, and in that sense presented a significant shift in loyalties, and this aroused the ire of the Confucian courts. The situation had already been tense as early as the 1704 when Pope Clement XI decreed that Chinese Rites, such as the veneration of Confucius and of the ancestors, were not to be accommodated by missionary orders as they were idolatrous acts, incompatible with the Christian faith, which in effect reiterated the ultimate authority of the Papacy in foreign European shores.

As an ardent Confucianist who believed in veneration of the ancestors, Nguyen Emperor Minh Mang stridently counteracted Roman Catholic missionary activity in the mid-1800s. The Emperor recruited "canton teachers" from among local scholars to reiterate the fundamental tenets of Confucianism as opposed to the potentially subversive aspects of Christianity. Along with this were decrees to eradicate traces of Catholicism as well as their institutions. In 1825, Minh Mang forbade any further entry of missionaries into Vietnam, and less than a decade later, decreed the profession of the Catholic faith an offense punishable by death.

Official condemnation of Christianity gave impetus to a number of persecutions, harassment, and even execution of priests between 1833 and 1838. This persecution was part of a larger isolationist policy borne out by such facts as the closing of Vietnamese ports to European shipping in 1836 and official opposition from the court. Such having been the situation, understandably, there was a lot of pressure to inculturate the faith.

In Indonesia, Christian mission expansion faced competition from the growing influence of Muslim kingdoms and traders along the coasts of Sumatra and Java from the thirteenth to the early sixteenth centuries. Anti-colonial sentiments found fierce expression in the Batak lands where alternative access to Christian authority was offered by the locals, not part of the European clerics. In 1890, a Toba Batak healer and magician named Guru Somalaing organized the Parmalim movement that emphasized local indigenous beliefs and practices in a land that was coming under the increasing influence of Christian missionary activities particularly from the German Rheinisch Missionary society. After several previously unsuccessful attempts at overt resistance against Dutch rule in the late 1880s, Somalaing became inspired through visions and dreams to think of Christianity as a vehicle toward the propagation of traditional Batak notions of piety, purification of the soul, and regard for the ancestors. In fact, the Parmalim movement preached that traditional, pre-Christian modes of piety offered a superior means of access to the Supreme deity, Jehovah.¹³

Later proponents of this movement would propagate a faith that was indigenous in orientation but Christian in idiom. Na Siak Bagi, a prominent leader of the later stage of the Parmalim, preached the revival of the Toba High God, Muladji Na Bolon, as their ultimate deity. Yet even this message was heavily couched in terms of Christian moral injunctions and millenarian expectations. Parmalim followers were taught that the meek and humble would bear witness to God's power, and even that Sisinga Mangaraja XII (1849–1907), the last priest king of the Batak people, would return. Amulets, purification rituals, and incantations were part of this millenarian expectation and by the early twentieth century Na Siak Bagi had attracted a considerable enough following to be perceived as a threat by the Dutch authorities, leading to his arrest in 1910.

In the Philippines, anti-colonial protest was sparked by long brewing dissatisfaction with perceived abuses of clerical authority, which came to a head with the execution of three native priests in 1872, and then later of the most celebrated Filipino nationalist and writer Jose Rizal in 1896. The executed priests and Rizal himself were projected as martyrs who, in dying for the cause of freedom and reform, became remembered by Filipinos through the redemptive narrative of Christ's passion. Filipino, "Kristos" became potent exemplars of a wide spectrum of groups, from revolutionary underground movements to charismatic leaders of new religious movements. The relevance and potency of the biblical narrative extended to the twentieth century, not merely in the context of anti-colonialism, but in the varied aspirations of liberation and nationhood. Socialist and Communist parties built up their ranks by adapting their principles in ways that communicated with Roman Catholic idioms of Christian liberation. The "Red Passion," propagated in the mid-1930s by the likes of Lino Dizon, evoked the allegory of Christ's call to humility as an indictment on the excesses of wealthy landlords

and the governmental bureaucracy. Correspondingly, the influence of liberation theology led to the politicization of native clergy, which formed the seeds of the Church-led overthrow of the regimes of Presidents Marcos and Estrada through the “People Power” revolutions of 1986 and 2001, respectively. In the Philippine case, it can be said that the role of the Church has been the most crucial in bringing about major political upheaval in more recent times.

NATIONALISM AND INDEPENDENCE

If anti-clerical sentiment was the initial spark for the struggle for independence in the Philippines, in East Timor it was precisely the activism inspired by the Church clerics that galvanized the struggle against Indonesian occupation in the 1970s. Portuguese colonialism and missionary activities were only mildly successful in East Timor, both in creating any significant infrastructure or in converting more than a quarter of the population in the three centuries of their tenure. When the political conditions in Portugal led to the severing of its colonial ties in 1974, East Timorese political parties began to take control of their nation’s fate, with one political party, FRETILIN, declaring independence in July 1975 amidst domestic internal contestation. However, in 1975, Indonesian intervention, both clandestine and overt, prevented the consummation of East Timorese aspirations for self-rule. In November of that year, Indonesian forces invaded resulting in the deaths of approximately 60,000 East Timorese in the first two months. The occupation that ensued brought forth a climate of terror and fear perpetuated by the deployment of death squads. Serious human rights violation and atrocities occurred in their bid to subdue the population.

In the years following Indonesian occupation, spiritual authority became increasingly vested in the Catholic Church, whose growing activism became seen as a catalyst toward the development of a common resistance against Indonesian atrocities. With the tacit support of the Vatican, the East Timorese Church became not merely a safe haven for people and an outspoken and vehement vocal critic, but also the proponent of the idea of a nation free from foreign oppression. As a result of this “Timorization” of the Church, as Lyon observes, Catholic conversions quadrupled to nearly 60% of the total population in the 1970s, and have increased even further.¹⁴ Today, Christians form 85.5% of the entire population. The driving force of conversion to Christianity was the Indonesian policy of *Pancasila*, which mandated every citizen to choose one of the five official religions. East Timorese, encouraged by the support of local parish priests who were critical of the regime, naturally opted against the religion of the aggressor that is Islam and chose Catholicism.

The Roman Catholic Church in the Philippines and East Timor inspired by influential clerics such as Archbishop Jaime Cardinal Sin and Bishop Carlos Filipe Ximenes Belo, have been an active catalyst of political and social change. Given the roles the Church has played in the nation-building process itself, its leaders have been invested in the

formation of governmental policy, particularly where issues of reproductive health, education, and corruption and public morality are concerned.

As discussed earlier, Christian churches have had to withstand official pressure and persecution in Vietnam. In spite of this, there have been moments in that country's history, when Christian advocates, if not the institutional church itself, have been able to exert significant influence on the political and social landscape. The regime of Ngo Dinh Diem in the mid-twentieth century, for example, instituted pro-Catholic policies, which at the time caused great strain with the majority Buddhist community, and had greatly conditioned international perceptions of the Vietnam War. In recent times, controversies over church property have strained the relations between church and state. This involves a historic Buddhist site that was bequeathed to the Vatican by the French colonial government for use as its Apostolic Nunciature. The grant was then revoked by the North Vietnamese government in 1959. In 2008, following sustained campaigning by the Catholic faithful in Ho Chi Minh City and Ha Dong, the Vietnamese government agreed to return the property to the Catholic Church only to later change their position in favor of creating a public park. While many Catholics saw this as yet another instance of governmental repression of religion, there has been in recent years a gradual re-establishment of diplomatic relations with the Vatican, with the belated appointment of some Bishops, and granting of permission for younger men to enter the seminary. In 2011, the former Apostolic nuncio to Indonesia and Timor Leste, Archbishop Leopoldo Girelli, was appointed as the Vatican nuncio to Singapore, Malaysia, and Brunei, as well as the non-resident pontifical representative to Vietnam—the first papal representative appointed since relations broke off in 1975.

As British, Dutch, and American colonial administrators were relatively lukewarm to the missionary endeavor, Protestant churches were, on the whole, less successful than their Roman Catholic counterparts in gaining converts in the region. There is merit to the suggestion that the influence of Protestant Christianity has been particularly significant among ethnic minorities, who struggle to negotiate their social, economic, and political positions within the nation-state. Where identification with a world religion is a prerequisite of one's state identity—as is the case in Malaysia, Indonesia, and Singapore—there is an incentive for ethnic minorities to be receptive to Christian proselytization. If only in name, conversion to Christianity gave ethnic minorities an administrative identity which helped them negotiate state-sanctioned harassment or communal violence. As Salemink puts it, the adoption of Christianity was in many cases more than just converting into a religion but was, in crucial respects, a negotiated complicity with state-imposed mandates of citizenship.¹⁵ Beyond this, membership in a Christian community, which offers a strong institutional and organizational infrastructure, enables a minority group to facilitate connections with broader, transnational linkages with diasporic ethnic networks, thus helping them reach beyond their immediate vicinities and tap into wider community identities. This observation can be made for ethnic minorities across a wide cross-section of Southeast Asia, such as the Karen in Burma and Bidayuh Christians in Sarawak and Borneo. For these groups, adherence to the faith is a significant part of

their identity politics, particularly in the face of pressures exerted by dominant ethnic communities and state apparatus.

By no means should it be assumed, however, that Protestant Christianity is restricted to marginal ethnic communities. In more recent years, church groups have become an increasingly distinct presence in the religious landscape in Southeast Asia, particularly among the urban middle class. Java, Malaysia, and Singapore are home to among the fastest growing Christian groups in the world. Charismatic Christianity in these places is becoming increasingly associated with upper class values and aspirations, notably among ethnic Chinese populations for whom Christianity is less about reiterating their ethnic affiliation as it is about the egalitarian access to the gifts of the Spirit. In many instances, Christianity offers the forum for morality in the context of commercial behavior, managerialism, and the pursuit of prosperity. In the Philippines, meanwhile, there is a Protestant Church with enough critical mass, the Iglesia ni Cristo (INC) that is rapidly expanding as a global church and wields formidable influence as an electoral bloc. Mega churches in urban areas around the region are becoming increasingly influential.

CONCLUSION

The Asian engagement with Christianity can be seen as a heuristic tool in understanding how Asians have historically dealt with the encounter with foreign ideas and practices. In this chapter, I have sought to encourage seeing beyond the numerical status of Christianity in the region by focusing discussion on three themes. First, the adoption to Christianity, though propelled by missionary zeal, was typically met with pragmatic and calculated reception by Southeast Asians. While the missionary sources may depict a solemn, heartfelt, and seemingly complete submission to the faith, missionaries and their beliefs were often seen by the people in terms of the potential benefits of association with European colonial regimes. In that respect, the cases of conversion to the faith should be considered with significant caveats, given the prevailing geopolitical conditions. Second, the articulation of Christianity in the context of the colonial encounter was not always premised upon clerical and institutional sanction. In the examples I have discussed above, Southeast Asians had understood and practiced Christianity in ways that were made to correspond with traditional and customary belief systems. While there were some documented cases where imposed Christian belief and local practices were in conflict, it was not uncommon to find instances in which the latter was expressed through the idiom of the former, particularly if this provided the benefit of colonial patronage, protection, and privilege. On the other hand, Southeast Asian conversions did not always mean that the Christian message was accepted in ways that colonizer or missionary could expect. In fact, Christianity often provided the vocabulary for anti-colonial sentiment. Third, while colonial regimes have passed, the Christian legacy in the region remains today in the ways the faithful have expressed their aspirations of nationhood, or in the way they negotiate the experience of living within the specter

of the nation-state. While it does not constitute the majority faith in Southeast Asia, it would be a folly not to consider Christianity in the region as a crucial part of the story of world Christendom, given that it is tied so inexorably to the politics of identity of a fast-growing number of its flock.

NOTES

1. "Global Christianity—A Report on the Size and Distribution of the World's Christian Population," *The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life*, December 19, 2011, <http://www.pewforum.org/Christian/Global-Christianity-asia-pacific.aspx>.
2. For details for each country in South East Asia, see the statistical table in the appendix of this volume.
3. Ibid.
4. Samuel Hugh Moffett, *A History of Christianity in Asia, vol. 2, 1500 to 1900* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis books, 2005), 636.
5. See Pierre Brocheux, Daniel Hémerly, Ly-Lan Dill-Klein, et al. *Indochina: An Ambiguous Colonization, 1858–1954* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2009).
6. Merle C. Ricklefs, *A History of Modern Indonesia, c.1300 to the Present* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993).
7. Peter C. Phan, *Christianities in Asia* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 144.
8. William Henry Scott, *Barangay: Sixteenth-Century Philippine Culture and Society* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1994).
9. Jan S. Aritonang and Karel A Steenbrink, *A History of Christianity in Indonesia* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 387–88.
10. Peter Carey, "The Catholic Church, Religious Revival, and the Nationalist Movement in East Timor, 1975–98," *Indonesia and the Malay World* 27 (June 1999): 77–95.
11. See Julius Bautista, *Figuring Catholicism: An Ethnohistory of the Santo Niño De Cebu* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2010).
12. Moffett, *A History of Christianity in Asia*, 45; and Phan, *Christianities in Asia*, 133.
13. See Masashi Hirose, "The Parmalim Movement and Its Relations to Si Singa Mangaraja XII: A Reexamination of the Development of Religious Movements in Colonial Indonesia," *Jurnal Antropologi Sosial Budaya ETNOVISI* 1, no. 3 (2005): 113–22.
14. Alynna Lyon, "The Activist Church in Independent East Timor: 'The Church is not a Political Institution,'" Porto, 2011, <http://www.wiscnetwork.org/porto2011/getpaper.php?id=721>.
15. Oscar Salemin, "Is Protestant Conversion a Form of Protest? Urban and Upland Protestants in Southeast Asia," in Julius Bautista and Francis Khek Gee Lim, eds., *Christianity and the State in Asia: Complicity and Conflict* (New York: Routledge, 2009).

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CHAPTER 15

SOCIOPOLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN WEST ASIA AND THEIR IMPACT ON CHRISTIAN MINORITIES IN THE REGION

AHMAD FAUZI ABDUL HAMID

HISTORICAL SETTING

FOR the uninitiated, the subject of Christianity and Christians in West Asia would seem to be as oxymoronic as the topic of “Islam in the West.” This latter topic, of course, has gained a discursive foothold among global stakeholders in governments, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), the media, universities, research institutions, and regional bodies. But the fact of the matter is that in geopolitical terms, Christianity has seemed so heavily identified as a Western religion and Islam so portrayed as a Middle Eastern-derived faith that apparent paradoxes are bound to be encountered upon deciding to investigate any one of the religions or their adherents within the context of a not only “alien” but also purportedly hostile geographical setting. The dilemmas affecting both religions are, however, asymmetrical. While interest in Western-based Islam as faith-cum-political ideology and in Muslims as a distinctive polity has accelerated in line with global geopolitical developments occurring in tandem with the oil-driven and conflict-triggered Islamic revival since the late 1960s,¹ relative ignorance regarding Christianity and Christians in West Asia (the Middle East) has been the norm rather than the exception. Ironically, on historic grounds, the plight of both the Christian religion and peoples of the Middle East arguably deserve comparable if not greater attention. In contrast with their Muslim counterparts in the West, Christian minorities in the

Middle East are indigenous to the region, with a religious heritage arguably older than that of Islam.

As a matter of fact, prior to the Arab conquest of the seventh century, Christians formed the majority population in the Middle East, the birth place of the three Abrahamic faiths of Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. In the early days of the Prophet Muhammad's missionary efforts in the Arab Peninsula, he encountered not a few Christians who encouraged him in one way or another. While some ended up embracing Islam, others remained Christian but concluded friendship agreements with the burgeoning Muslim nation. Treaties signed with the Najran Christians and St. Catherine's Monastery were especially memorable accomplishments for the Prophet of Islam in the realm of Muslim-Christian relations.² In the former encounter, the Prophet during his twilight years received in Medina a visiting delegation of sixty to seventy Christians from Najran, in present-day Yemen, to engage in theological dialogue pertaining to the person of Jesus Christ. The ensuing disagreements notwithstanding, the Prophet concluded a pact with them which protected their lives, churches, and belongings in return for *jizya*—a form of poll tax. His affability went to the extent of allowing the Christians to pray in the mosque despite reservations of some of his Companions.³ In the latter episode, in A.D. 628 the Prophet magnanimously responded to a delegation from St. Catherine's Monastery, located at the foot of Mount Sinai, Egypt, with an unconditional promise to defend Christians' civil and religious rights. Not only did he proclaim Christians as his "citizens" and "allies," but he also forbade Muslim men who had taken Christian wives from disallowing their spouses to continue to worship in churches.⁴

In their introduction to a recent special issue of the journal *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, the guest editors lament, "Christians in the Middle East have been curiously absent from Western and Middle Eastern scholarship and their relationship to their non-Christian neighbours is typically only discussed in projects of 'interfaith dialogues.'"⁵ In other words, contemporary discourse on Middle Eastern Christians typically depicts them as lacking agency (i.e., the ability to influence events and categories which affect them politically, economically, socially, and culturally). They are stereotyped as the perennial object of other actors, who in the Middle East with the exception of Israel are invariably the Arab-Muslim and Persian-Muslim majorities. In their position as minorities surrounded by an overwhelming presence of believers in Islam, Middle Eastern Christians struggle for survival against all odds and amidst incessant pressures to bow to majoritarian demands.⁶ Their ontological experiences are more than often discussed in conjunction with their Islamically imposed status as *dhimmi* (i.e., covenanted non-Muslim communities which the Muslim-dominated state is obliged to protect against external aggression in exchange for *jizya*). The general pessimism is aggravated by the tendency to assume that Middle Eastern Christians are necessarily helpless in arresting irreversible decline in terms of both numbers and clout. Sensational media depiction of Middle Eastern Christians as victims of unceasing persecution only serves the agenda of external parties which harbor ulterior motives in perpetuating communal tension in the region.⁷

On the whole, discussing the fate of Middle Eastern Christians within the “minority versus majority” framework validates their *dhimmitude*—a position of inferiority which they themselves have taken for granted, having internalized it. Although intentions of the Muslim majority may be benign, they inadvertently reduce their fellow Christian nationals to de facto second-class citizens, feeling duty-bound to defend Christians from external aggression simply because Christians are weaker and presumably cannot survive without such patronage. Christians, in turn, resent the implied condescension in a *dhimmi*-based relationship with Muslims.

Zeidan has likened Muslim attitudes towards *dhimmis* to how “traditional Muslim men view their women: inferior, segregated, having specific functions in society, obliged to manifest modesty and humility in their behaviour, not equal before the law—yet protected by the stronger group and in a curious way bearing its honour. As the Muslim male is bound to protect his womenfolk from any breach of honour, so Muslims are honour bound to protect ‘their’ *dhimmis* from attacks by outsiders.”⁸ Although the scenario refers to the case of Egypt, such an impression may be taken as the general Christian perception of Middle Eastern *dhimmi*-based societies.⁹ *Dhimmitude* was formalized within the nineteenth-century Ottoman empire’s *millet* system, whereby minority religions were afforded relative autonomy to organize their communities along confessional lines both legally and administratively. Such a system, however, treated each and every Christian as a member of his or her religious confession rather than as an equal subject before a common law.¹⁰ Decisions were mediated through religious elders and notables of the communities, conferring upon them enormous civil authority. By default, the head or patriarch of a particular Christian confession was catapulted into the forefront as leader of his whole community, irrespective of how devoted or lax were his commitments to the activities of his church.¹¹

The steady crumbling of the Ottoman Empire, nonetheless, exposed the various Christian communities to the influence of Western imperial powers. European penetration, as manifest in the *Tanzimat* reforms of 1839–76, hastened Ottoman decline, the seeds of which were already present in internal decay.¹² These European powers, eager to expand their spheres of influence, resorted to adopting as their protectorates particular Christian communities whose religious persuasion most closely resembled theirs.¹³ Under such an understanding, for instance, the French patronized the Middle Eastern Catholics especially the Maronites of Greater Syria, Britain and the United States became benefactors of Protestant groups, and Russia had the Orthodox churches as its clientele. In many ways, the so-called “Eastern Question” emerged due to rivalries among the advancing colonial powers, many of whom were guilty of fomenting dissidence and secessionist activities among their Middle Eastern coreligionists. The Christian minorities, on their part, welcomed such support, oblivious of the fact that the Western governments were using them as some kind of Trojan horse to consolidate their economic stranglehold on and to extract further concessions from Ottoman dominions.¹⁴ Already in virtual control of commerce and finance in the declining Ottoman economy, the Christian minorities were instigated in rebellious tendencies. Many of these unfortunately brought about massacres and suppression, thus signaling

the de facto abandonment of the Ottoman's classic model of ethno-religious tolerance and pluralism.¹⁵

The role of political economy in dictating Western penetration into traditionally Muslim-held dominions had never been in doubt. But bearers of Christianity as developed in and imported from the West accompanied the political economic interests. In different forms and varieties, Western missionaries established an inexorable presence in the Middle East. Some, like the Americans, operated independently from the state while others, like the Russians, received their government's overt support.¹⁶ Whether intentionally or otherwise, distinct Western Christian religious denominations worked hand in glove with their Middle Eastern brethren in undermining a Muslim empire which was increasingly derided as "the sick man of Europe."

Western intervention left an indelible imprint on Middle Eastern society. It drove a wedge between Middle Eastern Christians and Muslims, who had shared a heritage in culture and language which stretches back to pre-Christian times. In fact, Middle Eastern society had been kaleidoscopic in character, with varieties of local communities and tribes of different ethno-religious makeups coexisting with one another. Since cultural and linguistic affinity was the definitive link between the assorted groups, a consensus has never been reached on what properly constitutes Arab identity.¹⁷ The three Abrahamic creeds cut across existing configurations without dismantling them. If anything, they added further to the diversity, since sectarian schisms took place from time to time in all three religions. Even as Islamic dynasties asserted their authority in the region, their hegemonic rule did not necessarily lead to assimilation or even the integration of non-Muslim minorities. The Lebanese Christian economic historian Georges Corm attributes such preservation of plurality throughout the ages to Islam's express recognition of the legitimacy of "monotheistic religions, especially Judaism and Christianity" and its "structural acceptance of pluralism," in contrast with a "Western Christianity which until recently did not grant any legitimacy to other religions."¹⁸

Western Christendom's interest in the Middle East lay not only in the region's historic value as the blessed land trodden by Jesus Christ and his Apostles but also in biblical interpretations which ascribed special eschatological importance to the Holy Land. The emergence of Christian Zionists, a powerful lobby group in the West inspired by millennial expectations of the ultimate triumph of good over evil, has been mentioned as a great obstacle to peace in the Middle East. Biblical justification plays no small part in Western support for Israel, whose manifest existence is defended on the grounds that its founding had been pre-ordained by the Bible, in preparation for Christ's Second Coming.¹⁹ Nineteenth- and early twentieth-century missionary accounts made it quite clear that their aims were not merely converting non-Christians. Upon seeing the very limited impact of their proselytization efforts on Muslims and Jews, they partially shifted their attention to the "easier" targets—indigenous Middle Eastern Christians whom the foreign missionaries tended to view as "nominal Christians" whose religious customs were seen to be so decadent to the extent of being "scandalous" to Christendom.²⁰

CHRISTIAN IDENTITIES IN THE MIDDLE EASTERN NATION-STATES

In the carving up of the Middle East following the Ottoman collapse and the world-wide impulse favoring decolonization, the new nation states of Iraq (1932), Lebanon (1943), Syria (1946), Jordan (1946), and Israel (1948) were created. It has been argued that the modern nation-state system in the Middle East originated from colonial pressures exerted by especially the British and the French, aimed at securing unimpeded access to the region's natural resource, specifically oil, exploited in commercial quantities since the 1930s.²¹ Within this framework, the new nation-states of the Middle East were characterized as *rentier* or allocation states, whose incorporation into the world capitalist system was predicated upon an uninterrupted supply of oil to advanced capitalist countries in exchange for manufactures, food, and technical know-how. Bromley defines a *rentier* economy as "an economy in which income from rent dominates the distribution of national income," while a *rentier* state is one in which "the bulk of the externally derived rent is received. . . . by the government," and where rent makes up the larger part of the state's income.²²

Their *rentier* state status brings about three peculiar traits affecting Middle Eastern nation-states. First, the skewed oil-led growth has overdeveloped the state by unduly strengthening its role in the process of capital accumulation. As a consequence, wide inequalities prevail within and between states. Second, with priority given to stability of oil supplies, continual Western patronage of Middle Eastern governments has legitimized authoritarianism at the expense of political reform toward more participatory polities. Third, as a bulwark against nationalist forces intent on destabilizing the aforesaid economic equilibrium, the West has constantly supported Israel in regular wars of attrition against its Arab foes, who were almost always led by Egypt before the Camp David Accords of 1978.²³ Pro-Western Middle Eastern Muslim states have never quite come to terms with how to reconcile being friendly to the West while maintaining the virulently anti-Israel stance, which was crucial for their own regime maintenance.²⁴

Amidst the sociopolitical flux accompanying the emergence of new nation-states, the Middle Eastern Christians became embroiled in an identity crisis. Culturally and linguistically they were part of the wider Arab nations and had similarly suffered injustices wrought on the entire Middle Eastern native population by the Western schemers. Nineteenth-century European expansionism was not its first encroachment into Middle Eastern territories. The marauding Crusaders had many centuries earlier massacred both Muslims and Eastern Christians during the course of their expeditions; the pillages of Jerusalem in 1099 and of Constantinople in 1204 had left particularly painful memories, passed from generation to generation, of Caucasian invaders.²⁵ As the Orient became increasingly confronted with the challenge of European colonialism, it was argued that Middle Eastern Christians served especially well as the bridge between East and West, being culturally part of the Arab world but yet, unlike their

Muslim counterparts, foregoing the inhibitions against importing pedagogical techniques from their Western coreligionists, as evidenced in the splendid achievements of Christian-based universities in Palestine and Lebanon.²⁶ An eloquent example in this regard is St. Joseph University in Beirut, originally established in 1875 by Jesuit missionaries who happily adapted their educational programs to local culture, to the extent of adopting Arabic as the language of communication. Upon the founding of Greater Lebanon as a national entity, St. Joseph graduates made up a disproportionately large number of its technocrats and intelligentsia.²⁷

Under pressure from both the Muslim and Western stakeholders, Middle Eastern Christians developed ambivalence for both. Straddling between the Orient and the Occident, they presented contrasting images to one another. To their fellow Middle Eastern denizens, they embodied “the modern and the new, renewal and progress, social liberation and modernization.”²⁸ In Palestine, for instance, the long-standing public image of native Christians has been one of “elitism,” “class privilege,” “nonviolence,” and “open personalities.”²⁹ To the West, however, they were backward Christians in need of salvation not significantly different from that required of “heathens.” In fact, as the scenario in Jerusalem testifies, since the nineteenth century, Western-based churches have pursued evangelism more vigorously among local Christians than among Muslims and Jews, drawing away large numbers of the Orthodox faithful to become Catholics, Anglicans, Lutherans, Baptists, and Pentecostals.³⁰ The intense competition for Middle Eastern protégés has been likened by Grafton to a Middle Eastern Christian “arms race,” where “Capuchins, Dominicans, Lazarists, and Jesuits competed with the American and British mission societies over the right to entice Eastern and Oriental Christians into their communities.”³¹ Such rivalries, occurring both within and between Roman Catholic and Protestant groups, were reinforced by their multiple connections to competing national and political interests, plus the grim reality that the different missionary clusters were often vying for influence of and favors from a limited pool of clientele from among local converts and foreign donors respectively.³²

Evangelical impunity and failure to internalize Middle Eastern Christian culture have not unusually resulted in tension between indigenous Christian congregations and Western-based churches. Middle Eastern Christians have proudly differentiated their spiritually rich tradition from its Western counterpart, which they bemoan as having been polluted by deviant interpretations and heretical practices.³³ Even within Western-based churches, as the numbers of Arab parishioners rise, friction has not uncommonly arose between the foreign-dominated clergy and the autochthonous laity. For example, the patriarchate of the largest Christian congregation in Jerusalem, the Greek Orthodox Church, has been beleaguered with allegations of corrupt dealings with Israeli state agents, ending up in the leasing of church property to Jewish capitalist interests.³⁴ Such maladministration has raised the tempo of demands for a comprehensive indigenization of the ecclesiastical hierarchies. The makeup of local Orthodox communities has been made much more complex with the recent arrivals of Russian emigrants, many of whom privately profess the Orthodox faith in spite of their nominal Jewish identity.³⁵

The identity crisis affecting Middle Eastern Christians has been outlined by the Lebanese Protestant scholar George Sabra in terms of a dichotomy between two fundamentally different approaches of realizing their Christian identity, namely either as Arab Christians or as Eastern Christians. On the one hand, Arab Christians seek to identify themselves with the Arab nation and its Muslim populace, the Arabic language and Islam being definitive components of Middle Eastern culture and civilization. Historically, this approach can be traced back to Syrian and Egyptian Christians' welcoming of seventh-century Arab conquerors as liberators from fellow Christian Byzantine oppression, which locates its roots to the Arab Christians' rejection of doctrinal verdicts of the Council of Chalcedon in A.D. 451.³⁶ Within Chalcedonian Christianity, the Great Schism between East and West in A.D. 1054 severed the Orthodox Church of Jerusalem from Roman Catholicism—a separation the Crusaders sought to amend without avail.³⁷ As far as Arab Christians were concerned, their suffering at the hands of Western conquerors throughout successive generations was no less horrific from what had befallen their fellow Muslim countrymen. To them, their future destiny lies within the context of a Muslim-dominated Middle East, regardless of their success in devising a *modus vivendi* with Muslims and Islam—whether comprehended as a religious faith currently undergoing resurgence or as a political ideology.³⁸ Whatever is conceived of as Arab and Islamic are deemed inseparable from the Middle Eastern Christians' worldview, underlying which can also be found deep-rooted anti-Western and anti-Zionist sentiments. This cultural convergence, claims Sabra, reached its heyday during the greater part of the twentieth century.³⁹ At the turn of the century, Middle Eastern Christians had made a disproportionately significant contribution to the reflowering of Arabic literature, science, and culture known as *An-Nahda* (renaissance). A glance through Middle Eastern scholarly history will reveal a glittering account of Christian participation in such path-breaking Arab intellectual undertakings as the medieval translation movement from Greek to Syriac to Arabic and vice versa; there even emerged a distinctively Christian Arabic literature.⁴⁰ Later, at the height of the decolonization era, Arab Christians played conspicuous leadership roles in the various pan-Arab nationalist movements that proclaimed support for secular principles of nationhood in modern heterogeneous societies.⁴¹ Among prominent Christian figures in this regard were founder of Ba'ath Party Michel Aflaq (1912–1989), Syrian National Socialist Party ideologue Antun Sa'adeh (1904–1949), renowned Egyptian nationalist Makram Ebeid Pasha (1879–1961), and progenitor of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) George Habash (1926–2008).⁴²

On the other hand, Eastern Christians are wont to throw in their lot with the West, whom they regard as sharing with them a distinctive cultural and civilizational heritage whose origins were fundamentally Middle Eastern. While admitting that political machinations of contemporary Western powers have had adverse effects on the Middle East, Eastern Christians feel that a greater danger to their existence and vitality lie in the Islamic threat. To them, the only way to safeguard the unique identity of Middle Eastern Christianity is for the Christians to connect at all levels with their coreligionists from the larger world of Christendom. In short, Middle Eastern Christians should not identify

themselves as Arab and ought to view Muslim rather than Western forces as the true occupying power set out to condemn them to perpetual insignificance. Much fodder against Islam is made out of its alleged inherent anti-democratic features which stand out as perennial obstacles against peaceful coexistence between Muslims and minority non-Muslims. Sabra picks out the Lebanese intellectual Dr. Charles Malik (1906–1987) as the chief protagonist of the Eastern Christian perspective. He further observes that, while both the Arab Christian and Eastern Christian tendencies are found across the spectrum of all Middle Eastern Christian communities and are far from being mutually exclusive, the Islamist revival and consequent Islamization of Middle Eastern polities have threatened to reduce the Arab Christian outlook to irrelevance.⁴³ Fears of Islamism have accelerated since the Arab Spring revolutions of 2011–12, with palpable Islamist influence being the norm in the formation of new governments which replaced autocratic regimes.⁴⁴ That the Eastern Christian position is gaining traction is underscored by Professor Murre-van den Berg's solemn verdict summarizing the impact of Western patronage of Middle Eastern Christians: "Today Eastern Christianity is seen as the paper unto which Western Christianity can write its history, also today Eastern Christians are seen as representatives from the West, and also today, their threats are seen as threats to Christianity in the West. Parallel to the growing presence of Islam in the West, these threats also literally are identified as the same: that of Islam as the enduring and most dangerous rival of Christianity."⁴⁵

In the post-Second World War era of nation-states, how Middle Eastern Christians responded to sociopolitical developments depended to a significant extent on how they positioned themselves vis-à-vis the Muslim majorities and the different regimes under which the Christian minorities live. For example, in Palestine-cum-Israel, where the Christians live alongside a Muslim minority with whom they together face a Jewish majority and an oppressive Zionist state, Christian mobilization has invariably taken up the Arab Christian character. Guided by a distinctively Palestinian liberation theology, which modified its original Latin American-oriented discourse to suit local conditions, Palestinian Christian thinkers and activists have sought to reorientate Palestinian Christianity as the Islamist movement's ally in the struggle against Zionist incursions into their homeland. In doing so, they have censured the relationships which Western Christians have fostered with Zionists, criticizing the biblical justifications for such linkages as a misunderstanding and misapplication of the gospel. At the forefront of a specifically Palestinian hermeneutics in interpreting the Arab-Israeli conflict are Protestant religious intellectuals such as Naim Ateek, Jonathan Kuttab, Elias Chacour, and Mitri Raheb. Ateek, an American-trained Anglican clergyman widely regarded as the founder of the movement, for instance, adopts universalist readings of the Old Testament that deny Jewish claims to Israel, focusing instead on the nature of the Divine as a just God above all else. The story of the Exodus to a Promised Land is decoupled from its nationalist implications, and given instead a ubiquitous quality with the help of other relevant biblical narratives.⁴⁶ At the discursive level, Palestinian Christians have come out strongly in support of *intifada* (uprising), although they eschew the violence that accompanies it. Barring minor disagreements, they have thus accepted as comrades-in-arms

both the Islamist *Harakat al-Muqawamah al-Islamiyyah* (HAMAS: Islamic Resistance Movement) and the secular-oriented Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO).⁴⁷ In practical terms, Christian civil society organizations have proliferated, the foremost of which has been the Naim Ateek-led Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center in Jerusalem. Sabeel has become a household name for having hosted luminaries such as the scholar Edward Said, peace negotiator Hanan Ashrawi, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, and Archbishop Rowan Williams in speaking engagements.⁴⁸ Palestinian Christian charities are well-known for distributing aid, benefits, and a host of social services cutting across religious and confessional lines.⁴⁹ The prevailing Arab Christian perspective among Palestinian Christian elites has been foregrounded by Marsh, “Any future for Palestinian Christianity must be a future in the context of Islam.”⁵⁰

At the other end of the identity spectrum are the Lebanese Maronites, the most steadfast among Middle Eastern Christians in resisting incorporation into any form of Arab-Muslim entity or against assuming any facet of Arab identity. The only Middle Eastern Christian community to have cooperated to any degree with the invading Crusades, the Maronites, who maintain a token loyalty to the Holy See in Rome, prefer to maintain a semi-autonomous hold on Christian enclaves around Lebanon’s mountainous areas. Immensely proud of their distinctive heritage, the Maronites had regarded the founding of Lebanon as the sole bastion of Christian power, surrounded by a sea of Arab Muslims whose civilization and traditions they despised and sought to sever relations with.⁵¹ In place of Arabism as their cultural trope, the Maronites curiously staked a claim to Phoenicianism as the basis of their ancestral nation, oblivious to the many disputations that such a disavowal of Arabism amounted to an intentional invention of history. Phoenicians were supposedly the quintessence of “high culture,” to which occidental civilization locates its provenance and whence it inherits trading, traveling, and literary skills.⁵² Even today, surveys of Maronite attitudes indicate their hardened stance against integration into a post-civil war plural Lebanese state.⁵³ Continual Maronite dissatisfaction is expressed against terms of 1989 Taif Accords, which had given greater public roles for Muslims, in line with the shifting demographic balance favoring the Sunni majority. Of particular significance was the reorientation of Lebanon’s identity to reflect more its sense of belonging to the Arab world, accentuated by the legitimization of Syria’s oversight of Lebanon’s internal affairs.⁵⁴ Maronite intransigence in holding on to a fundamentally different worldview from that of their Arab Muslim neighbors, nonetheless, does not mean that Maronites have been devoid of proponents of the Arab Christian perspective. As discussed at length by Baroudi, in 1957–58 Patriarch Paul Meouchi’s pan-Arab disposition endeared him more to Lebanese Muslims than to hardline Christians led by President Camille Chamoun, dragging Lebanon into an intra-Maronite mini-civil war.⁵⁵

Between the two polar ends of the Arab Christian and the Eastern Christian outlooks, lay a variety of Middle Eastern Christian responses to regimes which displayed a clear authoritarian slant for the greater part of their history. Under the autocratic regimes presided by Saddam Hussein in Iraq (1979–2003), Hosni Mubarak in Egypt (1981–2011), and Hafez al-Assad in Syria (1971–2000), Christians were generally seen

as preferring the safe option of not opposing the dominant political establishment. The national leaders, on their part, undertook the responsibility of safeguarding the welfare and rights of their Christian minorities. Apart from ensuring that personal-cum-family laws of the Christians were respected,⁵⁶ the secular-oriented Muslim heads of states coopted many willing Christians who rose through the political and bureaucratic hierarchies of their home countries until reaching high-ranking positions. A prominent example in this regard was that of Mikhail Yuhanna aka Tariq Aziz, an ethnic Assyrian, Chaldean Catholic, and long-time confidante of Saddam Hussein who served loyally as Iraq's Foreign Minister (1983–91) and Deputy Prime Minister (1979–2003). During the Iran–Iraq War (1980–88), many Iraqi Christians served valiantly for their homeland in various capacities, but were especially admired for their frontline exploits in military combat.⁵⁷ Patriarchs of the various Christian communities developed a certain level of understanding with the national governments, toward the protection and even furtherance of their peoples' rights.⁵⁸ This contrasted with the rising tension that often prevailed in relations between the ruling elites and the Islamists, who were inclined to view the Christians as collaborators with the secular-nationalist regimes. At times when such friction escalated into violence, Christians not uncommonly found themselves to be at the receiving end of the ensuing commotion, with churches being a favorite target for vandals. Ecclesiastical figures not unexpectedly preferred the option of secular equality to the uncertainty of an Islamist political order. They were prepared to tolerate a degree of authoritarianism evinced by secular-oriented Muslim rulers, as exemplified in Egypt by Patriarch Shenouda's original call for Coptic Christians to refrain from supporting the anti-Mubarak demonstrations—a call which was eventually ignored by young Copts who joined hand in hand with their Muslim compatriots in bringing about Mubarak's eventual downfall in February 2011.⁵⁹

CHRISTIAN RESPONSES TO MIDDLE EASTERN SOCIOPOLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

Understanding Christian responses to sociopolitical developments in the Middle East is impossible without taking into account the authoritarian political culture endemic to peoples of the region.⁶⁰ While the Western media and think tanks have tended to pinpoint the allegedly inherent incompatibility between democracy and Islam, whose political traditions undergird Arab societies in general, in explaining the phenomenon of authoritarianism, David Grafton has recently pointed out that anti-democratic tendencies in the Middle East are properly rooted in the Arab family system, which concentrates authority in the patriarch or the *shaykh*. Such a patriarchal modality of authority cuts across ethno-religious boundaries, such that among Orthodox communities which have remained steadfast to Middle Eastern communitarianism with its embedded

hierarchical systems, modern concepts of citizenship, individual freedoms, and equality are as alien as obtaining in Muslim communities. Unlike in the Western-derived “civil society” or “polity” or in the Hellenistic *polis*, the locus of power in a Middle Eastern political unit is not the individual but rather the family, the tribe, or the clan. A community is made up of different groups rather than distinct individuals; it was through the mechanism of such tribal-confessional loyalties reified in the *millet* system that the Ottomans reached out to the Christian minorities for centuries before the arrival of Western powers.⁶¹ Whereas under the Ottoman imperial administration Christian political responses were mediated via communal units, in the postcolonial Middle East their reactions were officially negotiated through nation-state structures in their capacities as citizens. Culturally though the patriarchal system bearing innate authoritarian traits was never going to vanish easily.

In the era of nation-states, Christians’ *modus vivendi* vis-à-vis authoritarian Muslim regimes and Arab Muslim majorities can be summed up by the “sameness and difference” discourse. In a nutshell, the Christian minorities’ existence is predicated on their ability to balance out narratives of sameness and difference with their fellow Muslim citizens. On the one hand, Christians regard themselves as equal citizens of their nation-states, without any artificial differentiation from the majority Muslim populations. In this sense, they refuse being categorized as minorities, for such categorization reflects a legally inferior position to Muslims and dependency on the Muslim state for their protection. Their demand for equality is claimed to be embedded in the modern state system, without the need for any special attention reminiscent of the Ottoman-era *dhimmi* status imposed on them. In Egypt, for instance, the notion of Coptic Christianity is said to be integrated with the concept of national unity. Trite answers of Copts and Muslims being “blood brothers” when quizzed about differential aspects of both communities’ relative political significance signify the presence of the sameness perspective.⁶² On the other hand, recourse to a measure of difference is required of the Christians in their quest for equal stakes in the definition and operationalization of nationhood. Without state intervention, a real danger of Christians being overwhelmed politically, economically, and socially exists, particularly with the manifest advance of Islamist causes and categories in defining the character of contemporary Arab nation-states. In Syria, for example, the positioning of Christians as minorities has even proffered advantages in that they are seen as allies of a state dominated by fellow minority Alawites, from whom they have historically managed to extract tangible concessions pertaining to freedom of religion.⁶³ Since the onset of the Arab Spring uprisings, however, the Syrian state has been drawn into a protracted civil war against Sunni insurgents who are purportedly supported by victorious elements of the Egyptian insurrection. In the long term, Christians are thus presented with a huge dilemma of whether to declare overt support for the ruling establishment, lest their partisanship ends up favoring the losing side, spelling out grave consequences for their fate in a future Syria commanded by a new set of Muslim leaders.⁶⁴

Confronted with the authoritarian challenge, Middle Eastern Christians have responded by reasserting their distinctive ethno-religious identity. The long-standing

failure of originally Western churches to indigenize their ecclesiastical hierarchies betrays a crude lack of understanding of Middle Eastern political culture. However, this has changed, for example, with the installation of Michel Sabah, an ethnic Palestinian, as the Latin Patriarch in Jerusalem in 1987, and his succession by Fouad Tawal, another Arab Christian, in 2008.⁶⁵ Other Palestinian churches have also experienced indigenization efforts at the behest of their congregations, who felt the urgent need to unite under a more cohesive identity in the face of Israeli occupation. Concerned over the alleged failure of Greek clergymen to defend their interests, Palestinian members of the Orthodox Church formed an Arab Orthodox Initiative Committee in 1992 to prod for increased native representation in the Patriarchate.⁶⁶ Within the Anglican Church, the last English Archbishop of Jerusalem, George Appleton, served from 1969 to 1974, after which a succession of Arab bishops has followed: Faik Ibrahim Haddad (1976–84), Samir Hanna Kafity (1984–98), Riah Hanna Abu El-Assal (1998–2007), and Suheil Salman Ibrahim Dawani (since 2007). Such Arabization, while having the positive impact of uniting Palestinian churches in adopting a common stand condemning Israeli repression of the *intifada*, has not proceeded without encountering opposition. The Church's Ministry among Jewish People (CMJ), an influential Anglican society which had formerly organized under the London Society for Promoting Christianity amongst the Jews (LJS), had unsuccessfully petitioned to retain an English bishop. The earliest Anglican mission in the Middle East, the Church Missionary Society (CMS), also had a racist record of opposing the ordination of Arab priests.⁶⁷

In most Arab polities, Christians have had to face nation-states which were not only authoritarian but who also willingly pandered to the interests of Islamists in an effort to neutralize their appeal to the increasingly religious Muslim masses. The Islamic resurgence, often boosted by petro-dollars from oil revenue, had therefore pressured what had hitherto been secular-oriented Muslim states to initiate Islamization programs to appease their Islamic constituencies. In 1980–81 in Egypt, for instance, under President Anwar Sadat's auspices, the constitution was amended making *sharia* (Islamic law) the main source of national legislation. In spite of his constant repetition of the slogan "no religion in politics and no politics in religion," in practice Sadat fueled Islamism by encouraging the growth of Islamic associations and putting on a pious image as the "Believer-President" during his well-publicized visits.⁶⁸ Unfortunately, he also drove a wedge between Muslims and Christians by publicly berating the Coptic Church for allegedly conspiring against the state.⁶⁹ The Arab Spring revolution has to all intents and purposes rekindled Coptic fears concerning Egypt's slide toward an Islamist theocracy under the leadership of President Mohammed Mursi, an erstwhile Muslim Brotherhood activist.⁷⁰ In Syria, following the brutal repression of the Muslim Brotherhood in 1980–82, the Ba'athist state sought a partial reconciliation with the Sunni Muslim majority by allowing "cultural Islam" to flourish, as shown by abrupt rises in veiling for Muslim women, in Muslim preference for gender segregation in public space and in the erection of mosques.⁷¹ Christians have been besieged by such public display of Muslim dominance, to the extent of having to contend with the purposeful building of mosques in the Christian quarters of Aleppo and Damascus. When such construction

plans proved detrimental to communal relations, the state had to be called upon to halt them.⁷² In Iraq, notwithstanding the concessions given by the Ba'athist regime to Islamists after Iraq's retreat from Kuwait in 1991, Christians generally led comfortable lives under Saddam Hussein's benign protection. Nonetheless, the prevailing impression among especially Shi'ite Islamists that Christians were responsible for engendering secularism and had later colluded with Ba'athist secularism proved to be injurious in the long term.⁷³ As far as Christians were concerned, Saddam Hussein's deposition unleashed a situation where all hell broke loose. Paradoxically, post-Saddam's governments operating under the US's aegis have been unable to defend the human rights of their Christian minorities from being wantonly trampled upon. As a result, thousands of Iraqi Christians have fled for neighboring Syria, where President Bashar al-Assad is holding his ground against an Islamist-inspired rebellion.⁷⁴ The alarming situation has prompted Louis Sako, the newly appointed patriarch of the Chaldean Catholic Church, to issue a statement questioning the path that the Arab Spring is taking, perceiving it to have been hijacked by nefarious elements after largely hopeful beginnings.⁷⁵

Faced with constant uncertainty and tribulations, Middle Eastern Christians have reacted both inwardly and outwardly. Internally, they have experienced a religious revival of their own which, different from their Muslim counterparts' politico-ideological struggles to uphold Islam, has focused on spiritual aspects of their religion. As consciousness of their unique position as descendants of the earliest bearers of Christianity rises, they are gradually foregoing the shame of practicing rituals, celebrating festivals, and reciting liturgies which seem to differentiate them from their Western religious brethren. As a matter of fact, such *sui generis* traditions and customs have instead become a source of pride for many modern Middle Eastern Christians.⁷⁶ For lay and religious Christians alike, the Church has consequently emerged as a new force for social mobilization. In Egypt, for instance, Christian revival has taken the form of Sunday classes, theological study groups for laity, Coptic language lessons and pilgrimages to religious sites, especially monasteries. Indeed, Middle Eastern Christianity is especially distinguished by its monastic character, and resurgence of interest in monasteries and monastic life has been particularly telling among the youth, including highly educated ones. Religious tours, which include a trial stay in monasteries, reinforce participants' sense of Christian belonging and foster camaraderie via activities such as congregational prayer, reflection, and storytelling of narratives of Christian saints and martyrs.⁷⁷ In Lebanon, the role of the Maronite Church as the definitive voice of Christians—politically marginalized since the end of the civil war in 1990, has been catapulted to the forefront by virtue of intra-Maronite wrangling among political camps, each in support of opposing Muslim factions.⁷⁸ Internal Christian fragmentation has deteriorated to such an extent that terms such as "Shi'ite Christians" and "Sunni Christians" have entered Lebanese popular parlance.⁷⁹ Nevertheless, instead of adopting clear-cut political stances, which would only further divide the Christian community, the Maronite Church has returned to the spiritual roots of its founder, the fourth-century Syriac monk St. Maroun, via a reassertion of its eremitical tradition.⁸⁰

Christian religious revival has taken place not only within specific faith-based communities but also between the different denominations. The most significant manifestation of this new consciousness of inter-group solidarity has been the phenomenal growth of ecumenical churches, organizations, and initiatives in recent years. A watershed was arguably reached in November 1994 with the joint declaration between Pope John Paul II and Patriarch of the Church of the East toward solving age-old Christological disputes, followed by the lifting of barriers against a Catholic attending Eucharist held at the Church of the East, and likewise for a member of the latter church wanting to participate in a Catholic-held Eucharist.⁸¹ In Syria, not only are ecumenical churches rising in numbers, but intermarriages between members of different Christian churches are also no longer a taboo.⁸² While ecumenism has taken hold across denominations and countries, in nowhere has it been more urgent and vivid than in the Holy Land, where the environment is no less influenced by Christian sentiments of being besieged on two fronts: by the Israeli state and by the Islamists, some of whom wage significant clout in the interim Palestinian governments. Socioeconomic factors and demographic decline weigh heavily against Christians in their tenuous relationship with the Muslim majority, with the inevitable outcome of deterioration of Christian political clout despite their traditional advantage in education and in economy.⁸³ Moreover, the great diversity of the Christian landscape in Jerusalem has meant that ecumenical efforts were never going to be easy. It was only in January 1997 that the three Patriarchs of Jerusalem achieved the unprecedented task of jointly presiding, sitting side by side, over a ceremony to mark the beautification of the dome sheltering the tomb of Christ.⁸⁴ Latent tensions do exist, however, as when the Greek Orthodox Patriarch Diodoros (1981–2000) warned Catholics against proselytization in the fields of education and welfare.⁸⁵

The most important ecumenical development to have emanated from Palestinian Christians has been Naim Ateek's founding of the Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center in Jerusalem in 1989, as mentioned above. Besides pioneering intra-Palestinian ecumenical efforts, Palestinian Protestant leaders also played a pivotal role in the formation of the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC), which has taken a bold stand opposing Christian Zionism as propagated by Western Christian evangelists.⁸⁶ Born at its first General Assembly in Nicosia, Cyprus, in 1974, the MECC was considered the legitimate successor of the Near East Council of Churches (NECC), whose origins go back to the founding of a Near East Christian Council in Beirut in 1932. Different perspectives, however, prevail between the Protestant, Orthodox, and Catholic churches on myriad aspects of the MECC. Hence, despite being officially acknowledged in the West as the legitimate mouthpiece of Middle Eastern Christians, the MECC, whose headquarters remains in Beirut, has still not attained the degree of respect and affection from those it seeks to represent.⁸⁷ MECC's vision and mission, stating categorically its aim of "establishing and strengthening Christian presence and witness in the Middle East" via activities which fall under three themes, viz. "Spiritual Ecumenism, Pastoral Ecumenism and Ecumenism of Service and Witness," is a tall order indeed to accomplish.⁸⁸ The long road toward Christian unity in the Middle East is indisputably thorny.

Another popular outward response of Christians to sociopolitical developments in the Middle East has been emigration outside the region. While the pace of Christian outward emigration has certainly accelerated in recent years, contributing to a leap in the numerical decline of Christians—which many see as the most crucial issue facing them,⁸⁹ in reality the pattern of Middle Eastern Christians' emigration to the West had existed ever since the Western powers established their presence in the region. Prior to Western capitalist interests establishing economic bases, Western missionaries had earlier pioneered humanitarian work in the form of schools, medical services, and the introduction of modern amenities to the average Middle Eastern populace, Christian and Muslim alike. In exporting modern lifestyle to their target groups, they were acting as agents of cultural change to those whose posterity unsurprisingly developed a fascination for everything Western.⁹⁰ For those who were able to climb the social ladder via educational advancement, emigration to the West seemed to be a naturally attractive option, especially in view of prevailing uncertainties in the Middle East. Almost all Middle Eastern churches today have branches in the West. With what are perceived to be increasing Islamist aggressiveness and bleaker economic prospects as time passes,⁹¹ the emigration tide looks set to continue in spite of widespread concern expressed at a possible disappearance of Christians in a not too distant future. The most worrying picture painted of the dwindling Christian population has been that of Palestine, with Jerusalem's symbolic importance as the birthplace of Christianity. It is estimated that since the Israeli occupation of West Bank and Gaza in 1967, close to 40% of Palestinian Christians have left their homeland; furthermore, statistics consistently show that the motive to migrate is stronger for Christians than for Muslims.⁹² While Palestinian Christian activists blame Israeli repressive policies for the shrinking numbers, the Jewish state's press is inclined to attribute such a phenomenon to the Christians' own economic vitality.⁹³

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Throughout their eventful history, Middle Eastern Christians have had to perennially situate themselves in relation to the "other." These "other" parties were not only alien to Middle Eastern Christians, but they also almost always bore the traits of an active occupier intent on imposing foreign categories and lifestyles on the indigenous population. Identities of the "other" vacillated between East and West, later taking the forms of "Muslim powers" and "Western powers," respectively. The identity of each category was plural: on the one hand, the dominant "Muslim powers" with whom Middle Eastern Christians have had to deal with over the centuries include the Umayyads, the Abbasids, the Mamluks, the Ottomans, secular-oriented Muslim nation-states, and now Islamist-influenced nation-states. The "Western powers," on the other hand, shifted from the Byzantines through to the Crusaders, Roman Catholic missionaries, Protestant missionaries, and later European and American interests, are more than

ready to establish clientelist networks with Middle Eastern Christians. With such a nuanced backdrop, small wonder that the Middle Eastern Christians themselves developed multiple identities which they could easily shift from one to another depending on circumstances and interests. Such identities could be religious (Christian, Orthodox, Protestant, Catholic, etc. with their varied denominations), ethnic (Arab, Assyrian, Maronite, Coptic, Armenian, etc.), or national (Palestinian, Syrian, Lebanese, Iraqi, Jordanian, etc.). It has been noted, for instance, how at the turn of the twentieth century, Lebanese Christians who relocated to the West frequently converted to Protestantism as a passport to gain “American benevolence.”⁹⁴ With such diversity and volatility in the identity constructions of Middle Eastern Christians, neither the impact of sociopolitical developments on them nor their attendant responses evince a coherent pattern or monolithic qualities, let alone predictability. In spite of the diligent ecumenical endeavors of recent years, achieving Christian unity in the Middle East has a long list of obstacles lying in front of those determined to tread the path.

With the slow and painful process of democratization taking root in the Middle East, one can expect less interaction in the future with authoritarian states and leaders. It seems that the axis of power with which Middle Eastern Christians will be increasingly engaging are Islamist ones or at least those which aspire to become Islamic-oriented. The present state of affairs, whereby an edgy coexistence just short of overt tension apparently prevails between Islamists and Christians, does not augur well for future communal relations in the Middle East. One can be more optimistic if and when the current Islamist phenomenon acquires more spiritual characteristics in the way of the great Muslim mystics, saints, and sages. There is a convergence between the approach of the Sufis, as Muslim followers of *tasawwuf* or Sufism—the branch of Islam looking into affairs of the soul or heart, are called, and the modern Christian revival which has rediscovered and is continually unearthing its rich spiritual heritage. In his review of contemporary literature on the subject of religious coexistence and conflict, not only does L. Michael Spath recognize the parallels between Sufism and Christian monasticism, but he also laments the fact that a bulky encyclopedia on religion and war found it worthwhile to devote only one page of coverage to peace in Islam with respect to Sufism, thereby “completely ignoring Islam’s peace tradition” and “reinforcing age-old stereotypes about the faith’s ‘sword theology.’”⁹⁵

A modern example of a Sufi master envisaging Muslim–Christian relations in cordial rather than antagonistic terms can be found in the figure of Said Nursi (1876–1960), a Turkish scholar of ethnic Kurdish origin and leader of the Naqshbandiyya Sufi order.⁹⁶ Famous for his *Risalae-I Nur* (Treatise on Light) pamphlets, Nursi championed unity between Muslims and pious Christians, whom he understood as followers of the true religion of Jesus and for whom he coined the term “Christian Muslims,” in the face of challenges from atheistic secularism and communism. An early advocate of Muslim–Christian dialogue, he conveyed his message of peace by corresponding with the Pope and paying a courtesy visit to the Greek Orthodox Patriarch in Istanbul.⁹⁷ Moreover, he viewed Muslim–Christian cooperation as imperative for peace in a future global order, as had been signaled in *hadiths*⁹⁸ ascribing an eschatological role to Jesus

Christ as the faithful companion of Al-Mahdi, the Islamic messiah. According to Islamic beliefs concerning apocalyptic events near the end of time, upon his descent from the heavens, Jesus will join Al-Mahdi in prayer, and together they will defeat evil forces led by *Dajjal*, the Antichrist.⁹⁹

NOTES

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3. Zeki Saritoprak, “Said Nursi on Muslim–Christian Relations Leading to World Peace,” *Islam and Christian–Muslim Relations* 19, no. 1 (2008): 30; Mahan H. Mirza, “A Delegation of Christians from Najran Visits the Prophet Muhammad: Contemporary English *Sirah* Literature for a Western Audience,” *Islamic Studies* 50, no. 2 (2011): 159–67.
4. The Prophet’s charter of privileges to the Christians can be read in its entirety at St. Catherine’s official website at http://st-katherine.net/en/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=20&Itemid=65; see also an article which has been published in many newspapers around the world by Dr. Muqtedar Khan, “Prophet Muhammad’s Promise to Christians,” *Ijtihad.org*, August 22, 2010, <http://www.ijtihad.org/Prophet%20Muhammed%27s%20Promise.htm>.
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 12. Edward Mortimer, *Faith and Power: The Politics of Islam* (London: Faber and Faber, 1982), 95–98, 127; Simon Bromley, *Rethinking Middle East Politics* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994), 50–51.
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 17. Corm, *Fragmentation of the Middle East*, 13–17.
 18. *Ibid.*, 18.
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CHAPTER 16

RELIGIOUS DISARMAMENT

Rethinking Religious Conversion in Asia

RUDOLF C. HEREDIA

SEEKING COMMON GROUND

THE theme of this chapter calls for a starting position, and we cannot avoid beginning from where we are, within our own perspectives and commitments as people belonging to various religious traditions. But we also need flexibility and openness to place ourselves outside these and adopt an etic over an emic approach, as we seek together the commonalities we share. It requires us to bracket, not betray, our deep-seated beliefs and commitments, for the time being, in order to come back to them more sensitized, to critique and refine them after the exchange. This is not a dialectic approach, which results in a clash of horizons of understanding and then synthesis where the old ones do not prevail but are subsumed in the new. It must be a dialogic approach which leads to a fusion of horizons, to open new and more meaningful worldviews, wherein both are enriched and carried forward.

This common ground for the starting point must be extended to include other areas of human values and concerns that may well be outside these religious traditions and can still serve to question and critique them in turn. Nor does it exclude the secular or the non-religious, insofar as this helps to further a multifaceted dialogue.

Bracketing Differences

Bracketing was the first step in the phenomenological approach of Edmund Husserl (1859–1938), later extended by Martin Heidegger (1889–1976) to deconstruction and interpretation. Dealing with intersubjective phenomena, bracketing implies a suspension of, a prescinding from our settled beliefs, putting aside our prejudgments and presumptions. Bracketing away alienating differences and contentious dogmas is not a denial of our long-held beliefs and deep-seated convictions, or a negation of our pledged

commitments and cherished identities, but rather a methodological device putting divisive and contentious aspects of our “stock knowledge” out of play for a while, so that we can come back to our original positions to critique and refine them further.

Bracketing is not just at the level of knowledge, whether this be common sense or expertise. It must also extend to the roles we play and the identities we hold in our social situations. Multiple roles and identities cannot all be activated simultaneously. In our search for common ground we bring into play only the ones that help this quest, and bracket the others. This is not feasible if our roles are isolating and totalizing and our identities rigid and solidary. To be first, last, and always a Christian or a Muslim or a Hindu is to position oneself thus.

Suspending differences implies a deconstruction of one’s own point of view in order to reach common ground with others, where we can reconstruct and expand what we share on common ground to travel together to a higher ground.

PLURALISM AND RELATIVISM

In coping adequately with our globalizing world, our starting point today can only be the de facto given of our plural social reality. In working toward pluralism adequate to this plurality we conclude to a de jure plurality for our world. We need a pluralism that will celebrate and reconcile our differences, affirm and subsume our identities in a larger organic whole, a continuity in change for an overarching civilizational unity to our cultural diversity.

Relativism, whether religious, ethical, or political, when this is associated with non-commitment, is hardly compatible with an authentic humanism, whether religious, ethical, or political. Pluralism, as Raimon Panikkar explains, is the necessary consequence of “recognising the contingency of everything that is human.”¹ The human is never the ultimate absolute but always in relationship to it. For pluralism is not about the equality of differing and contradictory truths, but about equal respect for others, who hold different truths. We owe this respect to others, even as we expect the same for ourselves.

In our multicultural and pluri-religious Asian societies, pluralism is a psychological challenge, a cultural imperative, an economic political necessity, a theological given. We need a pluralism inspired by a humanist, liberating, this-worldly ethic, premised on tolerance and sustained by dialogue.

MANY BOUNDARIES, MULTIPLE CROSSINGS

In attempting a holistic approach to the issue of conversion in Asia, I will distinguish four levels of understanding: the psychosocial, the sociocultural, the eco-political, and

the socio-religious. These levels are distinct but not separate. They overlap and interrogate each other.

Personal Boundaries

At this psychosocial level, conversion is a personal choice involving a complex set of more than just religious motivations. For religious identities are never in isolation but embedded in the social context of a person's life situation. This is clearly the case in Asia. Individuals looking for personal space often opt for a changed religious identity that allows for such space, whether psychological or social, intellectual or emotional. The change may be experienced as a liberation from one's family, community, social traditions; negatively, it could be an escape from all this. It could be seen as affirming individual equality and dignity, freedom and solidarity promised in the new tradition and rejecting the hierarchy and prejudice, alienation and anomie experienced in the old.

This inevitably critiques and interrogates both the old and the new. As history and experience show in Asia, it can be a painful process for the convert, particularly where one's personal identity is enmeshed in a network of dependencies and responsibilities. It can also be threatening to, and resented by the group the convert leaves behind. They may feel rejected by the change, especially when critical numbers or significant individuals convert. This has political consequences too. When identities are inflexible and group boundaries impervious, conversion can even precipitate violence. Obviously then, open and inclusive identities and groups are better able to cope with such change than closed and exclusive ones. The danger is to have a single, consolidated identity, inflexible and rigid.

Religious conversion as a personal change cannot but imply a new rearrangement of such evolving identities. At this personal level, religious conversion is not merely a renunciation, even though confessional narratives by converts often emphasize this. It is also a transition from the old to the new. This necessarily involves a negotiation of both the consonance and conflict between two identities, two traditions that may at times be more, at others less contrary to each other. The negotiation can sometimes be very subtle and unconscious, at others almost a struggle for survival. It can be a defensive self-justification or an aggressive protest, a spiritual liberation or a leap of faith. The different protagonists have different takes on such identity change.

Beginning with the converts, their old identity is not erased; rather, the new one is overwritten on it. They often undergo much role strain and stress in their new situation, which may show up in unanticipated and critical ways. Conversion may even involve a reorganization of personality that could be quite radical. New entrants often represent alternative perspectives on, and a critique of the old traditions they have left, as well as the new ones to which they commit themselves. This is precisely the complex transition they must negotiate, whether conversion happens in an assimilative or an oppositional context.

Coming now to those promoting conversions, in one scenario at this psychosocial level, these converters could be projecting, extending, and imposing their own religious

identity on the converted. If this is by force or fraud or unfair inducement, then it is a violation of the person, an illegitimate dominance over another. On the other hand, a converter may also be reaching out to others with an enabling religious alternative that helps them cope with their own situation, bringing them to experience a greater freedom. Buddhists monks of Emperor Ashoka's times were certainly more respectful of the people they preached to than colonial missionaries.

Those who oppose religious conversion perceive it as an unfair imposition that violates a person's identity and dignity. Historically, this has certainly happened, and subjugated or colonized peoples in Asia still have bitter memories of this. But it is also true that communities and groups who perceive religious conversion as undermining their dominance or compromising their interests, can become aggressive, precipitating violence against the converters and the converted. This escalates into a spiral of violence rather than putting a stop to the conversions, because the root causes of the conversions are not addressed.

Proponents and opponents of conversions are often locked in a battle to impose their own religious convictions, where the real casualty is the freedom of the would-be convert caught in between. Unfortunately, religious violence is not the only violence converts are subject to, and yet for the other two protagonists, religion becomes the overriding preoccupation.

A liberal secular democracy must negate the presumption of ascribed status. Human dignity demands the right to express one's individuality and freedom. This "freedom of conscience" must embrace both the right to change for the converted, as also the right to propagate for the converter, always respecting the need for reasonable restrictions that all civil liberties and democratic rights must be minimally subject to.

Community Boundaries

A community has a collective right to its own identity, so long as this does not violate the fundamental rights of its individual members or the reciprocal rights of other communities. Individual freedom is in tension with, but not necessarily in contradiction to, community solidarity. Religious freedom is one of the most sensitive areas of this tension. However, the protection of identity and dignity, whether of the individual or the community, will need more than a regime of political rights. There is also the need for civic space in which both can flourish and the individual–community tension meaningfully resolved. This is an issue of tolerance that cannot be legislated and so all the more concerns our civic sense.

Collective rights are consequent on corresponding collective identities. However, while they are distinct, they are never separate from, much less in opposition to, individual rights and identities. They must be complementary, never contradictory to them. Thus while protecting a community's identity and safeguarding its dignity is a legitimate exercise of these rights, the freedom of choice for individuals or of groups to reject, accept, or change their own allegiance, and consequently their identity, cannot be rightfully denied.

Anxiety over such a change of allegiance is hardly surprising, particularly when there is a close identification between community and religious tradition as happens with ethnic religions. It implies a threat to the tradition and the collective identity of both communities affected by the change: the one left behind, where feelings of anxiety and rejection may be greater than for the one that the converts join, where the neophytes may not always be welcome.

Sometimes the anxiety and resentment even yield to a narcissistic rage. Religious wars and religious terrorism are ghastly demonstrations of this. However, not all conversions necessarily imply drastic sociocultural change. Often there is cultural continuity after the conversion, though more often than not there is a certain rupture. But violence is not inherent to the process of conversion as seen in religious traditions that have spread without conquering or subduing a people. While religious conversions can further exacerbate cultural tensions, they can also be the focus of interrogation between the opposing traditions. For religious conversions challenge our understanding of and commitment to a pluralist society; and point to the need, and perhaps the necessity too for a secular state.

As with persons, so with groups: the converts may well be seeking a new social identity as an escape or liberation from a self-understanding no longer adequate or acceptable. Their choice is a social protest directed, not to reform the old, but to reject it, inspired by hope for a better future elsewhere.

The motivations involved in such conversions are quite complicated and must be carefully and respectfully disentangled. The converter in this context may be imposing a new dominance, or protecting, or even extending the dominance of the old community and its tradition by assimilating new and marginal groups, thus domesticating the alien. Too often Christianization has meant Westernization, Islamization has imposed Arabization, and Hinduization is made equivalent to Sanskritization. Sometimes there is an internal attempt to adapt and even reform the tradition to better cope with the neophytes' expectations. But this indigenization or inculturation may be resisted by the old orthodoxy.

The converter could be genuinely sharing or offering a new sociocultural liberation. However, when the liberating power of a religious tradition finds expression in conversion across traditions, it is a doubly provocative challenge to the status quo.

Considered at this cultural level, those opposing conversion have a fear of cultural, even demographic extinction. This has happened with conversions in the colonial period to eastern religious traditions in Asia, just as today there is apprehension in the West toward conversions to other religious traditions, especially to Islam.

Economic-Political Boundaries

Conversion could also mean a passage from subaltern to dominant eco-political groups. It could involve the co-option of a subjugated people, domesticating the alien, as happened with colonialism. Or it could be empowering a coalition of otherwise disparate individuals

and groups as happens with revivalist movements. Although human motives are notoriously mixed, only a deep cynicism would believe that material advantage is the sole, or even the most dominant motivation here. *Homo sapiens* do not live by bread alone!

The real issue here is how conversion will affect other levels of social interaction. The exploitation of subject peoples has all too often been legitimized by the religion of the subjugators. When religious converters followed in the wake of political power, there were enormous ambiguities not easily explained in religious terms. However, the converter can also be motivated by a sense of economic justice and political liberation for the oppressed. Where the real issues are indeed economic and political, we must face them with a secular agenda, interpreting our religious traditions creatively to draw inspiration from them. Making such interventions conditional on conversion is to compromise them, as Mahatma Gandhi rightly insisted.

Opposition to religious conversions at this level is articulated in terms of protecting the would-be converts from violence to their conscience, culture, and religious allegiance. However, to assume that religious conversion is inherently violent is to deny to converters the freedom to propagate their faith fairly and respectfully. It negates the freedom of converts under the guise of protecting them. It is blind to the violence the weak and vulnerable already suffer from dominant groups, supposedly protecting them from force, fraud, and inducement. Oftener than not, those opposing the conversion of these groups are motivated less by the concern for the converts than by the threat they perceive to themselves. "Nation at risk," "Religion in danger" becomes their battle cry, resulting in brutal atrocities. Few religious traditions can claim innocence in this matter, once they are politicized. Both piety and patriotism have all too often been the refuge of scoundrels.

If the converts' freedom is really the issue, they must be protected against those who convert, as also against those who prevent their converting, when either of these use force or fraud or undue inducement. To pretend that some citizens are incapable of such freedom and need state protection against being misled is dangerous paternalism in a secular democracy that has seen fit to privilege its citizens with universal franchise.

Religion has necessary community and social dimensions. It cannot be banished to the private sphere, certainly not in Asia. However, when it steps into the public domain and demands its political rights as guaranteed by a secular, democratic Constitution, religion must also constrain itself with the consequent political and civic duties, not just by respecting the rights of others, but also being sensitive to their sensibilities, including religious ones. This is especially so when it comes to preaching and propagating religion, for insensitivity here degrades both one's own and the other's religious tradition as well.

Religious Boundaries

A genuinely "religious" conversion across traditions implies a change in a religious worldview and its root paradigm. Often this can be a wrenching experience, for it involves reconstructing one's life and context in new and unfamiliar ways.

However, as Bernard Lonergan has pointed out, at times “conversion is not so much the denial and destruction of value systems and root paradigms as their restatement and transvaluation.”² Thus John Henry Newman considered his conversion to Catholicism an affirmation of his earlier Anglo-Catholicism, a coming home not a going away; or with Brahmabandhab Upadhyay and Pandita Ramabai, for whom religious conversion to Christianity did not negate being culturally Hindu. This is the issue of multiple identities and multiple belongings, and as being English and Catholic was for Newman.

Here the religious motivation of the convert is the focus of concern, though the motivation can be more or less mixed. Sometimes persons may feel so constrained by their own tradition that they may long for an escape into something more spiritually and religiously fulfilling. Sometimes, it is these very desires, nurtured in one tradition, which may seek their fulfilment in another. Here again conversions of significant persons from the dominant group, even for primarily religious reasons, may then be seen as undermining the group and its dominance, and similarly conversions into the group as extending, and sharing in its influence.

At the level of the religious community, a change of worldview and of the root paradigm can undermine the foundational myth of a people’s religious tradition. The real issue here is the one of religious pluralism, and the tolerance and dialogue this must entail. Should boundaries between religious communities be porous or sealed? Should there be an open, inclusive understanding of religion or a closed exclusive one? flexible, non-antagonistic expressions of religiosity, or rigid, hostile ones? Should we be tolerant of religious differences and dialogue across them toward understanding and harmony, or seek to impose homogeneity and uniformity on others and ourselves? Where does organized group or mass conversion stand in this regard? These are essentially religious issues, but politically explosive ones, the more so today in our contentious Asian social context.

Certainly some converters are but proselytizers, who function like travelling salesmen hawking religious wares; but there are others, like wandering minstrels, who sing the divine praises for all to hear; and still others like the garden rose, whose enchanting fragrance suffuses all around. There are the martyrs, who witness with their lives to the truth, in which they believe, and the fanatics, who impose their truth on others’ lives. There are organized efforts at converting others and an informal absorption of others into a community. Caught in between are the hapless converts and would-be ones, who become so much cannon fodder in this religious war.

Religious functionaries and elites, who have the most to lose with the exodus of their flock, often resist their leaving. However, some are opposed to any religious conversions in principle even when conversion is a free and spiritually motivated decision. Their concern is that religious conversions may eventually destroy a community’s cultural identity and undermine a society’s multicultural diversity. Affirming social identity and diversity should not stand in contradiction to personal freedom and dignity. For neither identity nor diversity need be frozen and static, they must be allowed to evolve and change into new identities and new diversities.

RETHINKING CONVERSION

Our response to pluralism must begin with rejecting inequalities and accepting differences, affirming equal dignity for all and respecting the unique identity of each, reaching out to live and celebrate similarities and differences as parts of a larger organic social and cultural whole. Our pluralism is not so much to promote our unity over and above the reality of our diversity, but rather to protect our diversity in our quest for unity. Not unity-in-diversity so much as diversity-in-unity.

Individual identities pertain to the cultural domain. When these are aggregated from the individual to the group, they can become more intractable and uncompromising than ever. This is precisely what happens with exclusive and total identities. They subsume all other individual identities into the group one and oppose this to the identities of other groups. This is the death knell of any kind of cultural pluralism in society. Religious nationalisms and fundamentalisms are prone to this.

Rather, we need inclusive multiple identities both for individuals and groups, identities that are layered and prioritized according to the context around a core identity that gives stability and continuity to the person and the group. This will demand flexible identities and overlapping porous group boundaries.

Religion and Dharma

There is a rich heterogeneity in the confused complexity of the religious traditions of Asia. In actuality, each constitutes a family of fluid traditions and evolving institutions, of thought and experience, of practices and beliefs. They are labeled as a matter of convenience, for the sake of shorthand reference, but this is at the risk of misunderstandings and misrepresentations.

Religious conversion either as change within the same religious tradition, an *atmaparivartan*, or as change across religious traditions, a *dharmantar*, implies a change in both one's religious commitment and social position. Thus, conversions can destabilize the life of a people, unsettle painfully balanced boundaries, scramble carefully constructed identities.

Conversion as Change

However, religious conversion as change is not merely a threat to the unity of a people. There is both continuity and discontinuity implied in any process of conversion. In a plural society, it can challenge the more particular and exclusive community identities, to come together as multilayered identities under a more universal and inclusive one, as in a common citizenship in civil society or an overarching culture or civilization.

There can be huge risks involved in disturbing the status quo, but freezing it has its own costs too.

The legal banning of religious conversion, proposed in the name of religious harmony between communities, is in actuality a protection of the religious status quo. Yet, whether it is possible to maintain inviolable boundaries between such communities in our pluralizing, globalizing world is a moot point.

Conversion as Subversion

As with any change that crosses traditionally ascribed boundaries, conversion tends to disturb the status quo and precipitate unpredictable and uncontrollable consequences, especially when the ethnic community is identified with its religion. If the affected people have imagined an exclusive nationhood for themselves, then nationalists will readily see conversions as subversive. The proclamation of an official state religion has too often led to the bloody persecution of minorities and ethnic cleansing.

However, when the majority religion is politically dominant, national and religious identity get conflated. “After all,” Gauri Viswanathan emphasizes, “nationalism’s recourse to concepts of ethnicity, race, religion and language is precisely what conversion contests”³ by making group boundaries fuzzy and porous. Clearly, perceptions of subversion are selective and there is room here for much soul-searching all round.

Conversion as Atrocity

Inevitably, “identity politics” premised on religion become the “politics of passion.” Religious nationalists use riots and pogroms as ritual performances to construct and sustain such divisive and hostile borders. Religious fundamentalism becomes the boundary-keeper.⁴ Conversion across such boundaries renders them porous and defused and not surprisingly is perceived as more than just a subversive betrayal. It amounts to a threat of annihilation, an atrocity against the group, which now counters this with atrocities of its own in order to survive by reinforcing group boundaries.

The response from religious conservatives from moderates to extremists to conversion, within or across religious traditions, has often been varying degrees of denial and resistance, and the resounding call to a counter-offensive of assertion and aggression becomes deeply rooted in fear and anger.

Conversion as Freedom

In terms of *dharma*, “freedom of religion” is then understood as freedom *for* dharma, to freely do one’s duty in terms of dharma. As a matter of a person’s choice not being determined from the outside, freedom of religion would mean freedom *from* influences that

restrict that choice in matters religious. There is a tension here that demands a sensitive resolution. A dharma, ascribed by birth, that allows no option out, whether this concerns religion or caste or other social affiliations, cannot be compatible with fundamental or human rights, neither can a personal choice that negates one's duties in the given circumstances of one's life, or shows no tolerance to others, be justified by such rights.

Ultimately, it would seem that the question is whether the freedom *to* convert as a fundamental right constitutionally guaranteed must be constrained by the freedom *from* conversion as a necessary protection provided by the state. Certainly, force, fraud, and other unfair and unethical means are taboo, but is there no legal space for ethical persuasion in matters religious? Or is this to be confined only to matters within, never across religious traditions? What happens when there is a plurality within a tradition, where all our religious traditions are complex and multiple? Will the status quo be frozen with anathemas and excommunications, fatwas and interdicts? Surely, there are complicated and confusing issues involved that cannot be addressed with any kind of rigid extremism or atavistic fundamentalism. For here we face the profound dilemmas of rights and duties, of freedom and responsibility, of liberty and tolerance.

Conversion as Tolerance

In a pluralistic society, religious conversions (particularly mass conversions, as have been happening in Asia) put tolerance to the test. It is not just the tolerance of the opponents that must be questioned, but equally that of the proponents, as well as the motivation of the converts. To jump to sinister conclusions of force or fraud is precipitously obfuscating, or at best benignly patronizing. Banning conversions or containing them through legislation as attempted in some states in India, for example, restricts people's religious choices.

Certainly, it is an unfair curtailment of legitimate civil liberties and democratic rights to ban even an organized attempt to propagate and persuade others of one's own views and beliefs, whether, religious, political, cultural, or otherwise, provided this did not violate the freedom of others. But religious conversion becomes an extremely sensitive issue, especially when it gets caught up and distorted in electoral politics.

Limits of Tolerance

The limits of tolerance must be set within a regime of human rights. However, to be sustainable our tolerance must go beyond legal norms. It must be founded on positive values and given some substantive content in terms of justice, truth, humanity, compassion, and love. It must be spelt out in behavioral norms that reflect these values: nonviolence and respect for life, social solidarity and economic equality, freedom and truthfulness, gender relations in terms of equality and fairness. Our tolerance must

express sensitivity to the “other” in multiple ways in the diverse arenas of interpersonal and social encounter.

Further, the level of tolerance we live by is set by the way the “other” is perceived by the “self.” From perceiving the other as practical obstacle, to positive complement, to moral obligation, to mystical-spiritual fulfilment, our perception of the other is always complex. Yet in a given context, one or the other perception will be the more operative, and so limit the level of tolerance correspondingly.

Finally, if tolerance must include tolerating the intolerable, how do we set limits to intolerance without abandoning our own tolerance, without becoming intolerant ourselves? This is indeed a delicate paradox that brings us to the necessity of dialogue as the *sine qua non* of tolerance. For without some level of reciprocal tolerance, an open and equal discussion is a nonstarter. It is more likely to result in confusion and misunderstanding, even recrimination and hostility.

Conversion as Dialogue

Today more than ever, the only way of being truly human is to be in constructive and creative interrelationships with others, not in isolation from them, if that indeed were possible any more. For our threatened religions in an unbelieving world, the only way of being religious is in solidarity with other believers not in confrontation with them. For today to be a person I must be interpersonal, to be religious I must be interreligious. In other words, to be human and religious, besides tolerance, even more necessary, is dialogue. Only thus can we genuinely be our authentic selves, true believers and truly human.

Fundamentally, dialogue is opening myself to another so that the truth of the other, which can question and so reveal my truth, that is often hidden from me. Thus, “dialogue is a way of knowing myself and of disentangling my own point of view from other viewpoints and from me.”⁵ Dialogue and conversation, then, are intrinsic to the human condition, the very language of our existence, the necessary site for interpreting all our experience.

All genuine dialogue must be “to recognise oneself (or one’s own) in the other and find a home abroad—this is the basic movement of spirit whose being consists in this return to itself from otherness.”⁶ A further challenge is to recognize the alien other in oneself and realize the basic human commonalities that bind us all together, reaching beyond our differences.

Interreligious Dialogue

Indifference, non-engagement negates creative pluralism, undermines respectful tolerance. Such inbreeding can only lead to a genetic decline of the group’s cultural and intellectual DNA. Rather we need to create a culture of dialogue that breaks the silence and opens communication, discredits suspicion, and creates trust.

A constructive engagement will demand a radical change, a *metanoia* of our hearts, to free us from the *paranoia* of each other. Raimon Panikkar rightly insists that “dialogue is not a bare methodology but an essential part of the religious act par excellence.”⁷ Conversion is at the crossroads of such an interreligious dialogue and ought to be an opportunity to reach out to, not a threat to retreat from the other.

Domains in Dialogue

Recently Catholic Christians have been urged by their church to engage in a four-fold dialogue: “the dialogue of life, of action, of religious experience, of theological exchange.”⁸ These distinct not separate domains allow for a multiplicity of diverse dialogues with a variety of different partners, even with nonbelievers outside any religious tradition, as with neighbors in a pluri-religious community.

Intrareligious Dialogue

An intrareligious dialogue is a necessary condition for an interreligious one.⁹ For a religious tradition that is homogenizing, insensitive, and intolerant to its own diversity from within cannot be open to being enriched by the diversity and difference of others from without. We all need this collective *metanoia*, an *atmaparivartan*, in our engagement with each other. And eventually, we may well find that we ourselves have undergone a religious change, a *dharmantar*, in our life and our world.

An Equal Dialogue

Any dialogue that starts with the assumptions of superiority on one side or has a hidden agenda can never be an open exchange, for all unequal exchange, whether between classes, castes, genders, or even between communities, regions, and so on, eventually becomes exploitative and oppressive. To be truly creative, dialogue must be open and honest, equal and free, beginning with mutual respect and continuing in reciprocal enrichment.

Dogmatic religious traditions find it problematic to concede that those outside their revelation and beliefs have an equal access to the truth. In such a perspective, a clash of religious traditions becomes unavoidable and peace and harmony is only possible in a secular space. This is precisely the argument of the rationalist, and history would seem to justify their stance.

Nevertheless, if interreligious dialogue between such exclusive religious traditions is more difficult, it is also more necessary. The challenge is to move religious traditions from being exclusive and intolerant to being inclusive and tolerant, or at least to find some common ground for a dialogue. This requires the partners to bracket their insider

perspective and prescind from it by positioning themselves on common ground, where all the partners to the dialogue can be equal.

Moreover, any attempt to clear a common ground for an equal dialogue must begin with reciprocity of perspectives, seeing ourselves as others see us as a necessary exercise for individuals and groups, for communities and other agents as well. This means positioning oneself outside one's own perspective and situating oneself within that of the other's. Only on such a common ground can all engage as equal partners and set the conditions for a deeper religious dialogue.

For the believers of the creedal religions, claiming privilege for their truth, an equal dialogue may not be a matter of "equal truth," yet it must always be one of "equal freedom." Any apparent controversy between truth and right, between tolerance and justice must be resolved with the only common currency viable: our common humanity and a basic humanism.

To those outside the faith community, these creedal religions may well be perceived as unwilling or unable to face the challenge of an equal dialogue. "My truth is truer than yours." Such religious traditions need a relevant intrareligious dialogue to be more open and inclusive. From an insider perspective, when a creedal religion holds its truth to be revealed, the objective possibility of one's conscience leading one outside the fold, as it were, is extremely problematic. Is this always "apostasy"? At least the insider must grant the subjective possibility of this happening in good faith, for we are all conscience-bound to follow the truth wherever it leads. Nevertheless, crucial questions remain. How inclusive is one's perspective? How informed is one's conscience?

The non-creedal religions are generally not constrained by exclusive beliefs. However, inclusiveness too must have its own cautions. It must not fall into relativism or degenerate into permissiveness; neither must it become a process of appropriation and absorption into a higher unity, wherein the distinctiveness of each tradition is conflated, not just subsumed. The all-inclusiveness of some universalists sometimes seems to imply just this. "My truth includes yours, but not vice versa." A valid inclusiveness would demand the integration of diversities into an enriching and higher unity so that we have a "diversity-in-unity" rather than a "unity-in-diversity."

White light includes the wave lengths of all the seven colors, yet the rainbow has its own especial beauty. So too, the polyphonic voices in dialogue make the symphony.

THE SANITY OF DISARMAMENT

Human Rights and Religious Liberty

The UN's "Universal Declaration on Human Rights" in December 1948, proclaimed in Article 18 the universal right to "change" and to "manifest," one's religion or belief in "teaching, practice and observance." In 1966, the UN "International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights" declared in Article 18(2): "No one shall be subject to coercion

which would impair his freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice.” This was considered necessary to allow for freedom of choice and at the same time to protect individuals from overzealous proselytizers.

Protection against proselytization is now seen as the right of a community to its own religious tradition, much in the same way as the right to its own language and culture. Without this, no group or community can feel any real acceptance in society. This is why they are contested with such political passion. Religion is an intrinsic part of these cultural rights. What this actually means in the concrete context of religious freedom and rights needs to be creatively and imaginatively worked through.

Religious conversion pertains to religious belief and practice, but to perceive it only at this level is to leave out more than what is comprehended. The change in religious identity and the allegiance it implies has an inevitable social impact on the religious traditions, to which these changing identities and allegiance are bound. It is here that differences must be faced and reconciled where possible, rather than just those in doctrinal conflicts or ritual disputes.

RELIGIOUS DISARMAMENT

Religion is a large and critical part of our culture, especially in a society where popular religiosity is predominant and religious traditions central. Religious beliefs and institutional interests also dig themselves into self-defensive bunkers, and trench warfare becomes a battle of attrition in the attempt to overrun and dislodge each other. Religious conversion can bring about an intensification of religious differences and antagonisms or it can be the occasion to review and resolve them.

When a culture entrenches its values and vested interests as non-negotiables, a *Cultural Disarmament* is the only *Way to Peace*.¹⁰ Today we need similar commitment to a “religious disarmament” to open a way to intra/interreligious harmony and intra/intercommunal peace. Recently the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the Vatican have hosted interreligious conferences at which reflections and recommendations and concluding statements are an apt example of this religious disarmament.

In May 2006 at Lariano in Italy, an interreligious meeting of representatives was hosted by the Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue, Vatican City, and the Office on Interreligious Relations and Dialogue of the World Council of Churches, Geneva, on “Conversion: Assessing the Reality.” The concluding statement pledged: “to collectively evolve a ‘code of conduct’ on conversion, which all faiths should follow.”¹¹

On June 28, 2011, in Bangkok, The World Council of Churches, The Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, and The World Evangelical Alliance promulgated their joint position paper on this conduct for conversion, a culmination of a five-year long consultation, that announced their core principle: “We affirm that, while everyone has a right to invite others to an understanding of their faith, it should not be exercised by violating others’ rights and religious sensibilities. Freedom of religion enjoins upon us all the

equally non-negotiable responsibility to respect faiths other than our own and never to denigrate, vilify or misrepresent them for the purpose of affirming the superiority of our faith.”

In the final analysis, a “rethink” on religious conversion must lead us to this: a struggle, a jihad with oneself, for the soul of a people, not just for souls to convert; an endeavor to sow the good seed of a meaningful, relevant faith for a hundredfold harvest of peace, premised on tolerance and justice, forgiveness and reconciliation.

There was no Hindu temple or mosque or church in the ashrams Gandhi founded. There was a prayer hall welcoming all faiths. It was a deeply religious and truly inter-religious place. Only a genuine religious disarmament opens such spaces for plural identities, and multiple belongings. Raimon Panikkar’s description of his own journey captures this most evocatively: “I ‘left’ as a Christian, ‘found myself’ as a Hindu, and I ‘return’ as a Buddhist, without having ceased to be a Christian.”¹²

NOTES

1. Raimon Panikkar, “Religion, Philosophy and Culture,” Special issue of *Inter*, no. 135 (October 1998): 99–120.
2. Bernard Lonergan, “The Dimensions of Conversion,” in Walter E. Conn, ed., *Conversion: Perspectives on Personal and Social Transformation* (New York: Alba House, 1980), 15–21; repr. from *Method in Theology* (1978): 13.
3. Gauri Viswanathan, *Outside the Fold: Conversion Modernity and Belief* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. xv.
4. Stanley Tambiah, *Leveling Crowds: Ethnonationalist Conflicts and Collective Violence in South Asia* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996), 310–11.
5. Raimon Panikkar, *Myth, Faith, and Hermeneutics* (Bangalore: Asian Trading, 1983), 242.
6. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York: Seabury Press, 1975), 15.
7. Raimon Panikkar, *The Intrareligious Dialogue* (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), 10.
8. Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue, no. 42, 1991.
9. Panikkar, *The Intrareligious Dialogue*, 40.
10. Raimon Panikkar, *Cultural Disarmament: The Way to Peace* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995).
11. *Vidyajyoti* 70, no. 8 (August 2006): 625–28.
12. Panikkar, *The Intrareligious Dialogue*, 2.

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CHAPTER 17

CHRISTIANITY AND POLITICAL DEMOCRATIZATION

The Case of East Asia

HUANG PO HO

INTRODUCTION

THE Asian world is relatively late in terms of its political democratization. Definitions and forms of democracy are varied, and so it is not easy to draw a line of demarcation for the beginning of democratization in Asia. Many scholars would see the seeds of Asian democracy in some of the earlier Asian institutions such as the Republic of Ezo (Japan, 1868), Lanfang Republic (Indonesia, 1777), and even the Republic of Formosa (Taiwan, 1895), and in the traditional Indian village governing system of "*panchayat*." However, it is a general understanding that Asian countries began to adopt the liberal democratic political system after the Second World War. There are considerable debates about the factors that affect democratization. Economics, culture, and history have been mentioned as factors impacting the process of democratization. Nevertheless, in many cases, Christian churches had significant roles either in initiating or promoting democratization in Asian countries. The people's power demonstration in the Philippines led by the Catholic Church, the Minjung movement that took place in Korea which was supported by Korean churches both Catholic and Protestant, and the self-determination movement initiated by the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan are examples that acted as catalyst for the democratization of these countries.

The role of churches in the midst of the political democratization process of Asian countries has interested many scholars in different disciplines, particularly those from political science. Traditional theological concerns on this issue were mostly expressed in the area of Christian ethics, namely, a study on Christian attitudes toward the public life,

which was considered an extension of Christian faith. It is, however, with the irruption of the Third World churches, and driven by the Third World sociopolitical realities, that the public theologies have been drawn into the center of Christian faith; ethics, thus, is no longer an extension of theologies but the main catalyst of theological formation.

This chapter is an attempt to discern, based upon the rising public theologies, the interactive relations between the contemporary democratization processes that have taken place in Asia, with particular concern for Taiwan and East Asia, and the development of Christian mission in these countries.

CONFUCIAN CULTURE AND ITS IMPACTS ON THE POLITICAL SYSTEM

Taiwan and almost all the Northeast Asian countries are deeply influenced by Confucian culture, though in different degrees. For Confucius, one of the main problems of politics was that the titles of people do not correspond to the behavior of those who claim such titles. He argued that to be worthy of any position, one should first behave accordingly with that position so as to have the virtue to occupy it. This problem was considered so serious by Confucius that it led him to develop the theory of rectification of names, which could be translated as rectification of behavior. The main objective was to explain the relationship between titles and behavior in order to make the actions match the hierarchical positions. In other words, the main contribution of Confucius toward the politics was to help effectively operate the existing social organizations and stabilize the given social order. This ethical orientation for political operation has its philosophical foundation on The Mandate of Heaven. Confucianism presupposed that an ideal political system is one which is corresponding to The Mandate of Heaven. "People" though are put in the center of concern of the Confucian political arena, they are objects of the political system and its operation and not subjects of it. Therefore, there is no way for Confucianism to develop a liberal democratic political system, though it has been strongly advocating a political system that takes people as its fundamental orientation.

Derived from this historical and cultural background, it is a general impression, that the modern liberal democratic system implemented in Asia, particularly in those countries with cultural backgrounds of Confucianism, was a transplant from the Western world. The basic value and spirit of the democratic system is generally considered by people from the Confucian background, to be consonant with and even derived from the doctrine of the human person of the Christian religion in the West. Reinhold Niebuhr's argument that "man's capacity for justice makes democracy possible, but man's inclination to injustice makes democracy necessary" has been quoted frequently to elaborate the relationship between democratic systems and Christian doctrines. Based on this background, the Christian religion in many of these Asian countries is

counted by both Christians and many of their fellow citizens, as an important catalyst of political democratization.

CHRISTIAN MISSION IN THE MIDST OF THE THORNY HISTORICAL JOURNEY OF TAIWAN

Christian mission in Taiwan can be classified into three major consecutive waves, in which both Catholics and Protestants have participated. They were (1) the Spanish Dominicans followed by Dutch Reformed missions in the period of Dutch colonization of Taiwan (1624–1662), (2) the Dominicans and later the British Presbyterian mission from the late 1850s under the Manchu occupation of Taiwan, and (3) the immigration of churches accompanied by war refugees from mainland China after the Second World War.

The Protestant mission to the people of Taiwan has a special relation with the Reformed tradition. The first group of Protestant missionaries led by Georgius Candidius to reach the land of Taiwan was composed of Dutch evangelists from the Reformed Church of Netherlands, accompanied by traders of the Dutch East Indian Company. This first wave of Christian mission in Taiwan ended with the defeat of the Dutch by the legendary warrior Koxinga. There was not much left of the first wave of Christian mission after the defeat and retreat of the Dutch.

The second wave of Protestant Mission was launched in 1865 with James Maxwell, who was sent by the London Missionary Society to Southern Taiwan. He with his missionary colleagues established the Presbyterian churches in Southern Taiwan, which was later united with Northern Synod Presbyterian churches to form the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan (1951). The Presbyterian Church was the only Protestant Church in Taiwan until the time of Japanese occupation, when the Holiness Church was introduced to Taiwan and joined Christian mission in the island in 1926. The defeated Chinese Nationalist Government fled to Taiwan during the civil war in mainland China. Accompanying this exiled government were refugees, including Christians from various confessions. They not only colored the denominational map of Christian population in Taiwan but also tested the ecumenical spirit of cooperation.

The Presbyterian Church in Taiwan has actively participated in international ecumenical communities ever since its inception as an indigenous church (1951) independent of the Western missionary societies. It has been ostracized at home in Taiwan from the denominations that had moved into Taiwan after the Second World War. The dissension was caused not so much by disagreement on biblical or theological matters, but by the differences of political and ideological positions derived from their perception of self-identity and from their historical experiences (i.e., Taiwanese indigenous culture, history, and religion vs. Chinese cultural and religious heritage). The first Chinese immigrants after the Second World War were enthusiastically welcomed by many Taiwanese,

as they were considered the victors in the Second World War, which, had resulted in liberating the Taiwanese from over fifty years of Japanese colonization. Regrettably, this exciting mood did not last too long. For very soon, the people of Taiwan discovered that the policies of the retreated Chinese National Regime of the Guomintang were not different from that of the departing Japanese rulers.

The corruption of the governmental administration and the failure of its socio-economic management compared to the state of the Japanese period disappointed the enthusiastic expectations of the people. Only two years after the Chinese Nationalist domination of Taiwan, on February 28, 1947, a massacre took place, later remembered as the "228 massacre," in which more than 20,000 Taiwanese elites were killed indiscriminately by Chiang Kai-shek's military. Still today the bodies of some of those killed have not been found. This incident acerbated the hostile relation between the new rulers and the indigenous people of Taiwan. The following "White Terror Control" and the historical record of long Martial Law rule in the island segregated the two groups of people even further. Unfortunately, the Christian congregations were not exempt from these negative historical experiences. While the rule by the Chinese Nationalist Party (Guomintang) lasted more than forty years, its administration and policies failed, because the political rulers never consulted the people and could not gain their support with the consequence that the Nationalist government never gained legitimacy. It remained stained by its colonial nature until 1996 when the first general election was held in the island.

THE STRUGGLES BETWEEN THE CHURCH AND THE STATE IN TAIWAN

The democratization process in recent years in Taiwan history was launched in the midst of the search for the identity of the Taiwanese people after a long history of colonization. Most people in Taiwan today are descendants from three major migrations: (1) the ancient Austronesia immigrants constituting the aboriginal tribes in Taiwan; (2) the Holo and Hakka immigration after the Koxinga occupation of Taiwan and during the following Manchu empire; and (3) the followers of the Chinese Nationalist Government which retreated to Taiwan after it was defeated in the Chinese civil war. An ironic phenomenon in the history of Taiwan was that the latecomers were able to seize political and economic power over the earlier settlers. A multilayer identity conflict is thus rooted deeply in this historical frame. A struggle for selfhood against the oppression from the later settlers has gradually evolved into political conflicts and revolts against the colonial ruling powers, and this has led to a nation-building movement.

The geopolitics in East Asia was affected by the civil wars that took place in China, Korea, and Vietnam after the Second World War. The international status of Taiwan after the end of the Second World War has remained an unfinished task. However, while the defeated Japan government declared abandonment of its sovereignty over Taiwan, the

United States made use of the island as its supply depot to support its military activities in both Korea and Vietnam. Taiwan was thus put under General Chiang Kai-shek's temporary administration. Struggling in the midst of different interests of the Super Powers, the nation-building movement in Taiwan has been strictly blocked by the international Super Powers, including the United States, Japan, and of course the People's Republic of China, while facing merciless suppression by the Nationalist government of Taiwan. Many political activists were imprisoned or forced to flee from the island seeking political asylum in other countries.

The Presbyterian Church in Taiwan was affected by its historical experiences of colonial oppressions and even gained support from its connection with the international church network and thus became the only organization that was able to give voice to the people and be in solidarity with them in their agony and in their protests during the Martial Law rule. It passed three declarations in the 1970s: the Statement on Our National Fate (1971), Our Appeals (1975), and A Declaration on Human Rights (1978). These were issued in response to the historical incidents: (1) "Our National Fate" responded to US President Nixon's visit to the Chinese Mainland in 1972. While some member countries of the United Nations were advocating the transfer of UN membership from Taiwan to the Chinese mainland, others were insisting on direct negotiations between Taipei and Beijing—both considered by the Taiwanese to be a betrayal of the people of Taiwan. (2) The statement on "Our Appeals" protested against the confiscation of the Bible printed in local languages on the pretext that it was in violation of policy to promote the use of the national language by the government. (3) The "Human Right Declaration" responded to US President Carter who, in his inauguration speech, consistently adopted "Human Rights" as a principle of his diplomacy; it asked President Carter to continue upholding the principles of human rights while pursuing the "normalization of relationships with Communist China" and also asked him to insist on guaranteeing the security, independence, and freedom of the people of Taiwan.

These three Statements on National Fate, Our Appeals, and Human Rights, though issued by the Presbyterian Church of Taiwan (PCT) in different times and contexts, show how the church has consistently stressed its fundamental position on the principle of the right of self-determination of people. The statements covered several issues of religious and political nature, as for example, the conducting of elections to replace the representatives in government bodies who were elected twenty-five years ago in the mainland, mutual trust between the government and the church, human rights, and welfare of the people.

CHRISTIAN CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE DEMOCRATIZATION OF TAIWAN

The principle of people's self-determination that the Presbyterian Church consistently advocated with its faith confession is in nature coherent with the spirit of Human Rights

Declaration of the United Nations. It was therefore soon adopted by many of the then nonparty political activists (political parties were frozen as well, no new parties were allowed to be formed under the Martial Law rule) who ran for supplementary seats of parliament or lower level elections. The church was thus entangled into the political movements and had to pay its price: it was forced by the government of Taiwan to withdraw from its membership in World Council of Churches in the 1970s; as noted earlier, its Bibles, printed in the local languages, were confiscated; its general secretary Dr. C. M. Kao and several local pastors were put in prison; the church was under strict monitoring of the governmental security units.

These sufferings were not without fruits; by the end of 1986, the first native opposition party was formed even before Martial Law was lifted (1987), freedom of press was restored, and the Parliament members were re-elected forty years after its first election. Once the dam was opened, the speed of reformation could not be slowed; a democratic Taiwan was born when the general presidential election law was legislated and the first president directly elected by the people of Taiwan came true in 1996. There was a power transition from the Nationalist party to the native opposition party in the year 2000.

DIFFERENT JOURNEYS FROM DIVERSE CONTEXTS OF ASIA

Samuel Huntington defined three waves of democratization that have taken place in human history, and he defined “the Third Wave,” as a global democratization trend in the world after the Second World War. The first wave had brought democracy to Western Europe and Northern America in the late nineteenth century. It was followed by a rise of dictatorships in the period between the wars. The second wave began after the Second World War, but lost steam after the mid-1970s. The latest wave began in 1973 and still goes on. Democratization of the post-Communist countries in Eastern Europe, and countries such as Brazil, Argentina, and Chile from Latin America, Korea and Taiwan from Asia, are seen as part of this third wave.

The modern liberal democratic states established in Asia can be found only after the Second World War; many of them belong to the so-called “third wave” in the categorization of Huntington. In general, the inception of democratization of Asian countries was inspired by former colonial countries, or was motivated by political-cultural impacts from the Western countries. Christian contribution to the demilitarization and democratization in Asia is considered one of the major factors of Western cultural and religious impact.

The emergence of the so-called “Four Tigers in East Asia” (Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore) after the Second World War was indeed a new phase of economic development in the continent. These countries were declared to be the “miracle from East Asia” by the World Bank in the 1990s, only three decades after their economic

takeoff. Although all these four countries were culturally characterized by their Confucian orientation beside their common experiences of rapid economic growth, their political developments have been diversified. Singapore as a city state has insisted on maintaining its autocratic polity, though not without challenge; Hong Kong though developed into a free and open society under the British colonial rule has never enjoyed real democracy even when ruled by a democratic British government. Its current status under Communist China rule after the handover in 1997 has not improved but rather worsened. After hard struggles of democratization, Taiwan and Korea succeeded in joining the club of democratic nations after the 1970s. In Taiwan, however, the people have continued to fight for their identity and persisted in their efforts of nation-building in spite of facing tremendous pressures from the two world Super Powers of the United States and China.

If the role that religions played in these four countries is examined in greater detail, the significant contribution Christianity has made can be discovered. Generally speaking, whenever the churches succeeded in gaining greater independence from political control and resisted the powers that be, their contribution to the democratization process was highly significant. Christians in Korea and Taiwan both paid a great price when they confronted the state power, and in spite of the small size of the Christian population, they were able to become a significant factor in the democratization process of their respective countries. The churches in Singapore have been too weak to confront the political forces. In Hong Kong, the strong Anglican Church which was hampered by its status of being a state religion of the colonial British Empire, together with the other major confessions could not play a major role in the democratization process because they were all closely associated with the colonial authority.

A DISPUTE OVER THE RELEVANCE OF DEMOCRACY TO THE EAST ASIA REGION

The 1980s were a significant decade for many of the East Asian countries with regard to the political developments. The Tiananmen protest that took place from April 15 to June 4, 1989, sadly ended with a cruel massacre of the students, yet it was etched in the memory of the people of China as a ray of hope in their struggle for democracy. Countries such as Taiwan, Korea, and the Philippines all went through significant democratization or demilitarization struggles.

In Taiwan the Kaohsiung Incident (1979), which originally was a protest rally for the international Human Rights day that turned to a riot under the suppression of the military and police, lighted the torch of the democratic movement and led to a series of social and political reforms in the island state. The Kwangju Democratic Movement that took place in the city of Kwangju in the provincial capital of the Cholla province in South Korea from May 18 to 27, 1980, and which resulted in the death of 1,200 students,

has marked a milestone in the process of putting an end to military government in South Korea. The so-called People Power Revolution emerged in the Philippines in 1986 and led to the departure of President Ferdinand Marcos and the restoration of the country's democracy. The massive martyrdom of the Christian students in Kwangju, the leadership role played by the Catholic Church for the People Power Revolution in the Philippines, and the imprisonment of the pastors and other prices paid by the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan are all considered important key factors in people's movements in this part of Asia. These are significant events for Asian democratization.

Christian contributions toward demilitarization and democratization in East Asian countries were supported by international networks of worldwide churches especially when peoples' movements were under immense threat and pressures. The concept of freedom and commitment to the liberation of people are not unique or exclusive to Christian doctrines or practice. It is for Christians and peoples of other faiths to come together and change history. Christians have joined the people's struggles that were generated from their common historical experiences and hope, and have been able to provide leadership for the building of the democratic system out of their faith's value on humanity.

Although Huntington has rightly pointed out that political democratization in different stages of human history without exception were ended by the counterattacks from autocratic or totalitarian forces, he has not explained why the autocracies, overthrown by the people, were able to come back to power. In some cases, it happened even in a very short period. This led to debates on whether democracy is a universal value for human political activities, and whether the liberal democratic system, generated on Western soil, is relevant to Asian countries where people have been raised with different cultural values and philosophies of life. The ideological conflict between Lee Kuan Yew, the former Premier of Singapore and Lee Teng Hui, the former President of Taiwan, is illustrative of this discourse. When Lee Teng Hui, a devoted Christian, who was decisive for the final implementation of democratic structure in Taiwan, tried to compare the two political systems, he said, that the so-called "Asian style democracy" (soft authoritarianism) in Singapore will not be sustained after the leadership of Lee Kuan Yew, while the democratic system implemented in Taiwan would last even without Lee Teng Hui. What has this conviction to do with his Christian faith? We do not know. It is still too short a period for us to make a judgment over this dispute. Nevertheless, the two Lees have set down two Asian political models for experimentation, the Singapore model of soft authoritarianism and the Taiwan model of democracy.

A CRITICAL REFLECTION ON CHRISTIAN CONTRIBUTIONS TO DEMOCRATIZATION

Despite this dispute on sustainability of different cultural values toward the democratic system, the proposal of Reinhold Niebuhr articulated from his Christian point of view,

that democracy is both desirable and sustainable to human society universally because of the particular nature of human beings deriving from creation (i.e., being the image of God, on the one hand, and sinful human being, on the other) has significance to this debate. According to Niebuhr, Christian understanding of human nature in sinfulness has denied any form of individual dictatorial rule, thus making democracy desirable. On the other hand, Christian belief in human creation in the image of God has given confidence for the collective pursuit of the common good. Accordingly, democracy is desirable for all peoples regardless of religions, cultures, and ethnicity. The liberal democratic system developed earlier in the Western countries, where Christian cultures provided the matrix, is proposed to be universally valid according to this Christian insight and conviction. Human pursuit of freedom and selfhood, which are regarded as values of democracy, are not meant only for the West, but are commonly to be pursued by all societies and all people.

Christian contributions to the political democratization in Asian countries as mentioned above have to do with the church's international networks and the Christian conviction about human freedom and human well-being. However, after they engaged in successful democratic and demilitarization movements, the prophetic voices of the churches were almost without exception silenced with the power transitions that took place in their respective countries. It is true of the Philippines, Korea, and also of Taiwan. A closer look at the unfolding of events reveals that even though the churches were able to stand up and fight against dictatorial and military regimes together with the victimized people, once the transition of power had taken place, those who fought with the church, and indeed the church itself, seemed to bask in the status and privileges of the newly acquired seats of power. And once individual Christians or churches became part of the new power constituent, they lost their momentum and prophetic voices and were not able to prevent the corruption of the new regime.

This phenomenon challenges us to reflect upon the nature of Christian commitment to political democratization and to ask whether churches and Christians differ from other political activists who also pay prices to fight for freedom and dignity of people, while they may be doing it for the sake of political ideologies, for self-liberation or revenge, or even for wresting power from the opponents. When some Christians insist that their political involvement is based on faith convictions, and that the church is not a political party, but rather a prophetic voice challenging the powers, this claim is yet to be substantiated.

CONCLUSION

The connection between Christian convictions on human freedom and the Western democracy are so close that it is difficult to draw a clear line of demarcation. Consequently, it is not easy to conclude whether the Christian contributions toward

Asian democratization are the result of Christian doctrines or the fruit of Western civilization carried to Asia by Christianity. While the Western political impact on Asia is viewed as part of colonialism and imperialism, however, Christian influence on the democratization process is viewed more positively. The difference is not in the content and values of democracy, but the difference in the identity of the advocates of democracy. While the Western advocates of democracy are viewed as foreigners acting from outside, churches and Christian individuals are involved in political struggles from below, at the grassroots and acting with the people. Probably this might give an answer to the debates between the two Lees in Singapore and Taiwan.

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CHAPTER 18

THE ROLE OF CHRISTIANITY IN PEACE AND CONFLICT IN ASIA

JUDE LAL FERNANDO

INTRODUCTION

THE role of Christianity (or of any other religion) in peace and conflict in Asia (or in any other region) cannot be examined within the simplistic framework of the “secularist” vs. “religionist” debate which is based on the question: Has religion the propensity for conflict and violence, or is it related to promotion of peace and harmony?¹ First, this framework creates an artificial demarcation between “secular” and “religious.” Second, it reduces religion into an abstract category devoid of ideologies and power structures while turning a blind eye to how the changing historical dynamics form religious and other identities. Third, in this debate the multilayered meanings of peace and conflict are not scrutinized. Therefore, in making a reasonable assessment of the Christian participation in peace and conflict in Asia, Christianity needs to be treated in relation to diverse particular contexts of changing socioeconomic, political, cultural, and religious dynamics. Conflicts occur in relation to these dynamics of social change. Within a historical perspective, in Asia, these dynamics of social change can be located in the processes of colonial, postcolonial, and post–Cold War globalizing currents and practices, and also in the contexts of the Pacific War, Vietnam War, and Korean War. In these processes a continuous attempt has been made by various groups of people who belong to particular ethnic, religious, ethno-religious, and ethno-nationalist collective identities, castes, socioeconomic and political classes to renegotiate their position within a network of power relationships. Christianity’s association with these identities and socio-political classes within changing historical processes determines its role in peace and conflict in Asia. In these processes, Christianity is involved in the politics of interpretation of its identity. Its position as a minority religious tradition among multiple and

majority religious, ethnic, and ethno-nationalist groups makes its role in Asia uniquely complex more than in any other part of the world.

Conflict is unavoidable in changing power relations among diverse groups, and this could be both violent and nonviolent. Both the patterns of socioeconomic and political exclusion of distinct collectivities (structural violence) and the accompanying stereotypical perceptions (cultural violence) have to be borne in mind in analyzing overt organized conflicts so as to avoid reductionisms that define these as mere religious conflicts. Christian presence could be seen in maintaining asymmetrical power relations, often supporting or directly using hard power or coercive methods in conflicts. It also functions as an agent of conscientization and mobilization of groups of people in changing such relationships where latent conflicts are made overt organized conflicts some of which could be low intensity or high intensity. Some others could be conflicts with sporadic, but not systematic and organized violent conflicts wherein Christianity is an embedded party. It could also function as a mediating force that goes beyond its embeddedness by belonging and going beyond exclusivist claims at the same time. In this sense, there are many types of conflicts as well as peace efforts where Christianity is involved.

I will explore each of the types of conflict where Christianity is involved and explore its role in peace-building, some of which are top-level attempts and others are grassroots initiatives where soft power is utilized as opposed to hard power military interventions. In conclusion, I will explore key theological insights and peace-building paradigms that Christianity could promote for a just peace in Asia.

PEACE AND CONFLICT: CHRISTIANITY AS A MINORITY RELIGIOUS TRADITION IN ASIA

One of the types of conflicts is based on the religious identity of Christians as a minority in Asia, and its relationship with other religious groups who form the majority within the context of colonialism and postcolonial nation-building. Even though Christianity has coexisted with other religious traditions in Asia (less in South Asia and East Asia, and more in West Asia) for over two millennia, its presence as a powerful religious and political institution was felt (with increasing numbers in South Asia and East Asia) most acutely as a result of its proselytizing approach and alliance with the colonial governments in the modern period. This shaped the power relationship between Christianity and other religions generating numerous conflicts since sixteenth century. These conflicts could be seen mostly in South Asia and East Asia, and were based on incompatible religious ideologies, exclusivist truth claims, and power relations.

In anti-colonial renegotiation of power relationships by nationalist movements with the European colonial establishment and Christianity as a minority religious tradition,

there were majoritarian religious nationalist currents that determined the postcolonial phase of nation-building. In Sri Lanka, the churches entered into a conflict with the government in the 1960s over the nationalization of schools, a move supported by Buddhists. In India, radical Hindu groups have been strongly reacting to all missionary activities directed toward the Adivasis, asserting that they belong to the Hindu fold. All these reflect conflict situations. In Nepal (which was not directly colonized) the Country Code of 1963 imposed a law against the propagation of Christian faith (and other faiths) and conversion in order to maintain the Hindu identity of the kingdom. Despite the fact that Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Indonesia had upheld secular constitutions in their initial phase of nation-building, these countries have become Islamic states, either partially or fully since the 1980s, exacerbating Christian–Muslim conflicts. Furthermore, Malaysia's dual court system (Islamic courts and civil courts) has compounded the relationship between Muslims and the Christians.

Since the 1990s, due to a new round of proselytism by evangelical and fundamentalist Christian sects, differences among religious identities have been sharpened, and this has led to an escalation of existing conflicts, and a generation of conflicts in new areas (including areas that were not impacted by colonial missionary activity). In Sri Lanka, tensions between Christians and Buddhists (and Hindus) arose due to a proposed anti-conversion bill leading to violent attacks on the churches.² By 1998 the number of sects had reached over 300 in Nepal, outnumbering the Roman Catholic and Protestants churches. There have been waves of violent attacks on Christian places of worship across Indonesia, Malaysia, and Pakistan (a good number of these belong to the new wave of evangelical and fundamentalist churches). It is worth mentioning the anti-Christian pogrom in the state of Odisha (formerly Orissa) in India.³ The main line churches are also affected as their members have been converted to new Christian sects. The former oppose the latter and distance themselves from the latter's activities. However, in the eyes of most Buddhists, Hindus, and Muslims, the new wave of baptisms evokes the colonial memory that there is only one type of Christianity, not many.

The churches continue to appeal to law and to the international community mainly in the West in opposing anti-conversion moves. The approach of the churches has reinforced the majoritarian nationalist mindset that the conversions are nothing but exploitation of the poverty of the masses by the power of the West, adding a global dimension to the conflicts. In places like Maluku in Indonesia and the states of Nagaland and Mizoram in India, where Christianity forms the regional majority, there have been armed conflicts involving Christian militant groups. Some misguided efforts in these territories for forced conversion has exacerbated the conflicts contributing to a deep polarization between communities. Presumably, using force of any kind in conversion is unethical. Force could also be exerted within asymmetrical socioeconomic and political power relations that are generated through the Asian churches' alliances with the rich Euro-American churches. In such contexts conversion becomes more a sociopolitical issue than a theological or soteriological concern.

Christianity's role in West Asia as a minority tradition among an Islamic majority has to be analyzed within the specific historical and political context of the region which

is distinct from East Asia and South Asia. Christianity in West Asia is not necessarily a result of Western colonial practice. The majority of churches are associated with age-old Egyptian (Coptic), Syrian, and Armenian churches and are local churches that have a distinct indigenous identity. Modern missionary activities of Roman Catholic and Protestant churches were geared toward existing Orthodox Christians, rather than Muslims.⁴ The presence of age-old churches in West Asia also reflects that Islam and Christianity coexisted with one another despite wars of empires that claimed to exclusively represent each tradition. The present Christian–Muslim tension in the region has to be understood not only from within the context of a rising tide of Christian evangelical proselytism in the region since the 1990s but also within the context of the US/UK-led invasion of Iraq, Israeli-Palestinian-Lebanese conflicts, and the Syrian civil war. In Iraq, the Christian communities have come under attack by the Islamic militant groups particularly after the invasion. Even though invasion of Iraq has to be analyzed mainly within an economic and geopolitical framework, within the United States there are groups who support the invasion on religious grounds and engage in Christian proselytism in Iraq. It is estimated that half of the Christians belonging to ancient Christian churches have fled Iraq, mainly after the invasion, and some have moved to Iran. In Iran, the “house church movement” of Christian evangelists that converts Farsi-speaking Muslims into Christianity—by beaming Christian evangelical channels via satellite TV and distributing hundreds of New Testaments—has entered into direct conflict with the Islamic Republic. Such a direct conflict is not visible with Iran’s historic Armenian and Assyrian churches, which have, not without tensions, their representatives in the Iranian Parliament.

In Syria, the Christian communities have actively participated in the conflict by supporting the Assad regime which has been mostly formed by the minority Alawites, a Shia sect, which is perceived as a heretical group by the Wahabi Muslim sect. The latter sect is one of the powerful groups among the Sunni majority who fight the regime and is perceived by the Christians—who are also a minority—as a threat to their religious freedom. In the cases of Lebanon and Palestine, a new round of Christian–Muslim tensions has emerged due to the rising tide of Christian evangelical proselytism. However, in these two cases there are more deep-seated ethno-nationalist factors that determine Christian participation in conflict than proselytism. These factors will be analyzed in the following section.

As in South Asia and East Asia, the churches in West Asia also participate in several types of conflict. The nature of challenges that these regions face differ from one another depending on their specific contexts. The above brief sketch on West Asia shows that the existing reality is not a conflict that has simply been generated by Christian and Islamic exclusivist theologies. It is a conflict that is mainly related to hard power military interventions and the threat of such interventions by the US/UK-led governments and their regional allies (Israel) and counterattacks and threats by others (Iran, Lebanon, Syria) in the region within asymmetrical military power relations. This, in turn, has disastrous consequences for Christian–Jewish–Muslim relations. Therefore, the challenge that the churches face is not only interreligious requiring a reconsideration of their exclusivist

truth claims but also prophetic, and thereby demanding a speaking of truth to the power. How have the churches in Asia responded to these challenges?

The participation of Christianity in both formal and non-formal peace initiatives needs attention. In the initial phase of the postcolonial nation-building process, it is important to recall how Christians and their coreligionists were involved in securing secular constitutions in countries like India, Pakistan (later in Bangladesh), and Indonesia. Until 1972, Sri Lanka had a secular constitution. The form of secularity adopted in these constitutions was different from the French notion of secularity. The latter totally distanced itself from religion (church) whereas the former adopted an equidistant approach to all religions until the majoritarian religious pressure mounted. The movement toward forming secular states (not necessarily toward the French paradigm) could also be observed in predominantly Catholic countries in Europe like Ireland, Poland, and Spain. This is a reflection of wealth of intellectual and cultural resources (though not developed in a theologically sufficient way by the official church) within World Christianity that could promote peaceful coexistence among diverse religious traditions. The principle of secularity upheld by a state is a form of peace settlement among diverse religions.

In India, the churches worked as peacemakers between Hindus and Muslims, even as the partition was leading to a large-scale violent conflict. Christian politicians in Punjab and Sindh joined with the Pakistani secular nationalists (who were Muslims) to found the independent state of Pakistan. In Sri Lanka there were both Roman Catholic and Protestant leaders who opposed the official position of the churches' hierarchy and joined with the Buddhists to support the nationalization of schools by the government. In Indonesia, many Catholic students joined Indonesian nationalist forces to demand independence from the Dutch rule. Despite tensions between the Protestants and Catholics due to Dutch rule, in the postcolonial phase the Christian churches joined hands with the Indonesian nationalists (mostly Muslim) to support the *Pancasila* ideology that upholds a religiously pluralistic state. These are formal attempts of collaboration toward peace where Christianity was involved in the final lap of colonial rule and in the initial phase of postcolonial nation-building attempts in South Asia and East Asia.

With the rise of a new wave of conflicts since the 1990s, there are many non-formal initiatives that have been taken up especially by mainline churches to increase understanding and peace in the countries of Asia. In response to the conflict between different types of religious fundamentalisms, there are grassroots peace initiatives for interreligious dialogue and community work, pioneered by Christian groups. In the aftermath of anti-Christian riots in the state of Odisha in 2008, Hindu and Muslim leaders rallied with the churches to oppose fundamentalist forces. On the village level, particularly in indigenous areas, there is a range of non-proselytizing community initiatives led by Roman Catholic and Protestant churches in India. These efforts have opposed both Christian and Hindu extremist forces while building peace across the religious divide. The Christian group called *Kithusara*—which means “the core of Christian faith”—in Sri Lanka has contributed to interreligious understanding between Buddhists and Christians along the southwestern coast, by opposing both Christian sectarian

conversions and Sinhala Buddhist nationalist violence. In a move to transcend religious extremism, the National Catholic Literature Board in Pakistan gathered eighteen Christian and Muslim poets to remember the peace efforts of Pope John Paul II and the humanitarianism of Mother Theresa and the Muslim humanitarian activist Abdul Sittar Edhi. The propagation of humanitarianism in Islam and Christianity in view of building peace was the aim of this gathering.

In terms of West Asia, on the grassroots level in Kirkuk in Northern Iraq, Christian and Muslim groups join in peace-building programs that are facilitated by the Archbishop and Imams of the region. These programs are called “building bridges of peace.”⁵ In responding to the US/UK-led invasion of Iraq, and the accompanying religious tensions, Christian Peace Witness, an umbrella organization of a large number of Christian groups based in the United States, has initiated a campaign to end occupation of Iraq. Another active group is the Christian Peacemaker Teams, who belong to a wider ecumenical movement rooted in the peace churches like Mennonites, Quakers, and Church of the Brethren. They have put themselves under grave risk in Iraq through their initiatives for the practice of nonviolence.⁶ They operate as human shields in accompanying Iraqi human rights activists and were the first to reveal US torture of prisoners at Abu-Ghraib. These groups practice a version of Christianity that is different from the fundamentalist version that justified the occupation of Iraq and other lands by the United States. These examples of witness to justice, peace, and interreligious understanding could inspire and challenge Christian communities throughout Asia to read the signs of the times and redefine their identity not in opposition to the other, but in relation and in service to the other.

PEACE AND CONFLICT: CHRISTIANITY WITHIN ETHNIC AND ETHNO-NATIONALIST CONFLICTS

Another type of conflict can be identified, wherein Christianity is associated with a particular oppressed ethnic or ethno-nationalist identity of a given region in the postcolonial states in places like Nagaland, Mizoram, and Meghalaya in India, Maluku, East Timor before independence, and West Papua in Indonesia, Tamil Eelam in Sri Lanka, Chittagong Hill Tract in Bangladesh, Karen region in Myanmar, Central Highlands in Vietnam, and Palestine in West Asia. In these situations, Christianity has associated itself with an oppressed ethnic identity and functions as a unifying force of diverse indigenous groups, and thus becomes a strong marker of ethnic or ethno-nationalist identity (Nagaland, Meghalaya, East Timor, and South Maluku).

In the encounter between distinct communities the nature of their power relationship can give rise to conflicts. In a situation where control of resources and livelihood by one community (structural violence) is resisted by another community, overt

conflicts can be formed. These are expressed through ethnicity or nationality where languages, religion, and particular cultural patterns become defining factors. Here, the resistance is to homogenizing ideologies and cultures that claim “one nation, one state.” In Europe, the Church maintained such homogenizing ideologies for centuries, but could not succeed due to emergence of multiple identities. In the above Asian cases, Christianity has functioned as a unifying force among oppressed ethnic groups in helping organized resistance to their oppression even though such a leading unifying role cannot be adopted in the geographical areas where the Christians are a minority. In Nagaland, Christianity helped to unite many indigenous groups and form a new ethnic identity that resists Indian nationalist dominance. The primary intention of Christian missionaries, mainly Baptists, was not to protect the indigenous cultures. However, Christianity provided the indigenous groups—who did not identify themselves with the Indian national identity—with a structure by which to organize their collective social and political life. In East Timor, the Catholic Church became a unifying force for at least twelve indigenous groups of people in forming resistance to Indonesian nationalist dominance. Such conflicts range from a demand to confer legitimate rights to the minority groups and integrate them into the fabric of the nation-state to a demand for total separation. From 1975 onward, there has been a steady increase of Catholics in East Timor, which is not due to a new wave of proselytism, but is a result of oppression by the Indonesian state, which is closely aligned with Islam. The rituals of Roman Catholicism also appealed to the indigenous practices.⁷ In this way, in East Timor, Christianity (Roman Catholicism) functions as a strong marker of Timorese national identity. Canvassing for identity-based recognition in this case becomes a way of expressing collective aspiration of oppressed ethnic communities for regional autonomy or total independence.

Christianity in Maluku in Indonesia holds an ambiguous position. In the colonial period Ambon and Ternate in Maluku were the favored centers with a sizable Christian population; by contrast, North Maluku, with a large Muslim population, was on the extreme periphery and facing social and political exclusion. In this way, a division was created between the Christian and Muslim Moluccans who initially were related to one another. For example, while the Ambonese Christians fought for the Dutch, the Ambonese Muslims fought for Indonesian independence. The former went to the extent of unsuccessfully declaring a Republic of South Maluku free from Indonesia immediately after Indonesian independence. In 1999–2000, both the main Muslim mosque and the Protestant Church in Ambon became the command centers for a fierce battle which killed over 3,000 people on both sides. The Indonesian government’s tacit support given to both parties through the local security apparatus also fueled the conflict. This was done with the intension of maintaining the ethnically distinct Moluccans under government control. Christian Ambonese militias groups, like *Laskar Kristus* (Christian Warriors) and their Islamic counterparts like *Laskar Jihad* (Muslim Warriors), have contributed to an organized armed conflict in the region on the basis of an exclusivist claim to territory.⁸ West Papuans too have found Christianity as a uniting factor in their resistance to Indonesia’s Muslim Malay dominance.⁹ Indonesia’s fragile national identity

is constantly under strain due to regional ethno-religious conflicts where Christianity plays an active role.

Christianity also has played a role in ethno-nationalist conflicts in the postcolonial nation-building project where majoritarian state nationalism is discriminatory and oppressive. In that sense what has come to the fore is not necessarily Christian identity as such, but an ethnic or ethno-nationalist identity which the Christians share with the oppressed community. In such cases, Christianity has functioned as a force for mobilizing the discriminated ethno-nationalist sections of population. In that both violent and nonviolent approaches to social and political transformation in renegotiating the power relationship with the dominant “nation”-state can be identified. The Tamil-speaking churches in Sri Lanka share the oppressed Tamil nationalist identity with the Hindus and Muslims in their resistance to Sinhala Buddhist state ideology that opposes devolution of power to Tamil regions. In Myanmar, Christians who share the Chin, Kachin, Karen, and Karenni ethnic identities, due to this shared political exclusion, resist cultural homogenization of the state that is dominated by the majority and demand devolution of power to their regions. Christians, Buddhists, and groups who follow indigenous traditions and syncretist practices, face the same oppression. However the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army has joined the military junta, thereby generating division among the ethnic minorities. Christians have become part of the Chittagong Hill Tract people in Bangladesh who in collaboration with Buddhists and those who follow indigenous traditions resist state acquisition of land, colonization, and militarization, in the region. In West Asia, Christians in Palestine share the Palestinian national identity and its aspirations. The Christian Zionist groups in the United States who support Israel unconditionally would represent a radically different version of Christianity that neither shares the nationalist sentiments of the Palestinian Christians nor is capable of hearing the aspirations of the Palestinian Muslims. This shows how while one version of Christianity plays a positive role in ethno-nationalist struggles for justice and peace, yet another version is diametrically opposed to it.

In the above ethno-nationalist cases, Christianity has taken part in making latent conflicts overt ones by making demands for equality. However, Christianity has also contributed to conflict by forming majoritarian dominant national identities, and also by sharing such identities which are oppressive, and thereby entering into conflict with minorities in a state. Roman Catholic predominance among the majority of Filipinos formed a national consciousness as “the only Catholic nation in Asia.” This national ethos tended to exclude the Muslims and indigenous people and thus contributed to conflict. In some other cases, Christianity shared a nationalist identity that functioned as a state ideology. During the Pacific Wars the churches in Japan supported the regime’s imperialist ideology. This has been interpreted as a move that was taken out of fear because they believed they would be persecuted by the authorities as being unpatriotic. In Indonesia, the silence of the Indonesian churches in the face of repression in East Timor was seen as an endorsement of Indonesian state ideology. Paradoxically, this majoritarian nationalist complex which the Christians share can also be found in some sections in Naga and Mizo movement for autonomy in India, and also from within the

Moluccan Christian movement in Indonesia, thus envisaging an exclusivist collective identity that opposes other religious traditions.

A division among the Christian communities can be seen when they are present not only among the oppressive ethno-nationalist groups but also among those who uphold the majoritarian nationalist politics of the states. In Sri Lanka, the Sinhala-speaking churches shared the state ideology of a unitary state in opposing the Tamil nationalist resistance and demand for autonomy. It is important to note that while the churches are united among themselves in their demand for religious freedom in countries like India, Sri Lanka, and Indonesia, they can be deeply divided when it comes to the ethno-nationalist claims which have been generated by the centrality of the state and its nationalist ideologies. A parallel could be seen in Europe where the Church favored either state control or religious liberty, depending on what it would mean for the Church itself.

In West Asia, in Lebanon, Christians in opposing the Ottoman rule which persecuted them aligned with the French and became the pioneers of Lebanese Christian ethno-nationalism. In independent Lebanon, the Christians formed the majority in government and held on to several key positions, while the Muslims were also a powerful minority. As the Muslims became the majority with the increase in population, the country entered into a massive armed conflict where the concerned parties fought to maintain the balance of power.¹⁰ In the aftermath of the civil war, Christians also disintegrated into political fractions in making alliances either with Shia or Sunni parties in attempting to gain power in the confessional and consociational system of government. The above examples show how Christianity in Asia is rooted in other collective identities such as ethnic and ethno-nationalist. These conflicts cannot be called necessarily religious conflicts. However, there are religious and theological implications that are associated with these situations along with political challenges. The challenges that the churches face is how to engage in transformation of state structures and power sharing, and how to develop a theology of peace in a time of nationalist conflict and deal with the memory of loss. In what way have the Christians contributed to peace-building efforts in ethno-nationalist conflicts in Asia?

In the peace initiatives in ethno-nationalist conflicts the role the Catholic Church in East Timor played is of great importance. Its principled stand for a just peace with the Indonesian state led to a peaceful transfer of power after decades' long conflict that claimed a massive human cost. This avoided a victor's peace being imposed by the Indonesian military. In the case of Nagaland, the involvement of the Baptist Church in peacemaking missions between the Indian government and the Naga insurgent groups is worth mentioning. The church leaders appealed for peace as far back as 1957 in trying to find a moderate path to the resolution of the conflict. The Council of Nagaland Baptist churches negotiated a ceasefire agreement between the Naga insurgents and the Indian government in 1964 and formed a Peace Mission for a negotiated settlement which was called a program of action that would put into practice Christ's precepts of mutual love and trust. The churches have also made many efforts to unite different fighting Naga factions in the Naga national movement. In 2002, the churches succeeded in gathering over

120,000 Christians to a mass rally by emphasizing the need for peace-building.¹¹ Even when the churches' mitigating power has not been effective in resolving conflicts their attempts are remarkable.

In Maluku in Indonesia, a formal peace accord between the parties was signed in 2002 to end forced conversions, separatist claims, and violence. The peace meeting was attended by thirty-five Muslim and thirty-five Christian delegates. In many islands and villages like Dobo, Wayame, and Kei Islands, both Christians and Muslims worked together in protecting each other from attacks from extremist forces and built peace among them without the backing of the peace accord. In these local peace initiatives, traditional rituals that reinforce ethnic solidarity were performed demonstrating how both Christianity and Islam are interwoven with indigenous traditions.¹² According to the Indonesian Conference on Religion and Peace (ICRP) there are at least fifty-one interfaith groups where Christians (both Catholic and Protestant), Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists are involved on the national and grassroots levels in reaching understanding and building peace between religious communities. All these groups contribute to promote the pluralist sociopolitical space in Indonesia.

The Japanese churches' acknowledgment of war crimes committed by its government during the Pacific Wars and seeking forgiveness from the families of victims in Asia and the Pacific have created space for peace and reconciliation in the region. Contrary to such moves, in Sri Lanka, the Sinhala-speaking Catholic Church's open support given to the Sri Lankan government in spite of its war crimes against the Tamil community, and the frequent requests made to the Tamils to forget the past, has contributed to a deep polarization between the two communities. On the grassroots level, the work of the Christian Solidarity Movement, an umbrella organization of ecumenical and inter-ethnic groups that works for justice and understanding between the two communities has helped to build cross-community relations on a very basic level. In the Philippines, attempts have been made to resolve the conflict by the Bishops-Ulema Conference in Mindanao demonstrating how the religious leaders could contribute to peace-making.

Among many grassroots peace groups, *Silsilah* Dialogue Movement in Zamboanga City, Philippines, started by Christian peace campaigners is a well-known organization that brings together Christians and Muslims for interreligious dialogues and peace-building. The word *Silsilah* is an Arabic word which has been borrowed from Sufi mystics. It means "link." Moreover, the efforts of the Catholic Education Association of Philippines to rewrite the history textbooks removing the prejudices against the Muslim and indigenous cultures are worth mentioning.¹³

In West Asia, it is true that the situation in Lebanon is complex and precarious, but its consociational system of power sharing among diverse religious communities has introduced a framework within which Christians and Muslims could work together for peace. This framework has helped the Lebanese society to prevent drifting toward an extreme form of Christian nationalism that seeks its support from the West, or toward an extreme form of Arab nationalism. The Christian TV channel that is aired in Arabic from Lebanon throughout the Arab world also promotes programs with Muslim

Sheikhs and explores interreligious perspectives for peace-building. Assad Chaftari, a Christian militiaman made a public confession in 2000 apologizing for both his atrocities during the civil war and the anti-Muslim indoctrination of Christian community. This was a powerful gesture for Lebanon, encouraging the country to start a process of truth and reconciliation in a society where amnesia has become part of a political culture that is characterized by religious divisions. Another attempt at peace-building was the Christian Muslim Peace Summit which was held in Beirut in June 2012 amidst war and violence in the region. This was organized by the Episcopal Washington (DC) Cathedral. It gathered leaders from diverse groups from both religious traditions, including the Shia leaders from Iran.¹⁴ A Greek Orthodox priest was killed while attending to the wounded in clashes in the city of Hama. Another female Christian activist distributed Easter Eggs with paper strips of quotations from the Bible and the Quran among the Sunni, Shia, and Christian children who have been displaced in Homs. The Jesuit Refugee Service runs a nationwide relief program catering to at least 6,000 victims from all religious strands.¹⁵ Such testimonies are powerful indicators of bridge-building potential that both Christianity and other religions have.

The Kairos Document Palestine (KDP) which has been initiated by the Palestinian churches is a significant attempt that shares the aspirations of majority Palestinians and the wider Arab world to end Israeli occupation of Palestine. The document also contains a preamble written by a large number of Christian leaders in Jerusalem.¹⁶ This document has been inspired by the Kairos Document South Africa, a predominantly Christian country. In calling for an end to Israeli occupation, the churches are strengthening ties with the Muslim communities worldwide who share the aspirations of the Palestinians. The initiatives taken by the World Council of Churches through its Palestine Israel Ecumenical Forum holds that an end to occupation would guarantee the well-being of both Palestinian and Israel people. The all-inclusive language (Palestine and Israel) of WCC and its attempt to engage Christian, Jewish, and Muslim leaders in dialogue demonstrate how Christianity can play a positive role in the Middle East.¹⁷ In enhancing such dialogue it is important for the churches to engage in a critical reflection on the implications of the Shoah for Jewish and Christian theologies; so too on the implications for the Muslim and Christian theologies within the contexts of invasions of West Asian Muslim countries by Western powers and Israeli occupation of Palestine.

PEACE AND CONFLICT: CHRISTIANITY AND CASTE AND CLASS CONFLICTS

It will be misleading to reduce Christianity's role only to identity-based conflicts and peace efforts. Christian involvement in conflicts which are related to class and caste disparities is another type of conflict that needs to be recognized. These disparities are also shared by people of other faiths. In addition to the powerful Christian elite in Asia, there

is also a sizable population of Christians particularly among the fishing communities in Sri Lanka, Dalit and various indigenous people in India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, Karens in Burma, poverty-stricken Filipinos, and peasants and working classes in Korea. The churches' option for the poor made a significant contribution to bring to the limelight the socioeconomic disparities between the ruling classes and the masses during the dictatorships in the Philippines and in South Korea. Christianity has also become a conscientizing and mobilizing force among Dalits who confront the structural and cultural violence of caste-minded groups (including Christians) in India. This has given rise to conflicts between the Dalits and the dominant castes. The churches have been instrumental in making overt conflicts which had been only latent, through empowerment and mobilization of victims of structural violence. The need for social and political change has been expressed through this mobilization promoting a nonviolent transformation. In the case of the Philippines and South Korea, churches' institutional and numerical strength have contributed to building up of a strong civil society. This strength has been utilized in confronting undemocratic regimes forming violent conflicts between the governments and the churches. On a number of occasions in these countries, Christianity has contributed to challenging the quasi-peace that is based on the coercive power (hard power) of repressive regimes. The churches have promoted a peace based on democracy. The theological paradigm based on options for the poor that emerged in Latin America in the context of extreme poverty and repressive regimes has informed many Christians in Asia who commit themselves to justice and democracy. Christians in Asia have to adopt this paradigm within interreligious, inter-ethnic, and inter-ethno-nationalist contexts.

PEACE AND CONFLICT: CHRISTIANITY IN AN IDEOLOGICAL AND INSTITUTIONAL CONFLICT

As Asia attempted to overcome feudal and capitalist social relations and the communist revolutions unfolded, conflicts arose between Christianity and the governments of China, Vietnam, Cambodia, North Korea, and Laos. These were mainly ideological and institutional conflicts. These communist governments viewed Christianity as a counter-revolutionary ideological and institutional force. It is important to note how this conflict created deep divisions among the Christians themselves. In the Chinese civil war, churches aligned themselves closely with the nationalist regime by adopting a strong version of anti-communism as propagated by the Vatican and Western countries. This led to the persecution of Christians on the mainland after the victory of the communists.

In Vietnam, many Catholics joined the independent struggle against the Japanese and French invasions and supported the national liberation movement led by Ho Chi Minh. However, the ideological differences between the communist government and

the churches generated a deep division that was clearly reflected in the migration of Christians to South Vietnam as North Vietnam came under the communist rule. The former was backed first by the French and later by the American governments; during this period, a Buddhist-Christian conflict was reactivated. After Vietnam was unified under the communist regime, the churches had to undergo re-education programs and were heavily controlled by the regime. During the Korean War, the communist army pursued repressive measures against the Christians, despite the fact that Christians joined in resisting the Japanese invasion. In the aftermath of the war, the churches supported the autocratic South Korean regime which violated human rights in the name of curbing communism. However, this relationship radically changed after the military coup in 1961 which brutally crushed resisting groups of students, workers and peasants. As pointed out earlier, the churches in South Korea (mainly Roman Catholic and Protestant) have confronted the governments on issues of democracy and social justice.

Amidst continued tensions between the two Koreas, the North Korean government has allowed humanitarian aid to come from churches in South Korea into the North; churches continue to engage in creating space for understanding and peace between the people in the two countries amid the politico-military rhetoric of the two governments. The challenge that these regimes and churches face is how to deal with the memory of the past. This challenge is also associated with ideology when it comes to geopolitical strategies of these regimes in the face of growing US military expansions in Asia. Could the churches in East Asia, particularly in China, engage in a constructive process of dealing with the past while recognizing the geopolitical significance of their countries in countering militarism?

CHRISTIAN PRESENCE IN CONFLICTS IN ASIA: REGIONAL AND GLOBAL IMPLICATIONS

The new wave of Christian evangelical and fundamentalist conversions in Asia was mainly generated after the Cold War. This is also the period when fundamentalist types of Hindu, Buddhist, and Islamic political ideologies and parties began to have a major impact on the national ethos and governments of India, Sri Lanka, and Afghanistan, respectively. During this period, the ruling parties in Indonesia, Pakistan, and Bangladesh accommodated, to a large degree, to the demands of the Islamic fundamentalist groups. Pakistan had already been Islamicized during the Cold War period and fundamentalist groups were already being armed by American and Saudi governments via Pakistan to fight the Soviets in Afghanistan. This is also the period of an intensification of independent struggles in East Timor, the Moluccan Province, Ache Sumatra in Indonesia, and Tamil Eelam in Sri Lanka. The new round of conversions and ethno-nationalist conflicts—with corresponding demands for regional autonomy

or independence—are viewed by Hindu, Muslim, and Buddhist nationalist groups as part of a Western Christian conspiracy to “occupy” Asia. In the violent conflict between Laskar Jihad and Laskar Kristus in the Moluccan Province, the latter views the conflict as a battle between good and evil which will be resolved through the intervention of America.¹⁸ The former believes that not only the Christian political demand for autonomy in Maluku but also the struggle in East Timor is part of a Western Christian conspiracy. The Sangha Parivar which represents Hindu fundamentalist forces in India views the Naga movement for autonomy in a similar fashion. The Jatika Hela Urumaya which envisages a Sinhala Buddhist state in Sri Lanka views the Tamil movement for independence in the same way even though the latter is a radically secular movement that does not have any Christian or other religious overtones.

Moreover, the attack on the World Trade Center in 2001, has negatively affected Muslim–Christian relations in Asia. In the Philippines, the predominantly Christian security forces have been particularly helped in the post-9/11 period by the US military. This has furthered the perception of the conflict in Mindanao as a Muslim–Christian one. The attacks on Christian churches in Pakistan have increased after the “global war on terror” and “anti-Muslim Western policies in such places as Israel, Iraq, Bosnia and Kashmir.”¹⁹ The invasion of Afghanistan, Iraq, the ongoing conflict between Israel and Palestine—which are supported by the “global war on terror”—and the Syrian civil war have had devastating effects on the existing conflicts in Asia in which Christians are involved.

After the anti-colonial nationalist struggles, and the initial phase of postcolonial nation-building—most of which took place during the Cold War period—a new move is in motion, in the post–Cold War era, to replace the Christian and Western hegemonies with Hindu, Buddhist, and Islamic hegemonies which define national identities in an exclusivist way. This has reinforced a polarity of West (and/or Christianity) versus East. These binary constructions are a result of asymmetrical power relationships between some countries and communities in Asia and the West. However, replacing such relationships with exclusivist ideologies has furthered structural and cultural violence in Asia resulting in the escalation of religious, ethno-religious, and ethno-nationalist conflicts. Even though the stereotypical constructions of West vs. East seem real to those who are engaged in the conflicts in Asia, the reality is that there is a constant divergence and convergence of interests between Asian and Western states. It should also be noted that in the West the interests of churches and states do not converge at all times. There is a divergence of positions between them concerning a vast range of issues from sexual ethics to environmental ethics. States in both regions have also collaborated with one another in maintaining dominant structures that generate class and caste disparities and oppress women, ethnic, ethno-nationalist, and indigenous communities. Both Western and Asian models of development have devastated the earth.

It is important to identify the initiatives that can deconstruct the above polarity and build peace. In focusing on peace-building efforts in West Asia, Europe’s opposition to the war in Iraq, the European churches’ public condemnation of the invasion of Iraq, and the call made by the World Council of Churches and many other Christian

organizations to end the occupation of Palestine could be considered as key movements that can go beyond the above binary opposition. Archbishop Desmond Tutu's prophetic stand against the US and UK leaders (who publicly claim to be Christians) who spearheaded the invasion of Iraq could also help reduce polarization between Christian and Muslims in West Asia and in the world at large. Tutu has castigated the US and UK leaders for destabilizing and dividing the world by invading Iraq pointing out that "leadership and morality are indivisible." His statement was widely published both in the Western media and in the Arab world.²⁰ Christian involvement in peace-building in the Middle East in collaboration with Jewish and Muslim counterparts is not only pivotal for peace in Asia but also for the entire world because of the geostrategic importance of the region.²¹ On an international level, the support extended to the Palestinian cause by some leading Latin American Christian countries like Venezuela on the basis of a two-state solution, their opposition to the invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq, and their growing relationship with Iran can generate space to build understanding between Christian, Jewish, and Muslim communities as well as between rival governments in West Asia.

While the communist regimes in Asia, particularly China, have also become key players in capitalist globalization in the post-Cold War era, the relationship between these regimes and Christianity continues to be conditioned by the bitterness of the old conflicts triggered by extreme anti-communist Christianity along with the present wave of evangelical and fundamentalist Christian proselytism in these countries. The US geopolitical interest in Asia (which is also shared by India in opposition to China) and the military expansion through the "lily pads" approach have compounded this situation by moving China-led East Asian regimes to a further defensive mode. In addition, China engages in expanding its economic empire while building its "string of pearls" (harbors) in Asia thus linking the major sea lines of communication in the world.²² Where the battle for supremacy over Asia has been renewed, Christianity has also been implicated. It is important for the churches in East Asia to transcend the above ideological extremes and religious exclusivisms while remaining conscious of the geopolitical importance of their region for global peace.

CONCLUSION

It is clear how the historical processes of the politics of interpretation of collective identities in Asia have formed the nucleus of multiple conflicts in Asia. Christianity has engaged in this process as a colonial discourse, an ideological and institutional apparatus, an ethno-nationalist movement, a nation-builder, a class and caste denominator, and a global actor. In peace-building, it is important to engage in an alternative politics of interpretation that could resolve conflicts. As peace-builder, churches have adopted multiple approaches. One main approach is based on the right to religious freedom which is demanded by the churches in the wake of anti-conversion legislations in some parts

of Asia, occasioned in recent times by a new wave of sectarian Christian proselytism. There are limitations to this approach. In some cases the mainline churches also join the Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims, and others to protest against the new wave of conversions led by Christian sects. However, theologically there is an ambiguity regarding conversions in general even among the mainline Christian churches which are not necessarily upholding a pluralist or inclusivist theology of religions. Therefore, there is a need to go beyond the right to religious freedom in acting as peace-builders which should be informed by an alternative politics of interpretation of Christian identity in Asia. This demands genuine interreligious dialogue. The demand to right to religious freedom has been seen as a discourse that favors Christianity and as a threat to national sovereignty by Hindu, Buddhist, and Islamic fundamentalist groups who claim or aspire to state power in their particular countries. Similarly, churches' engagement in numerous peace efforts has been perceived as part of a western conspiracy. Politically, the church's colonial legacy and the existing relationship with some major powers in the West have partly contributed to this perception. Therefore, peace-building demands not only interreligious dialogue but also participation in the socioeconomic, ethnic, ethno-nationalist struggles of diverse communities of particular countries in question. Basically, this means that in order to be credible peace-builders in Asia the churches need to be local by voluntarily participating in "the Calvary of Asian poverty" and in Asia's interreligious ethos which is called "the Jordan of Asian Religions."²³ It is this partaking that gives a new meaning to Christian baptism and informs a liberation theology of religious pluralism.

In order to be local, the churches need to engage in a critical reflection on both their colonial entanglement and their association with exclusivist nationalist ideologies of postcolonial states. The churches' conflict with communist regimes in Asia needs to awaken them to their own ideological blindness that "the success of Christian evangelism depends on the failure of the socialist experiment."²⁴ In their attempts at fundamental identification with the struggles of diverse oppressed communities in Asia, it is important to hold onto faith in Jesus who was crucified outside the "religious walls of Jerusalem," and to be prepared to proclaim "forgive them for they do not know what they do!" Forgiveness here does not mean submission to injustice, but an inner disposition that dispels individual hatred while demanding and countering injustice. It is this disposition that creates space for reconciliation where truth and justice are prerequisites. While Asian churches can learn from the experiment of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission they need to go beyond its limitations by laying emphasis on the aspect of justice (Truth, Justice, and Reconciliation Commissions) as well as by drawing upon the spiritual wealth of other religions. Such a local reflection and engagement will have regional and global implications that can nonviolently counteract "global war on terror," military expansions, capitalist globalization, exclusivist national identities, and religious (including Christian) fundamentalisms.

As the local issues in Asia are becoming globalized and global issues are becoming localized, Christianity, in its local manifestations can contribute to building solidarity among those who seek a just peace across the borders in an ever-increasingly globalized world.

NOTES

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3. Cf. M. T. Cherian, *Hindutva Agenda and Minority Rights: A Christian Response* (Bangalore: Centre for Contemporary Christianity, 2007), 260.
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7. Cf. Georg Evers, *The Churches in Asia* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2005), 289.
8. For an in-depth analysis of the Moluccan conflict, see John Braithwaite et al., *Anomie and Violence (electronic resource): Non-truth and Reconciliation in Indonesian Peace-building* (Canberra: Australian National University E Press, 2010), ch. 3.
9. Cf. Charles E. Farhadian, *Christianity, Islam, and Nationalism in Indonesia* (London: Routledge, 2005), 176–77.
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11. For an insightful account of the church's involvement in Naga conflict and peace building efforts, see Samir Kumar Das, *Conflict and Peace in India's Northeast: The Role of Civil Society* (Washington, DC: East-West Center, 2007).
12. Cf. Braithwaite et al., *Anomie and Violence*, 172–73.
13. For a further account of grassroots' peace initiatives in the Philippines, see Karl M. Gasper, "Bringing Muslims and Christians Together in Peace," in Thomas Bamat and Mary Ann Cejka, eds., *Artisans of Peace: Grassroots Peacemaking among Christian Communities* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2003), 96–131.
14. Cf. Eileen White Read, "Christian-Muslim Peace Summit Underway in Beirut," *Ecumenical News International*, June 20, 2012, <http://www.pcusa.org/news/2012/6/20/christian-muslim-peace-summit-underway-beirut/>.

15. Cf. Bill Spindle and Sam Dagher, "Can Syria's Christians Survive?" *Wall Street Journal*, August 11, 2012, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10000872396390443537404577579473069060742.html>.
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17. Cf. Anon, "World Week for Peace in Palestine Israel," *World Council of Churches*, 2012, <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/programmes/public-witness-addressing-power-affirming-peace/churches-in-the-middle-east/pief/world-week/resources/wcc-policy-on-palestine-israel.html>, p. 3628.
18. Cf. Braithwaite et al., *Anomie and Violence*, 154.
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CHAPTER 19

CHRISTIANITY AND THE CAUSE OF ASIAN WOMEN

GEMMA TULUD CRUZ

As the largest and most populous continent with an array of cultural groupings, political systems, and socioeconomic conditions, Asia's vastness, diversity, and contradictory realities¹ offer a complexity that makes a substantial presentation of the topic at hand a daunting task. Clearly, there could be no homogeneous description for Asian women as women except probably for their causes, particularly against gender discrimination. While, again, there are varying degrees in which Asian women experience gender discrimination, one could arguably say that this happens in most key social systems and structures in Asian society, namely politics, economics, religion, and culture. Such multifaceted discrimination could be seen in the issues and problems that form part of Asian women's causes in the past and at present.

ASIAN WOMEN IN THE WORLD OF POLITICS

In the world of politics Asian women do not really find themselves at the bottom globally, especially in the last fifty years.² In fact, Asia leads the world in terms of the number of years women have governed as heads of state. Since 1945 to the present, Asian women have led their countries as prime ministers and presidents, even beating supposedly more egalitarian countries like the United States and Canada, which have yet to have a female president or prime minister. The list for women prime ministers includes Sirimavo Bandaranaike and Chandrika Kumaratunga (Sri Lanka), Indira Gandhi (India), Golda Meir (Israel), Benazir Bhutto (Pakistan), Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina Wajed (Bangladesh), and Han Myung Sook (South Korea). Women presidents include

Corazon Aquino and Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo (Philippines) as well as Megawati Sukarnoputri from Indonesia.³

While the Asian political leadership seems laudable as far as women are concerned, closer scrutiny will reveal that in many cases the political power these women leaders held is intimately linked to their being members of prominent political families. Most of them are the daughters, wives, or widows of former (male) government heads or leading oppositionists. In fact, the majority of these women rose to power not so much because of “militant feminism” but because they are heirs to male dynasties.⁴ An April 2012 report by the New York-based group Asia Society echoes this by attributing the rise of Asian women in leadership positions to dynastic traditions calling for women to take over from fathers, husbands, or sons when they die, are imprisoned, or killed.⁵ Indeed, political power still firmly remains with men in most Asian countries. To be sure, women are not only significantly outnumbered by men in terms of representation in local and national governments. They also remain grossly underrepresented in the executive, legislative, and judicial branches. Issues such as lack of legislation and effective enforcement of existing legal provisions that protect women and girls (e.g., domestic violence and the use of rape as a weapon of war) still need to be addressed in many Asian countries.

WOMEN AND ECONOMY

Great strides have also undoubtedly been made in the realm of economics as far as Asian women are concerned. This is largely because of economic globalization which paved the way for a worldwide increase in the participation of women in the labor force. At the same time, it cannot be denied that in contemporary Asia the global economic and labor market developments (e.g., global spread of flexible labor practices) are undermining the gains made by women. The above-mentioned report by Asia Society maintains that Asian women are still paid less than men for similar work and are extremely underrepresented in top leadership positions even in wealthy countries. Pay gaps remain significant. Increased economic competition and women labor denigration on top of the existing multiple roles in production and reproduction means that Asian women have to cope with the global way of living by working more, risking more, and suffering more.

A report by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) titled “Empowerment of Women in Asia and the Pacific”⁶ echoes these economic difficulties that Asian women face. The report says that Asian and Pacific women face increased layoffs and redundancies and are falling back on the informal sector and the rural sector for economic survival while an increasing number of women are being trafficked for sexual exploitation and forced labor.

THE CULTURAL DOMAIN

Without doubt, the political and economic marginalization of women in Asia has roots in patriarchy or a patriarchal culture which remains a formidable obstacle in Asian women's struggle.⁷ This patriarchal culture could be seen in the preference for boys which continues to exist, particularly in eastern and south-central Asian countries.⁸ Overall, this bias is detrimental to girls as this means that they are more likely to receive poorer medical care, nutrition, and education compared to their male counterparts, especially in developing countries. The discrepancy in schooling, for instance, has left the majority of women in four Asian nations illiterate: Bhutan, for example, has a female literacy rate of 10%, followed by Pakistan with 16%, Nepal with 25%, and Bangladesh with 31%. Nat Yogachandra's book *Beauty, Bureaucrats, and Breaking the Silence: The Status of Women in Asia*⁹ gives a sobering picture: nearly two-thirds of adult Asian women are illiterate and the percentage of girls enrolled in Asia's primary schools is far below every other region of the world except sub-Saharan Africa. With health care and education largely distributed on the basis of gender in a number of Asian countries, it is not surprising that illiteracy and poverty in Asia continues to have a woman's face.

The patriarchal culture also finds expression in the treatment of Asian women and girls as dependents. Thus, in spite of some legal gains in laws and courts, patriarchal traditions continue to deny women property rights. Korean woman theologian Nam-Soon Kang, for example, laments how, according to the teaching of Confucius, throughout life a woman's duty is to follow the three obediences or submissions: (1) before marriage, to obey the father; (2) after marriage, to obey the husband; and (3) in the event of the husband's death, to obey her son.¹⁰ This low status is reflected in the various forms of gendered violence that continue to plague Asian women. For some, the violence begins before birth with sex-selective abortions. While sex-selective abortions are illegal in Asian countries, it continues to exist at alarming rates, often aided by unauthorized clinics. In countries that strongly prefer sons, several practices may lead to abnormally high ratios of boys to girls at birth. The birth of baby girls may not be reported or girls may not be counted in census enumerations. In some cases, families may even resort to female infanticide, an issue that got international attention with the case of Afreen, a three-month old baby girl from India who died with burn marks on her head and a dislocated neck, injuries that were caused by her father who wanted a son.¹¹ In Bangladesh, India, and Nepal, girls aged 1 to 4 years are much more likely to die than boys.

In China during the 1980s, couples who wanted sons faced harsh penalties if they had too many children in violation of the government's "One-Child-Policy." Sometimes they gave baby girls away for adoption without registering their births. More recently in Korea, China, and Taiwan the introduction of technologies to determine the sex of unborn fetuses, combined with the widespread availability of abortion, has led to a record prevalence of male births suggesting that couples are selectively aborting female

fetuses.¹² The practice has been exacerbated by the population control programs of some Asian countries (e.g., China's "One-Child-Policy" and Singapore's "Stop at Two" program). While these programs have been terminated,¹³ centuries of preference for boys has created a worrisome gender imbalance. Noted Indian economist Amartya Sen raised global awareness on the problem in the 1990s with his now famous essay titled "More than 100 Million Women are Missing." Two reports confirm this. One is the 2010 United Nations Development Program (UNDP) report titled "Power, Voice and Rights," which says that India has 42.7 million women who were missing in 2007 (Pakistan is missing 6.1 million and Bangladesh 3.2 million).¹⁴ The other one, a report by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) released five days before the global population officially hit seven billion in 2012, raised the specter of "bachelor nations," with the predicted shortage of adult women over the next fifty years, especially in Asia.¹⁵

There is also the issue of child brides. Although it has been outlawed in India, for example, families who cannot afford to feed their children over the long term rely sometimes on arranged marriages in order to have more financial stability. Fear of rape and the consequent social stigma to the family is another important reason why the parents want to marry off girl children at the earliest. This is particularly true in rural areas with high poverty rates and closely guarded ancient traditions. In some of these areas, opponents of arranged child marriages could face serious threats such as gang rape, beatings, and maiming. On the same day that an arranged child marriage was annulled, for example, protesters at a mass child wedding in Rajasthan were attacked and injured by villagers.¹⁶ The dowry system, which requires the bride's family to pay cash or goods to the groom's family, also imperils women's lives as this sometimes results in bride-burning if the bride's family cannot pay the dowry. Then there is also the cultural and religious disapproval of widow remarriage.¹⁷

Cultural traditions that frown upon divorce and remarriage make women's lives even more problematic as they are forced to stay in abusive relationships. The patriarchal inclination to control women's body and sexuality has also put women's health and well-being at greater risk with strict policies on birth control methods and abortion further aggravated by inadequate programs on reproductive health. All this leads to greater female or maternal mortality. In the Philippines, for example, economist Solita Monsod notes how the people continue to be deprived of information on family planning because of traditions, gender inequality, and misconceptions about women.

The patriarchal culture takes on an enduring power as it is often justified or reinforced by global culture, particularly through the mass media's dominant images of women as sexual objects. Thus, sexual exploitation of Asian women did not stop with the plight of comfort women¹⁸ during the Second World War but continues, this time at a global level, with romance tours, sex tourism, and sex trafficking. It also does not help that women are told or encouraged worldwide to model themselves after the lifestyles of Western women and to desire what Western women are supposed to desire. Thus, it is not uncommon to see Asian women trying very hard to be thin, whitening their skin, dyeing their hair blonde, or having all sorts of plastic surgery (e.g., nose job in order to look like Barbie).

ROLE OF CHRISTIANITY IN THE CAUSE OF WOMEN IN ASIA

On the surface and from the perspective of demographics, Christianity might seem to have an insignificant role and presence in Asia as Christians constitute a tiny minority. The reality is that Christianity has been, and continues to be, a formidable presence in Asia. Whether in ways that are simple or grand, covert or overt, good or bad, intentionally or unintentionally Christianity has helped change and continues to help change Asia in manifold ways. Such influence extends to the plight and cause of Asian women in the way Christianity has both reinforced and, at the same time, challenged Asian women's oppression.

Reinforcing Oppression

Christianity undoubtedly shares part of the blame in the oppression of Asian women. At the heart of this is its continuing contribution in the socialization of women into gendered roles and subordinate status. Renowned Filipina theologian Mary John Mananzan, for example, points to the use of Christian texts not only to ingrain guilt, obedience, and subservience among women but also to value their virginity and to have many children. She portrays the general expectation from women and notes: "If a woman is married, she must have children—lots of them—The more, the better. Women are [also] responsible for the marriage so if the marriage breaks up, it is their fault. It is their Christian duty to keep their marriage intact. So religion conditions women to have a victim consciousness."¹⁹ Christianity's contribution and reinforcement of this ideology of domesticity goes way back to its mission history in Asia. In many cases conversion to Christianity entailed the restriction of Asian women's spheres of activity and influence.²⁰ Moreover, foreign women's missionary enterprise celebrated Christian domesticity as the solution for the benighted existence of women around the world. Foreign women missionaries carried out a kind of domestic evangelism, exporting Western femininity (not feminism) particularly the Victorian preference for monogamy and female domesticity which reinforces separate male and female spheres, traditional roles for women, and the primacy of an ideology of single and married missionary women's subordination to the demands of family and church.²¹ Thus, on top of their superiority complex, "the colonizers' characterization of Asian women as servile, weak, docile, long-suffering, delicate, and charming, and the idealization of these 'feminine' traits to best serve colonial goals, cemented the domination of men over women."²² In doing so, Christianity is both a direct and indirect source of the low status, and its accompanying death-dealing conditions, that Asian women continue to experience.

The continuing struggle of Asian women for leadership in society is also reinforced by Christianity in terms of how “male leaders of the institutional church always seem preoccupied with the doctrinal purity of their religions,”²³ particularly as expressed in its various forms of exclusion of women in leadership positions or in decision-making structures within the churches. Mananzan laments at how, in the Catholic Church, women fill the churches but ordination of women is not even to be discussed. In the Protestant churches even ordained women pastors suffer assignment discrimination. Dalit and tribal women in India are also placed in a difficult situation as many Protestant churches exclude seminary-educated Dalit women from ordination since they are considered the “most impure of the impure.” Citing Khasi Presbyterian churches in Northeast India, which go to the extent of having a man act as secretary of women’s fellowships, N. Limatula Longkumer of Nagaland complains that the role of women in the church is worse than in secular society.²⁴

Nila Bermisa thinks that many priests and male religious have yet to learn to see women as full human beings with equal dignity and potential. Bermisa points to how patristic bias against women, particularly as Eve the temptress and the cause of man’s fall, continue to plague the clergy. Bermisa believes that these negative portrayals of women by the Church have influenced and reinforced the subordination and violence against women in society, including the social sanctioning of rape and or sexual abuse.²⁵ In many Asian countries where the clergy (so with the Church they represent) is imbued culturally with holiness and divine authority—as “very holy” people beyond reproach—the community tends to remain silent because there is a lurking fear that victims (and/or those who will talk) will be blamed for challenging the culture’s superpowers. When putting members of the clergy on a pedestal is combined with the Asian culture of honoring the elderly, the teacher, and the father of the household, the effects could be highly problematic as “the male clergy tend to act as patriarchs of an extended family, exercising power without appropriate mechanisms of checks and balances.”²⁶ Many in the women’s movement in the Philippines, for example, see the clergy’s vigorous political involvement against the passing of Reproductive Health Bill 96²⁷ in this light.

Last, but not the least, Asian Christian theologies also reinforce the problems faced by Asian women by defending a rather homogeneous and patriarchal understanding of Asia’s past. Kwok Pui-lan, for example, laments how those who did theology in the midst of Asian revolutions were “sometimes too eager to embrace the cultural traditions of Asia without taking sufficient notice of their elitist and sexist components.”²⁸ Echoing observations by other Asian feminist theologians like Mananzan and Chung Hyun Kyung, Kwok contends that in their preoccupation with nationalist agendas or nationalist struggles, these Asian theologians have either unintentionally failed to take into account the liberation of women or intentionally did so by arguing toward subordinating or subsuming women’s struggle within the nationalist or democratic struggles.²⁹ Indeed, Christianity’s silence or lack of critique of oppressive elements of Asian culture, in general, and local cultures,³⁰ in particular, in the past or at present arguably makes it an indirect accomplice to the horrors and difficulties Asian women continue to face on a daily basis.

Contributing toward Women's Liberation

Despite its complicity and inadequacy, when it comes to its response to the cause of Asian women, Christianity has also directly and indirectly contributed to the alleviation of Asian women's oppression. Colonial Christianity, for example, brought some modernization. Andrew Eungi Kim even claims that Koreans first became acquainted with key values that mark modernity such as freedom, human rights, democracy, and equality largely through Christianity.³¹ A similar case could be glimpsed in China. Kwok notes that some Chinese women, after they became Christians, refused to follow the Chinese marriage rites or to participate in the funeral ceremony, which were social enactments of patrilineal and patriarchal family ideals. Moreover, some women converts at the turn of the twentieth century like Zhang Zhujun questioned the overt patriarchal bias of the Bible.³² Christian missionaries themselves, Kwok notes in *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology*, supported indigenous women's struggle on thorny questions pertaining to women's roles and female sexuality notably veiling, polygamy, child marriage, foot binding, and *sati*³³ in what Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak regards as the colonial project of "saving brown women from brown men."

Equally important, missionaries in colonial times did pioneering work in the field of medicine, science, and social services. In particular, they provided services that are critical to women and their families by setting up schools, hospitals, and other social service organizations.³⁴ In fact, the significance of many mission schools, particularly in providing education for women, has been widely noted.³⁵ In Korea, for example, Christianity is credited for the establishment of the nation's top universities, which include Ewha Women's University. Today, Christianity continues to help women across Asia with its schools and hospitals as well as numerous Christian organizations that help fight against poverty, illiteracy, and various forms of violence against women. In Korea, where these organizations make up the largest nongovernmental contributions to philanthropic causes, the array of services they provide (e.g., educational scholarships, free or subsidized daycare centers, vocational training, and job placement³⁶) go a long way in addressing death-dealing conditions Korean women face. In Japan and across Asia, the churches' growing focus on the marginal(ized) in society (e.g., migrant workers) is also good news for women as they are often the ones who suffer most within these marginal(ized) groups.³⁷

Despite its exportation of the ideology of domesticity, foreign women's Christian mission also played a role in addressing Asian women's oppression. In countries like India and China where there was segregation of the sexes the women missionaries were chiefly responsible for the "woman's work" in Christian mission consisting of evangelism, female education, and medical service. They contributed strongly to female literacy since, in order to read the Bible and the catechism, local women had to be taught how to read. Some challenged or encouraged Asian women to protest against oppressive cultural practices. Mary Porter, a missionary who arrived in China in 1871, spoke against some traditional practices and encouraged the girls in her school to unbind their feet.³⁸ Across Asia, particularly in China, India, and Korea, the phenomenon of the Bible

women is also a testament to the difference Christian mission has made in the lives of Asian women.³⁹ Bible women were employed to translate for the missionaries and to do home visitations. In China, as the church became involved in social reform, some of the Christian women participated in literacy campaigns and the anti-foot-binding movement, and organized health care programs and women's associations.⁴⁰ In Korea, the Bible women are often regarded as the most important factor in the work among Korean women. Since they know what Korean women are and what they experience in their lives, the Bible women can approach other Korean women more effectively with great sympathy. Since becoming literate was one of the requirements, Bible women also became good models for the rest of the women. Besides, becoming a Bible woman was more than simply becoming a devoted Christian; it was also an opportunity to learn and earn an income.⁴¹ Beulah Herbert's essay "Tamil Christian Women at the Turn of the Millennium: Mission Initiatives and Gender Practice," mentions this active involvement of lay women for more than two centuries in the case of the Indian church⁴² and speaks of a similar contemporary scenario as reflected in the lives of Tamil Christian women who are empowered by their female Christian identity and their involvement in the church's mission and evangelistic initiatives such as house prayer groups. Like the Bible women in colonial times many of these laywomen have gained confidence and boldness through their involvement in the mission.

When it comes to women leadership, Christianity in Asia is poised to provide a good example to Asian society through the spread of Pentecostalism since Pentecostal women serve as leaders in grass-root churches. As Peter Phan prognosticates, the face of Asian Christianity will change radically through the leadership of women, especially in the household church movement and mission outreach to other countries.⁴³ Not surprisingly, some of the most powerful and effective ways in which Christianity was engaged as a tool for liberation were those done with the initiative of Asian Christian women themselves. The 1944 ordination of Florence Li Tim Oi as an Anglican priest in Macau is seen as the starting point for the movement of women's ordination in the worldwide Anglican community.⁴⁴ Asian women also helped establish churches; Korean Christian women even established the Women Church of Seoul in 1989. A letter from a group of Indian nuns to Pope John Paul II in 1994 is equally bold: "Priests make use of inequality [between us] to their maximum benefit by extracting cheap labor from us. . . . Doctrines are made out of a culture of dominance and subservience."⁴⁵ In the midst of all of these, numerous women (and men) are actively engaged in various issues or causes affecting Asian women as women both in society and in the churches.⁴⁶ Recall, for example, the inclusion of gender justice issues in the contexts for doing Asian theology in the 2007 meeting of the Association for Theological Education in South East Asia (ATESEA) and South East Asia Graduate School of Theology (SEAGST).⁴⁷ In its description on gender justice, the group named as issues of growing concern, the rising cases of violence against women and children, evident gender deficit in organizations and institutions, and the circumvention of women's quest for equal rights and opportunities.

Today, Christianity in Asia is also engaging Asian culture in a way that helps the cause of Asian women. Inculturation efforts, particularly those that present Mary with the

features of the local woman (and not the European-looking one) with local social issues in the background constitute a positive move. The reference of Manila Archbishop Luis Tagle to problematic elements of Asian culture (e.g., culture of silence and culture of shame), in his speech at a conference of priests and bishops on clergy sex abuse in early 2012, also constitutes a good move. It reflects a church that will no longer keep quiet or tacitly accept unhelpful cultural elements simply because they serve the Church's purpose.

CONCLUSION

A Chinese proverb refers to women as “hold (ing) up half the sky.” In many ways, however, this proverb reflects more the ideal rather than the real, more of an aspiration rather than a fact, as far as Asian women are concerned. Throughout Asian history or, more appropriately *her* story, in every realm of Asian society women have been marginal(ized). Although significant progress has been made in alleviating women's oppression in the Asian region in contemporary times, women continue to suffer from economic hardships, social exclusion, and violence. Indeed, while Asian women's conditions have generally improved with economic development and social modernization, significant improvements in women's status still require changes in attitudes that are embedded in centuries of traditional culture.

Whether direct or indirect, in theory or practice, Christianity played and continues to play both the role of protagonist and villain for Asian women by reinforcing their oppression and, at the same time, contributing toward their liberation. Christianity, in other words, plays a double-edged role when it comes to the cause of Asian women. Whether in the past or at present,⁴⁸ Christianity has, indeed, found itself in an ambiguous position of offering both promise, and peril, problems and prospects for Asian women. Whether it will completely overcome this ambiguity and be a definitive and unequivocal source of hope for Asian women remains to be seen. What is clear is that the lament of those who “hold up half the sky” continues to cry out to heaven and, for its part, Christianity in Asia is challenged to offer far-reaching solutions that could very well rely on or lead to its own transformation.

NOTES

1. Economically, Asia has one of the richest countries (i.e., Japan) and some of the poorest ones (e.g., North Korea and Cambodia). Politically, it has the largest democratic (India) and communist (China) governments in the world. Within many Asian countries, as well, extreme wealth exists side by side with extreme poverty.
2. In a comparative list on percentage of female representatives in national legislatures worldwide, for example, Pakistan and China outnumber the United Kingdom and the

- United States. Susan M. Shaw and Janet Lee, *Women's Voices, Feminist Visions: Classic and Contemporary Readings*, 3rd ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2007), 622.
3. Sirimavo Bandaranaike is, in fact, the first woman in world history to become prime minister. More recently, Thailand elected its first female prime minister, Yingluck Shinawatra.
 4. A few examples: Sirimavo Bandaranaike rose to power as prime minister after her husband (former Prime Minister Solomon Bandaranaike) was assassinated. Similarly, former Philippine president Corazon Aquino was thrust to the political spotlight when her husband—prominent opposition senator Benigno Aquino—was also assassinated. Likewise, Benazir Bhutto's political career could be traced back to her executed father, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, a former prime minister of Pakistan. The same is true with former Indonesian president Megawati Sukarnoputri and former Philippine president Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo whose fathers were former president(s) of their homeland(s). Meanwhile, recently elected Thai Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra rose from the shadow of her brother and ousted former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra.
 5. Elaine Kurtenbach, "Report: Lower Women's Status Risk for Asian Future," <http://globalnation.inquirer.net/33967/report-womens-lower-status-risk-for-asian-future>.
 6. Available at <http://www.unescap.org/55/e1133e.htm>.
 7. I speak of patriarchy here as a system of oppression as it intersects with other structures of women oppression like racism and colonialism. For a more detailed discussion on the complex interstructuring of systemic oppression of Asian women, see Kwok Pui-lan, *Introducing Asian Feminist Theology* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2000), and Chung Hyun Kyung, *Struggle to be the Sun Again: Introducing Asian Women's Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991).
 8. Such bias against girls could also be glimpsed in other Asian countries like the Philippines and Indonesia. Among traditional Bataks in Indonesia, for instance, fathers and sons get served first during meals and only the males' names appear in the family tree.
 9. See Nat Yogachandra, *Beauty, Bureaucrats, and Breaking the Silence: The Status of Women in Asia* (New York: Global Arts Group, 2003).
 10. Nam-Soon Kang, "Creating 'Dangerous Memory': Challenges for Asian and Korean Feminist Theology," *Ecumenical Review* 47 (1995): 21–31.
 11. Afreen's death follows that of a 2-year-old girl who was abandoned. See Harmeet Shah Singh, "Baby's Death in India Blamed on Father's Anger She Was Born a Girl," April, 11, 2012, http://edition.cnn.com/2012/04/11/world/asia/india-baby-death/index.html?hpt=hp_t3. It is not just men or fathers who do this. Gabriele Dietrich mentions Karuppai—a woman from a village in Madurai District in India—who was sentenced to life in prison after she was caught killing her third child, a girl, since she already had two daughters. As cited in Gabriele Dietrich, "People's Movements, the Strength of Wisdom, and the Twisted Path of Civilization," in Fernando Segovia, ed., *Toward a New Heaven and a New Earth: Essays in Honor of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2003), 407–21, at 414–15.
 12. The Korean government even banned tests to determine the sex of fetuses in 1987 and increased the penalties for sex screening in 1990 and again in 1994. East-West Center, "The Changing Status of Women in Asian Societies," 52–53. Available at <http://www.eastwest-center.org/fileadmin/stored/misc/FuturePop05Women.pdf>.
 13. For example, due to its declining fertility rate, Singapore's new catchphrase is "Three or More!"

14. According to the report, for every 1,000 boys aged 6 or younger, the findings counted 914 girls, down from 927 a decade ago; see UNDP, *Power, Voice and Rights*. Available at: <http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/power-voices-and-rights>.
15. The report notes that in India and Vietnam the figure is around 112 boys for every 100 girls. In China it is almost 120 to 100. The report notes further that even if the sex ratio at birth returns to normal in India and China within ten years, men in both countries will still face a “marriage squeeze” for decades to come. See United Nations Population Fund, “UNFPA State of World Population 2011: People and Possibilities in a World of 7 Billion.” Available at: <http://www.unfpa.org/webdav/site/global/shared/documents/publications/2011/EN-SWOP2011-FINAL.pdf>.
16. Piper Weiss, “Child Bride Has Marriage Annulled,” April 25, 2012, <http://shine.yahoo.com/healthy-living/child-bride-marriage-annulled-laxmi-sargara-hero-day-180800827.html>.
17. *Sati*, which encourages the widow to jump into her husband’s funeral pyre to show her loyalty to her husband, is tied to this religio-cultural mindset. Lata Mani, *Contentious Traditions: The Debate on Sati in Colonial India* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998) sheds light on this.
18. Comfort women are the thousands of women from various parts of Asia, particularly from China, Korea, and the Philippines, who were abducted and forced to serve the sexual needs of an average of thirty to forty Japanese soldiers during the Second World War.
19. Mary John Mananzan, *Woman, Religion and Spirituality in Asia* (Quezon City, Philippines: Anvil Publishing, Inc., 2004), 8–9. See also Mary John Mananzan, “Education to Femininity or Education to Feminism?” in Anne Carr and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, eds., *The Special Nature of Women? Concilium* 1991/6 (London: SCM Press, 1991), 28–38.
20. Eliza Kent, *Converting Women: Gender and Protestant Christianity in Colonial South India* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), sheds light on this.
21. See Leslie A. Flemming, ed., *Women’s Work for Women: Missionaries and Social Change in Asia* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1989), which examines the impact of Christian missionary women on Asian women in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. See also Kwok Pui-lan, “The Image of the ‘White Lady’: Gender and Race in Christian Mission,” in Carr and Fiorenza, eds., *The Special Nature of Women*, 19–27, at 23–25.
22. EATWOT Asian Women’s Consultation, *Spirituality for Life: Women Struggling against Violence* (Mandaluyong, Philippines: Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians, 1994), 19, as quoted in Kwok, *Introducing Asian Feminist Theology*, 17.
23. Chung, *Struggle to be the Sun Again*, 113.
24. Muriel Orevillo- Montenegro, *Jesus for Asian Women* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2006), 63, 68–69. In the case of China, see Kwok, *Introducing Asian Feminist Theology*, 108–109. See also Elizabeth Koepping, “India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Burma/Myanmar,” in Peter Phan, ed., *Christianities in Asia* (Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 9–42, at 31.
25. Bermisa says that when a woman complains of rape or sexual abuse, the immediate response even from family members include comments and questions like: “How were you dressed?” “Why did you go with him anyway?” and “Don’t tell it to anyone, it is embarrassing.” Leonila V. Bermisa, M.M., “Facing the Reality of Clergy Sexual Misconduct in the Church: A Step toward Justice and Healing,” in Agnes Brazal and Andrea Lizares Si, eds., *Body and Sexuality: Theological and Pastoral Perspectives of Women in Asia* (Quezon City, Philippines: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2007), 216–33, at 222.
26. Kwok, *Introducing Asian Feminist Theology*, 107.

27. RH Bill 96 or “Reproductive Health and Population and Development Act of 2010” will cover, among others, the following areas: emergency obstetric care, access to family planning, maternal death review, family planning supplies as essential medicines, benefits for serious and life-threatening reproductive health conditions, mobile health care service, mandatory age-appropriate reproductive health and sexuality education, ideal family size, employers’ responsibilities, implementing mechanisms, and reporting requirements.
28. Kwok, *Introducing Asian Feminist Theology*, 30. See also Chung, *Struggle to be the Sun Again*, 24; and Mary John Mananzan, “Woman and Religion,” in Forum for Interdisciplinary Studies, *Religion and Society: Towards a Theology of Struggle*, Book 1 (Manila: Forum for Interdisciplinary Studies, 1988), 107–20.
29. I have discussed this in depth elsewhere. See Gemma Tulud Cruz, *An Intercultural Theology of Migration: Pilgrims in the Wilderness* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 291–97.
30. Kwok sheds light on this in the case of India in Kwok, *Introducing Asian Feminist Theology*, 96. Sometimes Christianity even uses the cultural-ethnicity argument to justify its problematic positions. See how this plays out in Myanmar in relation to the issue of ordination of women in Koepping, “India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Burma/Myanmar,” 31.
31. Andrew Eungi Kim, “South Korea,” in Phan, ed., *Christianities in Asia*, 217–30, at 223–24.
32. Kwok Pui-lan, “Mothers and Daughters, Writers and Fighters,” in R. S. Sugirtharajah, ed., *Frontiers in Asian Christian Theology: Emerging Trends* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1994), 147–55, at 151.
33. Kwok Pui-lan, *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 153–54.
34. Lo Lung-kwong, “Taiwan, Hong Kong, Macau,” in Phan, ed., *Christianities in Asia*, 173–95, at 179.
35. See Mark Mullins, “Japan,” in Phan, ed., *Christianities in Asia*, 197–215, at 204.
36. Kim, “South Korea,” 223–24.
37. Mullins, “Japan,” 205.
38. Kwok, “The Image of the White Lady,” 22. Foot binding was the long-outlawed Chinese custom of binding the feet of young girls painfully tight to prevent further growth and/or create tiny narrow feet, which were considered beautiful as they make a woman’s movements more feminine and dainty. The practice evoked protests as it resulted in lifelong disabilities.
39. For an informative essay on the gender dimension of Christian mission in Asia, see Wong Wai-ching Angela, “Engendering Christian Mission in Asia: Understanding Women’s Works in the History of Mission,” *Asian Journal of Women’s Studies* 9, no. 2 (2003): 38–66.
40. Kwok, “Mothers and Daughters, Writers and Fighters,” 149.
41. Hyaewol Choi, “The Visual Embodiment of Women in the Korea Mission Field,” *Korean Studies* 34, no. 1 Annual (2010): 90–126.
42. Beulah Herbert, “Tamil Christian Women at the Turn of the Millennium: Mission Initiatives and Gender Practice,” *Women’s History Review* 17, no. 4 (September 2008): 611–29, at 614.
43. Peter Phan, “Conclusion: Whither Christianities?” in id., *Christianities in Asia*, 255–61, at 260.
44. Lo, “Taiwan, Hong Kong, Macau,” 192.
45. Koepping, “India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Burma/Myanmar,” 31.
46. See, for example, Monica Jyotsna Melanchton, “Dalit Women and the Bible: Hermeneutical and Methodological Reflections,” in Kwok Pui-lan, ed., *Hope*

- Abundant: Third World and Indigenous Women's Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2010), 103–22; Katherine Li-Hsia Ho and Yih-Lan Tsou, “Biblical Reflections on Divorced Women of the Taiwan Catholic Church,” in Evelyn Monteiro and Antoinette Gutzler, eds., *Ecclesia of Women in Asia: Gathering the Voices of the Silenced* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2005), 124–35; Septemmy Eucharistia Lakawa, “Teaching Theology and Gender Perspectives,” in David Kwang-sun Suh et al., eds., *Charting the Future of Theology and Theological Education in Asian Contexts* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2004), 103–13; and Mary John Mananzan, “Emerging Alternatives to Globalization and Transformative Action: Philippine-Asia-Pacific Experience,” *Voices from the Third World* 21, no. 2 (December 1998): 119–133.
47. See Association for Theological Education in South East Asia, “Guidelines for Doing Theologies in Asia,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 32, no. 2 (April 2008): 77–80.
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CHAPTER 20

CHRISTIANITY AND EDUCATION IN ASIA

JUN LI

CHRISTIAN education has accumulated a long and rich tradition which has significantly shaped the landscape of education in this region. This chapter aims at reviewing critically the engagement of Christian missionaries in the field of education in Asia, especially East Asia, focusing on the impact of Christian education on the larger society. It presents case studies from the greater China region, examining such issues as the Christian contribution to literacy, women's education, and higher education.

A BRIEF HISTORICAL SURVEY

Although there were legends about St. Thomas and his mission to India in the first century, the picture of Christianity in Asia did not become clear until the second century when the churches of Edessa in eastern Syria and Adiabene in Mesopotamia were documented by Tatian (A.D. 120–180) who was proud of his Asian identity. Addai, a missionary sent to Edessa by St. Thomas around that time, built churches there and taught persons to read the Scriptures, understand the Ordinances of the church, and prepare for Ministry.¹ This may be the earliest Christian education carried out by an Asian missionary who did not come from the Roman context. The Syriac tradition was later to be inherited in eighth-century China, as is evidenced in the Nestorian stele of Xian. With the shift of political power in the third and fourth centuries from Rome in the West to Persia in the East, missionaries became active and dynamic in expanding their outreach in Asia. The Syriac *Didascalia Apostolorum*, written in Rome around A.D. 225–250, was widely used for missionary education in ancient Persia.² In this period, especially during the persecutions by the Shapur king of Persia, Nestorian Christians fled to India where they built churches and probably also educational institutions. Central to the work of education was the task of translating the Scriptures from Hebrew to Syriac and arguing about theological definitions of the apostolic teaching.

In the mid-fifth century, three well-established Schools of the Persians, the Syrians, and the Armenians, became the centers of theological controversy and added new dimensions to the divisions of Christianity between West and East. Among them, the School of the Persians, established around the fourth century, was the oldest and most prestigious, and it served as a center for Christian intellectual communication and for promoting ecumenical spirit between West and East. After its suppression by emperor Zen, it was later rebuilt by Narsai and Barsauma as the School of Nisibis. The School of Nisibis focused on spiritual discipline based on the twenty-two School Statutes and Bible studies, with more than a thousand students coming from afar to study. It was a tuition-free learning center based on autarky and served as a close-knit Christian community.³ Theological education was later reinvigorated and expanded by Mar Aba, Patriarch of the Persian Church in the mid-sixth century. Based on the model of the School of the Persians, a new theological school was also opened in the capital, Seleucia-Ctesiphon, as a result of the reform led by Mar Aba.

At the same time, churches were set up in India and some of their bishops were trained in the East Syrian Church of Persia. A little later, around the mid-seventh century, Nestorian theology from Syria found its home in the Far East. The history of this community was carved in the Nestorian monument in China in A.D. 781. The first Christian Church in China was built in the capital in A.D. 638, and the monks were all probably Persians or Syrians. The church served as a center for the translation of the Scriptures into Chinese, and more churches were built later in other places in China. By this time, Christianity had been institutionalized widely in many Asian countries, with its spread facilitated through education in churches and monasteries. The flourishing of Christian education was interrupted in China from the tenth to thirteenth centuries, and in the Arabian world from the seventh to thirteenth centuries for similar historical reasons—persecution arising from local religious and political struggles in China and the rise of Islam in the Arabic region. But in the late thirteenth century, some churches still survived on the Old Silk Road in northwest China, as well as in the southeast, according to *The Travels of Marco Polo*. Also Roman Catholic churches which had educational mandates were successfully set up in Beijing, the capital of the Yuan Dynasty (1206–1368). John of Montecorvino, Archbishop of Peking and Primate of all the Far East, baptized a group of forty boys and taught them Latin and the Roman services and hymns. He later moved to open another school, together with them.⁴ After him, seven more bishops with authorization from Rome went to China, but three of them were martyred on the way by Muslims in India. After the thirteenth century, Christian education was interrupted again, as Christian churches in China declined, as well as in some other countries in Asia, until the sixteenth century when Western missionaries came back by sea.

In the West's great age of discovery, the Portuguese and Spanish arrived at Goa and Cochin on India's west coast in the sixteenth century, and Catholic schools and seminaries soon bloomed. The first seminary was established for the children of the Malabar Syrian Christians by Vicente de Lagos in Cranganore near Cochin in 1540. These learning institutions were meant to educate principally the local people. Although the student body was principally Asiatic, it accepted also Portuguese and Eurasians. Francis

Xavier (1506–1552) was one of those who contributed greatly to a mass movement of evangelization, which reached the very young, the poor, and the illiterate. Displeased by the un-Christian life and manners of the Portuguese, Xavier left Goa for his adventure to Japan in 1549 via Malacca and south China, and he became the first Jesuit to serve in Japan as a missionary, accompanied by his Japanese disciple, Anjiro. Christian education flourished soon in Southeast and East Asia, along with the expansion of Catholic missions.⁵ For example, the College of San Salvador was built in Siam (Thailand) for the education of the Portuguese community by Thomas Valguarnera in the mid-seventeenth century. This tradition was carried forward and expanded later by Msgr. Jean-Louis Vey (1840–1909). He built a network of three colleges with 861 pupils, sixty-two schools with 2,692 pupils, plus one hospital in Thailand.⁶

In the early history of Christian education in Asia, there were many arguments, controversies, and adaptations, as the continent was divided historically by its rich indigenous religions, languages, cultures, and sociopolitical traditions. In Japan, the Western missionaries faced a huge barrier in the local language and culture. Although Christians were befriended in the Nobunaga Shogunate (1571–1582), they had to learn how to eat Japanese food and adapt to Japanese society. Education was used as an effective way to learn Japanese and to train local people for priesthood. By 1582, one Catholic college, one novitiate, and two seminaries were functioning as preparatory schools for training for the priesthood, and by then, the number of Japanese Christians had reached about 150,000.⁷

The story of Christian education was more controversial in the Philippines. Because of the same concern for the indigenization of the priesthood, Jesuit pioneers pleaded in 1591 to establish schools to train a local leadership for the church, but this proposal was rejected, since the Father General in Rome did not view missions in the Philippine archipelago as a priority. The Portuguese missionaries, however, had been mindful of the need to prepare native candidates for priesthood. It was not until 1595, however, that a group of Jesuits were sent from Mexico to ensure that there were enough missionaries for Christian education, and in the same year, the first classes were opened in the first secondary school in the Philippines, the College of San Jose, which later became the first university in Manila. Nevertheless, Christian education expanded slowly, from elementary schools in villages to colleges and universities granting doctoral degrees. It was originally intended only for Spanish boys, but later children were admitted from indigenous Filipino families, including girls. By 1726, there were four colleges and one seminary opened by the Jesuits.⁸

The interaction of Christianity and China from the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries came from the southeast, from Taiwan, Macao, and Hong Kong, a different gateway than that of its earlier arrival via the Old Silk Road in the seventh century. Formosa (Taiwan) was first seized by the Dutch in 1642, and a new wave of evangelization in Asia started, as the Protestant Reformation began to move out from Europe to Asia.⁹ At the very beginning, the Dutch Protestants preached in Dutch with great effort and diligence but they were rewarded with no fruit. Then they started to learn the indigenous language of Formosa and set up schools. By 1643, there were over 17,000 Christian Formosans

and Christian schools were flourishing in the island, with about 600 children taught in Dutch and Sinka, a major Formosan tribal dialect, by eight Dutch and fifty-four native Christian schoolmasters.¹⁰

Forbidden by the Chinese emperor to enter China, Robert Morrison from the London Missionary Society explored alternative ways of bringing the Christian faith into China. Landing in Macao in 1807, he wore Chinese clothes, and even arranged a false pigtail. He also learned the language and planned a Christian school for evangelism. The world's first Anglo-Chinese school, the Anglo-Chinese College, was opened with his strenuous efforts in Malacca in 1818, and moved to Hong Kong in 1842.¹¹ The Presbyterians from North America also opened small schools in Ningbo, another coastal city in east China, following the same approach that Morrison had pioneered in the south. Along with the forced opening of the forbidden Chinese empire to the West, more Christian schools were opened in China. There were a total of 289 schools by 1876 and 16,836 students by 1889.¹² Together with Christianity, Western science and culture were brought into China through the curricula in these schools. These schools and their students were an expression of the increasing influence of Western Christianity in China in the nineteenth century.

Although Christianity has a long history in East Asia, Christian education began to blossom only after the mid-nineteenth century, especially when Protestant missionaries from Europe and North America became active and dynamic in the region. In Korea, the first Christian school was kicked off in 1887 by Henry Appenzeller, a pioneer Methodist missionary from Pennsylvania, with the intention of converting the students enrolled. Yun Tchi-Ho, the first Southern Methodist Korean convert, established the Anglo-Korean Academy several years after he returned to Korea in 1895, following the pattern of his alma mater, the Anglo-Chinese College in Shanghai opened by Young J. Allen in 1881.¹³ In Japan, Doshisha, one of the greatest Christian schools, was founded by Jo Nijima in 1875. It became a university fifteen years later. Like the Methodists, the Japanese Baptists also attached great importance to education. By the close of 1888, there were 101 Protestant schools enrolling 9,672 students in Japan, in addition to fourteen theological seminaries with 287 students.¹⁴ Girls' schools were first put into operation by Mrs. Hepburn of the Presbyterian Church in the late 1860s, and later spread to other parts of Japan. In India, the Roman Catholics and the Protestants had a strong impact through their mission schools and colleges. By the end of the nineteenth century, there were around forty Protestant colleges whose graduates were equipped with strong leadership abilities to serve the church and the wider socio-political community in India. Jesuits placed high importance on Catholic schools which were open to all.¹⁵

INSTITUTIONAL DIVERSITY

As in other parts of the world, Christian education has emerged and developed in diverse ways in Asia, including informal, non-formal, and formal types. On the formal

side, one can see all levels of schooling, from kindergarten, elementary, and secondary schools to college and university, for both boys and girls, though not all these types and levels can be found in every Asian country.

Informal Christian education is different from other types in that it is not necessarily planned or organized, and it is not bound by time and space. It is a form of exposure to Christianity that occurs through daily life activities. Non-formal Christian education, by contrast, is planned and organized, but takes place outside of formal educational settings, including such activities as home schooling, literacy programs, and home- or church-based fellowships that do not lead to formal qualification. Formal types of Christian education refer to systematically planned or organized education in such regular institutional settings as schools, seminaries, colleges, or universities which usually offer formal qualifications. Among the three types, non-formal and formal have been predominant in Asia. The three forms have played roles differently in various stages of evangelization in Asia. At the very beginning, it was the non-formal type of education that played a dominant role in the process, as mentioned earlier. The formal type emerged and began to flourish when Christian education was needed by the Western missionary families residing in various Asian countries. In modern times, the formal type of Christian education is not limited to the Christian community, but has become very open to the larger society, indeed with not only local people but also international learners coming from all over the world.

The formal institutions include well-established and newly emerging Christian universities in many Asian countries. Examples include Meiji Gakuin University (1863) and Doshisha University (1875) in Japan, Ewha Womans University (1886) and Soongsil University (1897) in Korea, De La Salle University (1911) and Philippine Women's University (1919) in the Philippines, Krida Wacana Christian University (1967) and Christian University of Indonesia (1953), Fu Jen Catholic University (1913), Sophia University, Tokyo (1913) and Tung Hai University (1955) in Taiwan, Assumption University (1969) and the Christian University of Thailand (1983), Hong Kong Baptist University (1956) and the Chung Chi College (1951) in Hong Kong, Serampore College, Calcutta (1818), Madras Christian College (1837), Madras, St Joseph's College, Tiruchirapalli (1844), St. Xavier's College, Calcutta (1860), and Martin Luther Christian University, Gauhati (2005) in India.

The curricula of many of these higher education institutions include theological or evangelical domains, but are by no means limited to them. A wide range of disciplines, including natural sciences, social sciences, and humanities are covered by various programs for Bachelor's, Master's, or PhD degrees in these learning institutions. Although mainly serving local societies, most of these colleges and universities are ambitious and some are even aggressive in recruiting more and more international students.

Formal Christian education also has had rich development at elementary and secondary levels for both boys and girls. In Singapore, there are three major types of schools (i.e., government-aided, autonomous, and independent). Government-aided schools have a significant part of their funds coming from government but enjoy the least autonomy over how they are operated. Autonomous schools were established in 1994, so that they

open to all, and, of course, the School exempted fees for tuition, room, and board for its students.

Obviously, the cases of Yung Wing and Ma Xiangbo were individual personal experiences. But many other poor school-aged children had similar experiences of free admission at Christian schools, especially for English literacy through learning the Bible. Although Christian schools began to charge tuition later, when their high quality in education was realized by richer families, these schools served as good examples, as well as stimuli indeed, for Chinese educators and policymakers to establish a formal system of compulsory education for literacy in the early twentieth century.

Women's Education

China has a long tradition of girls' education, but without formal schools for girls. The situation began to change when schools for girls were first initiated by missionaries in the mid-1830s in China.¹⁹ The first Christian school for girls was opened in the greater China region by Miss Grant in Singapore in 1825. In 1834, a group of Protestant ladies in London formally founded the Society for Promoting Female Education in China, India and the East, which was renamed in 1838 as the Society for Promoting Female Education in the East (SPFEE).²⁰ Three years later, another girls' school for Chinese was set up in Sourabaya, on the Island of Java, by Miss Mary Ann Aldersey, a founding member of the SPFEE and the first single woman missionary who ventured to go to Mainland China.²¹ The first girls' school was set in motion in Macao, on China's south coast, in 1835 by Ms. Mary Wanstall and co-taught with her husband, the Rev. Karl Gützlaff (1803–1851). Miss Aldersey opened a boarding school for girls in Ningbo on China's east coast in 1844 after the Treaty of 1842. Her passion was such that she felt herself to be in precisely the situation she wished to be in and had no desire or intention ever to leave Ningbo.

Education for girls was initially constrained by traditional Chinese sociocultural stereotypes regarding woman's participation in society; so missionaries were pioneers in opening up equal opportunities of formal education for girls in China. They used a range of approaches to recruit girls, including providing them free food, accommodation, learning materials, clothes, and even transportation. Miss Aldersey was one of those who adopted this approach and succeeded in expanding her free school till there were over forty girls enrolled. With the dedicated efforts made by these early missionaries, schools for girls soon bloomed throughout the nation, in Shanghai, Nanjing, Suzhou, Hangzhou, Zhenjiang, Fuzhou, Tianjin, and Beijing. Girls' schools were also extended later to college level for women, through the upgrading of girls' secondary schools and the establishment of higher education institutions for women, some of which were later merged with institutions for men. For example, the North China Union College for Women, the first university for women in China, which later became part of Yenching

University, was upgraded in 1904 from the Bridgeman Girls' School founded in Beijing in 1864 by American missionary Sarah Miner.²²

Higher Education

Christian higher education institutions played a very important role in modern China before the Revolution of 1949,²³ and they shared a similar path of development with women's universities. Some were established new, while others were upgraded from secondary schools or pre-university colleges.

In addition to having established Aurora and Fudan Universities in Shanghai, Ma Xiangbo proposed to open a new Catholic university in Beijing in 1912, together with his close friend Ying Lianzhi (1867–1926). Based on the Fu Jen Academy for Catholic youth established in 1913, their dream came true in 1925 with the Catholic University of Peking founded by the Benedictines of St. Vincent Archabbey in Latrobe, Pennsylvania, at the request of the Holy See. By 1945, the University had a total of three faculties and twelve departments, with more than 200 professors and 2,200 students enrolled.²⁴ After the Communist Party took over the mainland in 1949, all religious organizations, including Christian churches and educational institutions, began to be repressed systematically. Christian colleges and universities were also forced to be either shut down or merged with other public institutions, and the Catholic University of Peking was merged into Beijing Normal University in 1952. In 1959, the Chinese Regional Bishops' Conference, the Society of Jesus and the Society of the Divine Word collaborated on the reestablishment of the University in Taiwan, supported by its alumni. Four decades after its reestablishment in Taiwan, more than 140,000 students have graduated, and the University ranks at the top of private universities in Taiwan, offering well-developed research programs at both graduate and undergraduate levels with a focus on theology and humanities.

Lingnan University illustrates a case that started from a different path of development that is, upgrading from a Christian secondary school. In 1888, Andrew Happer, an American Presbyterian Minister, set up a Christian college in Guangzhou. Fifteen years later, its English name was changed to the Canton Christian College, and the Chinese name Lingnan Xuetong was adopted. The College remained mainly at the level of secondary education until the mid-1910s when its programs began to be upgraded to undergraduate level with more than 400 students enrolled in the Horticultural and Medical Departments, and the Department of Arts and Sciences. It counted twenty-four foreign faculty and seven Chinese colleagues in the early 1920s.²⁵ In 1927, the College started to indigenize its trustees, presidents, and faculty, with the adoption of its new English name Lingnan University, to meet the requirements for the registration of Christian education institutions put forward by China's Nationalist government. This was a response to the pressure of the popular agitation against imperialism and for the restoration of educational sovereignty.²⁶ The University soon emerged as a key higher education institution in southern China, but was merged into various higher education institutions, including

local languages has prepared a solid foundation for social change and stimulated the process of democratization, modernization, and literacy of science in Asian societies.

The educational work of missionaries has aroused some controversy, since Christianity expanded and became deeply embedded in the Westernization process in the region in the nineteenth century, simultaneous with the spread of Western imperialism. Even though the missionaries might not have intended to make use of the protection of the imperial powers, nevertheless, there was in effect a close link between the two. After all, the colonial powers and the missionary enterprise shared the common interest of forcing open the door of traditionally non-Christian countries such as India, Japan, and China. Various forms of Christian education were also implicated. Evangelism was thus misperceived by many as cultural imperialism or a kind of spiritual opium, which went hand in hand with the efforts of Western powers to conquer Asian lands and impose political imperialism using canons and warships.²⁷ Resistance from and confrontations with local forces have been continuous over the centuries, and fiercely intensified sometimes, taking both political and cultural forms.²⁸ This is evidenced in the anti-Christian Movement and the nationwide Campaign to Restore Educational Sovereignty in China in the early 1920s.²⁹

Christianity has been one of the dominant players in the process of globalization in Asia, and education has served as one major form of evangelization. In its earlier stage, Christian education was a by-product of evangelization and was “utilitarian” in terms of serving the expansion of Christianity.³⁰ But later its role multiplied and took diverse forms, not only serving evangelism but also having a wider impact on societal development in the region. For example, the Tai Po International Baptist Church was officially set up in 2003, based on an earlier English Sunday School started in the 1970s in the New Territories of Hong Kong. Its humble history shows how Christian churches have blossomed out of educational work and how the evangelical work is amplified through it, with various religious and humanitarian services provided to the local and international communities.

The uneven development of Christian education in Asia has been connected to evangelical work and affected by very different sociopolitical and cultural contexts. Education has been both an instrument of Christian evangelism and a foundation for wider social change. A century ago, Rev. Calvin Mateer clearly noted that “Christianity and education are in themselves entirely distinct, yet they have such strong natural affinities that they have always been closely associated.”³¹ Given this notion, Christian education is likely to continue to expand in Asia and globally, with new dynamic forms emerging in the process of evangelization. This should facilitate a global dialogue among civilizations.

NOTES

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CHAPTER 21

CHRISTIAN SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT IN ASIA

FELIX WILFRED

REPERCUSSION ON SOCIETY

A proper understanding of the Christian social involvement in Asia needs to be set against the changing historical, cultural, and political backgrounds. Had there been no rites controversy in China, for example, which put off an otherwise well-disposed Emperor Kangxi, and made him turn against Christianity, China would, perhaps, have benefited much more from the social involvement of missionaries. Christianity that had no regard for what China held as very important for the life of its society—the veneration of its ancestors—could not make much impression upon the people, even if its missionaries were involved in social and welfare works. The penetration of Western powers into Asia and the establishment of colonial regimes and dominion through unequal treaties made no small number of Asians suspicious of Christian works of social welfare and philanthropy. Christians were viewed as integral to the penetration of Western powers into China and their domination of the country. “Guilt by association” had serious repercussions for whatever social work or service Christians and Christian missionaries were involved in.

Sustained social involvement was not possible because of strong anti-foreign sentiments, protests, and the outbreak of riots. The opium war and the suppression of Boxer Revolution and other forms of social protests also fueled the anger of the people against the missionaries and their social engagement. In the modern period, the churches’ support of the Kuomintang Nationalist Party and staunch opposition to communism as atheistic ideology made Christians appear as counterrevolutionary forces, which in turn affected the ability of Christianity for social intervention.

In the case of the Philippines, the alliance between the Spanish colonial power and the Catholic Church had been so close that both of them were held equally responsible for the injustices perpetrated on the people. In fact, the anger and resentment against the

colonial power and the revolution of 1896–98 turned as well against the Spanish friars under colonial patronage. On the other hand, the same Philippines witnessed the introduction of printing, Western medicine and modern technology, and a large number of educational institutions by the missionaries; all of these contributed to the transformation of the Filipino society.

As for Japan, the number of Catholics and Protestant Christians has been far from significant, both during the first encounter with Christianity during the time of Francis Xavier and after the proscription against Christianity was lifted following the Meiji restoration in the nineteenth century. There was little Christians could do in terms of social transformation. What proved to be effective in this field seems to be the schools established by missionaries, especially the Protestant ones. In a country that was open to Western influence, and was eager to change through science and technology, the Christian schools served as catalysts to that goal. The response to the much sought after education in things Western also resulted in the growth of the number of Christians. It is reported that during 1882–87, the number of Christians increased from 5,000 to 36,000.¹ Between the decades 1859–89, Christianity exercised greatest practical appeal to the Japanese society. The Christian contribution to social transformation in Japanese society has taken place also through some outstanding leaders who were deeply influenced by the educational institutions run by the missionaries. One group of these leaders was known as the “Kumamoto band,” and another group was associated with the Sapporo school.² Uchimura, originally a Methodist convert, was associated with this latter school. They tried to bridge the gap between their loyalty to the Japanese society and their fidelity to Christian faith. Uchimura started his own Church—The Non-Church Movement—distancing himself from the foreign image of Christianity, and it is in this context that he tried to address social issues and questions of the country from a Christian perspective. It implied also resistance to exaggerated nationalism. Well-known is his opposition to the Sino-Japanese War (1894–95) and the Russo-Japanese War (1904–5), and his refusal to make the traditional bow to the emperor.

Although Christianity experienced persecution in Korea, it turned out that from the latter part of the nineteenth century, when Protestantism was introduced in a big way, it played a modernizing role in this traditional and feudal society. The first modern schools, hospitals, and publishing houses were set up by missionaries. And this social engagement was taken forward by the Koreans themselves in a larger way, making the social service of Christianity indigenous. Along with modern institutions, there came about also a new set of values and a spirit of progress. All this explains the rapid growth of Christianity in Korea for the past one hundred years. As a mass movement, Christianity in Korea from the beginning of the twentieth century had such pietistic characteristics that it could easily have become apolitical. In fact, Christian churches helped Koreans in the period of weakness and instability that culminated in Japanese colonization in 1909 to acquiesce to the given situation. On the other hand, a section of the renewal leaders, in the light of an apocalyptic reading of the national situation, helped the revitalization of the society and its development. Christianity became a great force for the transformation of Korean society, for nationalism, and for resistance to Japanese imperialism.

There has been “persecution” and “martyrdom”—to use expressions commonly used—in Japan, China, Korea, and Vietnam. India did not experience any persecution of this kind, in spite of the fact that Christians have been critical of the society, its traditions, structures, and so on. Christianity challenged the traditional society and its value system. Ironically, what happened in the end was that Christianity itself was affected by some of the ills of the society such as the caste system. As a result, the Christian commitment for social service and for development was not as effective and radical as it could have been. Moreover, the denigration by Christian missionaries of all those things people held as sacred—their religious traditions and symbols—coupled with the effort to convert people from Hinduism to Christianity dampened the enthusiasm of critically thinking people for Christian social involvement, no matter how zealously and with what great spirit of love and sacrifice this was done by the missionaries. In addition, the repercussions of Christian social mission have to be seen against the background of caste—the central organizing principle of the society. In a caste society where the relationships take place on the basis of ascribed identities, each caste has its own duties to perform—the *dharma* of each caste. Thus, the duty of the Brahmin was learning and performing religious rituals, whereas that of *kshatriya* was to rule and be involved in warfare. Set against the caste background, the commendable social work done by missionaries was taken as the duty of service which the lowest caste—the *shudras*—was supposed to perform for the good of the society. In other words, the care for the sick, the old, orphans, widows, and many such services came to be viewed as the *dharma* or duty of Christians. They could not see anything extraordinary; for after all, it is the duty of Christians to do such service. In India, Christian social work not only did not gain the kind of public recognition it probably deserves. On the contrary, Christian social work came under a cloud of suspicion. For, many wondered why at all Christians were doing these kinds of services. There has been right from the beginning apprehension about whether these social and philanthropic works were a means to gain more converts into the Christian fold. On this count there have been numerous instances of opposition to Christian welfare and developmental activities. The opposition has been stepped up especially in areas where missionary work was directed to the marginalized groups such as the Dalits and tribals.

The impact of Christian social involvement in South Asia needs also to be viewed from another angle. The many social reforms missionaries supported—such as abolition of *sati* (the practice of widow-burning on the funeral pyre of her husband),³ remarriage of widows, abolition of child marriage, and so on—found a positive echo among a section of the Hindu society that was inspired by the involvement of missionaries. Thus, Jyoti Rao Phule (1827–1890) championed vigorously the cause of the lower castes and their education, and especially the cause of women and their liberation. On the other hand, Christian social engagement created a sense of threat among another section of the society. There was the fear that people might be allured by Christian social services and might switch over their religious affiliation. This indeed proved to be a trigger for social reform from within the Hindu society. As K. Natarajan observed, “the fear of the Christian missionary has been the beginning of much social wisdom among us.”⁴

Even today, suspicion about Christian social and development work is still strong, also because many of these works by Catholic and Protestant churches depend heavily on Western nations and their funding. This is true not only of South Asia but also in other parts of the continent.

PERSPECTIVE OF THE BENEFICIARIES

To gain a more comprehensive understanding of Christian social engagement, we need to turn to the perception of the beneficiaries as well as the motives of the missionaries. Although there was general opposition to missionaries, as I noted earlier, they were welcome among the marginalized communities. Thus, the minority Hua Miao community despised by the high-ranking Chinese Han majority, gained social mobility and empowerment thanks to literacy and educational work of the missionaries. In a society in which state examinations were important for acquisition of power and enrolment in the state bureaucracy, providing literacy and education were a great means of social empowerment for the marginalized. In like manner, in India, the oppressed groups and castes as well as the Dalits and tribals found in Christian social engagement the care and service they failed to receive elsewhere. In times of natural disasters or famines like the great famine of 1896–97 in India, missionaries cooperated with the state in relief work and took initiatives on their own in the face of a calamity that affected millions of people. Mission centers functioned as havens for the affected. Christian charitable institutions provided orphans and children education and social uplift. The various social services and welfare activities went far beyond help in the immediate emergency situation. For the beneficiaries it was a journey from immediate help and relief to a more lasting social, cultural, and economic advancement enhancing their lives. Christian engagement with the oppressed and marginalized groups helped them, in a more important way, to forge an identity of their own, to gain self-confidence, and empower themselves in different ways. To put it differently, the role of Christianity with these groups has been one of mediating modernity and its benefits. An integral aspect of the social transformation the marginalized experienced was the missionary contribution to the field of language and literature. Valorization of their languages by study and research and by translation of the Bible into their native tongues helped especially the marginalized acquire dignity, self-confidence, and respect. We may recall here the contribution of the missionaries of Serampore—William Carey and his associates in early nineteenth-century Bengal, India—to the cause of vernacular languages, especially the tribal languages.

Speaking of the perspective of the beneficiaries, I need to highlight something that emerges from history: It is the fact that the way the oppressed and marginalized related to missionaries in their social involvement depended on how much power the missionaries wielded. In the sixteenth century, a cluster of villages in the Coromandal Coast of South India converted to Christianity thanks to the protection offered by the missionaries against the harassment of Muslims in their fishing occupation. In interior China, the

What were the motives and the kind of theology that sustained this kind of social involvement? To respond to this question, three facts need to be taken into account. First of all, there was no single motive to which social involvement could be attributed. There were more motives than one, and indeed often there were mixed motives. Motives also differed according to the nature of the Christian denomination. Second, over time there has been development in the motives and theology in this field of social engagement. Third, there was a difference of opinions among the missionaries themselves on how to relate the social involvement with their mission preaching. One of the motives present throughout the missionary period, especially in the initial period, was the conviction that one is serving Christ in serving the poor, the sick, and the suffering—something that is very much part of Christian tradition.⁶ A most recent example is the work of Mother Teresa who viewed as a service to the suffering Christ what others saw as social engagement.

As for motive and theology in the institutional phase of Christianity spanning the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century, it all started with the concept of “civilizing mission.” The duty of Christian mission was not only to preach the Gospel; it also involved the mission of civilizing as a necessary prelude. From another perspective, humanitarian services and social works were interpreted as the material preparation for the noble and spiritual goal of the salvation of souls through the preaching of the Gospel. In other words, a hungry person may not be able to listen to God’s word. He or she needs to be fed beforehand. While these considerations were the dominant theological motives, there was at the same time, among some missionaries, a more radical approach to social involvement. Although they did not express themselves in today’s terms of liberation theology, their praxis was an anticipation of it. Thus, the missionaries were involved in freeing the tribal people from the bondage of the surrounding society. Fr. Constantine Lievens, a Jesuit missionary from Belgium, for example, worked among the tribals of Chotanagpur in India at the end of the nineteenth century. Other missionaries challenged the way workers were treated on the indigo and tea plantations of the colonial masters in India,⁷ and on the rubber plantations of Malaysia; and still others voiced their critique against opium trade in China. Significant was the staunch support of missionaries of the London Missionary Society and Church Missionary Society (CMS) to the marginalized castes in the state of Travancore, India, in their struggle against discrimination. The missionaries supported the struggle of lower caste women to claim their right to wear an upper cloth, which was forbidden by high-caste Hindus for lower caste women.⁸ Here again, there is a difference among the missionaries depending on their provenance. Those missionaries of the Mediterranean and Iberian origin tended to accommodate the local social conditions and structures for fear that the cause of missionary preaching may be hampered if they entered into what they felt were local social issues. They did not like to compromise the greater cause of the proclamation of the Gospel in the face of social inequality and oppression of which they were not unaware. On the other hand, missionaries from Northern countries of Europe under greater influence of European Enlightenment tradition were sensitive to social issues and on the need to question social inequality and other oppressive practices. There were

also differences that depended on the social classes to which the missionaries belonged. Those hailing from lower social strata in England and other countries had a radical and revolutionary streak to such an extent that the British colonial government, for example, was suspicious of them. They feared that they could become rabble-rousers in the colonies, foster revolutionary trends, and nurture anti-regime policies and practices. The difference could be seen also between the Scottish missionaries and British missionaries. The former, who came from a more egalitarian tradition and were under greater influence of the Enlightenment, related more closely social realities and experiences to the preaching of the Gospel.

As for developments in theology vis-à-vis social engagement, the mainline churches attempted to relate salvation ever closer to the changes in the material conditions of life. If in an earlier period attention was focused on sin and redemption, the soul and its eternal destiny—for which it was important to be baptized and become a Christian believer—the Social Gospel movement in the West had an impact on the way missionaries, especially the Protestant ones, dealt with social issues and questions. If the so-called First Awakening in the West, especially in the United States, had its focus on the soul and its redemption, the Second Awakening in the early nineteenth century brought the Bible closer to the social consequences of the development in industrialization, migration, and so on. The spirit of the Social Gospel, concerned with issues of temperance, prostitution, workers, migration, and so on, had its repercussion in the work of mission and missionary societies engaged in Asia.

As noted earlier, there was no one single motive for the social services and development actions of Christian missionaries in Asia. This will become clearer by observing the situation in different Christian churches. There has been a wide spectrum of theologies in the churches with its effects on the way social involvement is conceived and practiced. Today, for example, one could notice a difference between the approach of evangelical Christians and missionaries to the social issues of the continent, and those of the mainline churches. The evangelicals are trying to combine the proclamation of the Gospel with social services in such a way as to recall the suspicion from colonial times that social services are but a smokescreen for Christian proselytism. In a country like Cambodia devastated by war under the Khmer Rouge brutal regime, evangelical Christians face the problem of having to reconcile their agenda of mission with their works of development, especially in a situation where 95% of the people are Buddhists. This is true also with respect to South Korea with strong presence of evangelical Christians. The Yoido Full Gospel Church, the largest Pentecostal Church in South Korea (with about one million members), has numerous social and development projects and is also politically highly influential.

By contrast, in the mainline Catholic and Protestant churches, following the decolonization of Asian countries that marked the end of the missionary era, attention has been focused more and more on development inspired by faith. In many respects the Catholic and Protestant bodies working at the grass roots resemble the NGOs, with the difference that the former are faith-affiliated and faith-motivated groups. The new model of Christian social involvement makes it easy for greater interreligious cooperation in

social and human rights issues and also to work jointly with secular groups and movements. For the evangelical Christian groups, mission has not come to cease with decolonization; rather it needs to be pursued to reach the unreached. The agenda of mission is vigorously pursued by evangelicals, especially groups hailing from the United States and from South Korea. In short, there are different models of Christian social involvement. At one extreme are faith-based Christian groups becoming almost one with secular groups in their social agenda, and at the other extreme are the evangelical groups preaching the Gospel to which social services become an important instrument in today's conditions. It is to be noted that most evangelical missionaries do not belong to any particular organization but are sent from local communities in their places of origin.

FIELDS OF CHRISTIAN INVOLVEMENT

Missionary social involvement can be seen throughout Asia, in a wide range of social fields—education especially of women, orphanages and homes for children, homes for the destitute, for lepers, medical work, and so on. I cannot go into the details of all these social works and services; instead, let me single out Christian involvement in the field of healthcare. It has been widely recognized that Christianity played an important role in introducing Western medicine and medical care into Asia. It would appear that Peter Parker (1804–1888), a missionary from American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Mission (ABCFM) established in 1835 the Canton Hospital, the first such institution in China. Besides hospitals, medical schools, and schools for the training of nurses were run by the missionaries. Medical service also included care for those who were addicted to opium. The young Chinese women who got trained as doctors in the missionary medical schools and hospitals became agents of modern medical care and social hygiene.

Statistics on Christian healthcare relating to the first part of the twentieth century in China reveal the extent of Christian involvement. Zhuo Xingping of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences provides the facts:

Before 1900, there were about forty Protestant hospitals and clinics and also some Catholic hospitals in China. According to the statistics in 1933, there were already 266 Catholic hospitals and 744 pharmacies. In 1937, there were 271 Protestant hospitals and clinics, including 297 foreign doctors and 561 Chinese doctors, 256 nurses and 340 Chinese nurses, 278 medical technicians and 197 probationaries. There were 18,266 sickbeds in church hospitals and 1,034 sickbeds in church clinics. In this time seventy per cent of the total Chinese hospitals were church hospitals, and ninety per cent of nurses were Christians.⁹

Some of the prominent missionaries of the Protestant churches like Peter Parker (1804–1888) were medical doctors who were fired with missionary zeal. In Japan the Protestant missionaries James C. Hepburn, John Cutting Berry, and Wallace Taylor were physicians, and their medical work was a pioneering Christian effort. In India, the

and inter-ethnic encounter, unity, and harmony. Although the Church is involved in many developmental works and runs several prestigious educational institutions in Malaysia, this contribution to unity stands out.

CONTEMPORARY DEVELOPMENTS

One of the important debates taking place in the Asian churches is the extent and nature of their social involvement. While one segment of Asian Christians thought of social engagement as a witnessing to the Gospel and apolitical in nature, vanguard Asian Christians went into the analysis of the deeper roots of social evils the redress of which called for a critique of political arrangements and institutions. Creation of an equitable social order inspired by Christian vision and faith meant for these Christians also confrontation with the state, and its policies and programs. The various forms of liberation theology emerging in Asia were critical of the traditional social service and developmental approach of the churches. They opted for a more radical path of social transformation. Asia is home to the majority of the poor in the contemporary world. Such being the reality, radical social engagement meant churches becoming truly churches of the poor.

There has been a gradual development in the social consciousness of Asian Christianity from the middle of the twentieth century—something it shares also with the Christianity of Latin America. The 1970s brought to light the importance of the political dimension in development and in social involvement. Today with fast economic growth and liberalization in Asian countries, new questions and issues have come up, and critically thinking Christians expect the churches to turn their attention to the emerging new questions: migration, land alienation from the poor and the marginalized, trafficking of women and children, exploitative tourism, clinical trials among the poor, displacement of tribal and indigenous peoples, the plight of farmers and fisher people, and environmental destruction in the name of development. These issues are linked to politics, and hence the growing challenge for the Asian churches is to become politically conscious in their social engagements.

One of the critical questions encountered by many Christians in Asian societies is the reality of their minority situation. Pragmatic considerations have prompted many church leaders and groups of Christians not to take any confrontational approach which they fear would negatively impact on Christian minorities and their religious functioning. Here is a point of contention between those who foreground the cause of the Church and its smooth functioning and those who give priority to the issues of the people and stand by them, and who see the role of the Church as a prophetic service to their cause.

New challenges and experiences have also brought about change in the method and approach to social and political issues. It is increasingly evident that the churches cannot alleviate poverty and oppression suffered by millions of people in the continent. To be effective, it is important to move in the direction of advocacy for social

and environmental causes, and empower the communities at the grass-roots level for social transformation. In this context, theological developments, especially among the Catholic and Protestant churches, have had repercussions on the social engagement of Asian Christian communities. Politics is a field not to be shunned but to be viewed as an important arena for the transformation of society in the light of faith. Such was the clear message of Vatican II and Pope Paul VI in his Apostolic letter *Octogesima Adveniens, A Call to Action*. Vatican II in its Pastoral Constitution on the Modern World (*Gaudium et Spes*) underlined a theology of creation affirming the earthly realities as forming part of God's universal design, and recognizing their legitimate autonomy. Moreover, the Roman Synod of 1971 on the theme of justice saw action for justice as a "constitutive part" of the preaching of the Gospel. This is echoed in a statement of the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA), which said, "The Church's witness to the redemption of Christ must inevitably include the message of the renewal of society."¹¹ The reality of the poor became more and more a matter of theological and biblical reflections, and called for option in their favor. Similar theological insights were provided by the World Council of Churches and by the YMCA movement in Asia. All these new impulses have sunk deeply into the consciousness of Asian Christians who found ways and means to respond to the sociopolitical challenges of the continent.

Various movements inspired by new theological perspectives on social realities of the continent, initiated new forms of grass-roots social action. Organizations like the Young Christian Workers (YCW), International Movement of Catholic Students, the International Movement for Intellectual and Cultural Affairs, and similar bodies were actively involved in different Asian countries, and they created a new model for relating Christian faith with the sociopolitical realities of the continent. But this was not without a price. For example, in Korea, Hong Kong, Malaysia, and Singapore, individual Christians and Christian organizations involved in justice and human rights have been accused of subverting the state. In these countries, some Christian social activists have been harassed and were even jailed under the oppressive Internal Security Laws. From the perspective of most of these states, this kind of involvement in issues of justice, human rights, and the defense of the marginalized went beyond the realm of religion, which is supposed to confine itself to the personal faith and worship of the believers. However, some leaders in the Catholic Church like Cardinal Stephen Kim Sou Hwan of South Korea, Anthony Soter Fernandez of Malaysia, Cardinal Francis Xavier Nguyen Van Thuan of Vietnam, and Cardinal Stephen Hamao of Japan have given courageous and prophetic leadership in the sociopolitical arena in the life of Asian churches. On the Protestant side, the Christian Conference of Asia through its assemblies and conferences with marginalized people as the focus has provided leadership for a new kind of social engagement. Asian YMCA and YWCA—the lay movements—became also a nursery of Christian leaders with an ecumenical and social vision for the peoples of Asia.

This was true also in earlier times. Vedanyagam Samuel Azariah (1872–1945) the well-known Anglican Bishop of Dornakal in India, who was deeply involved in the cause of the marginalized, was a former secretary of the YMCA. K. T. Paul, who dedicated himself to the social transformation of rural India, was the national secretary of

Daoism, and so on—whose adherents have begun to rethink their faith commitment in relation to humanitarian issues. A well-known example is the movement of socially engaged Buddhists who seek to bring the religious message of compassion to the issues of development, justice, and environment. Given the situation, the Seventh FABC Plenary Assembly has rightly paid great attention to interfaith collaboration in social transformation.

CCA and FABC have cooperated also in responding to exploitative tourism in Asian countries by promoting the work of the Ecumenical Coalition for Third World Tourism (ECTWT, and now called Ecumenical Coalition on Tourism (ECOT)). The many grass-roots actions inspired and directed by the Coalition helped to hold in check what appeared to be a new form of colonialism, exploiting the land and eroding the culture and traditions of the local people in the name of tourism. In place of luxury tourism, CCA and FABC have promoted alternative tourism based on people-to-people relationship and on cultural exchange and mutuality. Another area of joint institutional involvement of both the bodies has been the Asian Cultural Forum on Development (ACFOD). Further both bodies jointly established a Committee for Asian Women (CAW). In the area of development, the contribution and initiative of Asian Partnership for Human Development (APHD) have been significant. In this partnership, the relationship with partners from the West—Canada, Australia, Ireland, England, Belgium, and France—was on an equal basis. The programs of this partnership took up such issues as the rights of farmers in Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines, victims of violence and war in Sri Lanka, and human trafficking in India and Nepal. This cooperation served also as a pedagogical means for the education of the people of the developed countries on social and political issues of Asia.

CONCLUSION

The legacy of Christian social involvement in Asia is marked by ambiguity. Mission meant not only preaching the Gospel but also attending to the material needs of the people. The connection between the two has not always been clearly thought out or articulated, but appears to be something that has happened spontaneously in praxis. Moreover, the mediation of modernity through Christianity created a basis for the development of Asian nations, especially its marginalized groups. On the other hand, varying degrees of connection between the colonial power and mission undermined the value of the missionary contribution, which became even suspect. The ambiguity seems to continue even today in changed circumstances. Indigenous Christian leaders have given a new twist to social engagement by turning Christian social services and developmental works into contributions for the building up of the nation.

While Christians in some of the Asian countries, especially under centralized states or theocratic states, still continue with social service and development work as contributions to the development of the country, in nations with greater religious freedom

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PART IV

ASIAN CHRISTIANITY
IN INTERACTION
WITH ASIAN
RELIGIOUS
TRADITIONS

INTRODUCTION

GEORG EVERS

THE eight contributions in Part IV deal with the interaction of Christianity with the other Asian religious traditions. In the first contribution S. Wesley Ariarajah describes the “Changing Paradigms of Asian Christian Attitudes to Other Religions.” He starts with presenting different paradigms of the missionary activities of Christianity in various parts of Asia during the early centuries and the time of colonial expansion. The early paradigm of “mission as integration” was later replaced by the paradigm of “mission as displacement” of traditional religious adherence by the acceptance of Christianity as substitute. Other paradigms of mission in Asia were “mission as service,” later followed by the paradigm of “mission as liberation.” After the end of colonialism and due to new theological insights, the paradigm of “mission as encounter” was developed, resulting in the “dialogical paradigm” and the call for cooperation with other religions in nation-building and development. Finally, Ariarajah presents the paradigm of “wider ecumenism” as the road to the future.

In his contribution, David M. Neuhaus presents “Jewish–Christian Relationships in West Asia: History, Major Issues, Challenges, and Prospects.” The focus is on the relationship between Judaism and Christianity in present-day Israel, characterized by the unique pattern that Judaism is the majority whereas Christianity constitutes the minority religion. The presence of Islam and the Israel–Palestine conflict have a strong influence on the Jewish–Christian relationship. Neuhaus concludes by looking at the prospects of Jewish–Christian relations and a brief description of this relationship in other parts of Asia.

A survey on “Muslim Perceptions of Asian Christianity” is given by Ataullah Siddiqui who delineates the changes and developments in the debates and the nature of the arguments during the last centuries in South, Central, and Far East Asia. This is followed by a presentation of some of the challenges and opportunities in the mutual encounter of Muslims and Christians in Asia. On the one hand, there is the opening of the main Christian churches toward dialogue, but contrasted, on the other hand, by the conflictual attitudes taken by fundamentalist and Pentecostal Christians, which create obstacles in the relationship of Muslims and Christians.

Ananta Kumar Giri addresses “The Multiverse of Hindu Engagement with Christianity” by recounting the complex history of the Hindu–Christian encounter in the past. He begins by examining first the Hindu perception of Christianity and then presents the reverse view of Christians looking at Hinduism. Special attention is given to the problems of the Dalits and the Adivasis, as well as the issues of colonialism, evangelism, and conversion.

Dennis Hirota provides a “small window” onto the complex problem of “Christian Tradition in the Eyes of Asian Buddhists” by focusing on the case of Japan. Here he distinguishes three periods: the time of the “Christian Century” in the sixteenth–seventeenth centuries, the period during the reopening of Japan in the nineteenth century, and finally the period of mutual exchange between Buddhists and Christians starting in the twentieth century and continuing till today.

In his contribution on the “Encounter between Confucianism and Christianity” Jonathan Y. Tan explores the social, ethical, and religious aspects by focusing on China, Japan, Korea, and Vietnam. The central problem in this encounter has been the issue of ancestor veneration which led to the rites controversy. The aftermath of this controversy shapes the Confucian–Christian relation till today.

Richard Fox Young addresses the sensitive topic of conversion, its conceptualization and critique past and present with special reference to South Asia. This he does by presenting first the “intellectualist model” developed by the cultural anthropologist Robin Horton, who addressed the questions of “who is changing whom?” and “what is changing?” in the process of conversion by insisting on the factor of indigeneity. Young then proceeds by outlining the “Reference Group Model” developed by the anthropologist Robert Hefner, and concludes with an appraisal of the two models.

In her contribution, Gudrun Löwner describes the historical developments of “Christian Art and Architecture in Asia,” starting from the early beginnings in India and China and proceeding to describe the developments after the end of the colonial period till today in different countries of Asia. In doing so, Löwner distinguishes three stages: first the stage of accommodation which is characterized by the attempt to present Christian themes in traditional Asian forms. The second stage is the attempt of inculturation and contextualization, which results “from a radical encounter with the existing social, economic, and environmental problems” in the various Asian societies. The third stage is that of globalization, which is characterized by a universal approach and which carries a universal message in forms universally understood.

and beginning of the twentieth century. In reality, there has been a long and fascinating relationship between Christianity and Asia from the very early stages of Christian history. No one is certain as to when exactly Christianity first came to the south and north-eastern parts of Asia. But it is clear that already during the time of Jesus there were trade links between Asia and the Middle East, by sea to the Indian subcontinent and beyond, and by land, leading all the way to the provinces of China through what was eventually called the “Silk Road.” These trade relations had led to the establishment of Arab, Jewish, Persian, and Armenian settlements in different parts of Asia.

It is not the intention of this chapter to discuss this history, but in our consideration of Christian approaches to other religious traditions one should make a note of these early Christian settlements under a variety of names such as Syrian, Nestorian, Armenian, and Chaldean communities. There is evidence to suggest that Christians lived in several Asian countries, including China, India, Tibet, Sri Lanka (first known as Taprobane and later as Ceylon), Burma (Myanmar), Java, and perhaps Korea and Japan via China. Of these communities, the only one that survives to our day is the “St. Thomas Christians” of Kerala (Malabar) who trace their origins to the Apostle Thomas himself.¹

Evidence also suggests that the early Christian messengers, both in China and India, had developed cordial relationships with the rulers and with the peoples of the religious traditions they met and found nonaggressive ways of witnessing to the Christian message. Often they incorporated some of the cultural and religious traits of the people into Christian worship and practices. St. Thomas Christians in India, for instance, were even accommodated into the rigid caste structure of India, with a place next only to the Brahmins. They maintained ecclesial contact with the Patriarchate of East Syria and followed its liturgy. However, they had so many social and cultural relations with the people that the Christian–Hindu relationship at that time was clearly symbiotic and has been described as “Hindu in culture, Christian in religion and Oriental in Worship.”²

It is not possible to enter here into an analysis of the nature of this accommodation and the reasons why these early Asian Christian communities, with the exception of St. Thomas Christians of Kerala, died out. But it is important to note that there was a paradigm of relationship that was in the offing, whereby, much like the Eastern (Orthodox) tradition of the church, Christianity in Asia was attempting to embed itself in the religion, culture, language, and traditions of the people. Here the Gospel message is understood as that which transforms and renews from within. However, this trend would change radically with the arrival of the next wave of Christianity.

DIMENSIONS WITHIN THE MISSIONARY PARADIGM

Despite the early history told above, a substantial presence of Christianity in Asia, along with its predominant patterns of relationship with peoples of other religious traditions,

emerged only after Western colonization of many parts of Asia. It must be noted that taking the Gospel to peoples in distant lands, where people lived by and practiced other religious traditions, was not part of the intentions of the Early Church. Despite the words of the “Great Commission” in Matthew 28, and the injunction to be his witnesses “to the ends of the earth” in Acts 1:8 attributed to Jesus, a close study of Jesus’ ministry suggests that he himself intended it to be limited to his own people. The spread of Christianity into the Greco-Roman religious and cultural milieu was also in some sense accidental. Paul and his companions were primarily interested in preaching to the Diaspora Jewish communities to convince them that Jesus, who had been rejected by the religious leaders in Jerusalem, was indeed the messiah promised by God. In every city in Asia Minor, their mission was to the synagogues in those cities. However, while his compatriots were reluctant to accept the message, some of the Greeks who attended the synagogue, because of their appreciation of Judaism and Jewish way of life (called “God-fearers”), responded to the message. This unanticipated turn of events presented Paul with theological and practical problems not unlike those that Peter faced when he was sent to the home of the Roman centurion, Cornelius, and when the Holy Spirit fell on his Gentile listeners (Acts 10–11).

The discussions reported in Acts 15 show that, back in Jerusalem, the leadership of the Early Church was not too excited about the prospect of a Gentile mission. Christians in the early stages saw themselves and functioned as a sect within Judaism. Throughout the Pauline letters one finds evidence of the tension between Paul, who had eventually declared himself as the “Apostle to the Gentiles,” and those who saw circumcision and the observance of the Torah as essential parts of Christian identity (Phil. 3:2–6; Gal. 5:1–12).

It is beyond the scope of this discussion to trace in detail the way mission was understood and practiced after the Christian faith moved into the Greco-Roman world. However, it would be of interest to note that the circumstances that attended the “Christianization” of Europe and the missionary efforts in Latin America were different from those related to the missions to Asia. Understanding the differences between them would shed light on the reasons for the emergence of a variety of Christian approaches to other religious traditions in Asia.

Christianization of Europe and Latin America

When the followers of Christ emerged as a distinct and recognizable community, the Romans were suspicious of their loyalty to the Emperor and according to Christian sources began to persecute them. The fortunes of the church in Europe, however, changed significantly with the conversion of Emperor Constantine (probably in 312 C.E.) and the eventual adoption of Christianity as the only official religion of the Empire (and the proscription of all religions except Christianity) by Emperor Theodosius in 380 C.E. Still it was a long and complex process before Europe was “Christianized” under Roman patronage. This does not mean that

Colonization and Mission in Asia

Vasco da Gama's discovery of the sea route to India led to Portuguese settlements in India. Soon they occupied Goa and the enclaves of Daman and Diu on the coast of Gujarat. The Portuguese were soon followed by the Dutch, the French, and the British who, over a period of time, controlled different parts of Asia, or as they became the dominant powers at sea, took over parts of the territories that had been colonized by earlier arrivals. The details of the competition to colonize Asia, which was inspired by the lucrative spice trade, are not important to this discussion. Generally speaking, this resulted in the Dutch controlling many of the Indonesian islands, the French—Indochina, the Spanish—the Philippines, and the British—India (which included Pakistan and Bangladesh), Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Singapore, and some crucial areas of China.

Roman Catholic missions in Asia began with the arrival of Francis Xavier (1506–1552) in Goa on May 6, 1542. From there he went to Malabar and Coromandel Coast in the south of India and spent three years working among the fisher people. He then went on to Sri Lanka, Malacca, and the Moluccas, and in 1549 set out for Japan. It is the time when the newly founded Society of Jesus or the Jesuit Order began active missionary work in Asia. The Jesuits were followed by the Franciscans, Dominicans, and the other orders of the Catholic Church. This resulted in significant presence of Roman Catholicism in almost all Asian countries. The Philippines, under Spanish control, became the predominantly Roman Catholic country in Asia.

Most of the initial Roman Catholic missions into Asia were inspired by the Counter-Reformation movement within the Roman Catholic Church. The Protestant reformers themselves, however, did not embark on any form of world mission. They were overinvolved in doctrinal and institutional reforms and were caught up in internal controversies. The Protestant form of Christianity was brought in by the Dutch into the areas they occupied, but Protestant “world missions” of any significant proportions began only in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Protestant Missions into Asia

Protestant presence in Asia began with the British East India Company (founded in 1600), the Dutch United East India Company (1602) and with the Danish East India Company (1616). These early companies had little missionary interest. The impulse for organized Protestant world mission was the product of some of the spiritual renewal movements, generally referred to as Pietism and Puritanism that emerged in continental Europe and in Great Britain in the last decades of the seventeenth century, and the “Great Awakening” in the United States in the early eighteenth century. These were followed by the revival movements led by John Wesley (1703–1791) that later emerged into Methodism. At the center of these movements was intense personal spirituality based on personal belief in Jesus and what they believed he had done for them on the cross.

This was accompanied by intense devotion to the Bible as the source and inspiration for their spiritual life. Eventually, there arose the conviction that this experience of salvation, and the spiritual benefits that came from it, must be shared with all those who have not had the opportunity to experience them. Since these revival movements were mostly outside the context of the official churches, soon several lay missionary societies were formed within all the major Protestant denominations with the intention of taking the message of the Gospel to peoples in Asia, Africa, and elsewhere. It would be a long while before world missions became part of the policy of Protestant churches.

Basing their impetus for mission entirely on their personal spiritual experiences, and what they perceived as a biblical mandate, these lay missionary movements and its volunteer missionaries made several assumptions about the peoples and religious traditions to which they were taking their message. At the heart of it was the conviction that those who did not have “the joy of salvation” they had experienced in Christ would not be saved. The emphasis on the Bible as the “inspired Word of God” provided the other basis for this conviction. The Great Commission in Matthew 28 to “Go out and preach the Gospel to all the nations” was assumed to be a command to go into Asia and Africa. Additional verses like “I am the way, the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6) and other verses that were part of the Christian polemics against the Jewish opponents of the Early Church were now applied to other religious traditions in Asia.

DIFFERENCES IN THE COLONIZATION OF ASIA

There are some significant differences between the colonization of Latin America and Asia that had implications for the nature of Christian presence and relationships to other faiths in Asia. To begin with, the Portuguese and Spanish moves into Asia were soon followed by other colonial powers like the Dutch, the French, and the British. The rivalry resulted in no nation having continued and sustained power over much of the continent to be able to impose their brand of Christianity on it.

Further, early missionaries like Francis Xavier and the celebrated missionary to China, Matteo Ricci (1552–1610), realized that they had come into areas that had highly developed religious and philosophic traditions in the form of Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Daoism, and so on. These have had long spiritual histories, well developed philosophic systems of thought, extensive ethical teachings, vast scriptures, and a long string of teachers, saints, and sages. The Asian social structures, even where oppressive and hierarchical, were very deeply entrenched and protected by long-established cultural norms and practices. Even though the missionary intent was not absent, the later colonizing powers with Protestant background, especially the British, were tempted to leave the religions and cultures of the people alone as long as they were able

to conduct their trade without interruption and were able to establish political control and collect taxes as a mark of the populations' acceptance of their authority. The colonizing powers, however, made it easier and to some extent supported the evangelizing activities of the missionaries and missionary societies from their respective countries. Yet, the situation was very different from the one experienced in Latin America. First, the local populations in Asia, in most cases, did not feel compelled to embrace the religion of the colonizers. Second, the missionary societies were not under the control of the colonizing powers, and, in the case of the Protestant denominational missions, not even under the authority of the churches concerned. This resulted in many strands of Christian approach to other religious traditions.

Four developments may be highlighted here that apply to both Roman Catholic and Protestant missions.

Mission as Displacement

The first and the major approach was the evangelistic thrust of preaching the Gospel, calling on people to renounce their religion to replace it with the Christian faith. In the course of the evangelical preaching, there was condemnation of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism including rejection of the culture, traditions, and practices that have emerged from these religions. In many cases this also meant that the convert had to abandon his or her family and community and see the church as his or her new community.

In this approach other religious traditions were rejected as not having any salvific value. At best they were judged to be in error and in need of being fulfilled by the message of the Gospel. The general conviction among the missionaries of the time was to consider them as "pagan," "heathen," and "superstitious."

This predominant approach within the missionary paradigm, which is still very much a part of one of the contemporary streams of missionary thinking and practice, alienated the majority within other religious traditions; they looked upon Christians as arrogant, ignorant, and intolerant. This is the negative side of Christian relationship to Asian religions one is still seeking to repair today.

Mission as Service

The hard-line evangelical approach was somewhat softened by the second dimension of the missionary paradigm. The seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Christian missions to Asia also had a pronounced humanitarian dimension arising from the love of God and humanity that was behind it. Christian missions, with the support and assistance of the colonial powers, engaged in widespread work in the areas of education, healthcare, and ministry to those at the margins of the society. Even though the evangelistic intent was not always absent in this approach, it was also done, in most situations, without sole

practices of other religious traditions in the way Christianity was conceived and practiced in the context of Asian religious traditions.

Despite these factors, it is important to emphasize that by and large most Asian religious traditions experienced Christianity as the religion of the colonizers that was being thrust upon them. While there was resistance, the power imbalance at that time made it impossible for the protest to materialize as a concerted movement against Christian missions. Where there was mobilization, much of the energy had to be directed toward freeing the nations from the clutch of colonialism which was at the heart of all other problems.

Perhaps the most significant reason for alienation of Asian religions from Christianity during this period has to do with the very different understandings of “religion” held by the Semitic and Asian traditions. Even though Semitic religions, like Christianity and Islam, had to find ways to deal with both internal and external plurality, and have done so to varying degrees, the nature of their belief structure makes it difficult for them to be at home with plurality of beliefs. Since they look upon the revelation on which their religion is built as unique and of universal significance, there is an in-built intolerance in them to the plurality of beliefs. Asian religious traditions, however, while maintaining the specificity and importance of each of the traditions, look upon plurality of religions, beliefs, and practices as something natural and to be expected. Therefore, on the one hand, they were willing to welcome Christianity as yet another witness to the Truth that can enhance the human quest to understand and appropriate it. But, on the other hand, they were alienated by the Christian claim to be the only true religion that can impart salvation to all humankind. This asymmetry in understanding the nature of religion and the nature of religious “truth” continues to plague Christian relationships to the other religious traditions in Asia.

DIMENSIONS OF THE DIALOGICAL PARADIGM

Despite the clear emphasis on evangelization of the whole world that inspired the missionary movement, from the very beginning there were also dissenting voices on the assumptions about other religions on which this vision was built. Already at the first World Missionary Conference in 1910 in Edinburgh, Scotland, Commission IV, which worked on the “Missionary Message in Relation to Non-Christian Religions” raised probing questions about the assumptions in mission, claiming that one needs not only respect the other religious traditions but also look upon Christian encounter with other religions as a mutually transforming one.

F. W. Steintal, a missionary in India, in response to a questionnaire sent by Commission IV toward the preparation of its work, argued that Christian knowledge

THE URGENCY OF WORLD MISSION RE-EMPHASIZED

Therefore, the next World Mission Conference in Tambaram, near Madras, in 1938, was designed by the leaders of the missionary movement to put mission to other religious traditions back on track. This was to be done by giving the strongest possible biblical-theological rationale for mission, and the task was given to the well-known Dutch Missiologist, Hendrik Kraemer. The developments within the missionary conferences until Tambaram has been traced mainly to present Kraemer's position on the matter and the discussions that followed, which were the catalysts for the next paradigm shift in Asian Christian attitude to other religions.

Kraemer wrote a more than 200-page preparatory volume for the Tambaram conference under the title, *The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World*. Based on his reading of the Bible, and drawing heavily on the theology of Karl Barth, Kraemer sought to base the need for world mission directed to other religions on three interrelated arguments. First was what he called "Biblical realism" about human beings. All human beings, having fallen into sin, are in a state of rebellion against God. The gap between God and humans cannot be bridged except from the side of God. Therefore, all religious efforts, however good and sublime they may be, are vain human attempts to reach God; they have no salvific value.

Second, God, out of God's grace, reaches out to all human beings in Jesus Christ; the Gospel message presents a challenge to all human beings to respond in faith and accept this initiative on the part of God. Therefore, we are under obligation to preach the Gospel to all human beings and challenge them to respond in faith.

Third, all religious systems are coherent wholes ("totalitarian systems" is Kraemer's phrase) where teachings, beliefs, values, and practices are closely interrelated. Christians should not look for values, teachings, or any other "points of contact" in religions as possible entry points for the Gospel. The Gospel message is in radical "discontinuity" with all religious traditions, including Christianity as a religious system.

It is important to recall this history briefly because this was one of the defining moments within the Protestant branch of the church in relation to other religious traditions in Asia. Kraemer's position led to two distinct developments in Asia on the Christian approach to other religions. Many within the missionary movement and the churches in Asia agreed with Kraemer's concept of discontinuity between the Gospel and religions. They did not see the possibility of the Gospel speaking from within another religious tradition nor of the need to enter into dialogue with others to find common values or points of contact. The proclamation of the message and the invitation to others to leave their traditions to join the church were seen as the only option provided by the Bible and the Christian message. Kraemer, having had very good relations with Muslims in Egypt and Indonesia where he had served as a

missionary, emphasized the importance of good relations and dialogue with people of other faiths as a social benefit that Christians should pursue. But all human beings need to hear the challenge of the Gospel. It is this view that still dominates the theology, preaching, and mission thinking of most of the Protestant churches in Asia. They are still in a state of spiritual alienation from their neighbors when it comes to religious matters.

THE “TAMBARAM CONTROVERSY”

But Kraemer's position at Tambaram also produced one of the strongest controversies both during the Conference and after it. Even though the minutes of the discussion at the meeting are not available, the organizers requested Kraemer and those who had challenged him at the conference to write down their positions. These were published as one of the volumes of the conference proceedings, under the title, *The Authority of the Faith*. In it, H. H. Farmer questioned Kraemer's basic interpretative principles: (a) Did Kraemer cover the ostensible data? (b) Were the interpretative principles that were used satisfactory? (c) Were they the only ones open to Christians? While agreeing with some of Kraemer's positions, Farmer said that the main impression that Kraemer left is that “the central driving force of all man's religious life is self-affirmation and self-insurance.” He held that elements of an awareness of God as “sacred” or as “absolute demand” prevalent in religions made it difficult to see them only in terms of self-affirmation. Farmer's conclusion was that Kraemer did not do justice to the religious life of the people of other religions. “Some things that Kraemer says about religions,” he claimed, “begin to look like sweeping generalizations in need of urgent qualification.”⁹

C. T. Chao of China, had great difficulty with Kraemer's unwillingness to see God's relationship to nature and history as part of God's revelation. He complained that by having such a limited concept of revelation Kraemer had not only relegated the rest of human spiritual achievements to mere human groping but also reduced “the Lord of heaven and earth, the Father of mankind and the ruler within human history” into “a spirit of narrow particularism.”¹⁰ The other Asian contenders included D. G. Moses of India, K. L. Reichelt of Tao Fong Shan, Hong Kong, and A. G. Hogg, missionary in Madras.

Many Asian theologians and missionaries who were not at the conference also challenged Kraemer's understanding of religion, the Gospel message, and his interpretation of the Bible. In fact, it is the “Tambaram Controversy” and the intense soul-searching that followed it that would lead, after an extended period of discussions, to the emergence of an alternate paradigm—the concept and practice of interfaith dialogue—beginning in late 1960s.

THE PARADIGM OF INTERFAITH COLLABORATION IN NATION-BUILDING

The theological advance made in this direction moved further with the end of Japanese occupation of other Asian nations, the end of the Second World War, the independence in India in 1947 followed by the gradual withdrawal of Western colonial rule in Asia. While the end of colonialism was welcome, it also raised many serious issues to Christians and churches that had until then shared the values of the colonial rulers and had the support and patronage of the empire. It is said that Christians in Asia during the colonial rule were “minorities with a majority complex” because, in one way or another, they felt part of the larger reality across nations and cultures. In the new context, the churches’ minority status became self-evident. Even though they still had control over the educational and health institutions, they were bereft of political power, which was shifting into the hands of Hindus, Buddhists, and others. In China, with the communist revolution, not only did the missionary movement come to an end, but Christians and churches entered a phase of suppression. Profound questions about the future of the church were also to be faced in Indonesia, which is the largest Islamic country in the world. In all Asian countries, with the exception of the Philippines, where the church was in the majority, and South Korea, where the church had been against Japanese imperialism, the future of the church was an open question. These experiences were accentuated by the revival and renewal of the other religious traditions that have been under pressure during the colonial rule. Hindu, Buddhist, and Islamic nationalism were on the rise.

These realities presented two possibilities to the churches. One was to continue to remain a minority without in any way rethinking the missiological basis of their outlook to other religious traditions; the other was to rethink the Christian attitude to other religious communities and to rebuild relationships that had been strained during the colonial era. In spite of the general tolerant attitude found in Asian religious traditions, there were several persecutions of Christianity in Japan, China, Vietnam, and Korea. For those Christians who wanted to build new relationships, the challenge of building a new nation became the opportunity to connect across the religious divide.

The practical initiatives taken to meet across religious traditions in the search of nation-building, especially in India, and the post-Tambaram theological debates eventually led to the development of the concept of “dialogue” that was embraced at the global level by the World Council of Churches. It created in 1971 a program subunit on Dialogue with People of Living Faiths and Ideologies, led by the Indian theologian and exponent of interfaith dialogue, Stanley J. Samartha.

The concept of dialogue, however, was deeply controversial within much of the mission constituency which was also part of the WCC. Opposition to dialogue came to a climax at the 5th Assembly of the WCC in Nairobi in 1975, where it was challenged on the ground that it compromised the uniqueness and finality of Christ, undercut the

urgency of mission, and would lead to syncretism. Stanley Samartha did a monumental job of negotiating the crisis, expounding the meaning, purpose, and goals of dialogue, and organizing a very important conference in Chiang Mai, Thailand, which brought together all parties involved in the controversy to draw up the WCC “Guidelines on Dialogue with People of Living Faiths and Ideologies.” Through this, and subsequent work patiently done with the churches, he helped in making interfaith dialogue a continuing concern within the WCC.

EMERGENCE OF DIALOGUE PROGRAM WITHIN THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

Providentially, this was also the time when Pope John XXIII called the Second Vatican Council (1962–65), which, after his passing away, continued under the leadership of Pope Paul VI. The Council was called for the renewal of the church and a new assessment of its calling in the modern world. It had much to say on both ecumenism and interfaith relations. In *Nostra Aetate*, “Declaration on the Church’s Relations with Non-Christian Religions” and *Lumen Gentium*, “Dogmatic Constitution of the Church,” the Roman Catholic Church made several theological moves that opened the possibility for its theologians to bring out creative new thinking on interfaith relations and to enable Christians to have organized encounters with peoples of different religious traditions. The Vatican had also created a Secretariat for Non-Christians, that later became the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, which, on the one hand, clarified and defined dialogue in relation to mission and, on the other, developed guidelines for Christian relations to people of other religious traditions and facilitated actual encounters between Christians and peoples of other religions. There was also strong cooperation between the WCC subunit on Dialogue and the Pontifical Council for Interfaith Dialogue, exploring several pastoral issues such as interreligious prayer, interreligious marriages, and issues related to missions and conversion.

From the perspective of Asia, the most significant development is the creation of a Commission on Ecumenical and Interfaith Affairs (CEIA) in 1978 by the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences (FABC) with Fr. Albert Poulet-Mathis, S.J., as its first Executive Secretary with Sr. Aloysius Ho as assistant. This Commission placed great emphasis on promoting interfaith relations at the local level and therefore facilitated from 1979 a series of meetings of the Bishops’ Institute for Interreligious Affairs (BIRA). These Institutes brought together groups of bishops to systematically study the issues and key documents related to interfaith relations and to have sessions that looked at Christian relations to each of the religious traditions in Asia. By raising the awareness of the bishops to interfaith issues and by also involving key lay leaders in these sessions, the FABC through the BIRA has done much to advance the course of interfaith relations in Asia.

Of equal importance has been the cooperation and collaboration between the FABC and the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) on interfaith relations and dialogue, giving an important ecumenical dimension to the interfaith concerns in Asia. For instance, in 1987, the FABC and the CCA co-sponsored an ecumenical consultation in Singapore on the issues involved in interfaith relations and cooperation and brought out a volume on *Living and Working with Brothers and Sisters of Other Faiths*, co-published by the FABC and the CCA.¹¹

It is beyond the scope of this chapter to discuss the guidelines and the principles and the theology of dialogue that emerged from the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, the WCC subunit on Dialogue, and the statements from the FABC and the CCA. There is no doubt, however, that the introduction of the concept of dialogue brought about a major paradigm shift in Christian relationships and attitudes to other religious traditions. What is significant is that the concept of dialogue and its implications were picked up locally in most parts of the world. This ushered in a new move away from the missionary paradigm that had dominated the relationships.

While affirming the ongoing dialogue of life, other dimensions of dialogue, such as the dialogue of organized discourse, dialogue of spirituality, dialogue of common action, and institutionalized dialogue through local, national, and international interfaith organizations came into vogue. Soon, despite a large section within the church that still believed in world mission directed to other faiths, dialogue as a way of looking at interfaith relations had come to stay.

One of the important offshoots of the emphasis on interfaith dialogue in Asia has been the emergence of Asian Christian theology in dialogue with other religious traditions. A prominent example of this (for instance, in Sri Lanka) is the work of the Jesuit theologian Aloysius Pieris, who has made very significant contributions by doing theology with the two foci of Asian poverty and spirituality, concentrating on Buddhist–Christian relations. Similar work was done in India and many other countries of Asia, but this is beyond the scope of my discussion. One should, however, note the significant contribution being made by the Congress of Asian Theologians (CAT), jointly sponsored by the CCA, FABC, and several institutions and associations for Theological Education in Asia, which periodically holds ecumenical theological congresses where theological explorations are made of Christian relations to the peoples and religious traditions of Asia.

A PARADIGM SHIFT TOWARD A SEARCH FOR A THEOLOGY OF RELIGIONS

There is disagreement among Christians on the significance, impact, and the usefulness of interfaith dialogue, particularly the dialogue of discourse. There are those who defend it as a necessary basis to build all other forms of dialogue insofar as it seeks to build a community of conversation across the religious barrier and to address the

themselves products of theological reflections that took place in a particular time and culture and to meet the challenges of a particular time, it is argued that the core of the doctrines of the church is badly in need of a restatement in the context of dialogue and the advances made in Christian relationship to other faiths. It is argued that without this rethinking both interfaith dialogue and theology of religions cannot make further advances. Related to this is also the call to reexamine the nature, purpose, and goals of Christian missions today.

THE SEARCH FOR A NEW PARADIGM RELATED TO CONTEMPORARY NEW FRONTIERS

All these discussions today have been relativized by some of the radical new developments taking place. Perhaps, the most significant among them is the process of globalization that has been accentuated by rapid advances in technology, communication, travel, and access to vast amounts of information, increasingly available across many barriers and borders that had existed in the past. There are various assessments about the benefits and problems created by the forces of globalization. However, economic globalization, especially of finance, trade, capital markets, and the banking sector has had devastating effects on the world's poor and has created unacceptable levels of economic inequalities between peoples and nations. What is important in this development, as also many other global issues one faces today, such as a rise of violence in many spheres of life, the ecological crisis, and so on is that they are no longer problems that face any one nation or religion. They are not Christian or Hindu problems needing Christian or Hindu answers, but human problems that need human responses.

There are also radical changes in human religious consciousness. Being a Christian, Hindu, or a Buddhist is no longer as stark an alternative as it used to be to increasing sections of population around the world. The search for an "authentic spirituality" has become a popular phrase and many people openly or in spirit practice double or even multiple religious belonging in their search for spirituality. The power, control, and impact of official religious institutions are on the decline.

At the same time, there have also been renewed expressions of religious fundamentalism, extremism, and militancy, and these find expression in religion-inspired terrorism. There are also new discussions on the role of religion in the Public Square, the relationship between religion and state, the tensions between religious freedom to propagate one's faith and the rights of communities to remain in their faith and so on. In India, Sri Lanka, and some other Asian countries differences over these issues is abused by political and communal forces to instigate interreligious conflict and violence. Increasingly, however, religious traditions are beginning to recognize the importance of addressing

Here it is also important to note that the peoples of Asia have had a long tradition of being deeply committed to a particular tradition and yet look at other ways of believing as legitimate and acceptable; there has been a studied reluctance to make exclusive claims for any way as the “only way.” Despite periodic dissensions and conflicts between communities, and issues of social injustice that plague Asian societies, which helps to guard against too much romanticism about Asia, we should, indeed, have deep appreciation for the basic approach to interfaith relations in Asia. Most Asian Christians in the pews, who are part of this heritage, have been indoctrinated into an adversarial attitude to other religious traditions by the theology of mission that accompanied the faith. Indications today are that many Asian Christians in the pew are in the mood to embrace the Asian approach to religious plurality and build a new relationship with people of other religious traditions. Because those in the pews are in daily interaction with people of other faiths and have begun to experience them as partners and fellow pilgrims. The question is whether the gap between the pulpit, which feels compelled to defend the “received faith,” and the pew which is open to the new can be bridged. Herein may lie the future of the possibility of a new paradigm that can build a new interreligious community in Asia.

NOTES

1. See John C. England, *The Hidden History of Christianity in India: The Churches of the East before 1500* (Delhi: ISPCK and Hong Kong: CCA, 1996).
2. Placid Podipara, “Hindu in Culture, Christian in Religion, Oriental in Worship” in *St. Thomas Christian Encyclopedia of India*, Vol. 2 (Trichur: STCEI, 1973), 107–12.
3. Cf. David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), chs. 5, 6, and 7. A brief summery is attempted here of the complex and detailed picture given by Bosch.
4. *Ibid.*, 227–28.
5. *Ibid.*, 227.
6. Brian Stanley, *The World Missionary Conference, Edinburgh 1910* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 133–36.
7. *World Missionary Conference 1910, Report of Commission IV* (Edinburgh: Oliphant, Anderson, and Ferrier, n.d.), 172.
8. *Ibid.*, 256.
9. John R. Mott, William Paton, and A. L. Warnshuis, *The World Mission of the Church, Tambaram 1938* (London: International Missionary Council, n.d.); *The Authority of the Faith* (London: International Missionary Council, n.d.).
10. *The Authority of the Faith*, 33–47.
11. *Living and Working with Brothers and Sisters of Other Faiths*, An Ecumenical Consultation, July 5–10, 1987 (Hong Kong: CCA/FABC, 1989).
12. Felix Wilfred, “On the Future of Asian Theologizing—A Forward to Asian Public Theology,” in Marshal Fernando and Robert Crusz, eds., *Theology beyond Neutrality* (Colombo, Sri Lanka: Ecumenical Institute for Study and Dialogue, 2011), 8–9.

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CHAPTER 23

JEWISH–CHRISTIAN RELATIONSHIPS IN WEST ASIA

History, Major Issues, Challenges, and Prospects

DAVID MARK NEUHAUS, S. J.

INTRODUCTION

One of the most impressive and emotionally moving revolutions of the twentieth century was in Jewish–Christian relations in Europe and North America. Long centuries of shared history were often marked by traumatic interactions: small Jewish minorities living in predominantly Christian countries were often marginalized, discriminated against, and even actively persecuted. The twentieth century saw anti-Jewish sentiment reach a pinnacle in the Nazi attempt to carry out the programmatic extermination of all Jews in Europe. Not only did the Nazis fail to carry out their plan, but instead the *Shoah* (as the genocidal program and practice of the Nazis became known) provoked a wakeup call as the Christian churches conducted a profound examination of conscience and called on Christians to purify themselves of all anti-Jewish sentiment, to become aware of the Jewish roots of Christianity, and to work with Jews in building a better world.¹

Over the past sixty years, Jewish–Christian dialogue in Europe and North America has brought Jews and Christians ever closer together, recognizing each other more and more as close allies in an increasingly secular world, defending together values rooted in their common heritage and working for a society founded on a shared ethical system. In addition, both Jews and Christians today recognize the essential contribution made by Christianity and by Judaism to the civilization that has come to be identified as Judeo-Christian, a society rooted in the shared scriptures of Israel and the Church. Today, a diversity of Jews encounter a diversity of Christians in order to discuss beliefs and theology, study their shared history together and work alongside one another in

order to build a better world. Not all misunderstanding has disappeared, but there is a palpable positive change in the way Jews and Christians relate to one another.²

The Shoah is not the only foundational element of Jewish–Christian dialogue in the modern age. Many Jews identify today with a national state in West Asia—the State of Israel. The establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 led to a further shift in relations as many Jews immigrated to Israel, making the Jewish population of Israel one of the largest in the world. For the first time in the history of Christianity, Jews constitute a majority in one country in the world—a country that is intimately linked with both Jewish and Christian origins. Israel has become a central element in the dialogue between Jews and Christians on a number of different levels, theological, political, and historical.

This chapter will focus on relations between Jews and Christians in West Asia (Middle East), in accordance with the general theme of the present Handbook and its focus on Asia, rather than on Europe and North America which have been the center of the revolution in relations. What relations exist between Jews and Christians in West Asia?

WHO ARE THE JEWS IN WEST ASIA?

The Jews, their faith, and civilization, originated in West Asia, often called the Middle East in Eurocentric discourse. An area of West Asia, which came to be called the Holy Land by millions of Jews, Christians, and Muslims, saw the evolution of the faith of Israel and the birth of a people who lived according to this faith.³ In this land, many centuries later, a Jew named Jesus called his fellow Jews to believe in him as Messiah and Redeemer and his disciples formed a new community made up of both Jews and believers from the nations. Judaism and Christianity are thus Asian religions in their origins although over the centuries, these two faith communities became more and more situated in Europe. In the seventh century, this land was conquered by the Muslim armies, and soon after Jews and Christians in the region became minorities living within an Arabic-speaking, Muslim majority and ruled for most of the period until 1948 by Muslim governors.⁴ Two interludes in Muslim rule were the period of the Crusades (1096–1299) and the period of the British Mandate (1918–1948).

Jews have always been an integral part of the West Asian world, in historical Palestine and in the surrounding countries. Many Jews in this Muslim world, like their Christian compatriots, while remaining faithful to the religion of their ancestors, adopted Arabic as their language and culture and contributed to the development of Arab civilization. There were vibrant Jewish Arab communities in many of the Arab countries of Western Asia until 1948, including Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, and Yemen. There were also vibrant Jewish communities in the non-Arab West Asian Muslim world, most importantly in Turkey and in Iran.⁵ The year 1948, which saw the establishment of the State of Israel and the beginning of a series of wars between the new state and the surrounding Arab countries, also saw the rapid decline of the Jewish communities in the other countries of Western Asia, where today sizable Jewish communities exist only in Turkey and Iran.⁶

Jews in Israel are very heterogeneous. There are believing, practicing Jews and non-believing, non-practicing Jews and many varieties in between. Well-known is the division among ultra-Orthodox, modern Orthodox, traditional, Conservative, Reform, and Reconstructionist Jews. As important for understanding Jewish life in Israel are the diverse cultural backgrounds of the Jewish communities in Israel that originate in Western and Eastern Europe, West Asia and North Africa, North America, Latin America, and so on. A helpful distinction with regard to our subject is the distinction between Jews who hail from the countries historically dominated by Christendom and those that come from the Muslim world. However, each community has its own history that molds attitudes toward Christians and Christianity. The enormous diversity of the Jewish population in Israel is still apparent in a society where more than half the Jews were born in other lands and migrated to Israel. Israel has been dominated politically, socially, culturally, and politically by elites whose roots are in Europe, particularly in Eastern Europe. To add to the complexity, close to 20% of the population of the State of Israel is made up of Muslims, Christians, and Druze, the vast majority of whom are Palestinian Arabs.

Jewish Israeli society is young and still in formation, and this does not always facilitate relations with those defined as outsiders. It is also important to be aware at the outset that the historical context of European anti-Semitism and its culmination in the Shoah is formative for and remains at the forefront of the attitudes of many Jewish Israelis toward Christians.⁷

WHO ARE THE CHRISTIANS IN WEST ASIA?

There are Christians, belonging to a bewildering diversity of confessions, who live in different West Asian countries, most of whom are Arabic-speaking. These Christians constitute religious minorities in the countries of West Asia. Since the end of the nineteenth century, Christians from West Asia have been migrating to North and South America and to Western Europe in search of a better life. However, there is also a growing population of Christian migrants (especially from other Asian countries) in the countries of West Asia. Lebanon has the largest Christian population in West Asia, constituting 35.7% of the general population. In the other countries of West Asia where there are Christian populations, the Christians are less than 10% of the population: Syria (5.2%), Jordan (circa 2.8%), Iraq (circa 1.5%), Palestine (circa 1.9%), Iran (0.4%), and Turkey (0.3%).⁸ In the countries of the Arabian Gulf and Yemen, there are almost no indigenous Christians, but there are a large number of migrant workers who are Christians.

Christians in Israel are a tiny statistical minority, officially around 2.4% of the general population. They are also far from homogeneous. There are Orthodox (Arab, Greek, Russian, Rumanian, etc.), Catholic (Eastern and Latin Catholics), Eastern non-Chalcedonians (Armenian, Syrian, and Coptic Orthodox), and Protestants (Anglican, Lutheran, Evangelicals, etc.). This confessional complexity is only one level

of diversity. Another level is the different origins of the Christians in Israel: there are those who are indigenous, generally Arabic-speaking Christians, those who are foreign born, many of whom are integrated within Jewish, Hebrew-speaking society, and newer populations of migrants (foreign workers and asylum seekers).

How are the relations between Jews and Christians in this area? This chapter will focus almost exclusively on the relationship between Jews and Christians in Israel/Palestine. Due to the fact that in the other countries of Western Asia (aside from Iran and Turkey) there is no substantial Jewish presence in present times, discussion here will focus uniquely on this context.

RELATIONS BETWEEN JEWS AND CHRISTIANS IN WEST ASIA

Perspectives on Christian–Jewish relations in West Asia⁹ must be clearly distinguished from perspectives that are current in Europe (and North America). From the European perspective, Jews and Christians have been in a fruitful and passionate dialogue for the past six decades. Documents, like the one published by the Catholic Church, *Nostra Aetate* (1965) and others published by Anglican and Protestant communities, have sown a new consciousness among Western Christians about Christianity’s Jewish roots and the fraternal relations it seeks with the Jewish people. This dialogue has been powered by two strong motors. One is the awakened sense of contrition among Christians with regard to the tragic fate of the Jews in Europe during periods when anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism dominated, culminating in the catastrophe of the Shoah. The other is the embrace of the biblical and, by extension, the Jewish heritage of the Church and at its center the fact that Jesus, his disciples, and the Early Church are part of a Jewish world that has bequeathed to the Church a rich shared heritage, most importantly the Jewish Bible.

The context, and thus the perspectives, in West Asia are quite different for historical, cultural, social, and political reasons. A degree of animosity toward Jews is common among Arab Christians in most of West Asia today, where Christians are themselves minorities (in countries that are by and large overwhelmingly Muslim), often marginalized and sometimes persecuted. Jews are not generally perceived as the victims of centuries of marginalization and even persecution but rather as the face of a problematic political reality in the heart of West Asia, in the form of the State of Israel and its occupation of Palestinian lands. Furthermore, the Old Testament, rather than being held up as “a shared heritage,” provokes concern, particularly with regard to texts about election, promise, and land. Many West Asian Christians fear a fundamentalist exploitation of these texts in the conflict between Arabs and Jews over Israel/Palestine. This is particularly pertinent with regard to the Jewish claims on land and sovereignty after 1948, and the continuing construction of Jewish settlements in the territories occupied by the Israelis after the 1967 War.¹⁰

One could underline five characteristics of the particular context for Christian–Jewish relations in West Asia in contrast to the European context: (1) the non-European, non-Christian context; (2) the presence of Islam; (3) the reversal of power relations; (4) the Israel–Palestine conflict as definitive; (5) the place of the Bible.

Non-European, Non-Christian Context

Contemporary dialogue between Jews and Christians has focused almost exclusively on historical relations between Jews and Christians in the lands where Christians defined the culture, society, and power relations. In relation to these lands, Christians have realized that certain modalities of thought, action, and political practice marginalized and even excluded Jews (and other non-Christians), often accused of being outsiders because they did not share the Christian faith of their compatriots and adhered to religious practices foreign to Christianity. However, West Asian society and politics are not predominantly formed by Christian history, culture, and tradition. This means that many of the themes and emphases of the predominantly European and North American Jewish–Christian dialogue are not perceived as directly relevant in the West Asian context.

The Presence of Islam

Since the seventh century, Islam has been the dominant religion in most of West Asia and Muslims are the majority in all countries of the area except for contemporary Israel. Thus, for Christians, dialogue with Muslims is a priority, in a way that is not self-evident in interreligious dialogue in Europe and North America. When dialogue with Jews exists at all, it almost always becomes a triologue within the West Asian context because Muslims cannot be ignored. Within this context, it is important to note that in most of the Arab countries of West Asia and in Israel/Palestine too, Christian Arabs and the Muslim Arabs, whatever their religious differences might be, live in a common society, speak one language, share one culture, and experience one sociopolitical reality. Whereas before 1948, Jewish Arabs were part of this milieu, most Jews in Israel are not fluent in the Arabic language and do not integrate into Arab society, culture, and tradition.¹¹

Before 1948, there were important Jewish communities in the Arab world, which lived profoundly embedded in the Muslim, Arabic-speaking world of West Asia (e.g., in Iraq, Lebanon, and Syria). Especially in modern times, Jews and Christians in these countries interacted in a variety of different domains, sometimes collaborating in political, social, and cultural spheres as members of non-Muslim minorities. Contemporary interreligious dialogue in West Asia might hopefully reawaken an awareness of the Jewish presence in West Asia that preceded the Israel–Palestine conflict, of a time before the abyss between Jew and Arab, of a time when some Jews

were Arabs. The Assembly of the Ordinaries in the Holy Land (2000) of the Catholic Church concluded that “in our countries, Muslims, Christians and Jews have lived together in fruitful social and cultural interaction, this being evident in the clear traces we find of this interaction in Arab civilization.”¹² These traces include the contributions of prominent Jewish figures within Arab culture whether in the medieval period (among the developers of Arabic language, thought, and science were Jews who worked alongside Muslims and Christians) or in modern times (among the writers, poets, musicians, journalists, film makers, and political and trade union activists were Jews too).¹³

However, today, whereas relations with Muslims are fundamental to the Christians in West Asia, actual, lived relations with Jews are not a significant element in the lives of most of these Christians except in Israel/Palestine. This impacts strongly, on the vision of relations with Jews and Judaism. What is still in its infancy is an overall understanding of how these two essential relationships—with Jews and with Muslims—can be coherently presented so that local Christians can be both faithful to the Jewish roots of the Church and participate in the rich dialogue with the Jewish people as well as engage in an absolutely essential dialogue with Muslims, with whom Arab Christians share a world.

The Reversal of Power Relations

Many contemporary European and North American Christians, profoundly cognizant of their context, are sensitive to the marginalized and vulnerable status of the Jews in the history of the West. However, the West Asian churches reflect on Christian–Jewish relations from the experience of the sovereignty of a powerful Jewish polity. Never before in history have Christians experienced Jewish sovereignty. For many West Asian Christians, the Jew is often first and foremost a soldier, a policeman, or a settler. Whereas European Christians, strongly influenced by the history of anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism, engage with Jews as a minority, marginalized, and often traumatized, West Asian Christians are in a situation where power relations are reversed. They do not feel responsible for the fate of Jews in Europe; on the contrary, they sense that they themselves are the victims of this history.¹⁴

The Israel–Palestine Conflict as Definitive

Whereas from the Western perspective, the watershed in Christian–Jewish relations was the Shoah, which provoked an awakening to a certain teaching of contempt for Jews in Christian circles, from the West Asian perspective, the question of Palestine is at the center of relations with Jews. Whereas dialogue from the European perspective often includes a focus on the struggle against anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism, the focus on justice and peace is an essential element of any prospective dialogue between Catholics and Jews within the Middle East context.

have been dramatically reduced. The present political situation in Israel–Palestine does not facilitate dialogue between Jews (who are dominant in Israel) and Christians (the majority of whom are Palestinian Arab but who are minorities in both Israel and in Palestine).

PROSPECTS FOR DIALOGUE BETWEEN CHRISTIANS AND JEWS IN WEST ASIA

In conclusion, there is little dialogue between indigenous Jews and Christians in West Asia because of the political situation. Where dialogue does exist it focuses less on theological, spiritual, and religious issues than it does on the conflict between Jews and Palestinians, and the attempt to find solutions that might guarantee justice and peace as well as democracy and human rights. Jews and Christians do collaborate on these issues when their political positions coincide. The rich dialogue between Jews and Christians that has developed in the West has hardly any echo in West Asia. Justice and peace, when they come, will perhaps reestablish a dialogue between Jews and Christians that will broaden perspectives beyond the European and North American arena. This dialogue will need to be open particularly to Muslims and the long centuries of shared history in the Arab world.

It would be largely incomplete to conclude this chapter without mentioning the development of new Christian, non-Arab populations in West Asia today. Whereas this is true of all the richer countries of West Asia,¹⁸ we are particularly interested here in the situation in Israel. Alongside the rooted Arabic-speaking Christians of the land, many of whom have emigrated from West Asia because of the difficult political, social, and economic circumstances in the region, there is a steady immigration of non-Arab Christians into the countries of West Asia. In Israel, many of these Christians are connected by family ties to Jews and have become Israeli citizens (mostly from the countries of the ex-Soviet Union), others migrate to Israel seeking work (large populations of Asians—predominantly Filipinos, Thais, Chinese, and Indians) or political asylum (predominantly Africans). They constitute a new face of the Church in West Asia (both in Israel and the surrounding Arab countries). In Israel, their lives, integrated as they are in the Jewish population, open up new perspectives for a dialogue between a Christian minority living at the heart of Jewish society, adapted to this society's culture and language.¹⁹ These new Christians are yet to be fully integrated into the existing churches and develop their own perspectives on the dialogue with Jews, but it will undoubtedly be a fascinating and new outlook on Jewish–Christian dialogue. It is undoubtedly significant that in these migrants from Asia and Africa, Jews encounter a Christianity that is not predominantly European and does not immediately raise the specter of a traumatic past.

JEWISH–CHRISTIAN RELATIONS IN THE REST OF ASIA

It is fitting to add a word here about Jewish–Christian relations elsewhere in Asia for two principal reasons. First and foremost, in those countries of Asia where Jews and Christians live, they generally constitute minorities outside of the Christian and Muslim worlds. Second, their relations are not defined by the dramatic and often traumatic history of Jewish–Christian relations in Europe.

Jewish communities can be traced in other parts of Asia, far from the historical roots of the Jewish community in West Asia. They were present at the beginning of the first millennium (if not before) in India (for example, the ancient Jewish community in Cochin) and a little later in China (for example, the ancient Jewish community of Kaifeng). From the late nineteenth century onward, Jewish immigrants (often fleeing anti-Jewish decrees in Europe) established communities in India, China, and elsewhere (for example, the Jewish communities in Bombay, Shanghai, and Hong Kong). In these same lands, India and China, for example, there were ancient Christian communities too.

It would be of interest to research the relations between Jews and Christians who live in predominantly Hindu, Buddhist, and other Asian religious milieus in order to provide other models for Jewish–Christian relations that are not dominated either by the Western model (defined by Christian theology and history) or by the present dead lock in the Arab-Muslim world.

NOTES

1. An extensive bibliography cannot be appended to this chapter and therefore only a few choice works will be mentioned here that give an overview of the developments in Jewish–Christian relations in the past decades: Eugene J. Fisher, *Faith without Prejudice: Rebuilding Christian Attitudes toward Judaism* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1993); John Merkle, ed., *Faith Transformed: Christian Encounters with Jews and Judaism* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2003); Edward Kessler and Neil Wenborn, eds., *A Dictionary of Jewish–Christian Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).
2. See also analysis of contemporary Western dialogue, with particular reference to the Catholic Church, see David Neuhaus, “Achievements and Challenges in Jewish–Christian Dialogue: Forty Years after *Nostra Aetate*,” *The Downside Review* 439 (April 2007): 111–29; David Neuhaus, “Engaging the Jewish People—Forty Years since *Nostra Aetate*,” in Karl Becker and Ilaria Morali, eds., *Catholic Engagement with World Religions: A Comprehensive Study* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2010), 395–413.
3. In the biblical narrative, the sphere of Israel’s origins is between Mesopotamia and Egypt. Abraham, father of Israel, left his home in Ur of the Chaldeans and centuries later Moses

- led the nascent people out of Egypt. Both Abraham and Moses made their way, guided by God, to the land that is known today as Israel or Palestine.
4. Islam is part of the Jewish-Christian world in discourse, practice, and imagination. The Quran, foundational text of the Muslim community, takes for granted the Old and New Testaments.
 5. See the concluding part of this chapter for a brief survey of Jewish-Christian relations elsewhere in Asia.
 6. A rapidly shrinking Jewish community of a few hundred still clings to its ancient home in Yemen, but the Jewish communities of Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon have all but disappeared.
 7. See David Neuhaus, "Jewish Israeli Attitudes towards Christianity and Christians in Contemporary Israel," in M. Kirwan and A. O'Mahony, eds., *World Christianity: Politics, Theology, Dialogues* (London: Melisende Press, 2004), 347–69.
 8. Editor's note: The statistics here are taken from Todd M. Johnson and Brian J. Grim, eds., *World Religion Database* (Leiden: Brill, 2013) (see appendix of this volume).
 9. See for particular focus on Jewish-Christian dialogue that is appropriate to the Israel-Palestine context: Jamal Khader and David Neuhaus, "A Holy Land Context for Nostra Aetate," *Studies in Jewish Christian Relations* 1 (2005–6): 67–88; David Neuhaus, "Catholic-Jewish Relations in the State of Israel: Theological Perspectives," in Anthony O'Mahony and John Flannery, eds., *The Catholic Church in the Contemporary Middle East* (London: Melisende UK Ltd, 2010), 237–51.
 10. See also Alain Marchadour and David Neuhaus, *The Land, the Bible and History* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007).
 11. The rich Judeo-Arabic culture, which was very much at home in the Muslim-Arab world, has all but disappeared even among those Jewish migrants to Israel. Israel consciously identifies itself with the European-North American cultural orbit rather than with the world of its immediate neighbors.
 12. Assembly of the Catholic Ordinaries in the Holy Land, *The General Pastoral Plan* (Jerusalem, 2001), 157.
 13. A remarkable study of the Jewish Arab civilization before 1948 is Ammiel Alcalay, *After Jews and Arabs: Remaking Levantine Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993). The Arab world of Muslims, Christians, and Jews also resonates in much of the literary works of the great Franco-Lebanese writer Amin Maalouf.
 14. Among West Asian Christian theologians, particularly those living in Israel or Palestine, Church leaders, and writers, it is not uncommon to find reflections on the price Palestinians have had to pay for the sins of European Christians committed against the Jews. See, for example, Elias Chacour, *Blood Brothers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Chosen Books: 2004), 120–24; Naim Ateek, *Justice and Only Justice: A Palestinian Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1989), 18–32; Michel Sabbah, *Pastoral Letter: Pray for the Peace of Jerusalem* (Jerusalem, 1990), 17.
 15. This has been clearly enunciated in the Kairos document, which can be read on the website of its sponsors: <http://www.kairos-palestine.ps/>. Eastern Orthodox, Catholic, Anglican, and Protestant church leaders and lay people composed the document which has provoked much debate in the circles that are involved in Jewish-Christian dialogue. Some reactions can also be found on the Kairos website.
 16. Latin Catholic Patriarch of Jerusalem Michel Sabbah composed an important pastoral letter on this theme: *Reading the Bible Today in the Land of the Bible* (Jerusalem, 1991). Other Palestinian theologians like Naim Ateek, Rafiq Khoury, Geris Khoury, Mitri Raheb, Viola

- Raheb, Jean Zaru, and others have written extensively on the challenges in developing a Palestinian hermeneutic for reading the Bible. See also Marchadour and Neuhaus, *The Land, the Bible and History*.
17. Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, "Notes on the Correct Way to Present the Jews and Judaism in Preaching and Catechesis in the Roman Catholic Church" (Rome, 1985), Part VI.
 18. There are very large populations of migrant workers and refugees who are Christians in the countries of West Asia, including in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf where they constitute the vast majority of the Christian population. In recent years, for example, the Roman Catholic Church has reestablished a hierarchical presence with Archbishops in Northern and Southern Arabia charged with the pastoral care of hundreds of thousands of Catholic faithful from India, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, and elsewhere.
 19. Analysis of these little known populations in Israel can be found here: David Neuhaus, "Qui est qui? Russes et juifs en Israël aujourd'hui," *Proche orient chrétien* 1–2, no. 58 (2008): 21–58; David Neuhaus, "La Foi chrétienne et l'hébreu en commun," *La Terre sainte*, no. 609 (September–October 2010): 280–281. More information can also be found on the website of the Saint James Vicariate for Hebrew Speaking Catholics in Israel: <http://www.catholic.co.il>.

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attitude toward Muslims was the same as when it encountered Islam in the continent of Europe. The Portuguese and Spanish colonizers called Muslims in the Philippines Moors, on account of their familiarity with the Muslims who ruled part of Spain for about 800 years. The term was used in a pejorative manner. They also had a problem in explaining to the adherents of other religious traditions in the regions, particularly concepts such as the uniqueness of Christ and the finality of the revelation found in Christianity.

Second, looking at the development of Christian–Muslim relations in Asia—Central Asia to the Far East—one can easily detect that in the last few centuries the debates and nature of arguments have changed very little. The scandal of the crucifixion, the accusation of Muslims against the Jews and the Christians of having distorted the scriptures (*tahrif*), objections against the doctrine of the Trinity, the position of women in Islam, taking offence against the Prophet Muhammad’s multiple marriages, and other familiar themes are well known. What is interesting here is that these polemical views become more prominent when one community feels threatened politically by the other. The more fervently and zealously the Christian missionaries tried to win converts, the more the Muslims resented it. This resentment of missionaries by Muslims became one of the factors that led to political oppositions and activism, South Asia being one such example which will be explored. In another context, the colonial rulers wanted to make use of missionaries to pacify the local Muslim population, with the misconstrued idea that by modernizing a generation of Muslims, they might rebel against their inherited customs and traditions, and as result develop sympathy for Christianity.

Third, the decline of colonial power in Asian countries after the Second World War and the emergence of indigenous churches, on the one hand, and the substantial change in the post–Vatican II world of Christianity, on the other, particularly in its outlook on other faiths, are remarkable. The desire to engage in dialogue with Muslims and other faiths, among both the Roman Catholic Church and the Protestant churches, through the World Council of Churches, has shifted the ground, not entirely but to some extent, in favor of listening and understanding.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Christian perceptions of Islam, and relations with Muslims, have been shaped largely by theological categorizations such as “Ishmaelite”—that is, going back to Ishmael, Abraham’s first son by Hagar who was expelled on the instigation of Sarah, but who is considered one of the Prophets in Islam. Islam was viewed as a fringe element, an offshoot of Christianity, and their fundamental beliefs were seen as an amalgam of Judeo-Christian and particularly Christian apocryphal materials. Muslims were perceived as being under the yoke of Islam, in obedience to a false prophet, and in serious need of emancipation by the Christians. Such perceptions prevailed down

SOUTHEAST ASIA

The Portuguese conquest of the small garrison of Malacca in 1511 forever opened up this section of the Malay population socially and politically. The Sultan of Malacca was overwhelmed by the superior firepower of the Portuguese and their reliance on Japanese mercenaries, aggravated by the nonexistent support from sections in Malay society that were unhappy with the Sultan. All these factors combined finally resulted in his defeat. The Portuguese colonized Malacca for 130 years. They introduced new regulations and a new religion, and replaced the local legal system (*hukum kanun Melaka*). They encouraged European settlement in the region and vigorously introduced the Catholic faith. The “Military Crusading Order of Christ” became Rome’s preaching arm, particularly among Chinese residents and Indian Hindu traders. The Portuguese were bent on the destruction of signs of Islamic presence such as mosques, religious institutions, and even graveyards.

Malacca was surrendered to the Dutch in 1641 and they introduced Protestantism. They succeeded in defeating the Portuguese with the help of Johar’s Muslim Army. While their main objective was commerce and trade, they slowly introduced Christianity among the locals. In the areas of Dutch control, Calvinist ideals were promoted, anti-Catholic laws were enacted, and most of the Catholic churches either demolished or converted to Protestantism. Unlike the Portuguese, the Dutch motive in capturing Malacca was more commercial than religious. In their approach to Islam, the Dutch were relatively more tolerant than the Portuguese, however, the Ethical Policy of 1901 created a much deeper rift that changed the social and educational system of the country.

Francis Light (1740-1794) arrived in 1786 in Penang, which became the first British settlement and which has the record of having had the longest European presence in Malaysia reaching until 1945. The British used treaties with the Malay rulers to expand their colonial presence and in addition made treaties with the Siamese (Thailand) to release Kelantan, Terengganu, and Kedah from their control. They also encouraged the mass migration of Chinese miners into the tin-mining areas of Malaysia, and this became later one of the contentious issues in the country. In religious matters, British colonizers seem to have learned lessons from the Portuguese and the Dutch and so adopted a policy of general noninterference in local customs and religious matters. This resulted in a nonconfrontational approach to Muslims. While the British had a liberal policy toward various religions, they preserved a special status for the Anglican Church.

In 1567 the Spanish arrived in the Philippines and established their first colony. The Spanish colonizers moved their center of governance from Cebu to Manila in 1572. They met with fierce resistance from Muslims. The Spanish defeated them but had to realize that their old adversaries had a stronger grip in the larger southern islands of Mindanao and Sulu, as well as strings of smaller islands reaching from west of Mindanao to North Borneo. In the lands conquered by the Spanish settlers, natives received

military protection but were made to conform to a Spanish way of life and to convert to Christianity.⁵ Such institution was continuously resisted by the Muslims particularly in Mindanao. Sovereignty moved from Spanish to American colonizers in 1898, and up until 1913 the Americans were preoccupied with pacifying and controlling the local Muslim population. Moro Province was created in 1903. The province was encouraged to grow rubber plants, and under local pressure the settlement of foreigners in this region was strictly limited and largely controlled. The American business control in Mindanao started to decline as the locals began to assert themselves by owning and controlling the businesses. From 1913 to 1917 Americans established seven agricultural colonies promoting Christian settlements. The Christians were deliberately placed among the Muslim population in an attempt to foster good relations, and perhaps to keep the Muslims under control and by extension the “Muslim problem.” After four years of such initiatives it was apparent that such engineered policies were doomed to failure.⁶ Once the Americans left the Philippines in 1946, the stream of Christian settlers turned into a flood tide coming in thousands and creating new settlements.

In order to weaken the Muslim influence, the Americans abolished the sultanate in 1915. Although they recognized the difficulties of keeping the two communities of Muslims and Christians together, the Bacon Bill, intended to separate Mindanao and Sulu from the rest of Philippines, did not pass in the US Congress. The new Independent Philippines instead adopted a policy of Christianization in these predominantly Muslim or tribal lands. The marginalization of Muslims and the depleted political and economic power in their own region eventually turned into armed resistance. In the 1970s Islam became the consolidating factor which brought various dispirited factors under the banner of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), followed later by the formation of the more radical Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). The MILF defended the line of total Muslim authenticity which, according to it, could only be achieved if Muslims in Mindanao were given the right to erect their own Islamic state. With this radical position the MILF distanced itself clearly from the MNLF which was ready to accept the autonomy solution proposed by the Philippine government, and the MILF declared the formation of an Islamic state and the full implementation of *shariah* laws.⁷

LEGACIES

One of the factors that had a direct long-lasting impact on the perception of Christianity among Muslims was the polemical debates—the *munazarahs*. These also contributed practically to the training of future Muslim leadership in the region. The person who arguably brought polemics into the public arena, in the mosques, churches, and on the streets of South Asia, was the missionary Karl Pfander (1803–1865). His assertion that salvation only can be found in Christianity which he presented to others, particularly Muslims, generated a spiral of polemics. His views on Islam, understandably, were deeply Eurocentric. However, unlike some European accusations denouncing

Muhammad as propagating “heresy” and “falsehood” of prophecy, an evangelical and evangelical-academics approach to Islam, Pfander was preoccupied with the idea that Islam fell short of Christianity. Possibly this was the influence of the German evangelist, academic-orientalist August Tholuck (d. 1877) with whose evangelist views and understanding of Islam Pfander had some affinity.⁸ Pfander had a keen eye for the contemporary development of Islamic publications, particularly those produced by the Orientalists such as Gustav Weil (d. 1889) and William Muir (d. 1905), a senior British civil servant in India. Muir’s publications were considered one of the most important sources for the missionaries. His biography of the Prophet Muhammad (*Life of Mahomet*) became a standard book for understanding the Prophet of Islam, but it was a book that created more heat than light. The Christian Missionary Society’s (CMS) historical account of Muir gives full praise to this and other works, and suggests that he “unearthed . . . works written by Oriental Christians to commend Christianity to Moslem; and he has made them accessible to missionaries and available for their use.”⁹ He entered into correspondence with Muslim religious leaders in India. His familiarity with Shia tradition led him to contact Shia leaders in India and then to move on to Sunnis. One Sunni scholar who accepted the challenge was Rahmatullah Kairanwi (d. 1890). It was not simply, for him, a religious challenge, but a mixture of various circumstances that drew him to munazarah. The *‘ulama* saw the British abandoning religious neutrality in favor of Christian missionaries. Also, the missionaries’ attempts to reach ordinary Muslims in their vernacular were seen as an attack on their faith and belief and a corrupting influence on them. This was perhaps the turning point where the Muslim religious leadership decided to include “logic” in their teaching and training curriculum more vigorously than ever before.

Rahmatullah Kairanwi, on the other hand, used various Christian sources in his debates, including modern critical writings published in European countries. Such materials were supplied by his friend Wazir Khan, an East India Company employee and physician. During the debate with Pfander, he maintained a safe distance between the writings of those “believing Christians” and of those whose writings he effectively quoted in the munazarah, from “unbelievers.” What he achieved through such debates was to establish that what Pfander thought about the Quran was equally thought by the “unbelievers” about the Bible.

Pfander’s book *Mizan al-haqq* (The balance of truth), first published in the Armenian language in 1831, was largely a refutation of Muslim charge of *tahrif*. It was translated into many languages used by Muslims, such as Persian (1835), Urdu (1840), Turkish (1860), and Arabic (1865). This is the book that, when he arrived in India, he sent to various Muslim leaders to read. Kairanawi’s book *Izhar al-haqq* (The demonstration of truth), written in Arabic in response to Pfander, was published in 1867, then in Turkish (1876) with several editions, French (1880) and English (1900). Ironically, a translation into the language in which Kairanawi debated, Urdu, was only published in 1968. Kairanawi’s book became a standard for reading and teaching about Christianity throughout the Muslim world. In several Muslim seminaries, *dar al-ulum*, if Christianity is discussed in any sense, this is the standard reference book for the students.

In debate with Pfander, Kairanawi introduced another book, *The Gospel of Barnabas*, which he had discussed in his book *Ijaz-i isawi* in 1854 and in his book *Izhar al-Haqq*. The churches considered this gospel apocryphal, whereas Muslims saw in their refusal to accept it “as the only true Gospel of Jesus” a sinister Christian motive. The doubt regarding the Christian death and resurrection story of Jesus, and the Muslim belief that the coming of Prophet Muhammad had been foretold in the Gospel received wider credence. Rashid Rida (d. 1935) defended the Gospel of Barnabas and produced the Arabic translation, first in the journal *Al-manar* and later under the title *Al-injil as-sahih* (The true gospel), which received a wider audience among Muslims. It was further translated into Urdu and English (1916), Persian (1927), and Indonesian (1969).

Syed Ahmed Khan (d. 1898), in India, advocated the idea of catching up with the West and modern values. He thought that intellectual development and economic advancement of Muslims in India were essential. He saw Britain particularly as a progressive country and its education system as a model that could be emulated by the Muslims in India. In the process he also explored Christianity. He entered into a scholarly venture to study the Old and New Testaments, unlike many of his contemporaries in the Muslim world. His view was that Muslims should take Christianity seriously and make an effort to understand the Bible without the traditional prejudices of Muslim apologetics. He produced *Tabyin al-kalam fi tafsir al-tawrat wa'l-injil ala millat al-islam* (Theological clarifications on the subject of the exegesis of the Old and New Testament destined to the community of Islam) with the English subtitle *The Mohamedan Commentary on the Holy Bible*. This was a ground-breaking venture, particularly against the backdrop of colonialism and the supremacy of colonial powers.

Syed Ahmed Khan was controversial, particularly in his views regarding the British. He praised their religious neutrality. He encouraged his fellow Muslims to consider the fact that the freedom to practice Islam with their rituals and personal laws—marriage, divorce, and inheritance—was intact. For him supporting the British was an essential part of loyalty. He argued that Muslims in South Asia were not religiously bound to support the Turkish Caliphate which no longer was capable of ruling over all Muslims and therefore Muslims were not obliged to give their allegiance to the Caliphate.¹⁰ This was a bold step, and certainly out of tune with the times.

In the midst of this polemical environment Syed Ahmed Khan never hesitated to provide an alternate narrative. He revisited the issue of sharing meals (meat in particular) in his book *Ta'am ahl al-kitab* (On eating meals with the people of the Book), where he argued that the British, being Christians, belonged to the Quranic grouping of “people of the Book.” Therefore, animals slaughtered by Christians are also permissible for Muslims to eat. He was also a protagonist of cooperation between the faiths and opposed prejudice and persecution in his writings. The sociopolitical conditions of the time and the subsequent development of Christian–Muslim relations in Asia decidedly took the side of Kairanawi and not Syed Ahmed.

The long protracted conflict in the Philippines created a continuous tension in the region. The already edgy situation faced a new challenge in April 2003 when thirty-eight people were killed and hundreds wounded in a blast at Davao. President

Macapagal-Arroyo declared almost a war on the city. The Army and Police were sent to deal with the “terrorists.” This was followed by a string of attacks by the MILF in which several people were killed. This tit-for-tat killing and counter-killing came to an end in July that year, after the signing of a ceasefire agreement. The agreement may have stopped the immediate crisis; however, the simmering tensions rooted in history and alive in collective memory have not been resolved. The Catholic Church played a significantly positive role in response to the long-standing conflict. The teachings of the Catholic Bishops conference of the Philippines (CBCP) show a twofold gradual shift. The first shift is from equating “Filipino” and “Christian” to realizing that the Filipino nation is a culturally and religiously pluralistic society. The second regards the notion of dialogue: shifting from the idea of “negotiations aimed at ending conflicts” to the idea of “engagement for building a culture of peace.”¹¹ The churches have played a significant role in building a culture of dialogue and engagement. At the ecumenical level the role of Peter Gowing, of the Dansalan Research Centre in the predominantly Muslim city of Marawi, has been outstanding. Its reconciliation efforts and regular publications on Christian–Muslim relations and the promotion of a culture of dialogue have been widely held up as a good example. “Bishop-Ulema Forums” are other good examples of reconciliation efforts.

Another volatile area is Pakistan. The issue of implementation of *shariah* in the country has a constitutional history. Up to 1971 the rulers were little concerned about Islam and the Islamization of the country. Islam was only there for ceremonial purposes. From 1971 to 1977, during the rule of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, the religious groups began to forge alliances and the demand for the implementation of *shariah* began. However the imposition of martial law by General Zia-ul-Haq (President from 1978 to 1988), the subsequent program of Islamization, and the invasion of Afghanistan by Soviet Union created an atmosphere where the situation led itself, without much reflection, toward the “implementation” of *shariah* in the country. It started when two senators, Qazi Abdul Latif and Mawlana Sami-ul-Haque of the Jamiat ulma-e-Islam Darkhawasti group, introduced the Shariat Bill in July 1985. Although it contained in section 1(4) that nothing within the Bill shall affect the personal laws of non-Muslims; however, the Bill was vigorously opposed by the Christians. A separate electoral system was introduced which was revoked in General Musharraf’s time in 2004. Such laws reinforced the distance between Christians and Muslims and raised suspicions about Christians as outposts of Western interests. But the most divisive, detrimental, and most politicized have been the Anti-Blasphemy Laws, additions to the paragraph in the penal code dealing with the crime of blasphemy (§295), with detracting the Quran (§295-B), and with insulting the memory of the prophet Muhammad (§295-C), by making these delicts punishable by an automatic sentence of death. The anti-blasphemy law used indiscriminately has had a devastating effect on its citizens.

In Indonesia, unlike Pakistan, the character of the nation was debated much earlier, even at the drafting of the Constitution of the country. What kind of Indonesia should it be once the colonial masters left? The Study Committee for the Preparation of Independence had already rejected the idea of an Islamic state, because accepting

this would mean that the state was siding with one community, which though it was the largest, would alienate the minorities.¹² The Committee's subcommittee reached a consensus, and what is known as the *Jakarta Charter* became the Preamble of the Constitution. Later some of the members persuaded others to press for a special provision for Muslims in the Charter by rephrasing the Principle "Belief in God"—the first pillar—by adding "with the obligation for adherents of Islam to practice Islamic law."¹³ This particular clause brought a strong rebuke from the Christian community of Moluccas (represented by Johannes Latuharhary), who argued that this addition would put Islamic law into practice, affecting the minorities in the country. Because of the protest, the clause could not be included, and ever since the debate regarding the nature of the state has been deeply entrenched.¹⁴ The secular factor had the advantage, but it created the perception that whatever happened, the Christians would prefer a secular state, even against the desires of the majority. "The Pancasila," the five principles of state policy of the nation continued to be applied in all aspects of public life. The *Pancasila-Ideology* consists of five fundamental principles: (1) belief in one and only one God; (2) social justice; (3) national unity of Indonesia; (4) democracy guided by deliberations among representatives; and (5) Humanism.

There was another issue that created a further rift between the two communities. By the mid-1960s, the Christian community had successfully established themselves by indigenizing the Church, at least at the clergy level, and generally separating themselves from Eurocentric Christianity. After the 1965–66 violence in the country and the purge against the communists, the number of Christians increased many times over, many converts coming from a Muslim background in Java. Some Protestant churches grew by 20%. In a very short period the total number of Javanese Muslims that converted to Christianity was 2% of the population. This led to massive suspicion of "back-door" recolonization of the country.

The current problem with Christian–Muslim relations in Malaysia, and for that matter in Pakistan and Indonesia, is how to square the universalism of Islam, with its populations' affinity and affiliation to the wider Muslim *ummah*, on the one hand, and the particularity of the nation-state, on the other. The nation is shared with those who are not Muslims and are equal citizens. The challenge of "establishing" an Islamic legal and social order (*shariah*) in the country, and the demand for the fundamental freedoms and individual rights of the state, generated an entrenched position on different sides of the argument. The opposition to the use of terms such as "Allah" in Christian publications is symptomatic of the increasing emphasis of Islam in public life. The rise of global Islamic resurgence, particularly Islamic movements' reassertion of Islamic states, as well as the reinforcement of Malay ethnic identity play significant roles in the sociopolitical life of the country. The assertion of personal morality against gambling, alcoholic consumption, sex and nudity, and so on have demonstratively been observed. The demands for more time for religious programs on television, and adjustments in the education system and social life have created an image of Malay self-assertive identity. Various faiths in the country also began to reassert their own identity, bringing them together to face the common challenge of Islamic

revivalism. In response to increasing Islamization, the 1980s saw a growth of several new umbrella Christian organizations. The National Christian Fellowship (NCF) was formed in 1983. It was largely dominated by the Protestant churches. In order to maintain greater pressure on the issue it joined the World Evangelical Fellowship. The Roman Catholic Church of Malaysia became instrumental in the formation of the Christian Federation of Malaysia (CFM). It brought almost all the churches in the country together to face the challenges. The CFM further increased its pressure on the issue by joining the Malaysian Consultative Council of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, and Sikhism (MCCBCHS). The debate on the rights of minorities vis-à-vis the right to live under *shariah* will continue with a much more hardened attitude on both sides.

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

The arrival of Christianity in Asia, particularly in South Asia, had the full support of the church establishment. They arrived with the full blessing of the pope. Missionaries were received by the Moghul Court with warmth in the sixteenth century. They became regular visitors and attendees of court functions and dialogue activities. They showed greater responsibility and care in dialogue. Such encounters were at a level where an ordinary subject of the empire had very little connection. As the situation changed in Europe, the Church and mission gradually found themselves on opposite sides of the road. The increasing number of privately organized missions, particularly the Protestants, began to assert themselves in Asia in particular. Such missionaries were trained by special colleges or institutions for which the established churches bore little or no responsibility. Missionaries were responsible to those who appointed them, in many cases the director of the institution, or the head of the ecclesial body. The growing distance between the missionary societies, their workings among the natives and the lack of accountability made them much bolder and more innovative. Furthermore, those who decided to join such societies were largely self-motivated, and it was that self-motivation that was grasped by the missionary institutions. Such missionaries arrived in large numbers among Muslims. They devised a mechanism for connecting with them; they were in direct contact with Muslims, with little constraint or inhibition, eager to reach out and win them over on to their side.

Now Christians in Asia, and for that matter Muslims, are facing the unprecedented situation of the Pentecostal "Church" and its revival in the midst of society. The relentless advance of Pentecostalism is creating its own rationale. The future direction of Christianity, and particularly its relations with other faiths and communities, is now directly affected by Pentecostal advancement. They are not interested in what the main-line churches have to say, nor have they shown any interest in submitting to the traditional Christian missionary institutions. Rooted in conservative fundamentalist traditions, their theology has the Bible at the heart of its structure.

One can see a similar picture emerging among Muslims in Asia as well. In the past two decades, the radical Islamic discourse has increasingly dominated the public sphere. The economically deprived, politically alienated, and socially marginalized community looking to redress such issues seems to have “found” a voice. The language and appeal of radical Islamic groups is that of mistrust of the established Muslim institutions. Confidently relying on direct interpretation of the scriptures, their message is not simply of the purity of the individual but also a spiritual cleansing of the society. Individually the demand is for the observance of Islamic rituals and the fulfilment of the duty of calling others into their fold, and collectively the duty of establishing the *shariah* in the society and striving (*Jihad*) against those who are “destroying” Islam. Against this backdrop a meaningful relationship with Christians is becoming even more distant.

Churches have made outstanding contributions in the areas of dialogue and engagement with Muslims. The Hyderabad-based Henry Martyn Institute’s contribution to Interfaith Relations and Reconciliation in India, the Christian Study Centre of Rawalpindi in Pakistan, and the *Silsilah* Movement of Zamboanga in the Philippines, are among many initiatives engaged with others, particularly Muslims, under very difficult circumstances. Their research and publications and efforts toward reconciliation have been very valuable. On the other hand, there is an emerging trend among Muslims to be involved in a serious engagement with Christians. “The Common Word” initiative from Jordan has made a considerable impact on Christian–Muslim relations worldwide; so too a letter signed by thirty-eight Muslim scholars representing various denominations of Muslims published in 2007 in reaction to Pope Benedict’s Regensburg address in 2006. The Royal Institute of Inter-Faith Studies (RIIFS) has contributed significantly through its publications and dialogue on Christian–Muslim relations. The Doha International Centre for Interfaith Dialogue is another significant initiative in this area. Such initiatives by their nature demand moving away from the center to the margins of the respective traditions. When the dialogue is conducted at the borderland, participants are not only largely engaging with “people like themselves” but are also able to see from this vantage point over the borders, and observe the differences and similarities; they can compare and contrast their respective traditions as well as scrutinize issues and challenges. The real challenge, though, remains to see how one community is prepared to create a space for the other in their theology and perceptions and to accommodate differences. In this process, Christians and Muslims perhaps need to address the issues of “history” and “memory”—two very powerful players—that could make or break the relationship. It is important to address these issues within each community, but also together.

NOTES

1. Susan Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings: Muslims and Christians in South Indian Society, 1700–1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 260–61.

2. Stephen Neill, *A History of Christianity in India: The Beginning to AD 1707*, Vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 33.
3. A. Christian van Gorder, *Muslim–Christian Relations in Central Asia* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2008), 55.
4. *Ibid.*, 98.
5. Jaim Dumarpa, “An Exploratory Study of Maranao Muslim’s Concepts of Land Ownership: Its Implications for the Mindanao Conflict” in *Dansaln Quarterly* 6, no. 1 (1984): 83.
6. *Ibid.*, 27–28.
7. K. S. Nathan et al., eds., *Islam in Southeast Asia* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2005), 55–56.
8. Avril Ann Powell, *Muslims and Missionaries in Pre-Mutiny India* (Richmond, UK: Curzon Press, 1993), 146.
9. Eugene Stock, *The History of the Church Missionary Society*, Vol. 3 (London: Church Missionary Society, 1899), 513.
10. Shahid Mukhtar, ed., *Nazaryat-i Sir Syed* (Lahore: Shahid Publishers and Booksellers, n.d.), 89–90.
11. For details, see Rocco Viviano, “Christian–Muslim Relations in the Philippines: Between Conflict, Reconciliation and Dialogue,” in A. O’Mahony and E. Loosely, eds., *Christian Responses to Islam: Muslim–Christian Relations in the Modern World* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008), 127.
12. V. Van Dijk, *Rebellion under the Banner of Islam* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1981), 47.
13. *Ibid.*, 48.
14. J. S. Aritonang and K. Steenbrink, eds., *A History of Christianity in Indonesia* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 188.

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CHAPTER 25

THE MULTIVERSE OF HINDU ENGAGEMENT WITH CHRISTIANITY

*Plural Streams of Creative Co-Walking,
Contradictions, and Confrontations*

ANANTA KUMAR GIRI

INTRODUCTION AND INVITATION

HINDUISM and Christianity have been in interaction for a long time. According to some, Jesus and his spiritual journey which later took an institutional form in Christianity was deeply influenced by devotional streams in Vaishnavism and spiritual quest in Buddhism prevalent in India and Asia. Jesus himself is said to have come to India and Tibet during the missing years of his life in Palestine and learnt the art of yoga and spiritual quest.¹ Many fellow seekers and fellow pilgrims such as Ramakrishna Paramahansa, Yogananda Paramahansa, and Swami Vivekananda have realized in Jesus a yogi, a spiritual master, and an embodiment of Divinity and have found great affinity between inclusive streams of yoga in India and Asia and the spiritual quest of Jesus.

COMPLEX HISTORIES OF CO-WALKING FROM THE HINDU SHORES

With the Portuguese colonial conquest of Goa, Western Christianity got a new lease of life in India. Robert de Nobili (1577–1656) came to India after this as part of Jesuit missionary activities. He accepted an indigenous mode of dressing and behaved as a Hindu

sannyasi. But, “he adopted local customs in order to win over the people of his day and to communicate his message, and not necessarily because he appreciated these customs.”² In the modern period, the deep significance of the encounter with Christianity is seen in the reforms of Hinduism and the formation of challenging streams such as Brahma Samaj. But even before this, encounters with Christianity had influenced Bhakti movements in India and varieties of critical spirituality, which had challenged caste and feudal domination. As Gail Omvedt writes:

While it may appear unrealistic to argue that Kabir’s ‘sai’ was actually ‘Isa’ (Jesus) and make him into a kind of crypto-Christian, it remains quite possible that among the later poets using the name ‘Kabir’ one was indeed influenced by Christian ideas. After the sixteenth century, specifically after 1545 when Jesuits began to spread through north and south India, a wide compact of ideas can be seen. In Maharashtra, a *Krista Purana* was reported as composed in 1626, as one of the earliest Konkani/Marathi writings, written by Fr. Thomas Stephen (1549–1619), an English Jesuit.³

Rammohan Roy (1772–1833), considered by many as the father of modern Bengal-Indian Renaissance, was influenced by the ethical precepts of Jesus. As Romain Rolland writes, “Roy extracted from Christianity its ethical system, but rejected the divinity of Christ, just as he rejected the Hindu incarnations.”⁴ He was also influenced by Islam, its lack of idolatry and monotheism. In fact, his first book was on Islam entitled *Tuhfat-ul-Muwathiddin* (A present to the believers in one God; a treatise in Persian with a preface in Arabic language). Roy’s encounter with Christianity made him realize the ethical significance of religion and with this he wanted to fight against cruel practices in Hinduism such as *Sati*. His interpretation of Christianity was challenged by evangelical and doctrinaire Christians of the time such as Joshua Marshman, who insisted on the significance of baptism and dogma. But in this insistence, Christianity lost a chance to creatively engage itself with the ethical and wider challenges of society beyond doctrinaire assertion and dogma. Unfortunately, the situation is not much different now even after two hundred years.⁵

Keshab Chandra Sen (1838–1884), Roy’s successor in Brahma Samaj, continued the creative dialogue with both Hinduism and Christianity, but he sought to bring devotion to Roy’s rationalism.⁶ If Roy had missed dialogue with the indigenous devotional stream of Bengal and India (such as the great Chaitanya movement which had transformed the religious situation in medieval India, making it anti-caste and open to dialogue with Islam), Keshab brought the Chaitanya stream to Brahma Samaj, thus widening the social base of Brahma Samaj. In this, he would have been definitely influenced by his meeting with Sri Ramakrishna though some also think that Keshab also influenced Ramakrishna. Keshab introduced a new form of worship in the mother language.⁷

In his engagement with Christianity, Keshab offered his own concept and realization of Oriental Christ: “Behold! He cometh to us in his long flowing garment, his dress and feature altogether Oriental.”⁸ Keshab also focused on the need to develop indigenous Christianity and a national church that is Christ-centered, rather than narrowly church-centered.

P. C. Mazoomdar (1840–1905), Keshab's successor in Brahma Samaj also followed his theme of Oriental Christ. For Mazoomdar, "the celestial figure of the sweet Prophet of Nazareth is illumined with strange and unknown radiance, when the light of Oriental faith and mystic devotion is allowed to fall upon it".⁹ Along with his realization of Oriental Christ, Mazoomdar also laid emphasis on the significance of Holy Spirit in life and in the world. In the multiverse of Hindu engagement with Christianity in the nineteenth century, Sri Ramakrishna (1836–1886) and Swami Vivekananda (1863–1902) have been deeply influential. Sri Ramakrishna's realization of Jesus and the Madonna was a spiritual realization going beyond dogma and outward paraphernalia. Once Ramakrishna saw a picture of the Madonna in one Jadu Mallick's country house and he was immediately moved by it. After this, he also realized the presence of Jesus.¹⁰ Ramakrishna was also deeply moved by the biblical story of Peter walking over the waters: "A picture of this scene was later hung on the wall of his quarters in the temple; it was the only image that was borrowed from the Christian tradition."¹¹ Swami Vivekananda realizes Jesus as a Son of the Orient and Christianity as a religion from Asia and the Orient. Like many from India, he is not bothered about the historicity of Jesus but realizes Him as God.

Unlike Rammohan Roy, Swami Vivekananda looks at the Sermon on the Mount as not primarily ethical; he was not impressed by the "moral precepts of the Sermon on the Mount." He once called the famous Golden Rule, with which the Sermon on the Mount ends, "excessively vulgar" because of the orientation to the Self. For him, the heart of all religion was to transcend the orientation to the self and to achieve unity with the godhead. One text in the Sermon on the Mount stood out, in his view, that is, "Blessed are the pure in heart for they will see God" (Matt. 5:8).¹² But from this, it is not helpful to make a contrast between ethical Christ and mystical Christ in Swami Vivekananda.¹³ Swami Vivekananda was as deeply influenced by the ethical and practical work of Jesus as his mystical and spiritual work. He was concerned with ethical aspects of religion and society and in their transformation through what he called practical Vedanta. As M. M. Thomas aptly puts it, "it is possible to look at Vivekananda's religion as an attempt to synthesize Advaita Vedanta with Christian philanthropy."¹⁴ But Vivekananda's practical Vedanta was not just philanthropy; it was also an engagement in practical mysticism as it was with Sri Ramakrishna. In fact, Sri Ramakrishna brought the challenge of transformation of suffering as the central challenge before any religion, and especially Hinduism.

It is the realization of Jesus which had played a key role in the formation of Sri Ramakrishna Mission. Swami Vivekananda founded the order telling to his fellow walkers the story of Jesus Christ. Seekers in the Sri Ramakrishna-Vivekananda stream have continued to undertake their own journey of Jesus realization and formally Christmas is a holiday in Sri Ramakrishna Mission—a tradition started by Swami Brahmananda who succeeded Swami Vivekananda. This has inspired some Hindus such as Vengal Chakkarai who was a prominent Christian nationalist and theologian to embrace Christianity.¹⁵ The many monks from Sri Ramakrishna Mission who have written about Christ (such as Swami Akhilananda's *Hindu View of Christ* and Swami Ranganathananda's *Christ We Adore*) call for co-walking with Jesus. Like

Swami Vivekananda, for Swami Ranganathananda, “The Kingdom of God is within you” (Luke 17:21) has “extraordinary significance for Hindus.”¹⁶ As Schouten tells us, “Ranganathananda also interprets ‘within you’ as ‘in your inner self’: the Kingdom of God can be experienced in the inner life. Pureness in heart is a precondition for sharing in this kingdom. But whoever fulfils this condition can realize unity with God and thus see God.”

Thus, the encounter with Christianity in the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda stream was a decisive step in the shaping of modern Hinduism which also led to much deeper and wider turns and cross-currents of reconstruction, creativity, and confrontations (confronting one’s tradition as Swami Vivekananda had done) compared to what had happened during the days of Brahmo Samaj.

Philosopher S. Radhakrishnan (1888–1975) realizes Jesus in terms of sacrifice of ego.¹⁷ The theme of sacrifice brings me to Gandhi’s (1869–1948) realization of Jesus, and his engagement with and challenge to Christianity. Gandhi looked at Jesus as a *Satyagrahi* and in his engagement with and challenge to Christianity brought out the different implications of the cross in societies and histories. Many Christians realized Gandhi’s noncooperation movement and freedom struggles as bearing the cross¹⁸ for liberation, while others sided with the imperialist and colonialist forces. S. K. George was one such Christian who was inspired by Gandhi’s noncooperation movement of 1919–21 and took part in it, which “made real to his youthful mind the idealism and passion of Jesus of Nazareth.”¹⁹ When the Civil Disobedience Movement (1930–32) was raging, he felt duty-bound as a Christian “to appeal to all Indian Christians to join in and act as custodians of non-violence.”²⁰ George took part in India’s freedom struggle, but he was not alone. Many Christians took part in India’s freedom struggle.²¹ In his book, *Gandhi’s Challenge to Christianity*, George tells about Gandhi as a spiritual fact²² having demonstrated “how the Sermon on the Mount can be practical politics.”

In his engagement with Christianity, Gandhi was deeply influenced by the Sermon on the Mount and he found similarity between the Sermon and the Gita. Gandhi was also influenced by Tolstoy’s understanding of Christianity.²³ In his journey of life Gandhi felt “great leaning to Christianity and for a time wavered between Christianity and Hinduism. But in the end, he ‘saw no reason for changing his religion.’”²⁴

Gandhi was opposed to conversion to Christianity using gullible means. His first priority was reform of one’s religion. Gandhi’s critique of conversion raised issues of responsibility to reform one’s religion of birth, but his was not a closed approach to one’s own religion as he himself was wavering between Hinduism and Christianity seriously considering conversion to the latter at one time.²⁵ But Bishop V. S. Azariah, the Bishop of Dornakal, challenged Gandhi’s view on conversion by arguing that conversion is not only led by foreign missionaries but also by people like himself who had grown up from the soil of suffering and was working with the poor for their amelioration and transformation.²⁶

To this multiverse of Hindu engagement with Christianity can be added the realizations of Chitta Ranjan Das (1923–2011), a creative thinker from the Indian state of Odisha. In his “Jesus Christ: White, Black or Yellow”? Das tells us: “Whatever might be

said about the Jesus in history, Jesus has come to be one of the very important inspiration in mankind's history, and continues to be that inspiration even today." Like many of his fellow seekers, Das urges us to go beyond a merely historicist understanding of Jesus and here urges us to realize the mystical quest of Meister Eckhart: "For Eckhart, Jesus was not born only once at one particular point of history. He is being born every moment of our life and world's life. . . . Jesus ceases to be only a happening in history, he becomes a challenge instead."²⁷ But to realize this we need to go beyond the theological construction of Jesus, including the Papal condemnation of the life of poverty of Jesus.²⁸

HINDU CHRISTIAN ENGAGEMENT: FROM THE SHORE OF CHRISTIAN JOURNEY

As Hindus have realized Jesus and Christianity with their own initial starting points in a journey of unfolding realizations, so, have Christians who have sought to understand not only Hinduism but also Jesus and Christianity with an immersion in some of the spiritual pathways of Hinduism. Down the ages Christians have been influenced by their participation in the cultural and spiritual journey of Hindus which unfortunately has also meant retaining or adapting one's caste practice.

As in the previous section, here I focus on a few exemplary voices. Starting with the modern period, I begin with Brahmabandhab Upadhyay (1861–1907). Upadhyaya was a classmate of Swami Vivekananda. He accepted Christianity and was baptized. He also took part in the Swadeshi movement in Bengal and worked with revolutionaries such as Sri Aurobindo. But Upadhyaya did not renounce Hinduism; rather he continued to be a Hindu Christian. Upadhyaya was the first to use the name *Saccidananda* for the "Christian idea of Trinity within Christian Church."²⁹ Upadhyaya used Vedanta to understand Christian theology, but he used the Thomist framework, not the mystical framework of Swami Vivekananda. Upadhyaya established an ashram and introduced worship of Sarasvati—the Goddess of Learning—in his ashram. About his journey as a Catholic Hindu, he wrote: "By birth we are Hindus and shall remain Hindu till death. But as *Dvija* [twice born] by virtue of our sacramental rebirth, we are Catholics."³⁰

Pandita Ramabai (1858–1922) is another exemplary seeker who refused easy categorization and denominational fixation. She was a great wanderer, a courageous rebel, and a creative being. She was born in a Brahmin family and had traveled with her parents to every nook and cranny of India on foot. Ramabai was a critic of patriarchal Hinduism. When she accepted baptism, Brahmin reformers such as Ranade criticized her, while Jyotirao Phule welcomed it and supported her.³¹ Ramabai established a woman's home for widowed and destitute women called *Mutkisan* (abode of liberation) in Khedgaon near Pune. Here she taught women how to live independently learning different trades, skills, and vocations of life. Ramabai learnt Hebrew and translated Bible into Marathi.

This translation was more creative and communicative compared to the earlier missionary translation, which was heavily Sanskritic.³²

Ramabai lectured in the United States about the same time as Swami Vivekananda was lecturing. She told her audience about the plight of high-caste Hindu women and came into confrontation with Swami Vivekananda about missing this aspect of Hinduism in his representation of Hinduism to the West. But with her self-critical interrogation of her own Brahminical tradition, she was not an uncritical convert to the other side as well. As Scouten writes: “While defending the Christian faith to Indian readers, she attempted to give English readers a better understanding of India’s high civilization. . . . Like Rammohan Roy, she objected to the designation ‘heathen’ for a Hindu.”³³

Sadhu Sundar Singh (1889–1929) was a convert to Christianity from the Sikh path and like Ramabai was not comfortable with denominational fixation. He lived the life of a wandering monk moving in between India and Tibet, and like Ramabai also traveled around the world. He was committed to an indigenous church in India: “The water of life has hitherto been offered by thirsting souls in a European vessel. Only when it is given in an Eastern bowl will it be accepted by simple men and women who seek the truth.”³⁴

C. F. Andrews (1871–1940) came to India as an Anglican priest and soon immersed himself in the freedom struggle of India as well as in the struggle for dignity on the part of the indentured Indians in Fiji, South Africa, and around the world. He taught at St. Stephen’s College, Delhi, and at Tagore’s Shantiniketan.³⁵ Swami Abishiktananda (1910–1973), a Benedictine priest from France, later known as Swami Abishiktananda came to India in 1949. He and Bede Griffiths, a Benedictine from England, realized the spiritual paths in Hinduism and made deep dialogues with Vedanta and other streams of seeking realizations. In 1950, Abishiktananda together with Fr. Jules Monchanin, who had come a decade earlier, founded an ashram near Tiruchrapalli, Tamil Nadu, called Shantivanam. He was deeply influenced by Ramana Maharshi and also lived in a cave in Thiruvannamalai for some time. For Ramana, “the *guhantara*, the cave of the heart, the interior space of experience resolved all dualism, and it is this imagery that is the central symbol in Abhisiktananda’s writing.”³⁶ Bede Griffiths also had a deep appreciation for the spiritual life of India: “The first thing that I have learned is a simplicity of life which before I would have not thought possible. India has a way of reducing human needs to a minimum.”³⁷ He also stayed in Shantivanam for a long time. Griffiths challenges us to realize the mystical dimension of Christianity and here he finds affinity between Shankara and Aquinas: “Shankara and Aquinas were both mystics who had experienced the reality of the world which transcends the senses and could bring their intelligence to bear on that.”³⁸ Griffiths finds yoga a spiritual way for the Christians. He also finds similarity between the integral yoga of Sri Aurobindo and Christian yoga.³⁹

The creative border-crossing and spiritual quest of Abishiktananda and Griffiths find a resonance in many Christians of India. They both belonged to the Christian ashram movement of India though not totally closed within a view of ashram as an institution. It must be noted that there is a long tradition of ashram movement in India nurtured by such pioneering initiatives such as the Christa Prema Seva Ashram in Sivajinagar,

Maharashtra, founded in 1927 by the Anglican John (“Jack”) Winslow. Another example is the Kurisumala Ashram in Kerala, founded by Fr. Francis Acharya (originally known as Fr. Francis Mahieu, a Cistercian monk from Belgium). Sameeksha Center for Indian Spirituality based in Kalady, the birth place of Shankara, is yet another example. It is involved in interreligious dialogue. It also pleads for creative border-crossing between Hinduism and Christianity. Sebastian Painadath from Sameeksha urges us to realize how Christians and Hindus can simultaneously realize the prophetic and mystical dimension in their social, religious, and spiritual lives. The mystical dimension would help Christianity go beyond its exclusivism and the prophetic dimension would help Hinduism go beyond oppressive structures of many kinds such as the caste system, leading to self and social liberation.

Subhash Anand also embodies inspiring openness in his participation with some of the rivers of Hinduism. He applies the Upanishadic principle of Bandhu which means friendship to realize a more creative interrelationship between Hindus and Christians theologically and practically. He tells us that when he is in a chapel he realizes Nataraja as the Lord of Dance and also Christ as Dance. He presents Nataraja as a holistic Christian icon: “Indeed, Jesus is the Dance of God, nay he is also the Lord of Dance.”⁴⁰ Anand urges us to realize that Shiva is not only male but also female, Shiva is a womb which can also challenge us to realize Jesus as a mother, as a womb.

Francis X. Clooney⁴¹ has explored some of the similarities between feminine spirituality in Hinduism and Christianity as part of a project of comparative theology. But Clooney shares with inspiring honesty the difficulty of radically crossing one’s identity as a Christian, a journey found in Griffiths and Abhishiktananda. Similarly, Felix Wilfred also challenges Christian theology and practice for more radical opening to Hinduism. Wilfred pleads for a Christian relativism as part of going beyond exclusive claims to truth. He also urges Christian institutions to go beyond their closed organizational logic and be part of a wider democratic civil society of accountability, transparency, and equal participation.⁴² Wilfred raises a challenge for a radical border-crossing in his *Margins: Site of Asian Theologies*:

Reading the New Testament will reveal how it has all the things necessary for salvation. But I have been struck by the lack of one thing in the New Testament: the humour. Though the gospels are meant to convey joy and peace, yet humour does not seem to have a due place. A reading of the divine intervention in human history as through the avatar of Sri Krishna would bring in the element of play, both in God and also in human life. This play, in reality, is not expression of any frivolity. Through the play (*lila*) of Krishna is expressed the *unbound freedom of God and God’s creation*. In fact creation is viewed as the play of God. What is happening at the microcosmic level with the play of Krishna is in fact the mirror of the macrocosmic reality of infinite freedom. . . . The magnetic pull of the milkmaids towards Krishna playing flute is nothing but the irresistible way the Divine power draws everything to itself. In Christian tradition we speak of the way the cross as the power of God’s mystery draws us all. . . . In short, a reading of the New Testament symbolism of the cross

and teachings of Jesus. Ethics in the Gospels was the beginning of a Hindu appraisal of Christianity in modern times. . . . But then sadly, instead of welcoming his effort to relate Jesus the moral teacher with Indian situation, his approach was resisted by missionaries, because it did not tally with what they thought was the Christian belief system. . . . *A meaningful presence of Christianity in Asia seems to lie in what it could offer in terms of ethics than in terms of beliefs.* (*Asian Public Theology: Critical Currents in Challenging Times* [Delhi: ISPCK, 2010], 217; emphasis added)

6. It is to be noted that on March 6, 1881, Keshab celebrated “the Blessed Sacrament with rice and water instead of bread and wine” (Rolland, *The Life of Vivekananda*, 132).
7. Cf. Arun Kumar Mukherjee, *Keshub Chunder Sen* (Delhi: Publications Division, 1992).
8. M. M. Thomas, *The Acknowledged Christ of the Indian Renaissance* (Madras: Christian Literature Society, 1970), 70.
9. P. C. Mozoomdar, *The Oriental Christ* (Boston: University of California Libraries, 1883), 16.
10. Ramakrishna’s biographer Romain Rolland writes about it:

Somewhere about November, 1874, a certain Mallik, a Hindu of Calcutta, with a garden near Dakhineswar, read the Bible to him. For the first time Ramakrishna met Christ. Shortly afterwards the word was made flesh. The life of Jesus secretly pervaded him. One day when he was sitting in the room of a friend, a rich Hindu, he saw on the wall a picture representing the Madonna and the Child. The figures became alive. Then the expected came to pass according to the invariable order of the Spirit; the holy visions came close to him and entered into him so that his whole being was being impregnated with them. . . . Then one afternoon in the grove of Dakhineswar he saw coming towards him a person with beautiful large eyes, a serene regard and a fair skin. Although he did not know who it was, he succumbed to the charm of his unknown guest. He drew near and a voice sang in the depths of Ramakrishna’s soul: ‘Behold the Christ, who shed his heart’s blood for the redemption of the world, who suffered a sea of anguish for love of men. It is He, the master Yogin, who is in eternal union with God. It is Jesus, Love incarnate. . . .’ The son of Man embraced the seer of India, the son of the Mother, and absorbed him into himself. Ramakrishna was lost in ecstasy. Once again he realised union with Brahman. Then gradually he came down to earth, but from that time he believed in the Divinity of Jesus Christ, the Incarnate God. But for him Christ was not the only Incarnation. Buddha and Krishna were others (*The Life of Ramakrishna*, 50).

11. Jan Peter Schouten, *Jesus as Guru: The Image of Christ among Hindus and Christians in India* (Delhi: Overseas Press India, 2012), 87.
12. *Ibid.*, 98.
13. Thomas does this when he writes: “Vivekananda rejects the ethical Christ for the mystic Christ. . . . the Sermon on the Mount, for Vivekananda, is not primarily ethics, but an expression of the spirituality of self-renunciation” (*The Acknowledged Christ of the Indian Renaissance*, 125).
14. *Ibid.*, 246.

Many of these Brahmin Christians focused their attention on intellectual or mystical-cum-spiritual (*bhakti*) issues...that sought for links between the great traditions from which they themselves had come and from which most of them never entirely parted. Even Pandita Ramabai's own *bhakti* devotionism did not begin to veer away from her own pure...identity until after her third Christian conversion and the "Holy Ghost" revival that broke twenty years later (1905) at the Mukti Mission in Kedagaon. Nor can the Christian career of Sadhu Sundar Singh be seen as reflecting a close identification with either *Adivasi* or *avarna* forms of Indian Christianity. (*Christianity in India: From the Beginnings to the Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 457).

45. David Mosse writes about this:

A Dalit-focused caste-based approach to social activism gradually became the predominant form among activists within the priesthood, beginning with the Jesuits of Madurai Province, whose anti-caste "social action ministry" inverted the social "accommodations" of their 17th-century founder Robert de Nobili. Indeed, from 1987 the Jesuit "option for the poor" had been firmly recast as a Dalit option... [But] despite its "Dalit option," only 18 of the 300 odd Jesuit priests were Dalits. ("The Catholic Church and Dalit Christian Activism in Contemporary Tamil Nadu," in Rowena Robinson and Joseph M. Kujur, eds., *Margins of Faith: Dalits and Tribal Christianity in India* (Delhi: Sage, 2010), 237–39)

46. Rowena Robinson, *Christians of India* (Delhi: Sage, 2003).

47. Pandian, "Nation as Nostalgia," offers a similar critique of Vengal Chakkarai's project of indigenization, which for him is mainly Brahminical.

48. The following interpretation is insightful

"Even in its brevity, the partial poem is replete with words evocative of Dalits and their condition: 'struggle' (*sangharsh*), 'cage' (*pinjara*) and 'tiger' (*sher*). But the image of the 'broken mirror' (*tuta darpan*) says the most about John, not to mention Dalit religion on the margins. In *nirguni* poetry, the mirror is often a sign of vanity, as it is in Kabir's famous song what face do you see in the mirror (*darpana*)?' In one sense, John uses the mirror to represent his reflecting on his shattered pride. In another sense, he also seems to be mourning his lost dreams..." (Mathew N. Schmalz, "Broken Mirror: John Masih's Journey from Isaih to Dalit," in Robinson and Kujur, eds., *Margins of Faith*, 206).

49. See Lalruatkima, "TRANS-formative Possibilities: Tribal Formations in Conversation with Dalit Theology," in Sathianathan Clarke et al., eds., *Dalit Theology in the Twenty-first Century: Discordant Voices, Discerning Pathways* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2010), 104–17.

50. This is in tune with the perspectives of scholars such as Judith Brown and Robert Frykenberg. cf. Judith M. Brown and Robert E. Frykenberg, eds., *Christians, Cultural Interactions and India's Religious Traditions* (London: Routledge-Curzon, 2002). This has contributed to "new Indian modes of worship and theological emphasis" (*ibid.*).

because to do so would be tantamount to surrendering their claim of uniqueness access to knowledge of God's will" (Rajiv Malhotra, *Being Different: An Indian Challenge to Western Universalism* [New Delhi: Harper Collins, 2011], 90); for Rajiv Malhotra, here yoga provides freedom from history.

62. Here we can reflect upon the following conversation between Ramin Jahanbegloo and Peter Desouza in which Jahanbegloo asks De Souza: "[Vivekananda] entertained a vision of India having a Vedantic brain, an Islamic body, and a Christian heart. Do you think India today has a Christian heart?" (Ramin Jahanbegloo, *India Revisited: Conversations on Contemporary India* [Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2008], 164); De Souza replies: "I think if there is something like Christian heart then we would like to have it. I think the idea of fraternity, brotherhood and sisterhood is there in Christianity. The world is moving away from these sensibilities and that's the cause for some degree of gloom actually" (ibid.).

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CHAPTER 26

CHRISTIAN TRADITION IN THE EYES OF ASIAN BUDDHISTS

The Case of Japan

DENNIS HIROTA

ENCOUNTERS between Christians and Buddhists in Asia extend back at least 1,700 years to the Hellenistic period, taking place in western Asia and India by the beginning of the third century. Buddhist–Christian contact has thus occurred over an enormous historical as well as geographical span, in vastly differing social and cultural contexts. Serious intellectual attention to Christian teachings and practices by Buddhists appears probable at various points during this long history. An often mentioned example is the presence—and even translation activity in Chinese—of Nestorian Christians in Xian during the Tang dynasty, a seminal period in the development of Chinese Buddhism and the subsequent Korean and Japanese traditions. As yet, however, clear documentation of significant engagement on the part of Buddhists emerges only from the age of Western navigation and conquest in the sixteenth century.

In order to provide one small window onto the question of Buddhists’ response to Christian tradition in Asia, I will focus in this chapter on the issues that reflect the endeavor of Buddhists to grapple with and reflect on Christian teachings and practices as recognizably “religious” in ways comparable to their own Buddhist traditions. This does not necessarily preclude study motivated in part by the polemical intent to refute a rival tradition or resist foreign hegemony, for given the historical circumstances and institutional relationships, it is impossible to isolate religious interests from threads of concern for the nation or reaction to the challenges of modernity. Nevertheless, our interests here will not be on expressions of political concerns, patriotic fervor in the face of real or threatened colonialism, or facile denigration of the foreign.

As a further narrowing of focus, I will draw examples from the case of Japan, which possesses one of the longest and richest records of the kind of Buddhist–Christian

There were open calls for the dismantling of Buddhist temples as foreign intrusions, and buildings, statuary, and texts were destroyed. In this atmosphere, often stripped of the backing that had been guaranteed by state policies, for more than two hundred years, Buddhist institutions sought to assert their importance, as a pillar of the new government and a bulwark against Western imperialist domination. Temple seminaries and colleges began instituting programs of study to resist and defeat the perceived threat of Christian proselytization, and temple scholars were dispatched to Europe to study Western philological and research methods in Sanskrit and Indian Buddhist studies.

By the mid-1890s, temples such as the Honganji in Kyoto had reconfirmed their position in Japanese society by developing relationships with the Meiji government through demonstrations of support, including even financial assistance. Here, the third phase begins. With new confidence, Buddhists endeavored to adapt to the inevitable changes sweeping society amid the waves of Westernization by seeking to digest and absorb Western philosophical and theological thought. Christian missionaries and educators in Japan came to be viewed not solely as alarming invaders but also as possible participants in conversation, similarly facing, like the Buddhists, growing challenges from modern scientific research and technology. In a sense, they might be partners in the new struggle to assert the importance of religion and resist the Western secularism that assumed religion had been discredited. It is during this period of engagement with Western philosophical and religious thought, which reached a peak of intensity in the latter part of the twentieth century, that scholars of the sectarian Buddhist traditions emerged who sought to modernize the traditional doctrinal orthodoxies, which had been codified in the Edo period and which continued to dominate clerical education within the temple institutions.

This chapter will seek to identify the major issues that have concerned Japanese Buddhist thinkers who have engaged Christian tradition by considering representative figures in each of the periods discussed above. Rather than a broad survey of the various Buddhist thinkers involved, the focus here will be on the challenges, whether hostile or constructive, Japanese Buddhists have perceived Christian tradition to pose, and the ways in which they have responded.

THE ENCOUNTER WITH JESUIT MISSIONARIES, 1549–1639

As I have noted, the writings of Jesuit missionaries in Japan and of their Japanese converts give a relatively rich documentary portrait of Japanese religious and social practices from the perspective of Christians. These include letters and reports sent back to Europe; teaching materials on Japanese religion, language, and social customs for training missionaries and on Christian doctrine for instructing native Japanese; and diaries and journalistic records of observations of Japanese life and cultural practices.

Preserved in Portuguese, Latin, and Japanese, such documents have been broadly studied not only by religious scholars, but by linguists and cultural historians for the vivid picture of Japanese life they provide. Further, these writings show clearly that it was in Japan that the Jesuits first consciously encountered Buddhism as a religious tradition and made their first attempts to understand Buddhist teachings and practices.

Unfortunately, there is no corresponding record of the encounter from a Buddhist perspective, even though it is estimated that by about the turn of the seventeenth century, fifty years after the arrival of Xavier, there were 300,000 Japanese converts out of a total population of 12 million. The relative reticence of Buddhist priests may stem from the political circumstances conjectured to underlie a large percentage of the conversions. Pursuing a policy of seeking converts at the highest level of authority in order to effect mass conversions among the ruled, the Jesuit missionaries were able to count a number of daimyo lords as Christians by 1580, particularly in the southern island of Kyushu. These daimyo, themselves embroiled in unstable alliances and struggles for power, strongly urged their retainers and the populace of their fiefs likewise to convert. Their likely motive was the hope of fostering trade relations with Portuguese merchants, who had first introduced firearms into Japan several years before Xavier's arrival. Even Buddhist priests in the fiefs were encouraged to convert, and those who refused were banished, with their temple properties transferred to Christian missionaries.

Under such conditions of vulnerability to the winds of political coercion and patronage, Buddhist clerics may understandably have been little drawn to respond formally to Christian teachings, even when directly engaged by the missionaries, unless they themselves converted. One Christian record states of an attempt at dialogue: "When the Fathers said to [the bonze] anything about our religion, he used to listen and then say that they had exactly the same things in his religion without any difference whatsoever. He gave this answer to everything they said, with the result that they made no headway at all."¹ Thus, informed treatments of Christian tradition by Japanese Buddhists are limited, both during Japan's "Christian century" and in the latter half of the nineteenth century, when antagonisms within the state appeared to threaten the power and even the continued existence of Buddhist institutions.

The Critique of Suzuki Shōsan

As a representative example of the understanding of Christian teachings and the response to them among Buddhists at the close of the Christian century, I will consider here a tract, *Ha Kirishitan* by the Zen priest Suzuki Shōsan (1579–1655).² Shōsan was a battle-hardened samurai who immersed himself in Buddhist teachings from his youth and formally entered Zen practice at the age of 42. After traveling and practicing under various masters, he returned to his home village and established a temple, becoming a popular preacher and author of Buddhist tracts. He is known for his propagation of "Niō Fudō Zen," a Buddhist practice in the fierce spirit of Buddhism's guardian deities. Critical of the laxity and worldliness of Buddhist temples, he taught a firm faith and

Second, a complex of intertwining issues arising in relation to this general framework appears to define the central contours of Buddhist engagement with Christian tradition in Japan from the sixteenth century down to the present. For the purposes of this chapter, I will focus on five topics that appear vital to Buddhists, at times in response to the criticism of Christians and at times out of an awareness of the need for doctrinal reform prompted by encounter with Christian teachings: emergence of salvific form from formless reality as a way of understanding incarnation and kenosis; emptiness or nondiscrimination; time and eternity; subjectivity; and ethical life. For Shōsan, the former two topics form the crux of his response to Christianity, while in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the latter three also become prominent.

To note briefly Shōsan's treatment of Christianity from his Buddhist perspective, as we have seen, one of the major challenges in Christian doctrine, the notion of divine creation, in itself makes little impact on him. Rather, he quickly conflates creator and incarnation, and finds the idea of a *unique* incarnation of "the Lord of Heaven and Earth"—particularly the cross—"bereft of reason."¹² He concludes that, falsely attached to a single Buddha, "This Kirishitan sect will not recognize the existence of the One Buddha of Original Illumination and Thusness," that is, formless reality.¹³ Another potentially compelling issue concomitant with creation, that of a theodicy, Shōsan raises only in relation to the Christian distinction between animals and humans. He asks: "If Deus made such a careful distinction in creating the souls of animals and humans, then why did he fix evil-mindedness upon the human soul?"¹⁴ As with the idea of singular incarnation, anthropocentrism has seemed contradictory to fundamental notions of enlightened wisdom as inherently compassionate and of all living beings as interrelated.

Shōsan addresses the Christian criticisms of the worship of the native *kami* as polytheistic and of the physical sun and moon as idolatry from his Buddhist perspective, but not in direct relation to the acceptance of many Buddhas. Regarding the *kami*, he assumes the standard syncretic view, in which "the Buddhas have first appeared as gods (*kami*) and manifested their traces in this country."¹⁵ That is, "the word 'Buddhas' and the word 'gods'—these have but the difference of water and waves," but the Buddhas manifested themselves as the native *kami* to accommodate themselves to the Japanese and guide them to the Buddhist teaching. Regarding worship of the sun and moon, in addition to a cosmological vision of the "four great elements" as constituting all existence in a dynamic of Yin and Yang, Shōsan asserts a Buddhist ethical stance: "The sun and moon . . . illuminate the world, this debt of gratitude is difficult to repay."¹⁶

It may be noted here that Shōsan also takes exception to a Christian esteem of miracles as "testimonies to the glory of Deus."¹⁷ Drawing in part on the Buddhist suspicion of the supernatural in contemplative experience, he asserts, "Men who endeavor to practice the Buddha's Way . . . have no use at all for miracles."¹⁸ Shōsan's dismissal of divine creation, biological and cosmic anthropocentrism, and miracles come to be amplified in the modern period when Buddhists sought to align Buddhism with modern science and cast Christianity as unscientific.

Overall, Shōsan views Christian teachings as a truncated tradition, with the entire dimension of the transcendent—ineffable, inconceivable, and apprehended only

hear this “new way.” . . . Christianity alone brings true repentance. . . . a deep personal loathing of sin is practically unknown [in Japan]. . . . Christianity alone awakens a true spirit of prayer. If no sense of sin and no deep repentance, true prayer by sinful man is impossible.²⁴

When Shaku Sōen speaks of Buddhist priests’ duty “to cultivate the faith of their believers,” he may have in mind something of the personal experiential religiosity Gordon proclaims as the power of Christianity. Gordon further states, “Christianity makes loving service to mankind more prominent than other religions.” The challenge of articulating both a personal and a corporate social ethic was also keenly felt by Buddhists. Roused by the work of Christian missionaries, Buddhists began to advocate the establishment of schools, hospitals, and various kinds of chaplaincies.

It may be said, however, that Buddhist engagement with Christian thought had to wait until attacks on Buddhism and Buddhist institutions as superstitious, parasitic, and socially reactionary had subsided sufficiently for Buddhists and Christians to begin to meet together for exchange.

THE ROLE OF CHRISTIAN TRADITION IN THE MODERNIZATION OF BUDDHIST THOUGHT

The Japanese Buddhist response to Christian tradition from the beginning of the twentieth century tended to be dominated by two interrelated trends: the attempt to reinterpret and articulate the nature of the Buddhist and Christian traditions, and the relationship between them, under the newly introduced categories of “philosophy” and “religion”; and the attempt to modernize Buddhist teachings by adopting modes of thinking about religious life discerned in Christian tradition and by probing the significance of Christian theological concepts and motifs.

Until the latter half of the nineteenth century, there were no terms or concepts in Japanese corresponding to the abstract categories of “philosophy” and “religion.” Nevertheless, the study of Western philosophy began to be diligently pursued even before the Meiji restoration as an important body of Western learning crucial for modern Japan, along with the natural sciences and other forms of knowledge. The accepted term corresponding to “religion,” *shūkyō*, came into use as the standard equivalent for the Western concept from the 1860s, when it was required for the translation of diplomatic documents in which representatives of Western nations asserted the rights of religious practice for their citizens residing in Japan. In terms of actual content, therefore, it was at first closely associated with Christianity.

For Buddhists, the concepts of philosophy and religion came to assume particular significance when they began to compare Buddhism and Christianity and to seek a framework in which to view both traditions together. Here, the concepts of philosophy and religion provided the means not only for positioning Buddhism in relation to

life experience, Soga stood within Shin Buddhist teachings and sought to show their vital significance, partly through comparison with Christian modes of thought.

M. L. Gordon, in an article explaining Amida Buddha and the Pure Land for other missionaries, quotes Rhys Davids as characterizing them as “hypothetical beings, the creations of a sickly scholasticism, hollow abstractions without life or reality.”²⁷ In the 1880s, Christian missionaries undoubtedly felt confident that the exposure of Pure Land teachings as “tales” unknown to Gautama would lead to the dismantling of “the most powerful sect in Japan.” Pure Land Buddhists were keenly aware of such criticism, and it may have prompted Soga and others to ponder Christian ideas in exploring the religious meaning of Pure Land teachings. While temple institutions had pursued the study of Christian theology for polemical purposes, it appears that by the turn of the twentieth century, Buddhists had gained a new confidence to balance the ongoing sense of crisis and the latitude to be stimulated by Christian ideas.

In one of his seminal essays, “Savior on Earth,” Soga begins:

In the first part of July last year (1912) . . . I intuited the phrase, “The Tathagata (Amida) is myself,” and in the latter part of August . . . the phrase, “The Tathagata becomes me and saves me,” was bestowed on me. Finally, about October, I was brought to realize that “The Tathagata becomes me’ signifies the birth of Dharmakara Bodhisattva.”²⁸

This essay was published in 1913 in the magazine begun by Kiyozawa, *Seishinkai* (The world of spiritual living), fifteen years after the journal references to the Bible quoted above. Although Soga is spoken of as “arguably the most innovative thinker in modern Shin Buddhist history” by sectarian scholars, and although Soga employs the tradition Shin term “directed [by Amida]” (*ekō*) in speaking of his “revelation,” the possibility that Soga had been testing the possibilities of Christian ideas in developing Shin teachings appears undeniable. The term “savior” (*kyūshu*) in Soga’s title is widely used for Christ, and in comparative remarks in the essay, Soga asserts that the unique incarnation as Jesus limits God’s salvific power to Jesus personally, while Dharmakara is born in each person and becomes “the true subjectivity of the self in the desire for salvation.”

Soga not only counters criticisms that Amida is merely mythical and that Pure Land Buddhism lacks historical foundations, but strongly affirms the immediacy of personal religious experience in Shin in doctrinal terms. Christian concepts related to kenosis, incarnation in historical time, and trinity may have stimulated Soga’s rethinking of the relationship between practitioner and Amida. There is also a temporal dimension involved. Although the Mahayana logic of the nonduality of the temporal, and the uncreated, had been articulated before in Japanese Pure Land tradition, Christian critique and Augustinian concepts of time and eternity may have contributed to Soga’s interpretation of the vast time spans of the narrative of Dharmakara’s vows and practice. Soga comments:

People are apt to consider this as an old tale that has nothing to do with their present selves. In fact, however, the one-moment wherein Dharmakara Bodhisattva evoked the faith of sincere entrusting is an absolute moment that embraces innumerable

eons. And equally the first moment wherein we are made to experience faith is an absolute moment that covers innumerable eons. . . . The present of faith is the great present of immeasurable life.²⁹

Christianity challenged Japanese Buddhists by teaching a personal religiosity and a stringent individual moral responsibility. Kiyozawa offers a prominent example of the attempt to engage these issues. Regarding the narrative of the origin of Amida Buddha and the Pure Land, which Gordon and other Christian missionaries regarded as obvious fictions created late in the tradition, Soga may have found resources for his thought in the very sources of the criticisms. It may be that in the Mahayana traditions of Japan in particular, the development of concepts of the compassionate emergence out of emptiness or formless reality provided for an openness and point of entry into certain areas of Christian thought.

POSTSCRIPT

Although I have focused on the case of Japan, it may be argued that a broad, representative range of basic issues in Asian Buddhist engagement with Christian tradition may be found there. Precisely the same challenges that I have surveyed are also found in the case of Sri Lanka, for example, where—somewhat ironically in the light of Gordon's intra-Buddhist comparative criticisms of Japanese Buddhism—"the main Christian accusations were that Buddhist doctrine was irrational, unscientific and nihilistic and that its ethics were non-operative."³⁰ As we have seen, in addition to Buddhists' emphasis on modern philosophical or scientific compatibility, they adopted Christian involvement in social concerns such as education, health, and the shaping of communal life.

Further, the same difficulty in disentangling the encounter with Christianity from the impact of modernity and Western scientific knowledge that I have considered in the case of Japan arises with regard to Sri Lanka and other Buddhist nations as well: "It was in countering the Christian missionary construction of Buddhism that Sri Lankan revivalists consciously appropriated Western arguments, and this is where the lines between what was drawn from the West and from the East blur."³¹ In Asian Buddhist countries, the glaring threat of increasing political domination by Western nations, or in most cases the actual experience of colonialism is undoubtedly the dominant factor in religious encounter. Thus, we find that in China, for example,

There has rarely been any exchange between Buddhists and Christians, and when it has occurred it has mostly been accompanied by more or less bitter polemic. And time after time theological-philosophical dialogue has been influenced by the problem of how China can find its political and national identity in the modern world without giving up its cultural identity.³²

As we have seen in the case of Japan, although an alignment and legitimization of Buddhism as a philosophy may be argued, especially in connection with a critique of Christian doctrines of creation and revelation as unscientific, a prerequisite for genuine engagement with Christian ideas appears to be mutual respect and a certain level of social stability in Buddhist institutions. When these conditions arose in Japan from about the turn of the twentieth century, in the fields of philosophy and Buddhist thought, figures appeared who explored Christian tradition for resources for the development of Buddhist doctrine. During the twentieth century, philosophers such as Nishida Kitarō, Tanabe Hajime, Nishitani Keiji, Takeuchi Yoshinori, and Abe Masao have drawn on both Christian and Japanese Buddhist traditions, particularly Pure Land and Zen, in engaging modern philosophical issues. Within Japanese Buddhist temple institutions themselves, however, engagement with Christian theological thought has been limited in impact.

NOTES

1. Michael Cooper, *They Came to Japan: An Anthology of European Reports on Japan, 1543–1640* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1965), 373.
2. Suzuki Shōsan, “Destroying Christianity,” c. 1642.
3. George Elison, *Deus Destroyed: The Image of Christianity in Early Modern Japan* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973).
4. Winston L. King, *Death was His Kōan: The Samurai-Zen of Suzuki Shōsan* (Berkeley, CA: Asian Humanities Press, 1986), 377.
5. *Ibid.*, 387.
6. *Ibid.*, 378.
7. *Ibid.*, 385.
8. *Ibid.*, 378–79.
9. *Ibid.*, 384–85.
10. *Ibid.*, 377.
11. Elison, *Deus Destroyed*, 43.
12. King, *Death was His Kōan*, 378.
13. *Ibid.*
14. *Ibid.*, 382.
15. *Ibid.*, 379.
16. *Ibid.*, 380.
17. *Ibid.*, 381.
18. *Ibid.*, 382.
19. *Ibid.*, 379.
20. *Ibid.*, 386.
21. M. L. Gordon, “The Religious Influence of Buddhism as an Obstacle to the Reception of the Gospel in Japan,” in *Proceedings of the General Conference of the Protestant Missionaries of Japan, Held at Osaka, Japan, April, 1983* (Yokohama: R. Meiklejohn and Company, 1883).
22. M. L. Gordon, “The Doctrine of Amida is Unauthentic,” *The Chrysanthemum: A Monthly Magazine for Japan and the Far East* 3 (1882): 108.

23. Notto R. Thelle, *Buddhism and Christianity in Japan: From Conflict to Dialogue, 1854–1899* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1987), 197.
24. M. L. Gordon, *An American Missionary in Japan* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1893), 213–14.
25. Ānanda Josephson Jason, “When Buddhism Became a ‘Religion’: Religion and Superstition in the Writings of Inoue Enryō,” *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 33, no. 1 (2006): 143–68.
26. James Edward Ketelaar, *Of Heretics and Martyrs in Meiji Japan: Buddhism and Its Persecution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 146.
27. M. L. Gordon, “The Legend of Amida,” *The Chrysanthemum: A Monthly Magazine for Japan and the Far East* 2 (1882): 4.
28. Soga Ryōjin, “Savior on Earth” (*Chijō no kyūshu*), in Mark L. Blum and Robert F. Rhodes, eds., *Cultivating Spirituality: A Modern Shin Buddhist Anthology* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2011), 107 (in his 1913 translation).
29. *Ibid.*, 115 (in his 1913 translation).
30. Elisabeth J. Harris, *Theravāda Buddhism and the British Encounter: Religious, Missionary and Colonial Experience in Nineteenth Century Sri Lanka* (London: Routledge, 2006), 187.
31. *Ibid.*, 186–87.
32. Whalen Lai and Michael von Brück, *Christianity and Buddhism: A Multi-cultural History of Their Dialogue* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001), 94.

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the convenient fiction by which the Jesuit missionaries were able to make sense of their position as insiders in the Chinese society. The Jesuits themselves called their approach “accommodation” (i.e., abandoning their European identity in order to accommodate themselves to the natives and become truly Chinese). Through this process of accommodation, the Jesuits went beyond drawing a correlation between themselves and the *ru* to becoming *ru* themselves, and therefore reinventing themselves as indigenous Chinese. The strategy of accommodation was effectively a process of Sinification—the Jesuits accepted the necessity of being Chinese, the superiority of the Chinese ways over European ways, and accommodated themselves to it by diligent study of language, cultural norms, customs, and rites. As Jensen rightly points out, this accommodation could not have been accomplished without the indulgence, generosity, magnanimity, and ultimately, embrace and acceptance on the part of the Chinese. Jensen goes on to explain: “What is most striking about the accommodationist endeavor is its success in generating a native Chinese identity for the fathers: they conducted themselves in a Chinese manner and were, in turn, recognized as Chinese.”³ Indeed, Ricci himself acknowledged in his letter of November 1584 to his former schoolmate, Giulio Fuligatti, “I have become a Chinaman. In our clothing, in our books, in our manners, and in everything external we have made ourselves Chinese.”

Fourth, Jensen perceives this process of accommodation as leading to a creative theology which proposes that the “original” *ru* of “Confucius” of Chinese antiquity enshrined an incipient monotheism and moral-ethical truth that pointed to a pre-existent presence of the “true” message of Jesus within the teachings of Confucius as the founding patriarch of the *ru* tradition, as Matteo Ricci would later argue in his *magnum opus*, *Tianzhu shiyi* (True significance of the heavenly master), the second of two early catechisms that the Jesuits produced for their Chinese converts. Jensen also points out an often overlooked but significant fact, that is, the Jesuits also unilaterally reorganized the traditional Confucian canon, favoring the Four Books (i.e., the *Daxue*, *Lunyu*, *Mengzi*, and *Zhongyong*) over the Five Classics (i.e., the *Shijing*, *Shujing*, *Liji*, *Yijing*, and *Chunqiu*), but rereading them in an order that was contrary to the tradition first established by the canon’s original compiler, Zhuxi, in order to support this reinterpretation of the teachings of “Confucius.” Instead of following Zhuxi’s instructions to start with the *Daxue* (Great learning), followed by the *Lunyu* (Analects), the *Mengzi* (Book of Mencius), and the *Zhongyong* (Doctrine of the mean), the Jesuits read *Lunyu* first, followed by the *Daxue*, the *Zhongyong*, and the *Mengzi*. Jensen asserts that in doing so, the Jesuits were not only manufacturing a new way of understanding “Confucianism” or the *ru* tradition that is constructed from a selection of texts but also aligning the Christian scriptures with the selected Confucian texts to illustrate the theological compatibility between the Christian Gospel and the “Confucian” tradition. Jensen terms this a masterly stroke by the Jesuits to assert that salvation is implicit in Chinese culture and the teachings of “Confucius,” thereby making an appeal to ancient Chinese heritage and tradition for the veracity of the Christian Gospel.

History remembers two of Matteo Ricci’s Chinese students, Xu Guangqi (1562–1633) and Li Zhizao (1565–1630), together with Yang Tingyun (1557–1627) as the “Three Pillars

the Christian message in the Chinese context after years of painstaking study of the Confucian classics.

Unfortunately, for Xavier, Yajiro was a samurai and not a scholar, and therefore could neither read the classical *kanji* script nor grasp the subtleties of Buddhist philosophical thought. Not surprisingly, Yajiro uncritically chose terms from his Shingon Buddhist background to translate corresponding Christian terms (e.g., *Dainichi* for God, *jodo* for heaven, *jigoku* for hell, and *tennin* for angels). Xavier soon discovered, to his horror and dismay that the use of these terms only confused the Japanese, who thought the Jesuits were Buddhist monks preaching another form of Buddhism. As a result, Xavier and his fellow Jesuits in Japan retreated from any attempt at inculturation. Instead of looking for Japanese equivalents, Xavier chose to transliterate from Latin to Japanese (e.g., *Deusu* from Deus, *ekerija* from ecclesia, and *artaru* from altare).

More significantly, Xavier's ill-advised attempt at inculturation handicapped Alessandro Valignano. As the Jesuit Visitor to the East, Valignano dreamed of establishing truly indigenous Christian movements in East Asia. However, his dream was only realized in China through the efforts of Ricci, Ruggieri, and others. In Japan, Xavier's disastrous foray meant that the Jesuits in Japan never did engage in any meaningful way with the philosophical and religious traditions of medieval Japanese society with a view to inculturate the Gospel in that context.

Confucianism rose to dominance in Japan with the establishment of the Tokugawa Shogunate, which used the Confucian principle of the "Mandate of Heaven" (Chinese: *Tianming*, Japanese: *Tento*) to justify its mandate to rule Japan. A Confucian-based educational curriculum was implemented and Confucian moral-ethical principles utilized to orientate and govern the Japanese social hierarchy, thereby marginalizing the daimyos and their samurai armies. By this time, however, there were no missionaries left to engage in a dialogue with this emerging Confucianism. Instigated by the Dutch and English traders, the Tokugawa Shogunate was also openly hostile and persecuted Jesuit missionaries, making no distinction between the missionaries and the Iberian empires that they came from, and fearing the Jesuit missionaries to be spies or a fifth column for a possible invasion of Japan. The Tokugawa Shoguns also implemented the policy of "Sakoku" that barred all foreigners from Japan on the penalty of death, thereby turning Japan into a closed society. Native Japanese Christians were ruthlessly rounded up and executed, driving them underground as "hidden Christians" (*Kakure Kirishitan*).

KOREA

Established by Yi Sŏngkye, who overthrew the Koryŏ Dynasty, and spanning more than five centuries from 1392 until the annexation of Korea by Japan in 1910, the Chosŏn Dynasty has the distinction of being the longest continuous Confucian dynasty in the world. Making a break with the dominant Buddhist influence over statecraft in

Chinese priest Zhu Wenmiao arrived in Korea in 1794, he was amazed to find a thriving lay-led Korean church that had not only survived but thrived for decades without a priest or foreign missionary support.

Nonetheless, the Chosŏn rulers and the conservative Korean Confucian elite who occupied positions of power and authority felt threatened by the energy and vitality of Christianity that was slowly but inexorably gaining influence among the *yangban* and common folk alike at the expense of Confucianism, and feared that Christianity would undermine the foundations of the Korean Confucian imperial ideology and loosen their grip over the kingdom. Moreover, the Korean Confucian establishment and the Chosŏn kings perceived the nascent Christian movement as a perversion of the true path of Confucianism. Beginning in 1801 and lasting almost to the end of the nineteenth century, the Chosŏn kings ruthlessly persecuted and executed Christians.

VIETNAM

Confucianism (*Nho-giáo*) was first introduced into Vietnam by the Chinese colonial bureaucracy during the second period of Chinese colonization known as the Hán-Việt (Sino-Vietnamese) Era (43–544 C.E.). After the suppression of the anti-Chinese uprising of 39–43 C.E., the Chinese had instituted a policy of forced Sinicization of the Vietnamese people by the imposition of Chinese language and culture, as well as Confucian sociopolitical institutions. Even after the Vietnamese regained their autonomy in 939 C.E. in the aftermath of the fall of the Tang Dynasty, Confucianism merely suffered a temporary setback for several decades, before returning in full force as the official ideology of several indigenous Vietnamese dynasties, namely the Lý, Trần, Lê, and Nguyễn Dynasties. It was the Lý Dynasty that revived Confucianism as a means of consolidating its grip over the country. For this purpose, the Confucian program of education and statecraft of Song-era China was imported, the first Confucian “temple of literature” (*văn miếu*) in the imperial capital was dedicated in 1070, the first Vietnamese civil service examination under the Confucian model was instituted in 1075 and the first national university was founded in 1076. As a result, Confucianism penetrated every level of society from the imperial court to the humble village. From the fifteenth century onward, Confucianism became the dominant orthodoxy for maintaining national integration and stability, beginning with the Lê Dynasty and reaching its zenith in the Nguyễn Dynasty when Emperor Gia Long and his successors implemented a rigorous policy of Confucianization at all strata of the nineteenth-century Vietnamese society.

The earliest presence of Jesuits in Vietnam goes back to 1615 when François Busomi and Diego Carvalho fleeing from the persecution in Japan reached the port of Hoi accompanied by three Japanese Christians. Full scale Jesuit missionary work, however, started with the arrival of Alexandre de Rhodes in 1624. Taking a leaf from Ricci and his confreres in China, de Rhodes made the effort to master the Vietnamese language and study the social, cultural, and religious traditions of the Vietnamese.

Of the three religions he encountered in Vietnam (i.e., Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism), de Rhodes bitterly attacked Daoism and Buddhism, while vacillating between openness and ambivalence toward Confucianism. In his landmark 1998 study on de Rhodes, *Mission and Catechesis: Alexandre de Rhodes and Inculturation in Sixteenth Century Vietnam*, Peter Phan explained that de Rhodes, while acknowledging the profound and beneficial influence of Confucian moral, social, and political teachings on the Vietnamese society, nevertheless distinguished carefully between the teachings of Confucius and the cult rendered to him, the former being acceptable as compatible with Christianity while the latter was condemned. At the same time, de Rhodes criticized Confucianism for what he perceived to be its failure to teach the existence of a supreme creator God, the immortality of the soul, and the existence of afterlife.

On the issue of the Confucian principle of filiality (Chinese: *xiao*, Vietnamese: *hiếu*) that formed the cornerstone of Vietnamese culture, de Rhodes acknowledged that this principle occupies a central position in Vietnamese society. Rather than simply condemning and prohibiting traditional practices of filiality, de Rhodes instead sought to Christianize them by replacing them with overtly Christian practices, for example, offering votive masses and prayers for the souls in purgatory and performing works of charity in the name of the dead. Phan cites the example of how de Rhodes persuaded Christian converts to replace the burning of offerings of paper clothes for the dead with buying real clothes for the living poor.

More importantly, de Rhodes was deeply suspicious of the cult of Confucius. While he recognized that it is possible to have a civil and political interpretation of the ritual, given its potential for superstitious interpretation, de Rhodes argued for its complete prohibition. Peter Phan explains this discrepancy between de Rhodes and his confreres in China by pointing out that de Rhodes, not being a scholar of Confucianism, lacked Ricci's in-depth and intimate knowledge of the Confucian classics. Phan further notes that because de Rhodes was "deeply in touch with the common people for whom many of the gestures and objects in the Confucian rites, whatever their original symbolism, were susceptible to superstitious interpretation," he probably "thought it wise, pastorally, to forbid them altogether." At the same time, Phan also recognizes that de Rhodes's rigid prohibition seemed to have offended at least two influential Vietnamese Confucian scholars, deterring them from embracing Christianity.

ANCESTOR VENERATION AND THE CHINESE RITES' CONTROVERSY

In the encounter between the Gospel and East Asians, nothing was more explosive than the controversy surrounding the ancestor veneration rites traditionally associated with Confucius and his teaching on filiality (*xiao*). The ancestor veneration

rites involve a complex interplay of deep-rooted religious, spiritual, and sociological factors in Confucian societies. Ancestor veneration rites vary from the historical but now defunct official rites performed by the emperor and his court for well-being of the entire nation, to the rites performed in Confucian shrines (*wenmiao*) by Confucian scholars, to the rites in honor of the local patron deity of a city or village called the “God of Walls and Moats” (*Chenghuang*) performed by the local city or village officials, and at the domestic level, to the rites performed by living family members in honor of the deceased family members. They have a long unbroken historical tradition supposedly dating from as far back as the Xia Dynasty, although much of the ritual repertoire first emerged during the Shang Dynasty, developed during the Zhou Dynasty, and refined in the Han Dynasty.

Matteo Ricci and his confreres viewed these rites as purely cultural and civic acts (*ritus mere civilis*), and therefore non-religious in nature. They perceived these rites as merely serving the social function of preserving good order in the Chinese society by means of achieving harmony through ritualized performance that simply seeks to reaffirm the hierarchical ordering of kinship and generational relations. Controversy erupted when the Dominican missionary Juan Bautista Morales contended that these rites were superstitious and erroneous. Morales’s complaint echoed the different perspectives of the Jesuits, on the one hand, and the Dominicans, Franciscans, and the missionaries from the Société des Missions Etrangères de Paris (MEP), on the other hand, over the identification of the normative meaning of the ancestor veneration rites. If the normative meaning of these rites were agnostic and rationalistic, as the Jesuits had claimed, then the rites were civil in nature. However, if a religious meaning could be ascribed to the rites, as the Dominicans, Franciscans, and the MEP missionaries insisted, then the rites were superstitious in nature. The Jesuit missionaries had adopted the rationalistic and agnostic approach of the Chinese literati, who, schooled in the Neo-Confucian philosophical thinking that emerged during the Song Dynasty, denied any divinity in the person of Confucius. This paved the way for the Jesuits to regard the ancestor veneration rites in honor of Confucius as purely honorary and ceremonial. The Dominicans, Franciscans, and the MEP missionaries argued that the folk religiosity surrounding the practice of ancestor veneration rites among the ordinary Chinese was clearly superstitious. For them, the meaning of these rites was anything but non-religious. This controversy raged for more than a century until Benedict XIV prohibited these rites in the bull *Ex quo singulari* (July 11, 1742).

Rome’s prohibition against the practice of ancestor veneration rites by East Asian converts led to the prolonged persecution of East Asian Catholics in China, Korea, and Vietnam over their refusal to participate in these rituals. Eventually, Rome reversed its prohibition through two instructions, *Pluries instanterque* (1936) and *Plane compertum est* (1939). Today, East Asian Catholics worldwide are allowed to participate in modified forms of ancestor veneration rites which comprise only the supposedly civil ritual elements and such other ritual elements which have been secularized over the passage of time.

RETHINKING THE HISTORICAL CHARACTERIZATION OF ANCESTOR VENERATION RITES

At the heart of this controversy is the different perspectives between Rome, which viewed the ancestor veneration rites through an *orthodoxic* lens, and East Asian Confucian societies, which are historically *orthopraxic* in orientation. Moreover, an “either-or” dichotomy in the characterization of the ancestor veneration rites is artificial at best because these rites are being isolated from their orthopraxic Confucian *Sitz-im-Leben* to be analyzed and judged through the orthodoxic lens of European Catholicism, resulting in a great injustice being done to the integrity of these rites themselves. Such a dichotomy also imposes an orthodoxic bias that favors the thought-intellect over action, assuming that ritual action merely expresses an *a priori* normative meaning, ideology, or paradigmatic belief. Accordingly, if it is possible to identify the normative meaning, ideology, or paradigmatic belief behind these rites as civil and therefore secular in nature, then these rites are permissible. However, if the normative meaning, ideology, or paradigmatic belief is identified as religious and therefore superstitious, then they are not permissible. This begs the question whether such an *a priori* premise is tenable in the first place.

More importantly, such an either-or characterization also highlights the fundamental clash between the orthodox orientation of European Catholicism that privileges belief in correct doctrines, dogmas, creeds, or teachings and excommunicates heretics who deviate from these correct beliefs. On the other hand, there is the orientation on orthopraxis of the East Asian Confucian societies with their emphasis on proper ritualized performance of behavioral responsibilities. While ritual in an orthodox culture is perceived as the secondary expression of one’s cultural identity which is formed or shaped primarily by concepts, beliefs, or norms, Judith Berling explains that ritual in a culture that emphasizes orthopraxis is perceived as the primary expression of cultural identity (i.e., ritual defines who belongs within an orthopraxic culture).

From a historical perspective, the orthopraxic nature of the Chinese culture may be seen in: (1) the way in which the Chinese people have perceived themselves generally, that is, as a group-oriented culture that is centered on participation in group activities rather than as an individual-oriented culture that is centered on the concept of one’s self-identity; and (2) the overarching role that ritual plays in the proper ordering of this group-oriented identity. It is revealing that the Chinese language does not distinguish between a person, a community, or the entire nation of Chinese people. It uses the same ideograph (*ren*) for all three categories. This is not to say that the concept of an individual self does not exist in the Chinese culture, only that its existence is usually perceived within the perspective of the community as a whole.

Within this communal framework, *li* or ritual observance, which also has connotations of propriety, etiquette, and ethical conduct, plays an important role in

establishing and shaping order, unity, cohesion, and harmony among the Chinese people. The Chinese ideograph for *li* combines a radical ideograph that means “altar” with ideographs for a vase of flowers placed over a sacrificial vessel. In its original context, *li* seems to refer to rituals associated with “sacrificial offering” at the ancestral altar. Over time, *li* was extended beyond the ritual of ancestor veneration *simpliciter* to encompass the norms of proper conduct and the modes of comporting oneself vis-à-vis others in a community. In contemporary Chinese usage, *li* comprises a whole range of meanings, including ritual, ceremony, courtesy, etiquette, and proper manners. For example, the phrase *limao* means polite; hence, a rude person is a person who has no *li*.

The important role that *li* plays in forming and shaping the orthopraxic Chinese cultural identity is conventionally traced back to Confucius. Living in a period of general anarchy that was marked by the absence of a central imperial government after powerful warlords defied the weakened Zhou rulers, Confucius yearned for the reestablishment of a strong central government to promote harmony, unity, and peace within China. He postulated that the Early Zhou period was harmonious, united, and peaceful as a result of the practice of *li*, while the present strife, chaos, and destruction was the result of the failure to practice *li*. Accordingly, Confucius taught that *li* embodies the harmonious ordering of human relationships in the Chinese society. For Confucius, the proper observance of *li* results in filiality (*xiao*) toward parents, elders, and ancestors, as well as propriety (*yi*) toward friends. A person who embodies filiality (*xiao*) and propriety (*yi*) as a result of the practice of *li* is said to possess *ren*, the highest Confucian virtue of “being human.”

From the Han dynasty until the collapse of the Qing Dynasty, successive Chinese emperors sought to exploit *li* to legitimize their rule in a diverse, pluralistic, fragmented, and often warring empire by promoting, despite incongruities with grass-roots attitudes, a single cosmologically rooted ordering of harmony, cohesion, and unity between the divine and human realms through strategic ritualization, that is, using *li* to ensure that everyone—the gods, ancestral spirits, rulers, and common folk alike—all had a proper place in the Chinese heaven-earth (*tian-tu*) cosmology. Similarly, the contemporary Taiwanese American philosopher Tu Wei-Ming concludes that social order in imperial China is maintained, not by law, but by *li*.

In other words, the actual “meaning” of the ancestor veneration rites is not as important as the participation in these rites as a symbol of solidarity and unity. Indeed, in orthopraxic Confucian societies, ancestor veneration rites may encompass a diverse range of meanings, as may be seen in the coexistence of both “official” meanings (as defined by the elite, e.g., Confucian scholars, as well as Ricci and his collaborators) and “popular” or “folk” meanings of the common masses, which may differ significantly from the “normative” meanings (as de Rhodes, the Dominicans, Franciscans, and the MEP missionaries had observed). What matters for East Asian Confucians is that by the proper observance of *li*, a family or person was considered *zheng* (orthopraxic). Any family or person who failed to conform to *li* would stand out immediately like a sore thumb, and be branded as *xie* (heteropraxic).

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On the serial nature of “conversion” (Hindus converting to Buddhism, for instance, and Buddhists reconverting to Hinduism), a more encyclopedic overview³ might highlight the “victory” over Buddhism of the great Śāṅkara (an eighth-century A.D. Vedantic philosopher) and of lesser-known bhakti saints, Śāivite and Vaiṣṇavite, who drove the Dhamma (or Dharma) of the Buddha out of India into Central Asia and beyond where missionaries such as the one depicted at Dunhuang passed on the torch. About Śāṅkara, a vast hagiological literature came into being trumpeting his transcontinental exploits over Buddhists (Jains, Materialists, etc.) in public debates (*śāstrārthas*) where the penalty for the loser was apostasy. In medieval Europe, Śāṅkara’s corollary would be the hallowed missionary saints who converted the Barbarians, also confrontationally. Still, for all the similarities, talk of “conversion” (from the Latin *conversio*, meaning a turn to piety from impiety) sounds somehow awkward in most Asian contexts, as though it were a phenomenon associated, culturally and conceptually, almost exclusively with Europe and Christianity. Nonetheless, I will argue that the word has a certain transcultural utility, despite the critics, who are legion,⁴ and even though “conversion” invariably invokes its Latin twin, “religion,” another term overburdened with unhelpful connotations of exclusion and encapsulation. Both words were an integral part of the cultural lexicon that Christian missionaries carried with them overseas. It being so often the case in Asia that affinity is rarely singular and identity often additive, one can understand why the kind of “conversion” envisioned for Asia by generations of Xaviers and Judsons might seem culturally alienating, without being utterly foreign. And so it did, as a source from early seventeenth-century Vietnam illustrates. There, in the market of Da Nang, Christophoro Borri, a Jesuit, witnessed a parody of missionaries urging the populace to convert. Whatever term was used, it evidently meant “entering into the belly of the Portuguese.”⁵

Until its Christian conditioning is recognized and there is some traction on the multiple meanings assigned to “conversion” by social science theorists, the analytical utility of the word will remain uncertain and the inverted commas around it will have to stay. More often than not, “conversion” elicits a preloaded association with experiences that are generally characterized as visionary, sudden, overwhelming, ecstatic, and aoristic because of being time-bound in the past. Of this, the paradigm would be the Apostle Paul’s transformative encounter with the risen Christ on the Damascus road. At first blush, however, it seems doubtful that “conversion” could ever be understood, constructively, in a way so lopsidedly interioristic, as an event within the human psyche, isolated from social context. As a process, not an event, with an uncertain beginning and unknown end, “conversion” might be better imagined as involving a multiplicity of processes, catalyzed by a variety of determinants operating discretely and often indiscernibly on a number of contextual levels: micro-, meso-, and macro-. As such, “conversion” occurs within specific ecologies, affected by wild-card variables that resist simplistic reductionism. What is more, all notions of “conversion” fail, analytically, whenever they presuppose as its most necessary entailment the rejection and replacement of religious beliefs. Empirically, social scientists see something less than a total rupture with the past, even though converts themselves often speak of that occurring. Another

assumption thrown into doubt—surprisingly, given the long reign of the dominant New Testament paradigm—is that “conversion” must elicit an experience of any kind at all, much less one of “finding Jesus,” being “reborn,” or getting “saved.” On the contrary, and despite the permutations, which, naturally, are numerous, it helps to think of the lively academic debate now unfolding in terms of a much-contested polarity: in “conversion,” which precedes the other—intellectualization or commitment?

ROBIN HORTON’S “INTELLECTUALIST” MODEL

Some of Asia’s most-concentrated Christian populations are found in remote geographical pockets such as the interstitial highlands of the South and Southeast. Located in the rugged terrain of Northeast India and Northwest Myanmar, these are places where the image of India as Hindu or Myanmar as Buddhist describes a faraway world: for the tribal minorities who reside there, the lived reality would be “Christian” (albeit differently Christian). In these and similar areas scattered across Asia, whole kinship groups and entire ethnolinguistic communities whose traditional religions—once called “primal” or “animistic”—have been swept up in a complex process of Christianization. As much of the growth in Asian Christianity occurs in such areas, social science research has largely been focused upon them; the findings, however, are relevant wherever folk religions flourish, including China, Korea, and Japan. A pioneering study is Richard Eaton’s on the Nagas of India’s Northeastern Highlands whose conversion to Protestant Christianity was virtually complete within a century. Drawing on cultural anthropologist Robin Horton, Eaton frames his case study with a helpfully clarifying question: “Who, in the meeting of two cultures is actually changing whom? And what, in the end, is actually changing?”⁶ Although Horton’s seminal theory of conversion was formulated to account for Christianity’s emergence as an African religion, Eaton makes a good argument for its cross-cultural portability. To appreciate its relevance, however, there is a certain “buy in” (as it were), since traditional religions are the basis for comparison, and Eaton assumes that Asia’s are the analogues of Africa’s. Once the categories are clear, one can appreciate Horton’s two most distinctive contributions to the debate about conversion: (1) the agents of change are usually or always indigenous, and (2) much of the action most worth watching occurs within the indigenous cosmology, whatever the form it might manifest.

Rationality and resilience are the main features that stand out in Horton’s discussion of African traditional religions.⁷ Instead of being fated to fade away when confronted with Christianity, African cosmologies “rationally adapt” themselves (or, better, their believer/practitioners do) in response to changes in their environment. Adaptation occurs in ways that are distinctive of “cognitive reorganization” (as the process has been named) in being conscious and deliberate, premeditated and purposeful, rather than ad hoc or haphazard. Here, one begins to see where Horton stands on the question of

precedence (intellectualization versus commitment). As he later clarified: "Where people confront new and puzzling situations, they tend to adapt to them as far as possible in terms of their existing ideas and attitudes."⁸ That may be so, but the rates of adaptability differ, and Horton's ideal-typical cosmology therefore consists of two extremes. At one end are the people groups that inhabit the microcosmic world of self-sufficient agrarian communities. For purposes of explanation, prediction, and control (viz., of "real" world events), they turn to the "lesser beings" (ancestors, nature spirits, etc.) who are more immediately involved in their affairs than the remote and impassive "supreme being" ordinarily found at the pantheon's apex. Unless the equilibrium of the microcosm is shaken, Horton argues, that exalted divinity will remain no more than tacitly acknowledged. At the other extreme, however, are pastoralists, traders, and other peoples whose mobility allows them to interact with the macrocosmic world where they are exposed to a variety of translocal influences. For them, a "supreme being" who remains merely tacit will no longer suffice. Here, Horton invokes Weber's concept of "rationalization" (i.e., the realignment of belief with experience or the attribution of causality to one particular divinity). To such macrocosmically oriented people groups, Horton attributes a predisposition for "conversion."

Notice, though, Horton's remarkably brilliant maneuver, in terms of theory: instead of having his macrocosmically oriented people groups reject their cosmologies for an exogenous substitute, he has them adopt and adapt the idiom (cultic and theological) of Christianity without an ensuing betrayal of their own indigenous orientations. Process-wise, the step that follows next can be described best as pantheon *simplification*: that is, enhancement of the "supreme being" will come at the cost of the "lesser beings." They, however, are not abolished but merely demoted and disempowered. That being the case, it would be a mistake to think of this as pantheon *liquidation* or *substitution*. Cosmologically, the trajectory of traditional religions can now be most helpfully thought of as monolatric (i.e., neither polytheistic nor monotheistic, since the "lesser beings" are never absolutely otiose). In pre-Christian Africa, changes like these were "already in the air," Horton argues, because microcosms were constantly collapsing into macrocosms. Still, the most startling aspect of the Intellectualist Theory has got to be the claim that Christianity cannot be singled out as the cause of conversion but only as a stimulant or accelerant of a process that was underway already.⁹ Or, as Pamela Stewart and Andrew Strathern write, "Continuity hides in change," as though in plain sight, "and change hides in continuity."¹⁰ This would be evident in the conversion (as it were) not so much of persons or people groups but of deities and divinities—a change that occurs with a recalibration of the attention they receive (in worship, veneration, rituals of pacification, etc.). Quite compellingly, then, Horton makes a powerful argument for thinking of Christianity as an African religion. Appropriate adjustments considered, he also opens up new possibilities for thinking about the multidimensional process by which Nagas (and other highlander minorities) become Christian and Christianity, correspondingly, becomes Asian (Nagamese, etc.).

The downside to Horton's "Intellectualist" model comes plainly into view once the notion of "cognitive reorganization" is unpacked a bit more rigorously. Is it so very

obvious, for instance, that being religious amounts to having a systematized set of articulated beliefs one can step back from, appraise, and reconfigure? On the contrary, say those who reject Horton's "interiorist bias," as anthropologist Robert Hefner does (who worked on mid-twentieth-century Javanese Christianity): "Conversion is rarely the outcome of intellectual appeal alone."¹¹ At most, then, Horton may shed some helpful light on why people convert (a microcosm's implosion under colonial duress would be a typically precipitating cause) but very little as to what it actually means to be a convert. Conversion, one would think, also needs to be imagined as a dually-constructed process, both cognitive and social. A proponent of that approach would be Rita Smith Kipp whose study of Indonesia's Batak Protestants found that "a convert's new identity may at first be lightly worn and only dimly understood. What being a Christian . . . means is then rethought and renegotiated over the years."¹² In point of fact, the field research has yet to be done that will support the idea that prospective converts ever really think about "conversion" in the detached, distantiated way the Intellectualist Theory supposes. Horton may think that intellectualization precedes commitment, but the needs of the heart are often more fiercely urgent than the mind's, and an argument to that effect will be put forward under the following heading. Still, the analytical utility of Horton's model in the Asian context will be obvious. Without it, one might not see as clearly that the main agents of religious change are usually or always indigenous and that many of the most interesting developments occur, phenomenologically, within an ethnolinguistic community's pre-existing cosmology.¹³

ROBERT HEFNER'S "REFERENCE GROUP" MODEL

As mentioned earlier, social science theorists nowadays place comparatively little emphasis on conversion as a change of belief involving rejection and replacement. Unfortunately, for Horton, the tide has basically turned, despite the durability of his insights, highlighted above, on crucial matters having to do with agency and indigeneity. Not only does the Intellectualist Model send up a red flag for being unrealistically mentalistic, it would appear to commit the cardinal sin of abstracting individuals and communities from their social contexts. Increasingly, scholarship on conversion in the humanities—and not only the social sciences—evinces a more pronouncedly exteriorist bias, often in a creative relationship of dialectical tension with its opposite, the interiorist, which retains the important advantage of taking a convert's subjectivity into serious account. For instance, when testifying to the changes they undergo—or, undertake—in their lives, converts almost always employ an idiom that expresses their felt conviction of discontinuity with the past. Whether the rupture is real or imagined, it will in all likelihood be a rupture of *affiliation*—and not of cultural *continuity*, since such a complete break would be unimaginable.¹⁴ A shift of commitment from one religious community

For that to happen, however, exiocientricity will have to become less interio-exclusive and interiocentricity more exteriio-inclusive, to highlight the importance of a forthrightly dialectical methodology with a new vocabulary.¹⁶

CALCULATING LOSS AND GAIN

To move beyond the impasse, one need not disagree with Hefner that conversion is hardly ever “the outcome of intellectual appeal alone.” Indeed, one could go even further and reject as a fantasy the idea that conversion could ever be a purely cognitive process, but the truth of the dictum can be overstated. Reconfigurations of belief can and do occur over time, in advance of a formal (public) change of religion. This happens throughout Asia, and not only say, in cultural milieus where a corpus of sacred texts—Buddhist or Hindu, Confucian or Daoist—has been central to religious life, historically: “From whatever points of entrée people engage and re-engage with Christianity,” writes Michael Scott, an anthropologist, “they aspire to systematicity.”¹⁷ From that perspective, it seems unfortunate that the contemporary reception of Horton’s “Intellectualist” Model is ordinarily so hostile. By and large, the reason may simply be that social science research is mainly geared toward, and scaled to, largish ethno-linguistic populations and traditional (“animistic” or “primal”) societies. Individuals, then, who undergo—or undertake—a kind of cognitive reorganization, whose interactions with Christianity are more self-conscious than haphazard and more premeditated than ad hoc, are often overlooked. Among them are some who may be profoundly learned, scripturally (in a Buddhist sutra, say, the Veda, or the Qur’an), while others may seem less impressively grounded in a theological discipline. Without saying of them that textualized religion is the only world they live in, neither do they live entirely outside of one. Often, such individuals regard their own conversions in the present as incomplete until they have also converted, theologically, their pre-Christian past through a process of discovering and discerning the prevenient presence of God.

To bear this out and exemplify a balance between the cognitive and the social, it may help to make an excursus into the life of a Brahmin convert, Nehemiah (Nilakantha) Goreh (1825–1895) of Benares (Varanasi), who became an Anglo-Catholic after a gradual disenchantment with evangelical Anglicanism. Prior to taking the plunge (as it were), Nehemiah declared that he would not want to settle for anything less than being a “*pakkah*” (*pakkā*) Christian—a word from Hindi for things that are “complete” and “done the way they should be”—in case he actually did become one. Several years earlier (ca. 1844–45), Nehemiah had composed a substantial treatise in Sanskrit that faulted Christianity, theologically, for all sorts of contradictions and inconsistencies (its theodicy, etc.), but—surprisingly—not for its Trinitarianism. To him, the very mystery of it was suggestive of Divinity. On the cusp of his formal conversion (sealed in an Anglican Church, Holy Trinity, by a public baptism) and sounding a little ahead of himself in his ability to comprehend the incomprehensible, Nehemiah boasted of being able “to

manage that subject [viz., the Trinity] very well, because he only looked upon the persons [Father, Son, Holy Spirit] . . . as manifestations of assumed characters." Increasingly aware of how very mistaken he actually was, Nehemiah tried to wrap his mind around the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity throughout the remaining years of his life. In a final testament to his theological acumen, just before he died, he admitted that "there is a great mystery in the Essence of God which we cannot comprehend and cannot explain"—words that recall what he had said about the Trinity when still a Hindu. Here, then, one finds a kind of inner calculus of loss and gain at work, neither fully transparent to us at this remove nor fully opaque to him at his.¹⁸

Just as room should be made for a convert's cognitive concerns, so must it be made for the calculation of "material" interests, all the more so as we earlier saw that the "ideal" interests of the mind are often trumped by the needs of the heart. Although conversion involves both in varying degrees, the preponderance of the "material"—often perceived, disparagingly, as utilitarian—should be acknowledged and the implications considered. Years ago, Arthur Darby Nock, drawing on his studies of ancient Mediterranean religions, argued that conversion was categorically different from "adhesion." While conversion was an act of commitment from which there was no return, adhesion fell short: the adherents of Mithraism, for instance, could also belong to other Mystery religions. The conceptualization may have been weak, but Nock was on the right track; a more ample lexicon for talking about conversion is sorely needed, and a rehabilitation of the word is neither impossible nor impracticable. In terms similar to the ones above, anthropologist Joel Robbins proposes a kind of *détente*:

[The cognitive approach] has a difficult time accounting for the very early stages of conversion, those in which people first engage the new religion with very little sense of what it might provide them by way of intellectual resources. Since Christianity is unlikely to appear as fully coherent on people's first encounter with it, one imagines that other than strictly sense-making ones probably sustain those early contacts. . . . Good at explaining the initial impetus toward conversion, the utilitarian approach gives way to the intellectualist one when it comes time to explain why in some cases people stay with the new religion and come to engage it deeply.¹⁹

Or, Robbins might have said, adhesion and conversion are to be located on a continuum; they do not have to be pitted against each other, oppositionally. In this light and apart from their other functions, churches often serve as spaces-in-between where the uncommitted can try a Christian identity on (as it were) to see how one might feel.

And, in the final analysis, there is always the possibility—or probability—that motivations will change over time and that the ones that keep a person (or a people) "in the fold" (as Christians say) may begin to differ from the ones that brought them there in the first place. And yet, despite having transcultural potential, both words—"conversion" and "adhesion"—remain chained to that third word—"religion"—which has already been noted for its unhelpful connotations of exclusion and encapsulation. It also being the case that the self—or selves—can be individuated in a variety of ways and that

religious identities are often more fluid than fixed, one simply cannot ignore the fact that the lived Christianity of a believer or faith community may resemble adhesion more than conversion, from the perspective of an observer looking in on Asia from outside. A more tightly bounded identity and a more singular affinity might be taken to mean that one's Christianity had been metabolized in "the belly of the Portuguese."

WHO CHANGES WHOM?

Having reached this point, the first half (at least) of the helpfully clarifying question originally raised by Richard Eaton about the Nagas can now be addressed more generally in terms of indigenous as opposed to exogenous agency. While the historic contributions of Euro-American missions are not to be trivialized, Asian Christians (neither more nor less than others) are—in the final analysis—the ones who make themselves Christian. And that is so, despite the fact that grounds can always be adduced for also acknowledging that in some sense, unspecifiable apart from particular contexts, Christians are also made into Christians. Here, our concern ought to be to steer a middle course between the utterly unpredictable and the already predetermined. However, since at least the end of the colonial era in Asia, such questions are not only of theoretical interest—they are also intractably politicized. Nowhere is this truer than in the South, India particularly, where Christianity's much-contested legacy remains indelibly and insuperably foreign. Not only that, fears of political betrayal are perpetuated (by some, for political gain) as though each convert lost to Christianity were potentially a quisling and the churches a proverbial fifth column. In the aftermath of Independence (1947), a number of Indian states enacted legislation aimed at preventing conversion by "force," "fraud," "allurement," and "inducement"; only after a judicial review could a person convert, legally. Besides being unenforceable and susceptible to abuse, such restrictions presuppose that converts have no agency of their own or that they cannot act in their own best interests (whether ideal or material or both) even if they tried. On the contrary, according to activist ideologues and public intellectuals who agitate for "protective" interventionism, converts do not act for themselves but are only acted upon (ostensibly) in the worst interests of alien outsiders.²⁰

Historiographically, the narrative outlined above takes small truths and turns them into an absolutized, overriding "Truth" about conversion. From the "bottom up," however, a countervailing narrative emerges, told by converts themselves (in their own idiom), who imagine conversion as a phenomenon that enables—instead of disables—their achievement of an identity other than the one that others have scripted for them, immemorially and sometimes even coercively. Converts (or, as the case may be, convert communities) rarely cast themselves in the role of hapless victims, bowing to forces altogether beyond their control or unleashed upon them from overseas. Instead of being acted upon by outsiders, their self-understanding is that they act in their own best interests, however understood or misunderstood. And so, even though agency is always rife

with enigma and never absolutely unconstrained or isolated from the interplay of power and politics or uninfluenced by authority, indigenous or exogenous, conversion as converts understand it (existentially and not abstractly) will appear to open up (seemingly) endless possibilities for self-definition and self-determination through the unencumbered exercise of choice. In that perspective, the action most worth watching will not be, invariably, macro-contextual but meso- and micro-contextual as well, occurring on the ground or close to it, often (but not always) in surprisingly self-initiated ways. Like anyone's, a convert's identity is always negotiable, within certain constraints and never as if there had not been a degree of deep-time conditioning, functioning *a priori* and making some kinds of choices more likely than others. Colonial legacies die hard, however, and one of the most resilient images Christianity will continue to labor under will be that of its foreignness, notwithstanding all that was said above about conversion in the Asian *oecumene* as a constant and a commonplace, historically.²¹

AND WHAT REALLY CHANGES?

For the last half of the question Eaton asked, I want to draw attention to an intra-Christian critique of conversion, since my discussion of the first half was from an extra-Christian perspective. For an indigenous voice, I will highlight the work of a Dalit author from Jaffna in Sri Lanka, K. Daniel (1927–1986), a Tamil Catholic who had soured on Catholicism. On the question of what really changes when conversion occurs, a novel of his called *Mirage (Kānal)*²² tells us that while certain things do change (the locus of identity, for one, as Hefner might say), the change has got to be more consequential. For an author from a caste considered so polluting that until recently it was all but unseeable, publicly, one can be sure that his views on agency and adhesion, self-definition and self-determination are acute and worth a hearing. A story about the conversion of the Nalava, a caste almost as downtrodden as Daniel's own, *Mirage* opens with a semi-fictionalized Tamil missionary, Fr. Gnana Prakasar (Ñānappirakācar), declaring to the Nalavas, only recently catechized, converted, and confirmed, that they are "Jesus' slaves." To the Nalavas, that sounds a good deal better than remaining as they were, abused and oppressed by the Vellālas (the dominant landholding and cultivating caste), whose chattel slaves (*atimai*) they used to be. Hope is kindled and a spirit of resistance instilled, and that's how things stand, upbeat and optimistic, about 30 pages into a novel of substantial size. About 30 pages out, however, things turn bleak again, and at the end I am reminded of anthropologist Mathew Schmalz's Dalit Catholic informants who spoke to him of feeling like "crabs" unable to climb all the way out of a basket because other crabs keep pulling them back down: "on [the basket's] raised edges," as Schmalz explains, they at least experience a degree of autonomy, less than what they had dreamed of, but more than they had before becoming Catholic.²³

While change, even of a limited sort, is not to be trivialized, the denouement of Daniel's novel sounds like a literary explication of Marxist sociologist M. N.

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CHAPTER 29

CHRISTIAN ART AND ARCHITECTURE IN ASIA

GUDRUN LÖWNER

THE EARLY BEGINNINGS IN INDIA AND CHINA

ALTHOUGH the general thinking is that Christianity reached Asia together with the colonial powers at the end of the sixteenth century, this perception is wrong. There is a strong living tradition among the Thomas Christians in Kerala, India, that they are descendants in the faith of the apostle Thomas who is supposed to have come to Kodungalloor near Kochi in the South Indian state of Kerala in 52 C.E. and died as a martyr in 72 C.E. in Mylapore near Chennai. These few Christians must have built places of worship, but as the climate is not favorable to preserve wooden buildings, nothing of the early period survives. Therefore, the first surviving artistic proof of Christianity in India are granite crosses as found in Mylapore near Chennai India and two in Kottayam with inscriptions in old Persian language. They are called St. Thomas crosses (fig. 29.1).

Through the language Pahlavi, old Persian, the crosses are dated to the eighth century or earlier, since afterwards the language was no more used. The crosses appear to be standing on a lotus flower and are surrounded by a *thoran*, a highly ornamental archway, known from Buddhist and Hindu architecture. The *thoran* originates from the mouth of a *makara*, a sort of crocodile. Although very few churches in Kerala from the time before the arrival of the Portuguese in 1498 still exist, there is no doubt about the similarities in the buildings of Hindu temples and churches. Collins suggests that “the phenomena to be seen are the product of a shared cultural heritage, in which ‘borrowing’ and ‘cross-over’ occurred and existed in an un-self-conscious way.”¹ The Syrian Church in Chengannur, Kerala, is supposed to date back to the fourth century and has many features in common with a nearby Hindu temple. There are elaborate gateway houses, stone lamps, brass oil lamps, and wooden, stone, or brass flagpoles in front of church and temple. The flagpoles are erected till today and carry a flag on festival days. Inside temples and churches, there are frescoes, but as there was no concern



FIGURE 29.1 St. Thomas Cross, India

Source: Collection Gudrun Löwner @ photo G. Löwner.



FIGURE 29.2 Good Shepherd

Source: © Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

for the preservation of old murals, they were simply repainted when they needed a facelift, and so ancient ones are not available. In Angamaly in Kerala some biblical murals exist from the beginning of the seventeenth century, but the rest are all from a later period.

Another place where Nestorian Christianity coming from Persia arrived early is in Mongolia, China, and along the Silk Road. In 1625 an engraved stele was found in Xi'an, China, dating from February 4, 781. It stated that the Nestorian Christians reached China in 635. This stele carries a very interesting "dynamic, flowering, in thin lines engraved living cross."² Similar crosses were also found on later gravestones in the area of Nanjing. Typical for them is to have a cross standing on the lotus flower, as can be seen in many gravestones which were found also along the Silk Road till 1371/72. This type of cross is more a sign of the resurrected and cosmic Christ than of the dead one.

In Buddhism and Hinduism, the lotus flower stands for purity. Therefore, the Buddha and the goddess Lakshmi are portrayed standing on lotus flowers. Christians followed this example and depicted their most precious cross also on the lotus flower and sometimes included some Chinese-looking angels.³ The representations of the cross in China and India have a lot of similarities, both showing a transformation from the symbol of death to a symbol of life.

Another early example of inculturation is a silver plate from around the ninth to tenth century, showing different scenes like the biblical story of Rahab (Josh. 2:1–16), and in it portraying Jericho in the style of a fortress of central Asia like the one in Sogdia, and also depicting the uniforms of the soldiers from Sogdia. In this area Nestorian Christians were found from the eighth century onward.

At the end of the thirteenth century, the Franciscan missionary Fra Giovanni erected several churches in China. Among them is a richly painted cathedral in Zaiton, built through the gifts of an Armenian lady in 1313; it was destroyed together with all other churches in 1368, when the Mongolian rule came to an end and everything Christian was considered foreign and necessarily to be erased. Therefore, it can rightly be said that Christianity did not come to Asia through the colonial powers but predated colonialism. Although few artefacts have survived, it is clear that inculturation happened from day one of the cultural encounter and did not start in the twentieth century as many believe. Future excavations might bring more light to the early history of Christianity in Asia.

THE EARLY PORTUGUESE INFLUENCE IN INDIA

Through the *Padroado* system which forced the Portuguese kings to put missionaries on all their ships, a large number of Roman Catholic missionaries came to India and Ceylon. In architecture and painting, they followed the baroque models which were

modern at that time in their home country. Some good examples of these box-like churches, decorated with fancy facades and inside with beautiful, wood-carved, gilded large altarpieces can still be seen today, for example, in Goa where one finds the burial church of the great Asian missionary and Spanish Jesuit Francis Xavier (1506–1552). His Indian silver glass coffin stands on a carved marble tomb ordered from Italy. Generally, one can say that in the Portuguese colonies like India and Sri Lanka (Ceylon), as well as in Latin America, local artists were taught to reproduce Western art. In order to insure the dogmatic correctness of ivory statues, the Catholic Church tried to enforce rules that only baptized artists were allowed to work for churches. But artists who did not convert found a ready export market. Ivory statues of saints were much in demand for house altars and chapels for the rich people in the colonies, and for export to Italy, Spain, Portugal, and Latin America. Only one type represents an early inculturation, a fusion between Christian belief and Asian art form: Christ the Good Shepherd Mount also called rockery (John 10:11). One sees a meditative Christ reminiscent of the Indian shepherd Lord Krishna and Buddha with some sheep sitting on top of a tiered landscape which includes elements like thirsty birds in a rock garden drinking from a fountain the water of life (Eucharist). At the base of the mount is often found in a cave Mary Magdalene, the ideal penitent (fig. 29.2).

For the new converts, these representations of the gospel on the mount (rockeries) included all basic elements of the Christian belief without showing the crucifix (i.e., the cross with the dead body), which was only hesitantly accepted in Asia. In fact, in this representation, the Holy Spirit is seen in the form of a dove at the top, and God the Father seated on his throne in heaven above the Jesus/Krishna figure.

Today few Good shepherd rockeries have survived from the sixteenth to nineteenth century, but they were once the gospel for India in a nutshell carved in ivory for devotion. Olsen calls them “an image of the confluence of two cultures,” symbolizing “a bridge of contact.”⁴ The Mary statutes which were abundant in terms of quantity, on the other hand, had rarely any Indian features and were mostly simply copies of the European model.

Similarly, Christian statues were also produced in large numbers in Fujian since 1576, where Christian mission happened. From the Manila harbor founded in 1571, and from the Portuguese colony of Macao, China exported ivory statues, which had an extremely good market in Mexico, Peru, but also in Spain, Italy, and Portugal. Only a few figures show Chinese features and therefore it is today difficult to say where a particular statue was produced. It is to be noted that we know also very little about the artists who produced such statues. Chinese artists were experts in ivory and precious stone carving and had no religious problem, in copying Christian subjects, and painting them on cups or other utensils. They produced particularly the Holy Family and the crucified Christ, where they made good use of bent ivory tusks to show the bent body of Christ. Chinese artists also painted on silk. In Latin America, angels with real feathers were very much in demand.

A very large influence on the Indian Mogul miniature art arose through the encounter with biblical engravings which the Jesuits in Portuguese Goa brought with them when they were invited to present their faith at the court of the Muslim Mogul emperor Akbar

The time from the arrival of Francis Xavier in Kagoshima, Japan, in 1549 till ca. 1640 when Christianity was declared a forbidden religion, is called the *Kirishitan* (Christian) period because the missionaries brought along with them many paintings which found great resonance among the Japanese and were widely copied. The Christian prints were used for the catechetical work and the missionaries started explicitly training artists in a special school. The Japanese artists were fascinated by the techniques of shadow and perspective. Very little survived the following time of persecution which started in Japan in 1597 with the crucifixion of twenty-six Christians, including six European monks in Nagasaki on the order of Toyotomi Hideyoshi. With the Sakoku Edict of 1635 issued by Shogun Tokugawa Iemitsu, officials went through the country and forced people to put their feet on a *fumi-e* (stepping on image), a metal picture of Mary and Christ. Whoever obliged and put his foot was considered to have apostatized from the Christian faith and therefore was free. Those who refused were severely persecuted, as Japan wanted to cut itself off from everything foreign. Nonetheless hidden Christianity continued to live the Christian faith and produced art forms which show a fusion style. Madonnas were depicted looking similar to the much loved Buddhist goddess Kannon, also called Guanyin (Kwanyin), the goddess of compassion. Japanese artists also depicted Guanyin (Kwanyin) in the style of Christian Madonnas. Actually, the Japanese Christians took the Buddhist statue of Guanyin (Kwanyin) and engraved a cross at the back, and then venerated the statue as Mary. Nando kami (closet gods) disguised cult-objects such as an ornamental button (netsuke) were used to hide Christ figures or images of Mary. Only in the nineteenth century, Christianity, with the introduction of freedom of religion in 1871 could emerge in Japan from the underground and become visible again.

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE ASIAN CHRISTIAN ART OF THE NINETEENTH AND TWENTIETH CENTURY AND ITS RECEPTION IN THE WEST

There is a big gap between the seventeenth century and the twentieth century with respect to evidence for Christian art. Only after the experience of the First World War, the Catholic hierarchy got interested in Asian Christian Art, thanks to Pope Benedict XV and his Apostolic Letter *Maximum Illud*, which declared that it is necessary to inculcate deeply the gospel in the culture of the country where mission is happening. This mission statement opened the doors for Christian art in the mission field, especially for catechetical and devotional use under the keywords of accommodation or adjustment. Without waiting for this signal from Rome, already in 1868, the Jesuit missionary Adolphe Vasseur had founded the Lucas Painting School in the township of Zikawei in

Africa and Asia (1969). The next comprehensive publication came from an Asian, from the Japanese professor of systematic theology, Masao Takenaka (1925–2006). Following a request of the Christian Conference of Asia, Takenaka visited 107 artists from eighteen countries and introduced them with 120 works in his publication *Christian Art in Asia* (1975). Only three years later, in 1978, the Asian Christian Art Association was founded. It widely supported the growth of Christian Art in Asia by conferences, exhibitions, publications, and particularly by the colored journal *Image*, which unfortunately due to financial problems had to be closed down in 2012. Takenaka published two more important Asian Art publications, one on the Bible¹⁰ and the second on church architecture.¹¹

Besides these publications which try to cover the whole of Asia and sometimes also Australia, many publications have appeared in Asia and in the West covering particular countries or artists. The cry of Arno Lehmann was heard, and Asian art with Christian themes is widely published today by mission boards and churches worldwide in order to show their global interconnectedness. I will give just one example from Germany. The Catholic agency Misereor features every second year during the Lenten season one artist with a painting which they print on a veil and distribute copies to more than 3 million people with an explanation, so that most church goers and many school children could be reached. Which living artist can dream of such a wide distribution of his or her prints? This tradition of paintings fostered by Misereor started in 1976 with the Indian artist Jyoti Sahi, who was again given a chance in 1984. His disciple, Lucy D'Souza, painted in 1990 "The Lenten veil" (Hungertuch) on "women in the Bible"; in 2000, Suzyo Indratno from Indonesia was given the chance, and in 2007, Li Jinyuan from China. Through these Lenten veils, calendars, postcards, school materials, and books, the Asian artists are often better known in the West than in their home countries. Within the limits of Christianity, they receive global recognition. There is still a lot of scope for recognizing these artists in their own countries and churches.

THE FIRST STAGE: ACCOMMODATION

There are different ways to show through art that the Gospel has arrived in a new culture, a new context. One of the easiest ways is to depict biblical scenes in the culture of the people who newly have an encounter with the Gospel. The artist can depict the people as dressed in the ordinary dress of that country. He or she might include or exclude Jesus in this endeavor, that is, the artist might depict him still as a foreigner, a Jew with a beard, or can paint him also as Chinese or Indian. He can change the landscape and he can use different styles of architecture and landscape. Instead of chairs he can put the people on the floor, if that is the custom of the land. The artist can also use indigenous painting materials, for example, a silk scroll and ink instead of canvas and oil colors. Accommodation was already used in the sixteenth century in China and continued to be used by Lucas Chen and his art school. It is still utilized today by some of the artists of the Amity Christian Art Center in Nanjing and other Chinese artists, who use the traditional form of paper

cutting for their art. This art can be simply called accommodation but can also lead a step further to inculturation. The paper cutting produces at once twenty pieces, as twenty layers of paper can be put on top of each other. The mostly anonymous Christian paper art, sold in Hong Kong at the Tao Fong Shan Christian Study Centre and elsewhere, belongs to this category. Much loved by the Chinese Christians are also the paintings in Chinese ink and realistic style of the theologian Yu Jia-de,¹² who shows Jesus mostly as an Arab. His style and background reflect elements of the province Xianjiang, under Islamic influence. His daughter is following his footsteps. Among the women artists in China, Fan Pu (b. 1948)¹³ is the most outstanding. She comes from a Christian family and has brought the art of paper cutting to perfection and creates large art works by joining various paper cuts and lining them with colored paper like “Our Father who art in heaven.” She is proud that every work of art she makes comes out in twenty copies and can be shared. The uniqueness of an art piece has no value for her. The Western concept that only an art piece is valuable when it exists alone has no value for her. Following in the footsteps of the folk tradition where copying is the norm, she makes as many copies of her art as people want as this is her medium to spread the gospel by low-cost paper cuts.

The Christian paintings of the Indian Catholic artist Angela Trindade (1909–1980) especially in her early career belong to this category. She depicts colorful Madonnas wrapped in Indian-style saris, Jesus in orange robes as a guru followed by his disciples in the same kind of robes. Her Christmas scene is set in the Ajanta caves. Many of her early paintings were printed by Art India as devotional pictures and greeting cards. The same applies to the Catholic Indian nuns, Sister Geneviève, of French origin (1919–1995), and her disciple, the Hindu convert nun Sister Claire (b. 1937). In addition to cards, they have both painted more than 150 Bible pictures, done frescos in churches, and many large altar pieces. The Indianness floats naturally from Sister Claire’s brush, who was honored in 2012 by the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of India for her life achievements.¹⁴

In Korea, the Anglicans built some churches in the beginning like a Confucian temple of which examples still survive like in Tae-So-Won and in Chunk-Chong-Puk-Do in South Korea. The first important Korean artist who turned to Christian art was Hak-Soo Kim (b. 1919). In his painting “Jesus in front of Pilate,” there is a traditional court in Korea, all the judges are dressed as Koreans; only Jesus wears a simple white dress; he is the other who has come to Korea. The message is that Christianity although coming from outside is at home in Korea.¹⁵ The same artist produced, for the centenary celebration of the arrival of the Protestant mission in Korea in 1986, sixty-six paintings depicting the mission history and thirty-three paintings about Jesus Christ. His Last Supper shows a pot with rice and rice wine, signs of inculturation. All paintings are done with Chinese ink; he adds a little color here and there. Heung-Jon Kim (b. 1928) uses a similar style like in a Christmas painting, where the holy family is Korean and men and women segregated in two groups like in Korean churches are coming to worship Jesus.

Only a few Christians live in Bali in Indonesia, the center of Hinduism in the archipelago, but several of them are artists. Ketut Lasia (b. 1945) was born in a traditional artist village. After his conversion to Christianity he started to apply the Ubud-style to Christian themes. Harmony and beauty together with a rich vegetation are the

In India, there are many Christian artists in this group starting with the Anglican Alfred Thomas (1907–1989), who took inspiration from the Buddhist and Hindu iconography and depicted Christ as an emotionless harmonious meditative guru. His paintings appealed to converts of upper castes, but were rejected by Dalits and tribals who form the majority of Indian Christians.¹⁷ The Goan Catholic Angelo da Fonseca (1902–1967) lived in an ashram in Pune, where he became a pioneer of Indian Christian devotional art. He went back to the folk art and gave up the perspective, because he wanted to express his faith in an Indian way. His art was influenced by Rabindranath Tagore and his Shantiniketan art academy where Fonseca studied. Very famous is his Eucharist, where all sit on the ground with Jesus seated as guru. Frank Wesley (1923–2003) went very far into the use of Hindu and Buddhist symbols but at the same time created a masterpiece with his *Forgiving Father*, which depicts the overcoming of caste barriers.¹⁸ Still alive and creative is the Lutheran theologian and artist from Dalit background Solomon Raj (b. 1921), who uses batik and woodcuts, which use cheap materials that are readily available. He depicts Jesus amidst the refugees and suffering people. The artist's favorite story is John 4, where he shows the liberative message of Jesus taking water from an untouchable woman, something which is still distant reality in South Indian villages, where the Dalits are not allowed to take water from the wells of high-caste people, since they are considered polluting. In his works, the flight to Egypt and Hagar in the desert recur frequently. Hagar is connected with village sex workers who have no fathers for their children. Both internationally and in India the best-known Christian artist is Jyoti Sahi (b. 1944). He is a theologian with the brush and has worked extensively in designing churches and chapels in Indian style (fig. 29.3), including the Catholic Cathedral in Varanasi.¹⁹

In the earlier phase of his artistic career, he used Indian symbols of Hindu origin. Today he is extremely attentive to depict the suffering of the Dalits and Adivasis and the cry of God's creation. His disciple Lucy D'Souza-Krone was born in a Catholic family in Goa in 1949 and in her art connects well the suffering of Indian women with the biblical stories. Among other well-known Indian Christian artists are two Roman Catholic women religious—Sr. Geneviève and Sr. Claire. As a female artist sister Claire had a special affinity to *Madonnas* (fig. 29.4), which were very dominant in the first phase of her artistic life.

The most important Christian Chinese artist is He Qui (b. 1950) who lives in the United States. Earlier he was professor in the Theological Seminary of Nanjing.²⁰ In 1988 he started to believe in Christ. In order to honor the local traditions, he experimented vastly with the folk art of paper cutting and was encouraged in his work by Bishop K. H. Ting. Many of his early works belong more to accommodation than inculturation. Now he also paints in various media like ink and gouache on rice paper. He Qui uses bold lines looking similar to woodcuts and bright colors and has a preference for biblical texts concerning suffering like the Flight to Egypt.

The Minjung theology started in the 1970s when great opposition arose against the dictator Chung-Hee Park. It set also a new context for art. The young artist Son-Dam Hong started to express the feeling of the common people, the Minjung, in woodcuts,

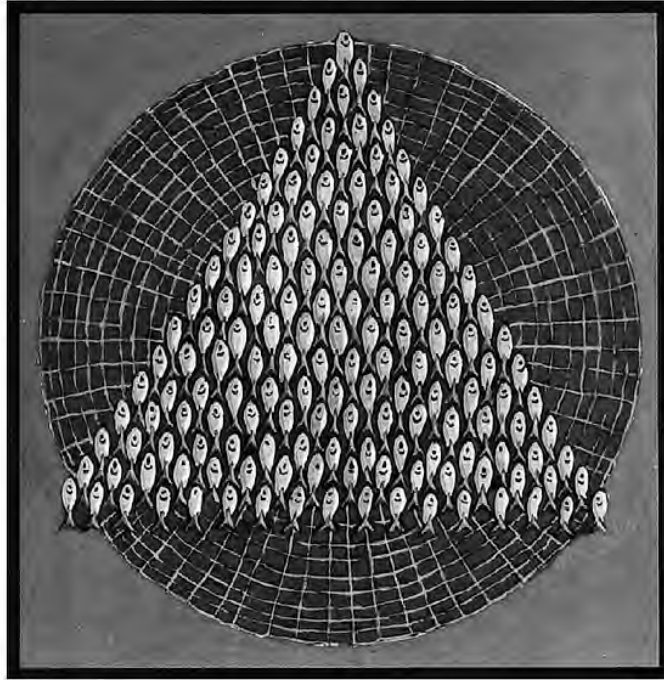


FIGURE 29.3 Mandala

Source: Jyoti Sahi, 153 Fishes, © missio Aachen.



FIGURE 29.4 Mary with Child Jesus, by Sister Claire

Source: Collection Gudrun Löwner @ photo G. Löwner.



FIGURE 29.6 Uvari, Church-Plane-Ship, India

Source: Collection Gudrun Löwner @ photo G. Löwner.

The Chinese, Japanese, Indian, Filipino, Indonesian, and Korean Christians, to name a few, with a large number of young educated members, want to show that their artistic expression of faith is on par with the rest of the world, no matter whether it is abstract or realistic. They want to be at home in a global culture and do not want to express their Christian faith in art forms dear to their forefathers and mothers. Although this trend is visible, there are also other trends emerging which give still very much importance to local cultures and contexts, so that for a long time to come both streams will coexist.

It is high time that Asian churches wake up to a dialogue with artists of other faiths who depict Christian themes. This painted interreligious theology is nowhere acknowledged.

NOTES

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3. Hans-Joachim Klimkeit, "Beispiele christlicher Kunst an der Seidenstrasse," in Theo Sundermeier and Volker Küster, eds., *Die Bilder und das Wort* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht Verlag, 1999), 55.
4. Marsha Gail Olsen, "Jesus, Mary and all the Saints: Indo-Portuguese Ivory Statuettes and their Role as Mission Art in 17th to 18th Century Goa" (PhD thesis, University of Minnesota, 2007), 102–3.
5. Anand Amaladass and Gudrun Löwner, *Christian Themes in Indian Art* (New Delhi: Manohar Publishers, 2012), 37.
6. ⁶ <http://catholic-resources.org/Art/Nadal.htm>. Tiziana Lippiello and Roman Malek, eds., *Scholar from the West: Giulio Aleni (1582–1649) and the Dialogue between Christianity and China* (Brescia and St. Augustin: Fondazione Civiltà Bresciana, 1997).
7. Theo Sundermeier, *Christliche Kunst weltweit* (Frankfurt am Main: Lembeck Verlag, 2012), 90.
8. This painting is in the Museum Pro Civitate Christiana in Assisi.
9. Comitato Centrale Anno Santo, ed., *Mostra D'Arte Missionaria Catalogo* (Rome, Città del Vaticano, 1950).
10. Masao Takenaka and Ron O'Grady, *The Bible through Asian Eyes* (Auckland: Pace Publishing and Asian Christian Art Association, 1991).
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13. Fan Pu, *The Way of My Heart: The Paper Cut Art of Fan Pu*, with Chinese and English text (Nanjing: Yilin Press, 2010).
14. Amaladass and Löwner, *Christian Themes in Indian Art*, 259.
15. Sundermeier, *Christliche Kunst weltweit*, 96 f.
16. K.-Ch. Epting, ed., *Christus auf Bali: Die Kunst des balinesischen Malers Ketut Lasia* (Karlsruhe, Hans Thomas Verlag 1994).
17. Alfred Thomas, *The Life of Christ by an Indian Artist. Twenty four paintings by Alfred Thomas*. 2nd ed. (London: The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel [1948] 1962).
18. Naomi Wray and Frank Wesley, *Exploring Faith with a Brush* (Auckland: Pace Publishing, 1993).
19. Jyoti Sahi, *Holy Ground: A New Approach to the Mission of the Church in India* (Auckland: Pace Publishing, 1999).
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21. Theo Sundermeier, *Christliche Kunst in Japan und Korea* (Frankfurt am Main: Lembeck Verlag, 2010).
22. Nalini Jayasuriya, *A Time for My Singing: Witness of a Life* (New Haven, CT: Overseas Ministry Study Center, 2005).
23. Takenaka and O'Grady, *The Bible through Asian Eyes*, 96 f.

PART V

SOME FUTURE
TRAJECTORIES OF
ASIAN CHRISTIANITY

INTRODUCTION

FRANCIS X. CLOONEY, S. J.

THE essays in Part V of the Handbook look to the future, where the broad and complex phenomenon of Christianity across Asia is heading, and what it means for Christians in Asia but also worldwide.

In “Christians in Asia Read Sacred Books of the East,” George Gispert-Sauch takes note of the fact that “a significant group of Christians in Asia live their faith life in a process of osmosis,” such as occurs “when one is immersed in a culture that is deeply influenced by the spiritualities of which the sacred books are a privileged expression.” On that basis, he argues that “some theologically awakened Christians in East and West alike think that in this century and perhaps in centuries to follow they will not be able to live as Christians in a shrinking world, without a constant dialogue with other faiths and ideologies.” He argues the case for the study of texts of various religious traditions. He concludes by emphasizing the need for a spiritual rapprochement and the importance of our attitudes to the guiding ideas and traditions of other communities as having a real role to play in shaping Christianity in Asia.

In “Asian Christian Forms of Worship and Music,” Swee Hong Lim stresses another mode of cultural learning. He observes that although Christianity was born in West Asia, the various Christian traditions’ liturgical languages have too often not grown up in Asian soil. It is not surprising then that Christianity failed to get a sustainable significant foothold in ancient Asia. “Had the trend of creating new families of the liturgy continued as in the early years of Christianity, there would be a multitude of local worship expressions such as Indian, Chinese, Japanese, Indonesian, and so forth.” But since this did not happen, it has only been in the twentieth century that local liturgical expressions gained impetus in Asia. Looking to the future, Lim asks when Asian churches, in order to shape identities that are fully Asian and fully Christian, will more boldly draw on forms of art and music hitherto not drawn up by Christian communities. It is within such streams that there lie the new Asian Christian forms of worship and music that also have much to contribute to World Christianity, particularly in regions where “church membership is declining or marginalized,” and today seeking renewal.

In “Asian Christian Spirituality,” Peter C. Phan asks whether there is a distinctly “Asian” way of living the Christian faith and highlights the essentially dialogical nature of this way of living. He notes that even “within Asian Christianity there are vastly different ecclesial communities which have preserved and promoted their own distinct spiritual traditions, from the oldest Church of Malabar or Thomas Christians in India to the most recent Pentecostal and evangelical house churches in China.” All of these found their distinctive form in relation to the local cultures where they flourished. Phan reflects on *spirituality* as human self-transcendence in the Spirit, and on *Christian spirituality* in the Spirit of Jesus. He highlights the distinctively interreligious nature of Asian Christian spirituality. Given the long-term nature of this engagement and learning, he suggests that it is in this realm of vital spirituality that we see more clearly why dialogue must be the norm, a way of life for the Asian Christian Churches of the generations to come.

In “Revisiting Historiographies: New Trajectories for Asian Christianity,” Daniel Franklin Pilario revisits current historiographies of Christianity in Asia and asks how they challenge the still dominant conception of the Western Christian narrative being constructed as the universal history of all Christianity. Pilario explores some contemporary developments in the historical sciences and how these impact on Christian historiography and maps some general directions on historiographies on Asian Christianity. By way of example he spells out these same directions through sample case studies and explores some methodological challenges and future prospects, with respect to the style and authorship of these new, emerging histories.

In “Asian Christianity and Public Life: The Interplay,” Felix Wilfred reconsiders the new vibrancy of religion since the 1980s. He reviews the distinction between the public and private spheres, now seen through the lens of postmodernity, cultural studies, and feminist critiques of the distinction between the private and public. Such new factors have changed how religion’s role is understood today. In reality, religion may not be relegated to traditional realms of politics, economy, culture, and civil society. Wilfred argues that in considering Asian Christianity in public life today we are therefore faced with a tension “between a public life that is being controlled by political powers centralized or under the grip of religious fundamentalist forces and of a Christianity that is centered on its inner issues and questions.” In this situation, religious pluralism is of help, since its vibrancy and relevance “brighten the chances of a fruitful interplay between the Asian public life and Christianity.” Conversely, an Asian public theology open and sensitive to sociopolitical issues will help the Asian Christian communities to open themselves up to the realities of Asia today.

Similarly, in “Migration and New Cosmopolitanism in Asian Christianity,” Jose Mario C. Francisco explores the nexus between Christianity, migration, and Asia by attending to tropes such as the dynamic between religion and its social locus, origin and destination, and solidarity and diversity. He draws on both theoretical explorations and empirical studies, with special attention to the often-unheard voices of migrant workers and others in marginalized communities. This paradigm allows us to listen to the migrants themselves, even while facing up to “the twin challenges of new cosmopolitanism and

CHAPTER 30

CHRISTIANS IN ASIA READ SACRED BOOKS OF THE EAST

GEORGE GISPERT-SAUCH

READERS of the *Handbook of Christianity in Asia* may wonder why scriptures of other religions are mentioned at all here. The reason is twofold: first because in fact a significant group of Christians in Asia live their faith life in a process of osmosis which takes place when one is immersed in a culture that is deeply influenced by spiritualities inspired by sacred books and of which they (sacred books) are privileged expressions. The second is that some theologically awakened Christians in East and West alike think that in this century and perhaps in centuries to follow they will not be able to live as Christians in a shrinking world without a constant dialogue with other faiths and ideologies.

The content and the methods of reading or hearing the sacred texts in Asian societies are an important element in the emerging dialogic culture. Pointers in this direction even in the West can be detected in the search for a global ethic by Hans Küng and others from the 1990s and, more recently, in Paul Knitter's book, *Without Buddha I Could Not Be a Christian*.¹ In this chapter, I shall focus mostly on the scriptures of India that are an important part of the Asian production, and on the ways they have been read both by members of their respective communities and by Christians.

That scriptures are a basic element of most religions is well known to sociologists and theologians. It should not be forgotten, however, that primal forms of religions do not have "scriptures" in the etymological sense of the word, but they do have oral sacred texts, more or less codified, that are often recited at festivals and referred to in oral instruction. Such texts have a role similar to that of scriptures in more sophisticated religions.

Obviously religions give different roles to their scriptures, and often these roles vary in different periods of the history of each religion. For Hinduism, the primary authoritative source of religious wisdom was originally the *Veda*. "Veda" means "Knowledge" or "Wisdom." But the word is used with two different contents: in recent times, influenced by the English tradition, Veda means the four collections of hymns and sacrificial or

magical texts called *Samhitas* (“collections”), that is, the Rigveda, Samaveda, Yajurveda, and Atharvaveda, written in ancient Sanskrit from the middle of the second millennium B.C.E. to the middle of the first. In older classical use, “Veda” includes not only the four *Samhitas* but also the later commentatorial texts called *Brahmanas*, *Aranyakas*, and *Upanishads*, generally related to one or other of the four *Samhitas*. The production of this “complete” Veda seems to have been concluded in the early centuries B.C.E.

Later philosophical Hinduism included among its “three foundational texts” or *prasthana traya*: (1) the *Vedas* in the second sense mentioned above; (2) the popular section of the Mahabharata called the *Bhagavad Gita*; and (3) the summary of the Upanishadic teaching made by Badarayana known as *Vedanta Brahma Sutras* probably around the second century C.E. Texts 2 and 3 have an authority and sacredness similar to that of the Vedic literature. Additionally, sections of the Hindu tradition consider sacred the two epics, the Mahabharata and Ramayana, some of the Puranas, and some ancient texts of the Tamil tradition.

Buddhism takes the *Tipitaka* or the “Three Baskets” as its foundational texts, the early forms of which seem to have been composed in Pali, at the time the vernacular in parts of North India. The three baskets are the *Suttapitaka* or basic doctrinal texts, the *Vinayapitaka*, or texts about correct behavior, especially for monks and nuns, and the *Suttanta pitaka* or philosophical teachings. In various countries and various forms of Buddhism, the contents of each basket may differ somewhat, and in a few of them the basket remains open to receive new texts.

Both Hinduism and Buddhism on principle consider their foundational texts sacred and authoritative, both for doctrine and for ethics. Interestingly, the early Buddhist tradition considered that the Vedas too were originally authoritative, but thought that in its transmission they had been corrupted and now were of no value. They were substituted by the *Buddha-vacanam*, the (oral) word of the Buddha, which rather soon itself took a written form and became a “scriptural” text. It would seem that the Indian tradition does not object to a plurality of religious “canons,” even though this word or its equivalent is not used.

In later Hinduism there emerged two different theologies regarding the origin of the Vedas. Both consider the Veda as the supreme wisdom and the ultimate norm of religious truth. The popular theistic interpretation elaborated by the *Nyaya darsana* or philosophy insists on the *personal* (*pauruseya*) origin of the scriptural text. God, the Supreme Lord (*Parameswar*), communicated the Veda to the first men and they wrote it down, and as such the text is the ultimate point of reference for the Hindu community. The Veda is consequently *a-nitya* (i.e., non-eternal). It belongs to history. Its authority comes exclusively from the Lord, and therefore is said to be *paratah-pramana* (i.e., “having authority from outside (the text)”).

By contrast, the two *mimamsa* schools, that is, the *Purva mimamsa* (“early reflection”) and the *Uttara mimamsa* (“later reflection”) or Vedanta have a contrary theology about the origin of the Vedic books. They affirm first that they are not spoken by a divinity to human beings: they are *apauruseya* (non-personal). They are rather eternal (*nitya*) Wisdom that was somehow captured by the earliest seers of the community, the *rishis*,

through their spiritual and poetic powers, and composed by specific writers who are not really the authors, as they only articulate in early Sanskrit poetry or prose what they “saw” by a kind of mystic intuition. The etymology of *rishi* as given by the lexicographer Yaska, seventh century B.C.E., would derive from the verb *drish* (to see). We may think of the Platonic “eternal ideas,” or of the medieval philosophy of an eternal “natural law.” For the two schools, the Veda is *svatahpramana*, that is, it draws its validity from itself, as eternal Wisdom, not from a person, whether divine or human. Because they are Wisdom itself, they cannot err.

There is however an important difference between the two mimamsas in that the earlier focuses on action, on the duties of the believers, whether ritual sacrifices or moral action. Its primary stress was on the earlier part of the “Veda” (i.e., the Samhitas and Brahmanas), relegating the role of the later texts (Aranyakas and Upanishads) to that of mere explanation (*arthavada*) of the dharma or moral life. Contrariwise, the Uttara Mimamsa or “Vedanta” (“end” and purpose of the Veda) sees the Vedas as essentially a wisdom text, teaching the true meaning of the universe around the concepts of Brahman and Atman. The practices prescribed in the earlier texts are seen rather as a lower form of spiritual striving, actually unnecessary to reach the experience of truth which alone can provide liberation or moksha.

The Buddhists’ view is closer to that of the Nyaya theologians insofar as the authority of the Tipitaka comes essentially from the preaching of the Buddha, the truthfulness of whom derives from his mystical illumination during his search for as a solution to the mystery of suffering. The Buddhist view has also an affinity to the Mimamsa view on the value of the sacred texts.

INTERTEXTUALITY

Intertextuality in Earlier Eras

The question of a sharing of other scriptures than one’s own does not seem to have occurred significantly before recent times when interreligious dialogue has become an obvious demand in our cultural and spiritual evolution. I must however record some elements of the question in earlier tradition. First, there is the fact that the Christian tradition assumed the whole of the *tanak* (i.e., the Torah), the prophets and the “writings” (i.e., the whole of the Jewish normative corpus), the “books” (*biblia*), as valid for the new community born within Judaism out of the experience of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. However, this reception of the old Bible was now possible only by subordinating it to the Christian new covenant, a new and revolutionary experience of the meaning of God. The Christian experience eventually found written expressions—letters, the “gospels,” the “Acts,” and other writings which were eventually canonized as the New Testament, added to the Jewish Bible now called the Old Testament to form, in recent more ecumenical language, the First and Second Testaments. In the process, the

these too contain religious traditions of great depth and power, which could presumably be taken up and canonized by the New Testament, as the pre-Israelite traditions of the Old Testament in fact were. For the history of salvation surely does not start with Israel. If Christ is indeed the Word made flesh who “enlightens every man coming into the world (Jn 1:9); if he is indeed the one Lord “through whom the whole universe (*ta panta*) [comes] and through whom we [go to God]” (1 Cor 8:6); if “the whole universe [*ta panta*] has been reconciled through him and towards him” (Col 1:16) so that “through him the whole universe [*ta panta*] has been reconciled to him” (Col 1:20); if it is the saving purpose of God to “recapitulate” (*anakephalaiosthai*) the universe [*ta panta*] through Christ (Eph 1:10)—then the pre-history of Christ cannot possibly be restricted to the history of Israel but must reach out to include the history of the universe itself. (64)

From these premises, Soares-Prabhu argues that “salvation history” must include not only the new covenant and the Sinai covenant but also the covenant with humanity as a whole, suggested in the biblical covenant with Noah. Each covenant implies a specific self-disclosure of God and each is accompanied by a special inspiration by which the covenant can be preserved in an authentic form. Each covenant is different, and the mode of inspiration correspondingly also different, even if we cannot specify it. So the non-Christian scriptures must be repositories of revelation and the word of God. “God was not silent during the million years and more of human history that preceded the call of Abraham; nor dumb to the millions of his children who stood (and still stand) outside the Jewish tradition after it.”

If such scriptures are really bearers of the divine Word, they would be of significance not only to the persons or communities to which they were directly addressed but to all humanity. For, the biblical God communicates primarily to humanity as a unit, and derivatively to particular communities or individuals. This is why the vision of the human family contained in the creation accounts themselves has been placed at the beginning of the Bible. All humanity is endowed with the dignity of the children of God, and therefore there is an equality of rights for all. The biblical account is not really about the story of one nation or race, but the story of humanity beginning in its creation and ending with “a new heaven and a new earth.”

The rich contribution of Soares-Prabhu to an Indian reading of the Bible says more than a mere reflection about the value of the scriptures of Asia even for Christians. He also suggests that there must be also different specific cultural readings of the biblical scriptures from different perspectives. For an intrinsic element of every reading is the perspective and pre-understanding of the reader. In the fourth volume of his *Collected Writings*, he has two essays on specific Indian readings from different perspectives. In one he makes “A Dalit Reading of the Decalogue” (Vol. 4, 208–13). After explaining the social position of the Dalits in Indian history, he shows the contrast between the traditional Indian law books and the Decalogue in its various biblical formulations. The Indian Dalit cannot but see the Decalogue as a charter of liberation, protecting him or her from the discriminations found in the ancient Indian law books. Soares-Prabhu offers him and her, a new reading with a special liberative meaning. He adds: “All law

in Gujarati), the word, through analogy or *laksanārtha*, signifies the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit of the Christian faith, but it also keeps resonance of the Indian philosophical spirituality as the Absolute (*Brahman*) being Existence (*sat*), Consciousness (*cit*), and Bliss (*ānanda*).⁴ Nobody can object to the appropriation of “Existence” to the One who is the Source of all reality, the Father, nor to the appropriation of “Consciousness” to the One who is revealed to us as the inner Word of God, nor indeed the appropriation of “Bliss” to the Spirit of God. In fact the great theologians of the New Testament, Paul, Luke, and John, explicitly link the sense of joy or bliss to the Spirit of God.⁵ This may seem to be new in the Christian theological tradition that has generally identified the Spirit with Love as the One who is the mystery of the union of Father and Son (hence other theologians in India have called the Spirit the *advaita*, non-duality in God), but not explicitly with joy or bliss. And yet it is true that the Spirit is the Bliss in God.

I could make a similar analysis of other words found in Brahmabandhab’s hymn some of which are philosophical while others derive from different contexts, devotional, historical, and even mythological: *yogi*, *caramapadam*, *buddham*, *puranam*, *paratparam*, *ikshana*, *savitṛ*, and so on, all are words rooted in the Hindu culture and religion. In all cases, the *dhvani* of the original meaning is added to and enriches the perception of the direct Christian meaning of the word. A similar analysis could be made of his hymn to the Incarnate Logos, published in 1901.⁶

READING THE SCRIPTURES OF OTHER RELIGIONS

In India the question of reading the scriptures of other religions in the official liturgy seemed at the beginning to be the result of an exaggerated enthusiasm for dialogue and of poor liturgical and theological sense. In the early 1970s, a young priest, Isanand Vempeny, published his licentiate dissertation at what is today called the Jnana Deepa Vidyapeeth, Pune, defending the legitimacy and need to include reading of other religions in the Catholic Eucharistic worship. One of his arguments was that Pope Paul VI in his first encyclical letter, *Ecclesiam suam*, had defined the church as a community of dialogue. It could be argued therefore that dialogue should enter into the heart of the church’s life, which is the liturgy, and what better way of doing this but by integrating in it scriptural readings from other religions? For the Pope had included in his concentric circles of the Church’s dialogue not only the dialogue between Catholics, laity and clergy, but also dialogue with other churches and with believers of other religions and even the atheists, as indeed Vatican II would soon do.

The youthful student bodies of the Jnana Deepa Vidyapeeth, Pune, and of the Dharmaram theologate, Bangalore, undoubtedly animated by some faculty, created new liturgies and started acting on the new will for dialogue by introducing selections from the Gita and Upanishads in the Eucharist. Soon the need was felt for a serious study of

the situation, and so a call was made by the Director of the National Biblical, Liturgical and Catechetical Centre in Bangalore, Fr. D. S. Amalorpavadass, for theological and liturgical writings about the value of the new trends. A seminar on the topic was called in Bangalore toward the end of 1974, with the participation of scholars in Bible, liturgy, theology, canon law, Indian religions, pastoral people, and linguistic experts. The conclusion of the seminar and its papers were published in 1974 in a volume under the title of *Research Seminar on Non-Biblical Scriptures* by NBCLC, Bangalore.

It is important to specify the point at issue. It was not primarily an evaluation of non-biblical scriptures nor even, directly, of their “inspired” character. Nor was it to seek if Christians could read such scriptures and be inspired by them. The direct point was whether it was theologically and liturgically fitting to read them within the Catholic official worship, specifically in the Eucharist. As it can be seen from the long statement published in the volume, most participants in the seminar thought that it was theologically and even historically meaningful, although it would be a new stage in the practice of the Church. In the official Church’s liturgy non-biblical readings are publicly proclaimed in the Liturgy of the Hours where the Office of Readings includes, after the biblical reading, texts generally drawn from the Fathers of the Church, but also from councils, including Vatican II, or even a few modern Catholic authors. It is true that for many centuries only biblical texts have been read in the Eucharist proper. But, there is some historical evidence, that in older times, some readings in the Eucharist were not biblical, but, from the Acts of Martyrs, for example, or other sources. It is true, however, that all these non-biblical sources come only from within the Christian tradition. The question was now whether it was theologically appropriate in our times to enlarge the scope of the liturgical readings to sources that have evidently enabled for centuries millions of our brothers and sisters of various religions to live a life of faith, hope, and love.

With Vatican II and Pope Paul VI and his successors, the Church has become more conscious of being in dialogue with the world, and especially with non-Christian religions. Various documents of Vatican II touch on this point. A Secretariat for Non-Christians Religions, now the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue in the Holy See, is an organizational expression of this consciousness. To this new consciousness there must correspond a new liturgical practice. And this was the basis for recommending reading of other scriptures in the liturgy. However, it was also affirmed that such reading could not be indiscriminate: it needed a prior discerning role of the Christian community that had to choose such readings as may enrich or strengthen its life of faith. This in fact is also the way the biblical and other readings are proposed, especially the readings of the Old Testament.

Soon after the Bangalore Seminar, the St Peter’s Pontifical Seminary (now St Peter’s Pontifical Institute), Bangalore, offered for their M.Th. students in scripture, and eventually in missiology, a course on “The Inspiration of Other Scriptures,” conceived and planned by Fr. Lucien Legrand.⁷

There are three different questions here: (1) whether theologically Christians can believe that other scriptures than the Bible are divinely inspired, independently from the categories by which the followers of each religion explain the sacredness of their texts;

sources. Doing this one comes to notice how one text enriches the understanding of the other. A spiritual symbiosis takes place. He shows this with concrete texts from both traditions, not necessarily scriptural, but of significance to at least a part of the community.⁸

Without using the words “comparative theology,” the idea had already been practiced in India for a number of years. As an example, Sebastian Painadath has propagated in India, Germany, and elsewhere, the practice of the “Gita retreats” where the most popular Hindu text is the main reading of Christians or others who meditate on them in a pattern similar to the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius of Loyola.

CONCLUSION

Our world is shrinking day by day and in the global village we cannot but be neighbors. Religious, cultural, and linguistic blocks have less and less importance. We need to prepare ourselves and the coming generations for communication in depth without losing our identities. We need to begin with a spiritual rapprochement. And our attitudes to the guiding ideas and traditions of other communities will have a role to play in the matter. In this century, we need to grow in an authentic sharing of our spiritual wealth as much as we need a more equalitarian distribution of economic resources. Reading of one another’s scriptures will probably have a significant role in the tasks ahead.

Intertextual reading is, of course, different from scholarly study of ancient texts of different religions. This is an academic exercise that has been practiced for centuries and still continues. Intertextual reading does not stop at inquiring what was the original meaning of various texts, but wants to uncover and present what they mean to us today. It requires humility to ask the text to speak and not to impose one’s idea on the text. It receives meaning. This need not be to the detriment of one’s personal faith. If properly done, it can rather strengthen it. It also prepares us for a new era when exchange and dialogue will not be restricted to the economic sphere or to the cultural and philosophical sphere, but will rise to the mystical and religious sphere where the human family will be an image of the Trinitarian family, both an affirmation of personal and collective identities, and yet a communion of being.

NOTES

1. Paul Knitter, *Without Buddha I Could Not Be a Christian* (Oxford: One World, 2008).
2. See G. Menachery, ed., *The St Thomas Christian Encyclopedia of India*, Vol. 3, published by the editor (Thrissur City, Kerala, 2010); “Biblical Inspiration and the Inspiration of Non-Christian Scriptures,” 62–64; a selection of other writings are found in the four volumes of *Collected Writings of George M. Soares-Prabhu* (Pune: JDV, 1999–2001). The following are the most relevant for my theme. Vol. 1: “Towards an Indian Interpretation of the Bible,” 207–22. Vol. 2: Many articles on biblical methods, especially “The Inspiration of the Old Testament as Seen in the New Testament and its Implication

Coward, Harold. *Scriptures in the World Religions: A Short Introduction*. Oxford: One World, [1988] 2000.

—, ed. *Experiencing Scripture in the World Religions*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2000.

Legrand, Lucien. *The Word of God Is Near You*. 3 vols. Bangalore: St. Peter's Pontifical Institute, 2001.

CHAPTER 31

MULTIPLE RELIGIOUS BELONGING OR COMPLEX IDENTITY?

An Asian Way of Being Religious

ALBERTUS BAGUS LAKSANA

DEBATING MULTIPLE RELIGIOUS BELONGING

WITHOUT doubt Asia is home to well-known Christian figures who have been perceived as pioneers and icons of multiple religious identities or belonging. Among Asia's natives, the list typically includes the likes of Brahmabandhav Upadhyaya, M. M. Thomas, Stanley Samartha, Aloysius Pieris, Anthony de Mello, and others. The appeal of Asia has continued to draw a great many figures from the West, ranging from the towering personalities of Roberto de Nobili, Bede Griffiths, Henri Le Saux, Sara Grant, Raimon Panikkar, and Hugo Enomiya-Lassalle, to myriads of ordinary traveler-cum-religious seekers whose complex spiritual journeys might not be considered authoritative in academic and theological discourse. The bestselling novel and the movie *Eat Pray Love*¹ seems to reinforce the image of Asia or Asian religious traditions as a place par excellence for the kind of complex spiritual exploration that includes different forms of religions and spiritual streams, a process that on the popular level often goes without an obvious and firmer sense of belonging to a particular religious tradition or more serious and deeper engagement with other religious traditions within their native contexts.²

In some cases, especially among religious elites and scholars, this process might result in a self-proclaimed hyphenated religious identity, such as Hindu-Christian, Buddhist-Christian, and so forth, a phenomenon that has become the primary basis for most scholarly and theological discussion on the phenomenon of "multiple religious belonging," typically revolving around the practice of meditation, intellectual or theological assent, and institutional affiliation.³

Most recently, however, scholars have begun questioning the usefulness and validity of this naming of hyphenated religious identity or the term “multiple religious belonging” itself. Among others, they argue that the term tends to be limited in its explanatory scope, being overly individualistic, elitist, and anchored in a narrow understanding of “religion” as a static and fixed entity or tradition. Consequently, they propose to return to the real dynamics of the phenomenon of complex religious and cultural identity formation that has also been the hallmark of many Christian communities in Asia.⁴ While Peter Phan, a Vietnamese American theologian, has remarked that multiple religious belonging is a norm in Asia, one can say that these ordinary Asians, for the most part, did not really pursue the negotiation of identity in such a dramatic and self-conscious manner, but rather through complex religio-cultural avenues that have become part and parcel of their natural identity. For them, the term “multiple religious belonging” and the self-proclaimed hyphenated religious identity might sound either foreign, too “academic,” or simply confusing, if not failing to capture the concrete dynamics of their complex religio-cultural identity.

Given this background, the present chapter seeks to take the subject of “multiple religious belonging” vis-à-vis the complexities of the phenomenon it intends to describe and problematize it in the context of Christian communities in Asia. Based on the rather overwhelming reality of complex religious and cultural interactions among peoples of different religious traditions in Asia, we might do better if we go beyond the term of “multiple religious belonging” and instead talk about “complex or complicated religio-cultural identity.” For in many parts of Asia, intimate and rather fluid encounters between different religious and cultural traditions have been going on for ages. In this kind of dynamic, there is a lot of mutual borrowing not only among religions but also among cultural traditions—or among religions within certain cultural matrices, given that “religion” never existed as a free floating entity, apart from the particularities of culture and people—sometimes through not so nice avenues such as ideological rivalries, political and religious conquest, colonialism, and so forth. In this framework, the idea of religious purity is certainly hard to trace. Various Indic methods of prayer, for example, continue to be quite influential in certain circles of Catholic seminarians in different parts of Asia. Even among charismatic Catholics in North India whose theological rhetoric can be rigorously exclusive—“salvation only through Christ”—one can still see how some aspects of indigenous North Indian traditions of healing and devotion are appropriated, helping to draw some Hindu devotees of Jesus.⁵ The roughly same pattern occurs among contemporary Evangelical Chinese Christians.⁶ Furthermore, on a daily and larger scale, pilgrimage to shared shrines continues to mark out the dynamics of encounters between different Christian communities and other religious communities across Asia, with the Indian cases being the most scholarly documented.⁷ When we look at the long history of Christianity in Asia, a similar pattern of engagement has also occurred in Japan and China.⁸ In general, these hybrid religio-cultural identities on the popular level are considered natural and not necessarily preceded or followed by a conscious decision and theological reflection. At times, hybridity even occurs despite political agenda of religious purity and exclusivity.⁹

COMPLEX RELIGIO-CULTURAL IDENTITY

As mentioned earlier, in the current academic discourse on the phenomenon, some scholars continue to use the term “multiple religious belonging,” but others prefer to use the more nuanced term “multiple or complex religious identity.” In any case, the degree and intensity of belonging to other religious traditions is also open to debate. A number of theologians believe that in the case of Christians who practice certain aspects of other religious traditions, Christianity should take precedence or should become the meta-language of integration.¹⁰ Phan calls this theological framework “inclusive pluralism.”¹¹ A similar sentiment is also stated by the Federation of Asian (Catholic) Bishops’ Conferences (FABC) in their statement:

The presence of the Holy Spirit in and beyond the Church in Asia may be perceived in a variety of ways. This is due, in part, to the fact that people encounter the Spirit within their context, which is pluralistic in terms of religions, culture and world-views. In this light, we affirm a stance of receptive pluralism. That is, the many ways of responding to the promptings of the Holy Spirit must be continually in conversation with one another. A relationship of dynamic tension may open the way for mutual information, inspiration, support and correction.¹²

For the most part, the inclusive role of culture is extremely crucial in the concrete dynamics of the formation and practice of this complex religio-cultural identity in Asia, especially among Christians. Here, it might also be useful to refer to James Clifford’s concept of cultural space that is in flux, or a contact space, as he writes, “we may find it useful to think of the ‘field’ as a habitus rather than as a place, a cluster of embodied dispositions and practices.”¹³ In this regard, it might be fruitful if we understand the whole idea of “complex religio-cultural identity” in the framework of Clifford’s understanding of the “field” as related to the habitus and embodied dispositions and practices of communities in the realm of religion and culture. This “field” is so dynamic precisely since it points to the concrete ways in which religious communities maintain their authenticity through finding new strategies of dealing with novel situations, of constructing and reconstructing realities alike.¹⁴

Furthermore, given the crucial role of cultural space in understanding the dynamics of complex religious identity, one might agree with a theologian who argues: “If one completely rethinks the concept of ‘religion,’ as the recent discussion suggests, and does not over-emphasize the cognitive aspects of Christian faith, a kind of multi-religious spiritual life may be possible. The Christian faith is capable of adapting itself flexibly to different cultural systems, not excluding their religious aspects.”¹⁵

Among Christians in South Asia, as well as other religious communities in the area, religious identity does turn out to be so complex and dynamic, rather than pure, simple, and monolithic. As scholars have pointed out, identities are marked by pluriformity, hybridity, and fluidity.¹⁶ Some degree of complexity is always involved in the formation

of Christian values (represented by the Dutch Catholics) and the growth of Javanese religio-cultural values or what they called “Javanese conception of humanness.” In short, these first Javanese Catholics were unabashed in their commitment to upholding their own Javanese culture in tandem with the Christian values and cultures brought about by Christian Europe. In the process, they were made acutely aware of the importance of culture as well as the rather flimsy boundaries between culture and religion in a complex society such as Java at the time. Their identity and Christian practice become hybrid precisely as a result of this negotiation, a process that was helped by the exemplary roles of the Dutch Jesuit missionaries and lay people.²²

So, in talking about the phenomenon of complex religious belonging or identity we would do better by being mindful to this complex nexus of interplay and interrelationships between the categories of (religious) identities, cultures, and religions in a long process that lends itself to a certain degree of constant negotiation and fluidity, a process that although is marked by a certain degree of certainty about what this identity should mean, nevertheless allows for some ambiguities that in the end can be made fruitful in the context of encounters with different forms of otherness, both cultural and religious. In this framework, aspects of otherness are acknowledged and taken as an invitation to delve further into this dynamic of the formation of self in the face of the other.

In this regard, the discourse of the new comparative theology as a theological discipline exemplifies this invitation to probe further into the world of the other as part of one’s complex identity. In making a case for talking about multiple religious identity (instead of multiple religious belonging), the comparative theologian Voss Roberts argues: “Identity offers somewhat greater potential than *belonging* to capture the agency involved in religious being.”²³ Voss Roberts goes on to mention Francis Clooney’s understanding of the complex identity of comparative theologian, an identity that becomes profoundly transformed by taking seriously other religious traditions. This complex identity, as exemplified in the works of Francis Clooney and other comparative theologians, is fostered by serious and multifarious engagement with other religious traditions, especially through back-and-forth reading, even if the comparativist does not “belong” to other religious traditions in an institutional or formal fashion.²⁴ Looking at what has been happening in Asia in terms of complex religio-cultural identity formations and encounters, the method of this new comparative theology provides an avenue for deeper and more explicitly theological reflections on the phenomenon. Elsewhere I have attempted to expand the Catholic understanding of *communio sanctorum* (“communion of saints and the Holy”) as a comparative theological response to the rich phenomenon of encounters between Javanese Muslims and Catholics around the practice of local pilgrimage and saint veneration. In this case, the method of the new comparative theology constitutes a more reflective step that makes these real encounters, namely, its meanings and structures, even richer, if not interestingly more complex. This method also allows the comparativists to reflect on the real transformation that these encounters with the other bring in terms of their complex religious identity.²⁵

shrine at Ganjuran, have also been hailed in a similar way: the hybrid Hindu Javanese Catholic style of the shrine that they founded during the late colonial period of the 1930s is always understood as an enduring expression of these founders' love for the loftiness of the Javanese culture and their commitment to the authentic, deep, and harmonious meeting between Catholicism and this culture.³⁰

The striking similarity in terms of their communal desire for religio-cultural hybridity put them closer to each other, among others in the entire tradition of pilgrimage that continues to be marked by the underlying and pervasive role of the local Javanese culture. In the case of south central Java, the unifying role of local culture is enhanced by the institutional support and patronage of the local Javano-Muslim courts that perpetuate Kalijaga's religio-cultural legacy. The Sultanates of Yogyakarta and Surakarta understand themselves as distinctive religio-cultural entities in many ways, but particularly in the manner in which the Islamic dimension is integrated within a rich religio-cultural framework that incorporates Java's older legacies, such as Javanese Hinduism and indigenous religious systems, manifested among others in the distinctive public rituals, art, and cultural style of its palace. In the history of Islam in the Indian subcontinent, a similar role has been played by various Muslim courts, such as the Mughals, the Nizams of Haydarabad, the Adil Shahi sultanate of Bijapur, and the Delhi sultanates.³¹ Interestingly, some local Hindu rulers in southern Tamil Nadu were also instrumental in the localization of Christianity in a Hindu soil.³²

Due to their identity as Javanese, many local Muslims and Catholics eagerly participate in various court-sponsored public rituals. Many have no qualms visiting the tombs of Javanese Muslim kings, considered to be their common paradigmatic ancestors, or meditate in the sacred places associated with the founding of the local kingdoms. These Javanese Muslims and Christians feel that their area is a supernaturally charged cosmos due to the presence of the many shrines and holy places connected to the founding and history of their community. In this regard, they are deeply influenced by local cosmology, that is, the Javanese understanding of the *mandala* (sacred space) paradigm, where a common spatial location becomes profoundly charged with divine and supernatural presence, as opposed to the empty geographical and physical location. For many pilgrims, the shrines, either Muslim or Catholic, become a true *mandala* in both physical and spiritual senses. It is a space in which pilgrims find the right physical atmosphere and spatial context to reintegrate pieces of their lives, generating an inner sense of peacefulness. It is this power that often really matters for pilgrims, not primarily the official religious affiliation of the shrine in question.

In this pilgrimage tradition, mutual encounters through common culture become manifest in the specificities of the practice. For example, in both Muslim and Catholic contexts, the ascetic component is often emphasized. This corresponds to the Javanese idea of pilgrimage as *tirakat* or *laku*, that is, a long and intense period of spiritual exercise, marked by a set of distinctive practices such as fasting, keeping vigil, purifying the heart, and so forth in a sacred precinct. Understood this way, pilgrimage is much more than a pious visit, and the blessings of this process come to be intimately related to the process, in which one's agency is as important as God's grace, rather than the end. Thus

practiced, pilgrimage is an important part of a self-formation done in a disciplined manner. For it is a journey toward an intensive solitary withdrawal from the humdrum of the outer world in order to better commune with God, the saints, ancestors, and protectors. In this regard, while the Arabic term *ziārah* may refer primarily to the pious act of visiting a grave or shrine, the Javanese practices of *tirakat* and *laku* are not just about the accompanying process, but rather a crucial part of the whole journey of visitation that gives the true personal and spiritual quality to the entire journey. The original spirit of the practice clearly dates back to pre-Islamic Java, where it was taken as a typical preparation of important undertaking, an intense period where one purged the self of egotistical interests and tried to discern the ways to proceed by communing with the ancestors and spiritual guardians of Java.

The deeply personal and spiritual element in this Javanese understanding and practice of pilgrimage also lies in the particular way in which the deepest meaning of pilgrimage comes to be experienced. In this regard, among Javanese pilgrims, both Muslim and Catholics, the level of authenticity and depth of pilgrimage experience is ensured through the employment of *rasa*. Derived from a loaded Sanskrit word, this Javanese term is generally used to express the dynamics of the inner life of the humans, referring particularly to the complex world of “intuition” or “inner knowing.” The term includes both the substance of the experience as well as the tool in which this substance is apprehended. Although the Javanese tend to locate *rasa* in the heart, actually it works in a way that involves the person as a whole including his mind, body, and senses. Understood this way, *rasa* becomes a very useful and integral instrument and milieu by which the pilgrims come to experience the true quality of this practice in all its aspects. Many pilgrims would typically employ *rasa* to tell whether they have come to be in true communion with the Divine at shrines. While some others, both Muslims and Catholics would use *rasa* as an inner spiritual tool to gauge the sacredness of the tombs of the saints, thus expanding the horizon of the official religious affiliation of the shrine and its saint.

In the common spiritual sensibility that the Javanese Muslim and Catholic pilgrims share, the depth and authenticity of pilgrimage experience is also understood in terms of the triad of the spiritual principles of *meneng*, *wening*, and *dunung*, which, due to their significance in the Javanese philosophy of life, becomes so amenable to appropriation by many Javanese across different religious persuasions.³³ The term *meneng* is associated with being in emotional equilibrium, unperturbed by the externals and trivialities in life; it represents the state of a soul purified from the gross temptations and confusions of material and worldly life and so forth. While the concept of *wening* refers to the state of having a clear vision or truth, good conscience, and inner peace (mindfulness) that is a natural result of *meneng*. In turn, the exercise of these two principles will bring about the state of *hanung*, that is, the state of knowing the deepest core of one’s being, getting in touch with the nature of one’s self and personal mission in life. In the traditional rendering of it, these three principles will bring human being to true victory (*menang*), which is nothing other than overcoming the lower, illusionary, or egotistical self, or the *nafs* in the Islamic theological anthropology. Sometimes the *hanung* is defined as *dunung* that refers to coming to terms with one’s true place and mission in the world, one’s spiritual

state, and it ultimately points to the existential challenge to act out this awareness in daily life.³⁴

Through these spiritual principles, Muslims and Catholics encounter each other in shrines and beyond, on a deeper level because they come to recognize the goodness and richness of each other's tradition through concrete shared practices that really matter for them personally. This logic of deeper and benign encounter can also be found in how the pilgrims understand the blessings of pilgrimage, a pivotal part of the whole practice. The Javanese pilgrims talk about "*berkah*" (from the Arabic *baraka*, blessings). The term has an obvious Islamic overtone, but the whole understanding of the practice connected to the term comes to be much more complex, as it is formed by different insights taken from Hinduism, Buddhism, local religiosity, and in some cases, Christianity.

Among Javanese pilgrims, the more important aspect of pilgrimage blessings comes to be understood within a network of native concepts such as true peacefulness (*tentrem*) and integral well-being (*slamet*). These constitute two of the most important values in the native Javanese spirituality and philosophy of life. For both Muslim and Catholic Javanese pilgrims, this deeper understanding of blessing is helpful, as they have to differentiate between "true blessings" and "boon" or worldly gain. Pilgrims believe that while both are bestowed by God, the two differ in their effect. For the true blessings (*berkah*) effect a true spiritual peacefulness and well-being (*tentrem* and *slamet*), whose horizon goes beyond the boundaries of earthly life, while boon (*perolehan*) is worldly and ambiguous in terms of its effect on the integral welfare of the person.

To summarize, the example above shows how the practices of other religious traditions are concretely appropriated through a complex and long cultural interaction, involving the unifying framework of local culture. This pattern of complex engagement with local culture and religiosity is quite widespread in Asia. Local cultures with their religious components—which, in the case of Java, also include layers of Hinduism, Buddhism, and native spirituality—has become an integral part of local Christian identity. This shared religio-cultural identity in general enables people to participate in each other's religious life to a certain degree and on various levels, not only the outward celebrations or festivals but also the underlying spiritual and religious values and experience behind those practices as well. Here we can talk about complex religio-cultural identity and belonging in terms of the practice of "multiple religious participation."³⁵ But again, the term "religious" here can be too limited or inaccurate, for instance, in the case of Javanese Catholics participating in the pan-Javanese rituals that sometimes have come to possess Islamic overtones, such as the pilgrimage to certain sacred tombs or communal ritual meal (*slametan*). It is also important to note that over time this common culture has also been enriched by these particular religious traditions while retaining its inclusive character as a privileged practice of forging hybrid identities.

A highly crucial aspect of this complex encounter has to do with ambiguities that are always there and negotiated by the community generation after generation along these at times unpredictable dynamics of encounters. At the Marian shrine of Sendangsono, the mother shrine of many smaller Marian shrines in Java, Mary was first conceived by

the early European Jesuit missionaries as an exclusively “Catholic” figure, since she was the missionary who would bring Javanese people to the bosom of the Church. This conception of Mary is without doubt a reflection of an understandably narrow and militant identity formation of the community at that early stage. But this understanding underwent some dramatic changes as the local Catholic community matured in terms of its “catholic” identity, and its encounter with the Javanese culture and Islam became more complex, inclusive, and nuanced.³⁶

As mentioned earlier, similar dynamics are observable among different Christian communities in Asia, especially in how shared religious sensibility and local culture have played a crucial role in their complex identity formation. In Sri Lanka, for example, local Catholic saint veneration betrays a striking structural parallelism to the Sinhalese Buddhism as the dominant religio-cultural framework of the society. In this regard, the anthropologist Stirrat argues, “In Sri Lanka, religion is inextricably linked up with culture, and to distinguish between ‘religious concepts’ and ‘cultural concepts’ is a hazardous operation.”³⁷ Again, this parallelism seems natural, but it is interesting to see that it occurred alongside the ambiguous relationship between Buddhism and Christianity expressed in the sentiment that Catholicism was contaminated by the Sinhalese Buddhist cult of gods or the *bhakti* religiosity.

These dynamics of encounter also occurs in Kerala and Tamil Nadu, with the metaphor of siblings or kinship being employed to describe the role of local Christian saints and Hindu deities in expressing harmonious relationship and maintaining social order among local religious communities.³⁸ On this point, Corinne Dempsey writes, “Family ties among sacred figures provide a fitting metaphor for Hindu-Christian communal relations in a context where the two communities have indeed shared the same roof—and with it, uncanny family resemblances—for nearly two thousand years.”³⁹ This pattern of engagement with the other that facilitates some degree of complex and hybrid identity has been a constant feature among Christian communities in India.⁴⁰ Catholic shrines in South India, such as Velankanni and John de Britto, have become sites of this rich engagement based on a larger shared religious sensibility and structures.

In the early history of mission in Asia, this negotiation of identity has already been advocated by Chinese Catholics. As scholars point out, the identity formation of this Sino-Catholic community tended to be hybrid and complex, as they tried to take into account both their Chinese (largely Confucian) legacy and the Christian teaching (“the teaching of the Lord of Heaven”).⁴¹ On the level of theological thinking this complex process is illustrated, for instance, by Yang Tingyun (1562–1627), the famous Sino-Catholic *literatus*, in his attempt to forge a synthesis between the Judeo-Christian account of creation and the Chinese Confucian cosmogony. As a result, while Yang Tingyun stresses the role of the Master or the Supreme Being (God) in the creation of the cosmos, he also understands the whole process in a more evolutionary framework, a process guided by this Being, whom he also calls “the Great Father-Mother.”⁴² For him, creation comes from nonexistence to existence, a process that will be followed by a reverse evolution of existence into nonexistence that is not totally empty because of the eternal existence of the Master. So while rejecting the central role of *qi* “matter-energy” and *li* “principle” in

creation, as well as four original elements, he nevertheless still assigns some role to these Confucian principles.

As always, this complex process can be highly creative and very promising, but it also carries some ambiguities that necessitate an ongoing process of discernment, which typically occurs communally in a long historical continuum, in the larger context of the complex, not to say hybrid, identity formation of the community. This process is continued by a number of contemporary Chinese Christian thinkers, such as He Shiming, Wu Jingxiong, Zhao Zichen, and others. One can say that this endeavor basically expands the seminal effort of Matteo Ricci and Yang Tingyun into a non-Catholic context by reflecting comparatively on important issues such as creation, humanity, wisdom, social order, self-cultivation, universal brotherhood, and sanctification.⁴³ In general, this spirit of complex identity is also found among educated Chinese Christians who practice Christianity with the realistic spirit of Confucianism and the liberal spirit of Taoism.⁴⁴ The same phenomenon also occurs in Korea, where Christian theologians have started to take seriously the hybrid nature and complex identity of their local Christianity. In the words of a Korean theologian: “Christianity maintains its own particular self-identity while being correlated with the Asian situation in a fusion of horizons. . . . In East Asian culture, Christianity cannot replace the traditional religions in the manner of a radical paradigm shift. The spiritual heritage of East Asian culture is too rich to be discarded.”⁴⁵

CONCLUDING REMARKS

This chapter has emphasized the significant and at times overwhelming phenomenon of complicated religious and cultural identities of Christians in Asia, a complexity that allows for a rather intimate embrace of other religious traditions through the medium of their native cultural legacy and context. The concreteness and scope of this complex identity formation should not be overlooked, particularly when it comes to how a Christian community becomes distinctively local and indigenous without losing its Christian visibility. As many scholars have recently argued, the agency of the local communities generation after generation, rather than just a handful of religious virtuosos, is perhaps the utmost important yet hitherto neglected aspect of the phenomenon of this complex or “multiple” identity.

However, in light of this significant and widespread phenomenon in the mode of Asian Christianity, we will do better if we are also mindful of the existence of its opposite mode, that is, a rather blatant repudiation of certain aspects of benign and hybrid encounters of Christianity with local religious traditions and culture, especially among evangelical and Pentecostal churches that are also thriving in many pockets of contemporary Asia, at times existing neck-and-neck with the hybrid Asian Christians. Many of these churches tend to conceive conversion as a total change of cultural and religious identity. While their identity is still very complex and local religious sensibility also colors their selective and largely unreflective mode of “inculturation”—for example, their

intense supernaturalism, giving rise to emphasis on healing rites, exorcism, the role of dreams and visions, as well as the strong element of millenarianism and messianic exuberance, all of which correspond to local religious sensibility—they tend to shun, in a categorical term, the positive elements of local religious tradition and culture.⁴⁶ This shows that Christianity in Asia is indeed complex and complicated. Even a rather blatant rejection of local culture on the part of Christian community can betray more complex dynamics of identity formation and an indigenization of Christianity. Over time, as the community has to handle different and more complex questions, its understanding and formulation of this process might get more nuanced as well.

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1. Elizabeth Gilbert, *Eat Pray Love: One Woman's Search for Everything across Italy, India and Indonesia* (New York: Penguin, 2007).
2. Tracy Sayuki Tiemeier, "Retrieving 'Asian Spirituality' in North American Contexts: An Interfaith Proposal," *Spiritus: A Journal of Christian Spirituality* 6, no. 2 (2006): 228–33.
3. Catherine Cornille, *Many Mansions? Multiple Religious Belonging and Christian Identity* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 4; Peter C. Phan, "Multiple Religious Belonging: Opportunities and Challenges for Theology and Church," *Theological Studies* 64 (2003): 71–76, 78.
4. Devaka Premawardhana, "The Unremarkable Hybrid: Aloysius Pieris and the Redundancy of Multiple Religious Belonging," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 46, no. 1 (Winter 2011): 76–101; Michele Voss Roberts, "Religious Belonging and the Multiple," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 26, no. 1 (2010): 43–62.
5. Mathew N. Schmalz, "Boundaries and Appropriations in North Indian Charismatic Catholicism," in Mathew N. Schmalz and Peter Gottschalk, eds., *Engaging South Asian Religions: Boundaries, Appropriations, and Resistance* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2011), 85–111.
6. Lian Xi, *Redeemed by Fire: The Rise of Christian Popular Religion in Modern China* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010).
7. Selva Raj and Corinne Dempsey, eds., *Popular Christianity in India: Writing between the Lines* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2002); Felix Wilfred, "Christianity in Hindu Polytheistic Structural Mould: Converts in Southern Tamilnadu Respond to an Alien Religion during 'the Vasco da Gama epoch,'" *Archives de sciences sociales des religions* 43, no. 103 (1998): 67–86.
8. Ikuo Higashibaba, *Christianity in Early Modern Japan: Kirishitan Belief and Practice* (Leiden: Brill, 2001); D. E. Mungello, *The Forgotten Christians of Hangzhou* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1994).
9. Jan VanBragt, "Multiple Religious Belonging among Japanese People," in Catherine Cornille, ed., *Many Mansions?: Multiple Religious Belonging and Christian Identity* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 7–19; Corinne Dempsey, *Kerala Christian Sainthood: Collisions of Culture and Worldview in South India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

30. Ibid., 320–49.
31. Richard Maxwell Eaton, *Sufis of Bijapur 1300–1700: Social Roles of Sufis in Medieval India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978); and *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier, 1204–1760* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993); Nile Green, *Indian Sufism since the Seventeenth Century: Saints, Books and Empires in the Muslim Deccan* (London: Routledge, 2006); Finbarr B. Flood, *Objects of Translation: Material Culture and Medieval “Hindu-Muslim” Encounter* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009).
32. Susan Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings: Muslims and Christians in South Indian Society, 1700–1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).
33. In this regard, the employment of this philosophy as well as of *rasa* as a spiritual method—that is influenced by but not identical to any particular religion—might be similar to the use of the Zen method by the Jesuit Enomiya-Lassale to experience deep union with God and Christ in the context of Japan. See Werner Jeanrod, “Belonging or Identity: Christian Faith in a Multi-Religious World,” in Cornille, *Many Mansions?* 113–14.
34. Laksana, “Journeying to God in Communion with the Other,” 413.
35. John Berthrong, *The Divine Deli: Religious Identity in the North American Cultural Mosaic* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999), 35; Voss Roberts, “Religious Belonging and the Multiple,” 49.
36. Laksana, “Journeying to God in Communion with the Other.”
37. R. L. Stirrat, “The Shrine of St Sebastian in Mirisgama: An Aspect of the Cult of the Saints in Catholic Sri Lanka,” *Man*, New Series, 16 no. 2 (1981): 197.
38. Wilfred, “Christianity in Hindu Polytheistic Structural Mould,” 71.
39. Dempsey, *Kerala Christian Sainthood*, 15 ff.
40. Raj and Dempsey, *Popular Christianity in India*.
41. See Zvi Ben-Dor Benite, *The Dao of Muhammad: A Cultural History of Muslims in Late Imperial China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2005). It is worth noting that roughly the same process also occurred among Chinese Muslims,
42. N. Standaert, *Yang Tingyun, Confucian and Christian in Late Ming China: His Life and Thought* (Leiden: Brill, 1988), 110–16.
43. Mikka Ruokanen and Paulos Huang, eds., *Christianity and Chinese Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2010), 185.
44. Ibid., 223.
45. Kyoung-Jae Kim, *Christianity and the Encounter of Asian Religions* (Zoetermeer: Boekecentrum, 1994), 163.
46. Lian Xi, *Redeemed by Fire; Eugenio Menegon, Ancestors, Virgins and Friars: Christianity as a Local Religion in Late Imperial China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009).

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CHAPTER 32

ASIAN CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY

PETER C. PHAN

WHAT is Christian spirituality, and is there a distinctly “Asian” way of living the Christian faith? If so, what are the main features of this spirituality? How are the various cultures of Asia to be integrated into it? How can the Asian religious traditions be channeled into this river of Christian spirituality? Within Asian Christianity there are vastly different ecclesial communities which have preserved and promoted their own distinct spiritual traditions, from the oldest Church of Malabar or Thomas Christians in India to the most recent Pentecostal and evangelical house churches in China. I will begin with brief reflections on spirituality as human self-transcendence in the Spirit, and in the case of Christian spirituality, in the Spirit of Jesus. Second, I will discuss some of the major features of Asian Christian spirituality. The third part focuses on a peculiar dimension of Asian Christian spirituality, namely, its interreligious character. In this context I discuss the contributions of some representative theologians from different Christian traditions to Asian Christian spirituality.

CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY AS LIFE IN COMMUNION WITH GOD MEDIATED BY JESUS AND EMPOWERED BY THE POWER OF THE SPIRIT

In its broadest sense, spirituality refers to the human capacity for self-transcendence that is actualized in acts of knowledge and love of realities other than oneself. More narrowly, it refers to the religious way of life by which one enters into communion with the transcendent reality, however this is interpreted and named (e.g., Emptiness, the Holy,

the Ultimate, the Absolute, the Unnameable, Heaven, God, etc.). More strictly still, it indicates a particular way of living out one's relationship with this transcendent reality, through specific beliefs, rituals, prayers, moral behaviors, and community participation (e.g., Hindu, Buddhist, Jewish, Christian, Muslim, etc.). Even though spirituality is not bound to a particular religion and can be found outside of religious institutions, there is no generic spirituality, untethered from a historical and particular tradition and community. Even when one attempts to construct one's own spirituality, such spirituality would not be generic but is necessarily related to a particular context; nor would it be entirely new since it can only be constructed by drawing upon various elements of pre-existing spiritual traditions. In other words, the community dimension of spirituality is essential to any spiritual quest. In Christian tradition, this community is called "church."¹ Thus, spirituality is constituted by human self-transcendence toward the Ultimate within a particular religious tradition.

Furthermore, since spirituality is a way of union with the Transcendent/God in the world, it necessarily entails a conception of the relation between the Transcendent and the world. This conception varies from spirituality to spirituality, some laying greater stress on God's presence in the world (immanentist), others on God's being above and beyond it (transcendentalist). In the former, our knowledge of and discourse on God are given prominence (cataphatic theology); in the latter, our "learned ignorance" of the divine "luminous darkness" is emphasized (apophatic theology). Some spiritualities give priority to knowledge of God, others to love. Again, some spiritualities focus on action, others on contemplation. Finally, some spiritualities favor the cultivation of the spiritual growth of the individual, others and the welfare of the community. Of course, it is more a matter of emphasis and priority than exclusivity, and many if not all religious traditions combine a both-and rather than either-or approach to these options.

The spiritualities of Asian religious traditions embody all these options, each in its distinctive way. Some of them, for example, Buddhism, and to a lesser extent, Confucianism, foster a non-theistic spirituality; others, for instance, *advaitic* Hinduism, seek unity/identity and not simply union with the Divine; still others, such as Daoism, seek human flourishing within an impersonal framework. Islam, though strictly monotheistic, does not set as the religious goal for humanity's union, much less identity, with God but total submission to God's will, and contrary to Christianity, does not conceive God in Trinitarian terms. As will be seen below, Christian spirituality has a Trinitarian structure, patterned on the relations among the three divine Persons in the Trinity.

Christian spirituality may be defined as a particular way of being united with God, mediated by Jesus of Nazareth in his ministry, death, and resurrection, and made possible by the power of the Holy Spirit, who has been poured out upon the community called church. In other words, Christian spirituality is *theistic* or *Trinitarian* (personal and filial relationship with God the Father/Mother), *Christological* or *evangelical* (mediated through and modeled after Christ, especially in his life, death, and resurrection), *pneumatological* or *charismatic* (empowered by the Spirit, especially through his gifts), and *ecclesial* or *communitarian* (realized in the church as a community of equal disciples of Jesus). Within this fourfold pattern, during the last two

millennia, Christian spirituality has developed a large variety of “schools” or “traditions,” especially in the monastic, vowed, and clerical ways of life, often named after religious founders, for instance, Benedictine, Franciscan, Dominican, Carmelite, Ignatian/Jesuit, and so on. In turn, these schools or traditions have been subjected to constant, at times radical, reforms, in both male and female communities, on the ground of their alleged decadence, demanding a return to the original, stricter forms of life, or of their perceived unsuitability to contemporary times, mandating progressive adaptations and renewals.

In spite of these diversities, Christian spirituality is essentially life in the Spirit of Jesus. Spirit is not antithetical to the body and matter. According to Paul, “spirit” (*pneuma*) and spiritual (*pneumatikos*)—from which ‘spirituality’ is derived—are the opposites of “flesh” (*sarx*), “fleshly” (*sarkikos*), and “soul-ly” (*psychikos*), but not of “body” (*soma*), “bodily” (*somatikos*), and “matter” (*hyle*). The Pauline opposition is not between two ontological orders: the incorporeal and the immaterial, on the one hand, and the corporeal and the material, on the other. Such metaphysical dualism did not attach to the use of *spiritualitas* until the twelfth century. Rather, the opposition is between two ways of life, one that is led by and functions in accord with the Spirit (“spiritual”) and therefore leads to life, and the other is opposed to the Spirit (“fleshly”) and brings about death. Christian spirituality then is a holistic way of life, involving body, soul, and spirit. It is essentially life in communion with God empowered by the Spirit of Christ, by whom men and women are made sons and daughters of God by adoption, and brothers and sisters of Christ, into whose image they must be fashioned. Such a life is endowed with the Spirit’s gifts of virtues (1 Cor. 13:13; Col. 1:9; Rom. 8:21; Gal. 5:13; 2 Cor. 3:17), fruits (Gal. 5:23–24), and charisms of different kinds to build up the Christian community (1 Cor. 12:4–11, 28–30; Rom. 12:6–8; Eph. 4:11–13).

It is important to note with regard to Christian spirituality that the divine being with whom Christians enter into communion is neither one nor plural, but, to use the expression of Vedantic philosophy popularized in Christian circles especially by Raimon Panikkar, *advaitic*, that is, non-dual. In terms of the Christian faith, God is neither a solitary monad (as in the Unitarian belief) nor a multiplicity of beings (as in the polytheistic tradition) but “Trinitarian.” This divine transhistorical Trinity manifests itself in history, to use Panikkar’s memorable coinage, as a non-monistic and non-dualistic “cosmotheandric” reality, the *mysterium coniunctionis* of the divine, the human, and the cosmic. As a consequence, Christian spirituality is necessarily tripartite in its structure—divine, human, and cosmic—and cannot be reduced to any one of these three elements.

Moreover, because of its intrinsically plural character, Christian spirituality is fundamentally open and receptive to other spiritualities, learning from their distinct emphasis on the divine (e.g., in Hinduism), or on the human (e.g., Confucianism and Buddhism), or on the cosmos (e.g., Daoism). Thus, the attitude of Christianity toward other religions is neither exclusivistic (which is dualistic) nor inclusivistic (which is monistic) nor pluralistic (which is both) but *advaitic*.² In other words, Christian spirituality is neither exclusively Christian nor inclusively religious nor pluralistically

Buddhist monasticism.) Rather, Iberian spirituality is characterized by personal love for and imitation of the suffering and crucified Jesus (hence, the centrality of the Passion and the Cross in popular devotions and the arts) and numerous devotional practices in honor of Mary, the angels, and the saints, which have a strong appeal to Asians with their own practices of honoring the ancestors, deities, and spirits. This spirituality, contrary to the monastic one, is in principle democratic insofar as it is open to all Christians, and not reserved to the spiritual elites.

With the coming in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries of religious orders, both male and female, of more recent, mostly French and Italian, origins, another piety and asceticism, of a predominantly individualistic cast and largely inspired by the Counter-Reformation, with a clericalist separation between the laity, on the one hand, and the clergy and the religious, on the other, was introduced to Asia. Uniformity and centralization were the order of the day, and consequently there was not much difference between the spirituality practiced in Rome and that practiced in Asia.

From the eighteenth century, Protestant churches, especially from Britain, Holland, Denmark, Germany, and the United States, introduced their distinctive Bible-based pietism which was strongly inspired by the *devotio moderna*. (Thomas à Kempis's *Imitation of Christ*, written between 1418–1427 was widely read by Protestants.) This spirituality, which was a reaction against the sterile scholasticism of the late medieval church in the fourteenth century, and later, in the seventeenth century, against Lutheran scholasticism, cultivates an affective “inner devotion,” rooted in the imitation of Christ. Since the latter half of the twentieth century, this Protestant tradition of biblical piety, which animated Methodism and the Holiness movement, has been further expanded with the dramatic and explosive growth of the Pentecostal, evangelical, and charismatic churches (including the Catholic variations) and Christian-inspired indigenous churches, with their strong emphasis on personal conversion, prophecy, healing, exorcism, glossolalia, and other gifts of the Spirit.

These imported spiritualities, together with a full panoply of sacramental and liturgical practices, remain widespread and influential in Asia, especially among the laity, thanks to their transmission by foreign missionaries and religious orders and societies and by indigenous Pentecostal house churches. However, despite their popularity, they have retained until the second half of the twentieth century their foreign character.⁴ Christianity remained in most respects a Western religion. While there were sporadic attempts at dialoguing with native cultures and religions such as those carried out by Matteo Ricci in China, Alexandre de Rhodes in Vietnam, and Roberto de Nobili in India, due to persecutions by the state, especially in China, Japan, Korea, and Vietnam, particularly in the nineteenth century, Christianity was forced to live in a cultural and religious ghetto. It was like a tree planted in a pot and transported from the West into Asia but was never transplanted out of its old container into the Asian soil to produce locally grown flowers and fruits.

With the waning of colonial power and the subsequent rise of globalization with its free-market economy and political democratization, things changed dramatically and rapidly in Asia. Within the Roman Catholic Church, changes were provoked by the

Second Vatican Ecumenical Council (1962–65), which mandated momentous renewals in church life, with far-reaching implications for Christian spirituality, even in Asia. In addition to the council, two significant events have promoted a new way of being church in Asia and consequently a new spirituality that is more appropriate to the Asian peoples, namely, the foundation of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) in 1972⁵ and the Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for Asia (the Asian Synod for short) in 1998.⁶ One of the central projects of Vatican II is *aggiornamento* (literally, catching-up-with-the-day) in all areas of church life which, as Aloysius Pieris has convincingly shown, is to be undertaken more properly as “renewal” than as “reform.” By “reform” is meant merely structural modifications, often initiated by the top and spread from the center to the periphery, which leaves the fundamental ideology unchanged. In contrast, by “renewal” is meant a radical renovation, creating something *new*, initiated by the bottom and moving from the periphery to the center, and throwing the center into crisis. Renewal entails reform, but reform does not necessarily bring with it renewal.⁷

One of the ways in which this renewal is to be carried out is inculturation, though the term was not used by Vatican II. It is the process of interacting between the Gospel and another culture—better designated as “interculturation”—in which there is a mutual enrichment, and if necessary, correction, of the culture by the Gospel and—equally important—of the Gospel by the culture. By “Gospel” is meant the good news that God has shared God's life with all humanity and the world through the ministry of God's Son Jesus and by the power of the Spirit. (The biblical expression for this reality of God's saving presence is the “Reign” or “Kingdom of God.”) It must be noted that the Gospel is not culture-free or culture-neutral. Although the Gospel can in principle be expressed in any culture, it was framed first in Hebrew/Jewish and Greek/Hellenistic cultures, and it was in these cultural terms that it was brought to other parts of the globe. “Culture” here refers not only to a society's “high” and “popular” cultures but also to its sociopolitical and economic conditions and above all, its religions. There was until recently a prevalent practice, as mentioned above, to impose Western ways of living the Christian faith or spirituality on the churches in Asia as well as elsewhere. Vatican II is the first ecumenical council that recognizes the necessity of interculturalization and promotes the diversity of ways of living the Gospel in culture as these two expressions are understood above.

With regard to spirituality, Vatican II's project of interculturalization was taken up in Asia by the FABC. In document after document, from the Final Statements of its quadrennial Plenary Assemblies to numerous reports of meetings and conferences organized by its various offices, the FABC insists on a new way of being church in Asia, and hence, a new spirituality. This new way of being church is not concerned with structural and organizational issues but with a spirituality that is appropriate to the Asian context. The focus of Asian Christian spirituality is not on *ad intra*, “churchy” issues. These have relevance only to the extent that they contribute to the *ad extra* mission of the church of witnessing to the presence and work of Christ and the Spirit in all humanity, and not only in Christianity. In other words, spirituality is not geared inward, that is, toward building

up the institutions of the church; rather, it adopts a predominantly outward movement, toward realizing and spreading the Reign of God, in oneself and in others.

According to the FABC, Christian spirituality in Asia must respond to the need for a triple dialogue with the peoples of Asia: dialogue with the peoples themselves, especially the poor and the marginalized among them (liberation), dialogue with their cultures (inculturation), and dialogue with their religions (interreligious dialogue). These three dialogues are not separable from each other; rather, they are so intimately intertwined that the efficacy of one depends on that of the other two. Consequently, Asian Christian spirituality must embody all the virtues and commitments that all the three dialogues require. Of the third dialogue more will be said below.

The first two forms of dialogue in various ways shape the contours to Asian Christian spirituality. First, insofar as Asian Christian spirituality requires commitment to liberation in dialogue with the poor, it must overcome the divide separating the private from the public, the personal from the political, the individual from the community, the material from the spiritual, contemplation from action—various forms of dualism that have been the bane of the traditional spiritualities such as Iberian spirituality and the *devotio moderna* referred to above.

In this Asian spirituality, solitude, which is admittedly a necessary condition for spirituality, cannot be conceived simply as quietude and silence, a spiritual desert or ashram facilitating communion of the soul with God (the alone with the Alone) but must lead to service to those who are oppressed or marginalized. Similarly, love goes beyond charity and almsgiving, albeit necessary, to include struggle for social justice and the establishment of just legal, economic, and political structures to ensure a just society. In short, Asian Christian spirituality must embrace the option for the poor and solidarity with the least members of society that are advocated by Latin American theology of liberation, and where conflicts exist, promote reconciliation and harmony. In this context it is helpful to recall Aloysius Pieris's distinction between "enforced poverty" and "voluntary poverty."⁸ The former, widespread in Asia, is the result of exploitation, colonialism, and neo-colonialist globalization. It is the reign of anti-God Mammon. The latter is the condition of material deprivation voluntarily and freely assumed in solidarity with the poor, so that the poverty of many will be eliminated. It is the consequence of being a disciple of Jesus. Voluntary poverty is an indispensable component of Asian Christian spirituality.

The second dialogue, namely, dialogue with Asian cultures, affords opportunities not only to introduce traditional Christian devotional practices into Asian cultural practices but also to import cultural practices into Christian spirituality, in accord with the two-way traffic of interculturation. In the past, fear of superstition and syncretism has fostered a negative judgment on non-Christian popular religion. Today, while the danger of a New Age cafeteria-style approach to religious practices exists and should be resisted, popular religiosity can be seen as part of cosmic religiousness with a pervasive and deep sacramental understanding of reality, a view consistent with the sacramental spirituality of the Catholic and Orthodox churches.

Some examples of the mutual enrichment between Christian spirituality and Asian cultures may be cited here. Foremost are popular devotions.⁹ As mentioned earlier, the Christian cult of Mary and the saints and praying for the dead find deep resonances in the widespread cult in Asia of spirits, titular genies, cosmic gods and goddesses, and the veneration of ancestors. With regard to the cult of ancestors (including the cult of Confucius), there was strong condemnation of it by Roman authorities from the latter half of the seventeenth century to 1939 during the so-called Chinese Rites Controversy.¹⁰ Today misunderstandings of its superstitious character have been removed and the veneration of ancestors has become an essential part of Asian Christian spirituality.¹¹ Asian Catholics are also well-known for their great devotion to Mary, especially to the various “Our Lady of,” in particular our Lady of Lourdes and Our Lady of Fatima. Today, Catholics in most Asian countries have their own “our Lady” and claim to have their own Marian apparitions and shrines. Furthermore, the Buddhist veneration of the bodhisattva of compassion Guanyin (Kwanyin) predisposes many Asian Catholics favorably to Marian devotion.¹²

Similarly, Asian Catholics have adopted the veneration of Western saints and it is a common practice to take the saints’ names as baptismal names. There are now, of course, Asian canonized saints, martyrs, and otherwise, whose veneration, liturgical and private, is becoming increasingly common, obviously not instead of but in addition to Western saints. This cult of the saints makes the Asian practice of ancestor veneration, sharply condemned in the past, much more acceptable now.

The mention of martyrdom draws attention to another important feature of Asian Christian spirituality, and that is, the place of suffering and witnessing to the faith, even unto death, in many Asian countries. Suffering for the faith is a current and widespread predicament of many Christians in Asia, especially in countries where they are a minority and in countries with communist government. Today, *imitatio Christi*, which was strongly advocated by Iberian spirituality and the *devotio moderna*, are no longer focused on the crucified Christ. Suffering is not embraced as mortification of the flesh, to share in the merits of Christ’s passion but as a willing acceptance of unprovoked persecution by hostile powers in a nonviolent and public witness to God’s universal love. Given the rise of the bombing-suicides in certain parts of Asia (sometimes celebrated as “martyrdom”), it is important to note that martyrdom in Christian spirituality cannot be confused with suicide to inflict death and destruction on others for the sake of a cause however lofty and noble. Rather it is a patient and peaceful acceptance of suffering coupled with forgiveness for the perpetrators of injustice to bear witness to God’s merciful love for all.

Finally, other cultural artifacts introduced into Asian Christian spirituality, especially in personal and public prayer, include song, chant, music, dance, the plastic arts, and architecture. To be mentioned are also the rituals celebrating the New Year, the changes of seasons, and the life cycle events such as birth, marriage, and death. These artifacts and rituals are not generally considered religious in the strict sense but rather as cultural practices, though a hard-and-fast distinction between culture and religion is not possible, especially in Asia. When invested with a Christian meaning

and function, they not only contribute to the indigenization or inculturation of Christianity into Asia but also enrich Christian spirituality in significant ways.

CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY AS INTERRELIGIOUS SPIRITUALITY

I come now to the third dialogue in Christian spirituality, arguably the most challenging and controversial, namely interreligious dialogue. Of course, the encounter between Christianity and other religions is as old as Christianity itself. From its very beginnings Christianity had to define its identity over against other religious traditions such as Judaism, Greco-Roman religions, and later, Islam. But these encounters can hardly be characterized as dialogue, inspired as they were by fear, hostility, and even violence.

Because Asia is the birthplace of most if not all world religions, and because Christians form but a tiny minority of the Asian population, Asian Christians, more than their fellow-believers in any other part of the globe, cannot live their Spirit-empowered lives apart from non-Christian religions. At first, most missionaries, both Catholic and Protestant, were pessimistic about the spiritual values of these religious ways of life. But the goodness of non-Christians (some of them are holier than Christians!), with whom many Christians share their daily life intimately as family members, give the lie to the church's age-old teaching that non-Christians are heathens destined for hell, that Christianity is the only true and universally valid way to God, and that non-Christian religions are corrupted by superstition and depravity. Clearly, non-Christians are good and holy, not in spite but because of the beliefs and practices enjoined by their religions. From the Christian perspective, these elements of truth and grace may be regarded as fruits of the Spirit, who is the gift of God and the Risen Christ, but who is active outside of, albeit not independently from, Jesus and the church, in ways known to God.¹³

Consequently, Asian Christian spirituality must be carried out in a sincere and humble dialogue with other religions to learn from, among other things, their sacred scriptures, doctrinal teachings, moral and spiritual practices, prayers and devotions, and monastic and mystical traditions. Such interreligious dialogue is possible only if it is done in humility, with commitment to one's own faith, a sense of commonality among religions, empathy, and hospitality.¹⁴ Let me refer here, by way of example, to some Catholic efforts. Although the seeds of interreligious dialogue had been sown by Jesuit missionaries in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, it is only in the twentieth century that a genuine dialogue between Christians and other religions took place in Asia. Its development and growth owe much to the initiatives and labors of expatriate missionaries, and more specifically, to monks, to whom Asian Christian spirituality is deeply indebted. A comprehensive account of Asian Christian monasticism must present the enormous contributions of the three Western "monastic prophets": Henri Le Saux (Swami Abhishiktananda), Bede Griffiths, and Thomas Merton. In addition to

these to be noted also are Jules Monchanin, Raimon Panikkar, Francis Mahieu, William Johnston, and Hugo Enomyia-Lassalle. To be noted as well is the contributions of Asian-born Brahmabandhab Upadhyay, D. S. Amalorpavadass, Vandana, and Aloysius Pieris.

From these pioneers' work, it is clear that the Asian religions with which the Catholic Church entered into dialogue are chiefly Hinduism and (Zen) Buddhism. It is also very important to note that this dialogue did not begin with a discussion of philosophical and theological issues, though they eventually assumed a significant role in it, but with monastic practices.¹⁵ The adoption of monasticism as the starting point for interreligious dialogue was not a purely historical coincidence as all of the above-mentioned individuals were monks or religious. Rather it was felt that monasticism would be the most fertile common ground between Christianity, on the one hand, and Hinduism and Buddhism, on the other, and that Christian monasticism would be greatly enriched by learning from the Hindu and Buddhist forms of monasticism. Thus, various Buddhist and Hindu monastic practices were adopted, such as dress, diet, bodily postures and gestures, meditation (e.g., *yoga*, *zazen*, *vipassana*), silence, fasting, and monastic community life (*ashram*). These manners of life and practices were not adopted in order to improve those of Western monasticism nor even to inculturate Christian life into the Asian context. Rather, the primary goal is to achieve an immediate experience of God or the Absolute, in the form of the experience of non-duality (*advaita*) and emptiness (*sunyata*), which is considered to be the essence of monasticism itself.

The dialogue with Hinduism and Buddhism in Christian spirituality is being continued by many contemporary Asian-born theologians, the former in India, and the latter in countries where Buddhism predominates such as Sri Lanka and Thailand (Theravada Buddhism), Japan (Zen Buddhism), and Vietnam (Mahayana Buddhism). Dialogue has also been extended to Confucianism and Taoism (in mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan) and to primal or tribal religions. Here I will concentrate briefly on the work of Vandana with Hinduism, Aloysius Pieris with Buddhism, and Choan-Seng Song with Confucianism.

Vandana (b. 1924), born to a Parsi family in Bombay, converted to Catholicism, joined the Society of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, and eventually became provincial superior of her order. As a result of her deep encounter with Hinduism, she took the Sanskrit name Vandana, meaning prayer, as the spiritual program of her life, and adopted the saffron robes of the *sannyasin* (female renunciant). To advance her vision of Christian-Hindu spirituality, Vandana founded an ashram, first located by the River Ganges and later in the Himalayas, which she called *jeevan-dhara* (living streams), open to both Christians and Hindus. Vandana intended her spirituality, which she called "ashramic Spirit-uality"—with a hyphen after "Spirit"—to be different from that of Abhishiktananda insofar as for her the primary mode of presence of Christ in the ashram is not in the Eucharist but in his Spirit. This emphasis might have been due to the fact Roman Catholic women are not admitted to the priesthood. Daily life in her ashram is marked not by sacramental celebrations but by meditation and the practice of the triple yoga of *jnana* (knowledge), *bhakti* (devotion), and *karma* (action). The ultimate

goal of meditation is to awaken oneself to the identity between oneself (*atman*) and God (*Brahman*), in the way Jesus came to realize his oneness with the Father at the River Jordan.¹⁶

Among Asian Catholic theologians the most versed in Buddhism is no doubt the Sri Lankan Jesuit Aloysius Pieris (b. 1934). A prominent proponent of Asian liberation theology, Pieris has devoted his scholarship to building bridges not only between the two thought systems, Buddhist and Christian, but also between these two ways of living, between *prajna* (wisdom) and *agape* (love), respectively, to form a Christian-Buddhist spirituality that is both “agapeic gnosis” (for Christians) and “gnostic agape” (for Buddhists). A central insight of Pieris’s spirituality is that it can be authentic only if the immediate experience of God is achieved in conjunction with the struggle for the liberation of the poor. Otherwise it runs the risk of escapism—a charge that has been leveled, at times unfairly, against the kind of ashramic spirituality proposed by Abhishikananda and Vandana. In developing his “mysticism of service” Pieris draws deeply on the teachings of the founder of his order, Saint Ignatius of Loyola, as embodied especially in the *Spiritual Exercises*. Pieris perceives a “symbiosis” between the Ignatian spirituality of “contemplation”—affective awareness of the actual God-experience mediated by works of love and justice—and the Buddhist practice of “awareness” or “mindfulness.” Similarly, he draws out similarities between Ignatius’s precept of “self-denial” and the Buddha’s teaching of *anatta* (no-self).¹⁷

The dialogue between Christianity and Chinese religious traditions, in particular Confucianism and Taoism, is less extensive and in depth than that between Christianity and the Indian religions. Among those engaged in this dialogue is the Taiwanese Presbyterian Choan-Seng Song (b. 1929), certainly the best-known to the West (most of his works are in English) and the most prolific Chinese theologian. One of the innovative features of Song’s theology is his use of Asian, mostly albeit not exclusively Chinese, historical events and daily realities, in particular stories, as resource for theology. Placing these Chinese stories side by side with the biblical stories, or to use his expression, by their “transposition,” Song enables them to illumine each other and expand their meaning for Asian peoples today.¹⁸ By his very method Song does not distinguish between theology and spirituality; his story theology is spirituality. Like Pieris’s spirituality, Song’s is deeply rooted in a liberationist reading of the ministry and death of Jesus. This Chinese liberation spirituality is most clearly expressed in Song’s trilogy entitled *The Cross in the Lotus World*.¹⁹ Claiming to offer not a theological system, a Christological formula, or a theological principle, Song masterfully weaves the Gospel narratives with a variety of Asian stories to offer a way of being a Christian in the Chinese, and more broadly, Asian context that contributes to the full human flourishing, especially for those who are oppressed in any way. Central to this Chinese spirituality are the concept of the reign of God announced and ushered in by Jesus as a place of justice and the understanding of God as compassionate love. For Song, love and justice are not mutually incompatible virtues but require each other for the building up of the kingdom of God in China.

In conclusion, it would be helpful to consider the practical ways in which interfaith dialogue can be made part of Asian Christian spirituality. As a part of Asian Christian

spirituality, interreligious dialogue is a genuine opening of persons of different faiths to one another with a view to share and be enriched by another faith, and it serves a multiplicity of functions. It helps overcome fear of the other, removes misunderstandings of and prejudices against other religions, promotes collaboration with others in areas of life beyond religion, and enhances the understanding and practice of one's own faith. According to the FABC, such a dialogue takes the forms of *common living* as friendly and helpful neighbors; *common action* for the sake of peace, justice, and ecological integrity; *theological exchange* to remove misunderstandings and to enrich one another intellectually; and *shared religious experience* in which people of different faiths pray and worship together.²⁰

These four dialogues do not function separately from and independently of one another. Rather they form a single spirituality composed of four intimately intertwined activities that derive their effectiveness from one another. Nor should any activity be given priority, especially theological exchange, as is often done in the West. On the contrary, theological exchange should be preceded by, rooted in, and nourished by common living, common action, and shared religious experiences.

Of these three activities, the last, sharing of religious experiences, is perhaps the most spiritually challenging yet is of vital importance. It is indeed interreligious spirituality in action. To pray and worship together, in the midst of religious diversity and differences, even in the very conceptualization of the Ultimate—and not simply to be together to pray, each one in his or her own traditions—is to realize at the deepest level the fundamental unity that binds all humans and the cosmos together. It is at this level that genuine and lasting justice, peace, and reconciliation of all peoples, despite their socio-economic, political, and religious differences, can be achieved. Sharing religious experiences does not require a doctrinal consensus among participants as its condition of possibility and legitimation, nor is it merely its practical consequence. Rather it is made possible by the very *advaitic* nature of reality, by the cosmotheandric *mysterium conjunctionis* that is beyond all religious organizations and boundaries. Thus, interreligious spirituality is the call and demand of our time of religious pluralism and is an essential part of Asian Christian spirituality.

NOTES

1. For a study of Christian spirituality in a global perspective, see James Wiseman, *Spirituality and Mysticism: A Global View* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2006); and Simon Chan, *Spiritual Theology: A Systematic Study of the Christian Life* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1998).
2. It has rightly been pointed out that “inclusivism,” at first sight, a seemingly generous attitude to other positions than one's own, is fundamentally not very different from “exclusivism.” It assumes that the position one holds is the only true one, and that the other positions can be true and good to the extent that they contain “elements of truth and grace” that per se belong to or are derived from one's position. Thus, while “exclusivism” is dualistic,

- “inclusivism” is monistic, and the two positions are not dissimilar in their attitude toward the “other.”
3. By “Asia” here are meant principally Central Asia, East Asia, South Asia, and Southeast Asia (excluding the Middle East or West Asia).
 4. It may be argued that Christianity must be and will necessarily remain a “foreign” religion in Asia, or anywhere else for that matter, since it has a transcendent reference. My point here is not that it must give up its distinctive features but rather that the many features that have been attributed to Christianity as its essential elements have been couched in Western modes, and these modes are not essential to Christianity, and hence can and must be changed.
 5. On the FABC and its documents, see the four-volume *For All Peoples of Asia*, ed. Gaudencio Rosales, C. G. Arévalo, Franz-Josef Eilers, and Vimal Tirimanna (Quezon City, Philippines: Claretian Publications, 1992–2014).
 6. On the Asian Synod, see *The Asian Synod: Texts and Commentaries*, ed. Peter C. Phan (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002).
 7. See Aloysius Pieris, *Give Vatican II a Chance: Yes to Incessant Renewal. No to Reform of the Reforms* (Gonawala-Kelaniya, Sri Lanka: Tulana Research Centre, 2010).
 8. See Aloysius Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988), 15–23.
 9. Richard P. Madsen has persuasively argued that the Catholic Church in China has been able to survive and even flourish thanks to what he calls “folk-Catholicism.” See his “Beyond Orthodoxy: Catholicism and Chinese Folk Religion,” in Stephen Uhalley, Jr. and Xiaxin Wu, eds., *China and Christianity: Burdened Past, Hopeful Future* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 2001), 233–49.
 10. On the Chinese Rites Controversy, see the following note. The literature on this theme is immense and is readily available in the works cited below and needs not be given here. For a readable account of the controversy, see George Minamiki, *The Chinese Rites Controversy from Its Beginnings to Modern Times* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1985), with helpful bibliography, 325–45. An international symposium was organized in San Francisco in October 1992 by the Ricci Institute on the significance of the Chinese Rites Controversy in the context of the history of the relationship between China and the West. It resulted in two important publications: Ray R. Noll, ed., *100 Roman Documents Concerning the Chinese Rites Controversy—1645–1941* (San Francisco: Ricci Institute for Chinese-Western Cultural History, 1992); and David E. Mungello, ed., *The Chinese Rites Controversy: Its History and Meaning* (Nettetal: Steyler Verlag, 1994). A recent important study is by Roland Jacques, “Le Dossier des rites chinois doit-il être rouvert?” *L'Année canonique* 41 (1999): 363–400. For a brief outline of the controversy, see the introduction of Ray Noll in *100 Roman Documents*, pp. vi–xviii. On the larger question of how the Jesuits transmitted Christian ideas to the Chinese literati and the latter’s reactions, see John D. Young, *Confucianism and Christianity: The First Encounter* (Hong Kong: University of Hong Kong Press, 1983).
 11. On the Asian cult of ancestors, the Chinese Rites Controversy, and Christian spirituality, see Peter C. Phan, *In Our Own Tongues: Perspectives from Asia on Mission and Inculturation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2003), 109–29.
 12. On Guanyin (Kwanyin) and Mary, see *ibid.*, 92–108.
 13. It is important to note that this language is a Christian language (which may be totally incomprehensible to non-Christians) and that this claim regarding the presence of the Spirit of Christ in non-Christian religions is one made by and in the Christian faith.

Whether this claim can be shown historically and whether all the activities of the Spirit must be attributed to Jesus are large theological issues that cannot be discussed here.

14. On these five virtues as conditions for interreligious dialogue, see Catherine Cornille, *The Im-possibility of Interreligious Dialogue* (New York: Crossroad, 2008).
15. For an illuminating account of monastic interreligious dialogue, see Fabrice Blée, *The Third Desert: The Story of Monastic Interreligious Dialogue*, trans. William Skudlarek with Mary Grady (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2011).
16. On Vandana Matajii's "ashramic Spirit-uality," see her works: *Living with Hindus: Hindu-Christian Dialogues, My Experiences and Reflections* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1999); *Waters of Fire* (Madras: Christian Literature Society, 1981); *Christian Ashrams: A Movement with a Future?* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1993).
17. On Pieris's spirituality, see his works: *An Asian Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988); *Love Meets Wisdom: A Christian Experience of Wisdom* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988); *Fire & Water: Basic Issues in Asian Buddhism and Christianity* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996); and *Mysticism of Service* (Gonawala-Kelaniya: Tulana Research Centre, 2000).
18. On Song's theological method, see his *Third-Eye Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1979); *The Compassionate God: An Exercise in the Theology of Transposition* (London: SCM Press, 1982); *Tell Us Our Names: Story Theology from an Asian Perspective* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1984); *Theology from the Womb of Asia* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1986); and *The Believing Heart: An Invitation to Story Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1999).
19. C. S. Song, *Jesus, the Crucified People* (New York: Crossroad, 1990); *Jesus & the Reign of God* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993); *Jesus in the Power of the Spirit* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1994).
20. See Peter C. Phan, *Being Religious Interreligiously: Asian Perspectives on Interfaith Dialogue* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005).

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CHAPTER 33

ASIAN CHRISTIAN FORMS OF WORSHIP AND MUSIC

SWEE HONG LIM

CHRISTIANITY was born in West Asia and was shaped by the various mileux where it spread out, and this is true also in the mode of worship as borne out by the story of the development of different ritual families. Thus, there came about the Byzantine, Syrian, Coptic, Armenian, Latin, and other traditions. The Syrian rite was introduced into Kerala, India, and the Latin Rite to most parts of the world. The liturgical languages used by these rites were not from the soil; nor were the worship forms. Had the trend of creating new families of the liturgy continued as in the early years of Christianity, there would be a multitude of local worship expressions such as Indian, Chinese, Japanese, Indonesian, and so forth. But historically this was not the case. It was only in the twentieth century that local liturgical expressions gained impetus in Asia.

Following the Second World War, many Asian countries such as India, Indonesia, the Philippines, and China achieved their rights for self-determination and independence. Within two decades, the Roman Catholic Church convened the Second Vatican Council in Rome and promulgated the groundbreaking document, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy) in 1963. This watershed event led to significant changes in the manner in which worship and church music were practiced with its advocacy for full, active and conscious participation of the laity in the liturgy. This renewal of worship, commonly known as, the Liturgical Movement within liturgical scholarship, also influenced other Christian denominations, leading them to evaluate their worship practices and the use of local non-Western congregational song for worship. In the United States, the smoldering Pentecostal embers from the 1906 Asuza Street Revival gave rise to the charismatic Jesus movement in California. This phenomenon brought additional pressure on traditional Western Christian worship and church music expressions. While both movements may seem unrelated on the surface, they emphasize the desire for relevance and meaning-making in Christian worship and its

musical expressions. In Asia, these liturgical and musical forces have inevitably collided and generated different forms of worship and music.

In this overview of Asian Christian forms of worship and music, generalization is inevitable given the scope and constraint of this chapter. So it is important to see this work as a starting point for further investigative efforts in this area. Keeping that in mind, I will discuss Christian worship according to the following regions of Asia: Central, West, South, East, and Southeast.

CENTRAL ASIA

Situated between China in the east and the Caspian Sea in the west with Russia in the north, the majority of countries in this region were parts of the former Soviet Union; namely Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. In social geography, Afghanistan, Xinjiang, Tibet, and Mongolia are also considered part of this region. Broadly speaking, this area is predominantly populated by Muslims and in the case of Tibet, Buddhists. With its restive history and present religious tensions, new information about Christian spirituality in these regions is rather sparse. Currently, the most prevalent expression of Christian worship and church music in the area would be that of the Eastern Orthodox and the Oriental Orthodox churches. Naturally there are also established Protestant denominations present in this region such as Lutherans, Baptists, Mennonites, Methodists, Presbyterians, and Pentecostals. Most mainline denominations are likely to maintain their denominational liturgical forms, typically Western, accompanied by translated traditional Western hymns. On the other hand, the Pentecostals and perhaps some nondenominational congregations would be using much more Western-originated *Praise and Worship* songs translated into the local lingua franca while retaining the original Western music. Then again there are probably some congregations that are investing in the more intentional work of contextualization where the local idiom and Western expressions are conflated. An example of this contextual approach can be seen in a video footage of a worship event in Tajikistan as documented by Heart Songs International, an affiliated agency of OMF International (formerly known as the China Inland Mission and the Overseas Missionary Fellowship).¹ The local song stands in contrast to the musical practice of the Orthodox Church that is normatively unaccompanied in its liturgical celebration. Although handclapping is an acceptable social-cultural gesture in this region, it is typically not used in the Orthodox liturgy. Crossing oneself and genuflecting would be much more prevalent. Overall, the Orthodox Church maintains its extant ancient liturgical form and music with minimal alterations from its Slavic roots. Adaptation of the local culture for Christian worship would be limited given the strong regional presence of Islam (or Buddhism in Tibet) even as it is natural that faith traditions will strive for identity differentiation.

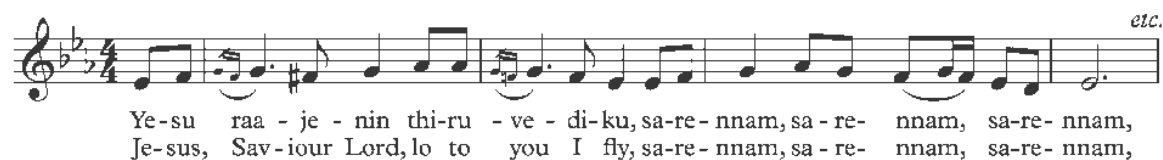


FIGURE 33.1 Extract of “Yesu rajaanin thiruvadiké” (Jesus, Saviour, Lord, Lo to Thee I Fly). Text: Psalm 61, Tamil lyrics by Sevak I. T. Yesusahayam, English adaptation by D. T. Niles. Used by permission.

many places for the same reasons (these days they are most often replaced, even in some of the poorest of village churches, by electronic keyboards & percussion pads). So Indian music in many places takes the form of music heard in the popular cinema, and the more traditional forms are often done only reluctantly in churches and then enforced by presbyters who have some grounding in recent currents in theology.⁴

Here as in West Asia, it would appear that there are factors favoring the continued use of Western-based worship and songs in the region. However it is illuminating to note that local song form and worship expressions are advanced by clergy who are willing to advocate their use in worship. An example of such advocacy can be seen in the effort of Sri Lankan ecumenical theologian, Daniel Thambyrajah Niles (1908–1970). He championed ecumenism and his lasting legacy to Asia was the *East Asian Christian Conference Hymnal* (Tokyo, 1963) that he co-edited with an American, John Milton Kelly, who served as music editor. This particular monograph contains 200 Asian hymns, several of which were Niles’s creative writings affixed to extant folk song. Take for example, “Yesu rajaanin thiruvadiku” that is matched to a South Asian folk tune (fig. 33.1).

Despite the fact that the editorial leadership had unwarrantedly imposed Western harmonic treatment for almost all the local songs and rendered the songs quite out of its cultural character, nevertheless, this collection became a vital resource for churches in Asia. For the first time, Asian Christian songs became accessible beyond their local settings. The numerous reprints of this hymnal and its acquisition by local churches bear witness to its significance and impact on the region and beyond.

In terms of local Asian Christian worship expressions, Felix Wilfred, well-known Asian theologian, offers this succinct observation:

The situation of Christian worship and music in India is very complex. As I noted early, there is a tendency to fall back on the hymns and melodies of the missionary era and set to Western music—a tendency more strongly pronounced with Protestant Churches, and among Pentecostal Churches.

We have somewhat a different picture among the Catholics of India. As for the Catholic Church, there may be some pockets of influence of the missionary past, but then, by and large this is overtaken by forms of worship and music [that are] indigenous in nature. This tendency of adaptation in Catholic Christianity existed even before the advent of Vatican II, and its programme of liturgical inculturation. In some parts of South India, in Tamil Nadu, for example, Christian hymns were composed following the local poetics and set to classical music.... The

popular celebration of feasts in the Churches—especially in the Roman Catholic Churches—took on numerous elements from the prevalent practices in Hindu temples and were harmoniously integrated into Christian worship and celebration. Further, rituals connected with initiation, wedding, funeral, etc. had culturally rich rites, which too were spontaneously integrated into Christian worship. The cultural symbols and rites were often transformed and given a Christian slant.. .

What the inculturation programme of Vatican II did was to adapt culturally the structure and form of Latin liturgy. In order to do that, the official Church—the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India—allowed 12 points of adaptation to be used in the Eucharistic liturgy, and in 1969 it got the approval of the Vatican Congregation for Divine Worship. For example, instead of the priest kissing the altar, [he] would touch the altar with both his open palms and raise them to the forehead and touch it. Similarly instead of standing, the worship could be conducted squatting on the ground as in Hindu worship. So too, instead of candles, oil lamps are used. These adaptations were quite minor relating to postures and gestures, with no change in the basic structure of the Roman liturgy. In the field of music, *bhajan* became so very attractive, because of the native melody and the involvement of the entire community, and the relaxing and meditative atmosphere it creates. In different parts of the country, *bhajans* were composed with Christian themes for use in the Church, and other *bhajans* for prayer with peoples of other faiths. Indian musical instruments such as tabla and cymbals also were introduced into liturgical worship. Besides, eastern methods of prayer and meditation like Yoga and Zen helped in the life of worship in India, and Asia at large, though this came under stricture from Vatican Congregation for Doctrine of Faith.

Great innovative liturgical leadership was given by D. S. Amalorpavadass, long-time director of NBCLC. This officially promoted liturgical adaptation by and large found acceptance among the people, though there was in the initial stage of introduction resistance to them as it was feared that these innovations may not be strictly cultural but may have Hindu religious connotations. Greater resistance, however, was to come a few years later, and indeed from the *Dalits* and tribals. There was a feeling that liturgical worship was adapted more to *Brahminic* Hindu tradition which according to *Dalits* was oppressive. Tribals on their part felt that, instead of adapting cultural symbols inextricably related to Hindu tradition, in the name of inculturation, they should develop their own tribal liturgy, drawing symbols and rites from the tribal traditions—something that is gaining acceptance in the Christian community. One would find in the Roman Catholic liturgy in India that some or other points of adaptation of 12 points are being made use of, though a more Indianised version of liturgy with all the 12 points of adaptation is likely to be found in Christian ashrams.⁵

EAST ASIA

Encompassing the countries of China including the Special Administrative Regions of Hong Kong and Macau, Japan, both North and South Korea, and Taiwan, this region has always bore the mark of Chinese influence in almost all aspects of life from economics

more prevalent, particularly in urban churches where young adults are the majority in the congregation. Not surprising, Western electronic musical instruments such as electric guitars and digital pianos as well as the multimedia technology accompany use of this form of congregational song.

In terms of Christian worship, liturgical forms that were in China prior to the constitution of the Three-Self churches continue to be in use by congregations without much understanding or appreciation of the origins of these liturgical forms. The lack of liturgical scholarship has limited the churches' ability of embarking on a sustainable process of liturgical renewal. What is ongoing and rampantly prevalent is the process of mutual adaptation whereby a local congregation adopts whatever its neighboring congregation is using successfully. Much of this process is driven by pragmatic reasons rather than specific theological thought. Capitalizing on this desire to learn by the churches in China, Angela Tam, a prominent church music scholar in Hong Kong, has done much to provide foundational training in worship and church music education throughout China and Hong Kong. Her major contribution is the annual church music conference she organizes through her office, the Hong Kong Church Music Association.¹¹ This annual two-week event attracts hundreds of participants from China and elsewhere. Through the conference, participants learn the essential skill set for worship design, worship leadership, and church music philosophies. In addition, she has developed long-term plans to make available liturgics and church music training through the help of a few seminaries in China.¹² No less important is the nascent effort of the Calvin Institute for Christian Worship in partnership with the North Point Alliance Church, Hong Kong, in hosting a biennial worship symposium as an extension of the Calvin Worship Symposium held at Grand Rapids, Michigan.¹³ It is by such direct transfer of knowledge and skill sets through training courses, conferences, and workshops that contextual liturgical renewal may come sooner rather than later into China.

In Korea, the majority of churches have steadfastly and exclusively retained the Western strain of worship and church music expressions. The ecclesial leadership generally rebuffs attempts at contextualization. A strong sense of individual pietism remains the core of Christian worship expressions that include dawn prayer and mid-week renewal services in churches. Similar to what Giles highlighted for churches in India, Korean churches are equally reluctant to plumb the depth of their culture as an avenue for Christian worship acts given the culture's strong association with Buddhism and shamanism. While Indian pastors were able to strong-arm their way in bringing about liturgical reform, this is not the case in Korea. In many instances, folk-based congregational songs are not readily accepted or used in worship. However, this situation is slowly changing as the population becomes receptive to such musical innovations. Whereas in the past, locally crafted hymns would not be found in denominational hymnals, the forthcoming Korean Anglican hymnal will feature fifty-four local hymns.¹⁴

In Taiwan, the name "I-to Loh" is synonymous with the development of East Asian church music and indigenous forms of worship. His persevering single-person effort in collecting, compiling, and editing the monumental work, *Sound the Bamboo: CCA Hymnal* (1990 and 2000) is without parallel in modern-day hymnal creation. He is also

instrumental in raising up a new generation of church musicians fully aware of the need for new Asian Christian forms of worship and music through his teaching at the Asian Institute for Liturgy and Music, Manila, and Tainan Theological College and Seminary in Taiwan. In 2009 the Presbyterian Church of Taiwan released a new denominational hymnal, *Seng Si* (聖詩), for which he served as editor. Through his advocacy, the hymnal committee maintained a complement of different categories of hymns—translated Western (50% of total corpus), hymns from the global church (25%), and local Taiwanese hymns (25%). Equally important in Taiwan are the pioneering efforts of Loh's former students in furthering the case for indigenous expressions of Christian worship forms and music. Here I would mention Edgar Macapili and Vuluk Lai Chao-Tsa. The former is an emerging and prominent advocate for the *Siraya* people, a lowland indigenous group that was assimilated with the dominant *Han* (漢, Chinese) population. Macapili has successfully worked on revitalizing this cultural tradition but more importantly has provided the means by which Taiwanese Christianity can draw from this rediscovered rich cultural resource. Vuluk, an ordained Presbyterian minister who actively designs and sculpts, advocates for the contextualization of liturgy, music, and the visual arts among the highland indigenous people group particularly his own *Paiwan* tribe. He has heightened the awareness of his own people group to the use of their cultural tradition for worship. This is most evident in the services he designs and leads at the local church where he ministers. Even more significant is the integration of Christian faith and *Paiwan* culture as symbolically expressed in the architectural design of *Yuquan* (玉泉) Presbyterian Church where he pastors (fig. 33.2).



FIGURE 33.2 Yuquan Presbyterian Church

Source: Photograph courtesy of Vuluk Lai Chao-Tsa. Used by permission.

SOUTHEAST ASIA

Situated between the two dominant regional powers of China and India is a region known as Southeast Asia. This region consists of Brunei, Indonesia, Kampuchea, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam. At present, this group of nations constitutes a socioeconomic regional bloc known as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). This nomenclature belies the differences of these countries in terms of ethnicity, religion, economic status, and politics. Unlike South and East Asia that showcase a relatively homogeneous ethnic populace, Southeast Asia is very much a smorgasbord of diverse ethnicities and religious beliefs. Nevertheless, all countries aside from Thailand were colonies of European powers between the sixteenth and twentieth centuries. Not surprisingly, these Southeast Asian countries still exhibit signs of that heritage in their sociocultural and civic settings. French nuances can be found beneath the local cultural landscape of the Indo-Chinese region of Vietnam, Kampuchea, and Laos. In the same manner, English sensibility readily shapes Malaysia and Singapore; Spanish and American that of the Philippines. With regard to religion, some of these Southeast Asian countries have embraced specific faith traditions and champion them politically. Thailand and Myanmar hold Buddhism as their state religion while Malaysia has Islam and the Philippines prides itself as a Christian nation. While other states may not have this stance, they do have significant numbers of their population adhering to faith traditions that naturally influence the cultural milieu. A good example of this would be Indonesia and with its large Muslim population base, and Kampuchea with its Buddhist population. This scenario alludes to the fact that Christianity is a minority faith tradition in this region as it is in other parts of Asia. It is therefore readily shaped by this mindset in its worship forms and musical expressions; namely, the need for identity differentiation. The implication of this mindset is the purposeful disassociation of worship and church music practices from the in situ culture. Faith and culture are typically juxtaposed and not integrated.

In terms of Christian spirituality, Western Christian nuances remain pervasive and dominate the worship and music life of most Southeast Asian churches. Wealthier congregations uphold Euro-American worship forms with much pride and conviction. In some instances, the use of *Praise and Worship* bands is much sought after. The easy access to electronic instruments such as digital keyboards and guitars has had significant negative impact on the development of folk-based church music, particularly when the original local culture uses a music tonal system different from the Western form. Take for example the equidistant scale system of Thai music and the Indonesian gamelan scale system. It is not surprising that instrument makers have adapted these musical systems and the instruments to be within the approximate Western musical tuning orbit. With this shift, locally crafted instruments can be used to complement Western instruments in music.¹⁵ While this may be seen as losing its authentic aural quality from the musicological point of view, however, by its adaptability this has secured the viability of

original Western music. This form of transformation is found in both Western hymns and *Praise and Worship* choruses. An example of the former would include well-known hymns such as John Newton's "Amazing Grace" or Isaac Watts's "When I Survey." An illustration for the latter would be "Mighty to Save" by Australian songwriters, Ben Fielding and Reuben Morgan.¹⁹ In most Asian countries, it is this genre that dominates the corpus of congregational song. Some church music scholars opine that this genre will eventually decline and be replaced by the local song form with contextual nuances particularly the folk heritage of the *in situ* culture. In my opinion, this is not likely to occur for a variety of reasons. First, with Christianity remaining a marginalized faith tradition and the *in situ* culture fully integrated with the extant dominant non-Christian faith, Christianity would be hard-pressed to differentiate itself from the other religious traditions. Therefore, drawing resources from the same cultural resource will be most difficult if not improbable. Second, with the long-standing deference afforded to the Christian tradition provided by Western missionaries, it would seem rather unbecoming to the populace to now abandon this valuable heritage and replace it with local expressions that were deemed unchristian in the first instance. Such a dramatic shift can only lead to confusion in Christian identity formation. Finally, the significant lack of theo-liturgical scholarship and leadership that can posit and motivate this dramatic shift toward contextual Christian worship expressions is another contributing factor. Case studies of revitalization movements have revealed the undergirding role of theo-liturgical scholarship and leadership in reinforcing seismic changes in Christian worship. The contribution of Martin Luther, Jean Calvin, and even John and Charles Wesley, clearly point to this factor. Each of these reformers was actively engaged in the process of change at multiple levels; from the sermons they preached to the ordinances they articulated. Therefore, there is no doubt that this genre of congregational song will continue to flourish in the foreseeable future in the worship and music life of churches in Asia.

The second form of Asian congregational song is that which exhibits strong Western nuances albeit crafted locally. This song form conflates Asian lyricism and Western idiom in a form of musical juxtaposition. In my observation, this musical form is a sustainable effort of contextualization that has and continues to gain widespread acceptance by Asian churches. The edited songs in the East Asian Christian Conference (EACC) hymnal of 1964 as well as the songs produced by the Streams of Praise Music Ministries mentioned earlier are examples of this song type. Given the penchant for Western musical nuances by most Asian churches, this song form offers a suitable compromise in the engagement of culture in Christian worship. Therefore, it is not surprising that this approach is much more palatable when compared to the third and final song form.

The third type of Asian congregational song form is the local song of contextual nuances. Generally, this song form has been exclusively associated with *in situ* folk cultural tradition. Here the song draws from local folk musical practice to convey Christian ethos and thereby enables the local congregation to readily identify with the musical idiom and accept the embodied lyrical content. The efforts of I-to Loh and his former students mentioned earlier are excellent examples of this approach. Yet if we are to understand that this song form's function is to negotiate a Christian contextual cultural expression within a given milieu, then clearly this song form does exist even in

worship and music once again have the opportunity to blossom as and when they are carefully nurtured and purposefully managed. With local visionaries the likes of D. T. Niles, I-to Loh, Anscar Chupungco, Masao Takenaka, Geonyong Lee, Francisco Feliciano, and others guiding its development, such renewal efforts in Asian forms of worship and music will have a significant and long-lasting impact within the churches in Asia.

In this chapter, I offered a broad survey of the cultural landscape of Asia and briefly described idiomatic features of Christian worship present in each of the regions of Central, West, South, East, and Southeast Asia. At the same time, I highlighted key personalities and their contributions in the region. Subsequently, three streams of Asian church music were identified and their characteristics defined. Thereafter I proposed a broader understanding of the concept of the third song form, the local song with contextual nuances to include congregational songs that seem to be overtly Western, pointing out that the *raison d'être* of this genre is comparable to its more common folk-song-based counterpart in the desire to be both culturally relevant and meaningful to a specific local community. After all, this congregational song genre sought to manifest the incarnational “Christ in culture” paradigm. Its efficacy as a song form is very much determined by the local Asian congregations’ willingness to adjust their current stance of relating Christ to culture and their ability to grapple with implications of an incarnational, seemingly syncretistic, approach to the practice of worship and music.²² Given the nascent development of this last stream with its trajectory still unfolding, it remains to be seen if Asian churches, in order to shape, strengthen, and remake an identity that is fully Asian and Christian will unabashedly embrace this song form. Finally, I offer that within these streams lie the essence of new Asian Christian forms of worship and music that has much to contribute to World Christianity, particularly to regions where renewal is sought in the midst of declining church membership.

NOTES

1. Referencing to the video series, *Sounds of Global Worship*, produced by Heart Sounds International, affiliate of OMF International. Here, a local congregational song rendered by a Tajikistan Christian community, <http://youtu.be/2KxkRrfxisw>.
2. Internet website, http://justus.anglican.org/resources/bcp/India/SIndia_euchr_intro.htm. Additional as well as the latest liturgies of the Church of South India can be found at the website of CSI Christ Church, Michigan, <http://www.csimichigan.org/Liturgy.htm>.
3. An example of a South Asian urban congregational song that has strong Western idiomatic expressions would be “Yeshu Masih Tere Jaisa hai koi nahi.” Here it is played by the Yeshua Band as found on the Internet, <http://youtu.be/NkFmbLiIAY>. Two examples of a local song that has strong contextual nuance are the Hindi Christian song, “Jo Krus pe kurbaan hai,” as found on the Internet, <http://youtu.be/iuCMvcjIWHQ>, and “Mera Yesu” a Punjabi-English rap fusion work by Shreya Kant, <http://youtu.be/L5NxUZhYu-g>.
4. http://www.randallgiles.org/working_in_church_music_in_india.html.

5. Email correspondence of Felix Wilfred, editor of the present Handbook, December 13, 2012.
6. Internet video footage about these hymns and the ministry of Xiao Min is located at <http://youtu.be/7dMpFofjzq8>, a brief summary about her work can be found at <http://www.gospelherald.net/article/ministries/44870/author-of-canaan-hymns-xiao-min-gave-touching-testimony-of-faith.htm#.UONLHYnjlv0>.
7. Streams of Praise Music Ministries, <http://www.sop.org/Home/home.aspx>, and Melody of My Heart, <http://www.momh.org/>.
8. <http://youtu.be/AIDiaVT-LHw>.
9. The Hymns of Praise (赞美诗) was published in 1999. It contained 400 translated Western and original Chinese hymns.
10. A brief account of Shi Qi Gui's accomplishment can be found on this web blog, <http://www.lynnupdate.com/Shanghai%20music.htm>.
11. Website for the Hong Kong Church Music Association, <http://www.hkchurchmusic.org/>.
12. Email conversation with the author on May 25, 2012.
13. A brief interview about this cooperation can be found on the website of the Calvin Institute for Christian Worship. See <http://worship.calvin.edu/resources/resource-library/conversation-anne-zaki-on-the-worship-symposium-in-hong-kong/>.
14. Email conversation with a committee member of Korean Anglican Church hymnal committee on September 20, 2012.
15. This phenomenon can be experienced in this Internet video footage, <http://youtu.be/oVuVyCsbiLc>.
16. For more information about the ministry of the Srisuwans, see <http://www.thaicov.org/bangkok/tfmf.html>.
17. For more information about Yamuger or the Indonesian Institute for Sacred Music, see <http://www.yamuger.or.id/>.
18. For an in-depth discussion of these three types of congregational song form, read Swee Hong Lim, "Raising the Bamboo Curtain: A Visit with Asian Congregational Song," *The Hymn: A Journal of Congregational Song* 63, no. 3 (2012): 10–21.
19. The Thai version of "Mighty to Save" can be viewed at <http://youtu.be/oSoSLA4VYvk>.
20. A video footage of the song in English can be seen at <http://youtu.be/uBDvh2tRs6k>, while the Chinese version can be found at <http://youtu.be/OPMeCrIiqOw>.
21. For an elaboration of this paradigm, see <http://kongheewiki.wordpress.com/2007/07/03/our-cultural-mandate-part-1-by-kong-hee/> and http://www.chc.org.sg/_eng/new-here/new-here_beliefs.php.
22. For detailed readings on the contention of Christ and Culture, see H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (San Francisco, CA: Harper and Row, 1956); D. A. Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2012); George Marsden, "Christianity and Cultures: Transforming Niebuhr's Categories" in <http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=517>; Peter R. Gathje, "A Contested Classic: Critics Ask: Whose Christ? Which Culture?" in <http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=2641>; Swee Hong Lim, "Raising the Bamboo Curtain," 10–21.

CHAPTER 34

REVISITING HISTORIOGRAPHIES

New Trajectories for Asian Christianity

DANIEL FRANKLIN PILARIO

“THERE is no history of mankind; there is only an indefinite number of histories of all kinds of aspects of human life.” The philosopher Karl Popper grieves about how the history of political power imposes itself as the “history of the world” in the quote above taken from his work, *The Open Society and its Enemies*.¹ Yet the same critique can also be hurled at the Western Christian narrative being constructed as the universal history of all Christianity. This chapter intends to revisit current historiographies of Christianity in Asia and show how they challenge this dominant conception. It aims to uncover its main currents and flows with the view of discerning its attendant assumptions, challenges, and prospects. This will be done in four distinct parts: first, I will explore some contemporary developments in the historical sciences and how these impact on Christian historiography; second, I will map out some general directions on historiographies on Asian Christianity; third, I will verify these same directions through sample case studies; lastly, I will explore some methodological challenges and future prospects.

APPROACHES TO HISTORICAL KNOWLEDGE

Contemporary discussions in historiography identify three views on historical knowledge: *reconstruction*, *construction*, and *deconstruction*—to follow the categories of Munslow.² Reconstructionism follows the common empiricist and positivist directions of traditional historiographies that believe in the possibility of actually reconstructing the past as it actually happened through available archival sources. It considers historical agents as rational and purposeful; their historical actions and the whole “past-as-history” are knowable as these are faithfully represented by the language of its

evidence. Historical science thus is an act of reconstruction of what really happened. However, after the rise of the social sciences, mainly structuralism in the 1960s, historical writings turned constructionist in direction. With the aid of social theory, historical writers attempt to come up with all-encompassing explanations of social, economic, and cultural phenomena (e.g., French *Annales* School, modernization, world-systems theory, neo-Marxist histories, etc.). History is not so much about specific events, as the reconstructionists believed, as they are about the sociocultural and economic factors that shape them. In the recent poststructuralist and postmodern turn to language, however, groups of cultural historians argue that historical knowledge is derived not only from research into documentary sources but also in the narrative forms of representation in which these documents and evidences are textualized. For these deconstructionists, there is no stable reality out there to be known. All we have are socially constructed texts—be it manuscripts or historical ruins, paintings or artifacts, epic poems or cultural practices. History is not a fixed reality awaiting discovery but an open system of dynamic meanings like the language in which it is narrated. Historical truth thus is relative to one's side of the socioeconomic, gender, religious, and cultural divides—since each side in fact constructs its own texts differently. For instance, historical narratives have always been written from the perspective of the imperial centers and traveled through some linear motion (be it called “civilization,” “progress,” or “missions”) to the periphery.³ Postmodern/postcolonial historiography in contrast allows other suppressed voices from the margins to emerge, providing space for varieties of histories in constant and perpetual interaction with one another.

The trajectory of Christian historiography runs in a parallel direction. The Christian historian Hillaire Belloc once wrote: “The faith is Europe and Europe is the faith . . . the Church is Europe and Europe is the church.”⁴ This dominant view takes as its original founding experience Paul's trajectory in Acts of the Apostles where the Good News came from Palestine, traveled West with him—to Rome, and later across Europe to the rest of the world. Latin America, Africa, and Asia are considered as latecomers and passive recipients of European missionary efforts from the fifteenth century C.E. onward. What is concealed, however, is a parallel movement of Christianity to Asia and other continents. Even if the Lucan trajectory has told us a great deal about early missionary endeavors, it was a selection of one strand of Christian history to the suppression of another. For, as one commentator wrote: “[Luke] simplified the movement of church history and we do well to remember that he has not told us the whole story.”⁵

A cursory survey of church history books would reveal this Eurocentric direction.⁶ August Franzen's *A History of the Church* (1968) divides history into three periods: Christian Antiquity, the Church of the Middle Ages, and the Church in the Modern Age. Latin America, India, and China are only treated in eight pages under the subtitle “New Age of World Mission.” In Justo Gonzales's *The Story of Christianity* (1984), other continents only appear in later chapters under the banner of “colonial Christianity.” Even the more popular series written by Jean Comby, *How to Read Church History* (1992, 2000), merely mentions in three short paragraphs that the early church has already reached Asia (Edessa, Syria, Armenia) within the first 300 years. For the rest,

that Christian churches had widely spread in Asia (Syria, Asia Minor, and Palestine) and some in Africa. At that time, communities in Rome and Puteoli were the only two centers that existed in what is called “West” today. “Europe which many Western Christians later came to think of as the centre of the global Christian community developed late.”¹² Irving and Sunquist outline the movement of Christians from Jerusalem to the Roman Province of Syria with its famous cities Antioch, Damascus, and Edessa—places that feature prominently in early Christian histories. The Syriac language spoken in Edessa became central to the Christians of the East—Mesopotamia, Persia, India, Mongolia, and China as the liturgies from these places attest. By 170 C.E., an Assyrian convert called Tatian composed a harmonized version of the Gospels—*Diatessaron*—which became a favored resource among the Syrian churches. Pushing the dates further, Philip Jenkins also argues that even beyond the first millennium, Christianity was stronger in Asia and North Africa than in Europe and “only after about 1400 did Europe (and Europeanized North America) decisively become a Christian heartland.”¹³ From Edessa, Christian missionaries traveled by land (through the famous Silk Road) or by sea and reached as far east as China, Mongolia, and Japan and as far south as India and Southeast Asia. During the first millennium, there existed diverse yet mature and vibrant expressions of the same Christianity in all the central cultures of the ancient world—Mediterranean, Persian, Roman, Chinese, Indian, Armenian, Arabian, African, and so on. For Jenkins, Christianity was a tri-continental religion—Asian, European, and African—almost of equal representation among each other until the fourteenth century when the Church of the East was almost totally annihilated. Christianity only came to be considered “European” by default: “Europe was the continent where it was not destroyed. Matters could easily have developed differently.”¹⁴ That is why when Christianity declined in the West and made its resurgence in the global South at present, it is said to have only returned to its original location.

Histories of Asian Christianity

With a more specific focus, there has been an upsurge in recent literature about Christianity in Asia. Two different groupings can be distinguished: (a) the general history of Asian churches, and; (b) the compilation of sources on Asian Christianities.

On the general history of Asian Christianity, the works of T. V. Philip, John England, and Samuel Moffett can serve as representatives.¹⁵ T. V. Philip, a church historian who was born in India, is a lay member of the Mar Thoma Church. His *East of the Euphrates* (1998) traces the eastern trajectory of the Christian story from its birthplace in Palestine to Edessa, Persia, Arab lands, China, India, and to other places as far as Japan, Tibet, Burma, Malaya, Thailand, Sumatra, and Indo-China. In contrast with the Greek-Roman Christianity that looked up to Paul as its ardent preacher and Rome or Constantinople as its centers, Asian Christianity is beholden to the missionary efforts of the Apostle Thomas¹⁶ as it remains “proudly Asian.” While the West was preoccupied with doctrinal controversies, the missionaries of the East were busy preaching

the Gospel in these places, developing a distinctly “Asian theology” not owing to its Latin counterparts. John England of the “Program for Theology and Cultures in Asia” of the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) pursues the same goal in his work, *The Hidden History of Christianity* (1996). Beyond T. V. Philip’s broad historical sweep, England was more conscious of focusing both on “the local and the regional, individual and social dimensions of the history” by using selected writings and existing artifacts found in the local churches—crosses, frescoes, inscriptions, manuscripts, ruins, and so on—to prove the richness and variety of Christian practice and witness in these places. For instance, England has shown that the mosaics, tombs, and frescoes point to the important place women had in these churches (e.g., as abbesses, prophets, ascetics, deaconesses, and even as ordained ministers) though these practices also began to decline from the fourth century on. And since the churches of the East were established by missionaries and merchants, it was in fact a liberating alternative to the colonial imposition of religion from the other side of the Christian divide—the Roman Empire.

Samuel Hugh Moffett’s two-volume work, *A History of Christianity in Asia* (1998, 2005), signals a move beyond the “early Asian Christianity” discourse of the previously mentioned works. Moffett was born in Korea and taught in Korea and China for many years before working at the Princeton Theological Seminary. His two-volume work has become the most authoritative source to date for both students and scholars of Asian Christianity. The first volume is an account of Christianity from its beginnings up to 1500—a volume replete with colorful details otherwise unknown to students of history. Some of the more interesting ones are his comparative accounts of Tatian the Assyrian and Bardaisan of Edessa whom Moffett calls “Asia’s first theologians” (64–77); the nineteenth-century discovery of *The Book of Heraclides* which is Nestorius’s own account of the controversies surrounding him and Moffett’s positive reappraisal of Nestorius’s theological position (168–84); the Nestorian Christian princess, Sorkaktani, who married the youngest son of Genghis Khan and became the mother of Kublai Khan, the emperor of Mongolia and China. Sorkaktani was instrumental in what Moffett calls the “Pax Mongolica” and the consequent further spread of Christianity in Asia (400–420). Moffett pursues the account of the spread of Christianity in his second volume from the years 1500 to 1900 C.E. He admits that the subsequent four hundred years of Christian history in Asia is a “tumbled mixture of guns, greed, and amazing grace,” the height of colonial power and church expansion that history has ever known.¹⁷ Yet he ends in an optimistic note that “the nineteenth century was the beginning of the rise of Asian churches for Asia’s millions” (645). Through these detailed historical analyses, these Asian historians make possible a fresh rereading of Christian history otherwise not visible in the Western narrative.

In the second group (i.e., the sources of Asian Christianity), there are several annotated bibliographies and dictionaries.¹⁸ But more extensive compilations are found in *Asian Christian Theologies: A Research Guide to Authors, Movements, Sources* (2002, 2003, 2004); *A History of Christianity in Asia, Africa and Latin America 1450–1990: A Documentary Sourcebook* (2007).¹⁹

Edited by a six-member ecumenical group with over fifty contributors, *Asian Christian Theologies* (2002, 2003, 2004) is a three-volume work, which serves as a research guide to authors, movements, and sources all over Asia, examining contextual Christian reflection in the continent from the seventh to the twentieth centuries. Each chapter treats one country in turn, starting from its sociohistorical context, the theological groups and movements, its theologians and their works. It is very attentive to ecumenical inclusivity, contextual theologizing, women's theological production, and some vernacular sources. It not only considers documentary evidence but also identifies inscriptions and crosses, carvings and monuments, ancient songs and annals, liturgies and hymns, and letters and commentaries from different countries. This work facilitates future in-depth research on Asian Christianity and dialogue with not only Christian churches in other continents but also with other religions in Asia. Another notable source for Asian Christian historiography is *A History of Christianity in Asia, Africa and Latin America 1450–1990* (2007) edited by Klaus Koschorke and others. In response to the movement of Christianity to the global South, this project presents selected first-hand documents from the time of the European missions in the fifteenth century to contemporary times. It is refreshing to read actual voices on the ground beyond the narrative of the historian or reflection of the theologian: how the first Spanish missionaries in the Philippines looked at Filipino indigenous religions as “a work of the devil”; how the Portuguese missionaries in Goa celebrated Mass together with the St. Thomas Christians in their own rites without much question; or how the people in Ceylon demanded an “Independent Native Church” from their international Anglican leadership so that they may have the freedom to “simplify the liturgy for uneducated people” and to “have a voice in the election of [their] own Bishops.”

Particular Histories of Local Churches

Beyond these pan-Asian resources lie a good number of the histories of Christianity of each country in Asia. To give an idea of how extensive these sources are, we can refer to a random sampling of the more recent histories of Christianity on the national level.²⁰ In recent years, there have been some significant collections of these national histories (e.g., the works of Georg Evers and Peter Phan).²¹ Georg Evers is the former director of the Asia Desk of the Institute of Missiology (Aachen) whose research interest is the Asian churches. In *The Churches in Asia* (2005), he presents a historical overview of thirty-one countries under the FABC and their significant developments in the last fifty years—from their beginnings to their growth in faith. The specific question that is posed for every country under consideration is how these churches respond to their specific contexts, thus, also becoming “genuine local churches.” Depending on the situation of each country, Evers takes cognizance of some predominant issues in the struggle of making the churches truly local, for example, “the foreignness” of Christianity as the religion of the colonizers, the failure to form indigenous clergy, and the sociocultural and religious effects of labor migration in many countries, among many others. Central

to Evers's method is the place accorded to the "minutiae of history," which also served as key moments to understanding the history of Christianity in Asia. As to the future, Evers places his hope on the FABC to steer the way toward making Christianity indigenously to Asian cultures.

The most recent collection in this category, Peter Phan's *Christianities in Asia* (2011), is written by an international team, many of whom are Asians and locals of the countries under study, among them, Jeyaraj Rasiah of Sri Lanka, John Prior of Indonesia, Edmund Chia of Malaysia, José Mario Francisco of the Philippines, Ying Fuk-chang of China, Lo Lung-kwong of Hong Kong, Andrew Eungi Kim of South Korea, and so on. This collection practically covers all countries in Asia, which are treated either as regional groups or as individual countries. There is also a discussion of the "Church of the East" (Nestorians) and the Middle Eastern Armenian churches. The main purpose is to show how Asians have appropriated Christianity into their local cultures, transforming it into an indigenous religion; thus, what we have are "Christianities," not Christianity.

Beyond what I can account for in this chapter are the many attempts to write histories of national churches and movements in their local languages.²² The greater challenge, however, is to write histories of small local churches—the everyday life, practices, beliefs of local communities, and grass-roots Christian movements as they interact with political, socioeconomic, and religious forces on the national, regional, and global levels. This contemporary initiative on the writing of "local history" or "micro-history" of towns and villages, dioceses and parishes is still not prevalent among church historians. It is only when the peoples on the ground can take account of their own muted histories, when the suppressed voices can narrate their stories of faith, fidelity, and survival, only then shall the inclusive story of Christianity be truly recounted.

THE "NEW HISTORY" OF ASIAN CHRISTIANITIES: THE CASES OF PENTECOSTAL MOVEMENTS AND FILIPINO CATHOLICISM

The deconstructionist direction of the contemporary historiography of Asian Christianities can be more clearly seen in the two case studies I present here: the history of Pentecostal movements and of Filipino Catholicism.

Pentecostal Movements as Indigenous Christianities

The present expansion of Christianity to the global South is first and foremost brought about by the spread of Pentecostal movements.²³ Pentecostalism has not only become

a major player in Christianity, but has also become a more potent instrument of its indigenization into different cultures. Trans-denominational (and sometimes trans-religious) in orientation, its “oral-aural” ministry with its emphasis on lively songs and dances, parables and stories, “speaking in tongues,” and “being slain in the Spirit” all provide a fresh alternative to the otherwise textual, rational, and rigid mainline religions. In some Christian historiographies, however, Pentecostalism is viewed as a deviant form of Christianity as it is sometimes called “Neo-Montanism” in reference to the second-century heresy. Although sometimes accused of being “fundamentalist,” Pentecostal groups in fact point to a new reading of the Bible, engendering liberating identities and hopeful frames of survival for the poor and the dispossessed who form the majority of its members.²⁴

Early Pentecostal historiography, however, displays the same Western bias found in general historiographies of Christianity mentioned earlier. Allan Anderson has shown that the first academic histories written about Pentecostalism by theologians, sociologists, missiologists, and historians of religions alike run on some common narrative: that they emerged from the United States and possess a “providential” view of history quite non-cognizant of the sociopolitical and economic causes of its emergence.²⁵ This myth of central origin persists in many histories to date—that Pentecostalism was born in Topeka (Kansas) with Charles Parham (1901) or at the “former livery stable on Azusa Street in Los Angeles”²⁶ with William Seymour (1906). From there, it spread itself worldwide to Asia, Europe, Africa, Latin America, thanks to the zeal of American Pentecostal missionaries who went to these far-flung continents. The classic history of Pentecostalism is thus viewed in three waves: the old Pentecostalism from Kansas and Los Angeles (first wave); the charismatic renewal in the 1960s which was trans-denominational (second wave); and the “signs and wonders movement” in the 1980s—also called “power evangelism”—where gifts of prophecy and healing were emphasized (third wave). This centrifugal direction also betrays an expansionist mindset born out of the neo-colonial worldview of America’s “manifest destiny.” The social, racial, and gender bias of the imperial center toward the periphery manifests itself on historical narratives, for example, the denigration of the experiences of women members and black peoples; or tagging the crowd who flock to Pentecostal groups as mostly “psychologically unstable” or “very poor,” thus, making the ecstatic experience an easy escape from economic or psychological difficulties.²⁷

In reaction, contemporary Pentecostal historians posit a different direction. “One of the greatest disservices we do the worldwide Pentecostal movement,” writes Anderson, “is to assume that this is a ‘made in the USA’ product.”²⁸ These historians disprove the “three-wave theory” through other data coming from the South, particularly, Asia. For instance, simultaneous with the Azusa Street Revival, the Pyongyang Revival in Korea happened in 1907—producing missionaries that evangelized places as far as Manchuria. Prior to both events, Pandita Ramabai started the Mukti Revival in Pune, India (1905) and even earlier than this, the Tamil Anglican evangelist, John Christian Aroolappen, already exhibited Pentecostal stirrings in Tirunelveli (1860–1865), as did Hsi Sgengmo of Shangxi, China, at about the same period.²⁹ All these groups were never influenced by

Western missionaries at least in their early stages. The United States thus does not have a monopoly on being the “cradle” of Pentecostalism.

In order to deconstruct this historiographic Western bias, Augustus Cerillo posits four approaches to reread Pentecostal histories to date: providential, historical roots, multicultural, and functional frameworks.³⁰ From the historical perspective then, it was shown that Pentecostalism did not travel from a single center to the peripheries. It was a multi-centered movement from its beginnings, thus, destroying the myth of single origin. This view is also reinforced by multicultural historiographic analysis. On the one hand, it has been observed that indigenous religions in Asia already display Pentecostal characteristics. On the other hand, Pentecostalism, instead of becoming an imposed imported religion, also possesses a great capacity to adjust itself to context, thus, acquiring a deeply indigenous character.³¹ The functional or socio-analytic approach to Pentecostalism addresses the social, racial, and gender bias by actually analyzing the movement from “ground up” taking into account the socioeconomic and political conditions of its possibility. For instance, in some cases, ecstatic experiences do serve as an unhealthy escape from the harsh worlds of poverty and degradation. At other times, however, being “converted to Jesus” has also engendered new frameworks of hope, afforded new strategies, forged new social identities for the poor, most of them women, to assert their regained dignities marginalized by cosmopolitan global society. Rereading historical discourse through these different frames of reference deconstructs the Universalist but also racist or sexist tendencies in Western historiographic narratives of Pentecostalism. Recent histories do attempt to recover the lost voices and stories of indigenous workers, their oral traditions and witness, as they forward Pentecostalism’s “new history.”

Filipino Catholicism: Toward a “New History”

The history of Filipino society has been deeply intertwined with the history of Catholic Christianity in the islands, thus, also with its historical trajectory. In recent times, historians have identified three phases of Philippine historiography.³² The first phase is that of classical “colonial history” where historians diligently examine archival materials on colonial practices, its motives and policies in the act of trying to faithfully render “what the governor said to the archbishop.”³³ The second phase (1950s–1960s) in Philippine historiography is a reaction to it: a nationalist direction which foregrounds the emergence of Filipino national consciousness whose “tipping point” is pegged at the year 1872, the failed Cavite Mutiny and the consequent execution of the three Filipino secular priests—Gomez, Burgos, and Zamora (Gomburza)—and which later led to the Philippine Revolution against Spain in 1896.³⁴ This group of historians views Philippine history in three periods: the “Golden Age” (pre-Hispanic society); the “Fall” (Spanish colonization of the sixteenth century) and its consequent “dark ages” (seventeenth–eighteenth century); and the rise of nationalist consciousness (late nineteenth century) toward the birth of the nation (1898). A third group of historians, responsible

for the “new history” approach, reacts to these Manila-centered histories and proposes to write about provincial towns, villages, and their events. Also called the “local history approach,”³⁵ it tries to uncover local issues and concerns which do not prominently feature in national accounts. Characteristic of the “new history” is the decentering of the “individual” common to both colonial and nationalist approaches (e.g., accounts of “heroes,” “great men,” or the “proletarian”) from the interpretive limelight. In its place are the concrete social interactions and their accompanying structural conditions that make events happen beyond individual intentions.³⁶

Philippine church historiography has followed parallel directions. The ecclesiastical colonial historiography mainly dealt with “friar chronicles”—one of the predominant forms of history writing since the Spanish period. The persistent debate around “friar chronicles” is on the extent of Hispanic influence through Christianity among the Filipinos. On the one side, Hispanophiles—mainly Catholic writers—argue that the Spanish missionaries brought “civilized ways, salvation, and unity to the island.”³⁷ Pablo Fernandez’s *History of the Church in the Philippines (1521–1898)*, a popular church history textbook in seminaries, seems to find itself under this category. To use his own words: “they were able, at (the) cost of so much sacrifice, to keep them for Christ and for Spain.”³⁸ A commentator writes: “The lines are ascribed to the first Recollects who came to the Philippines, but the author might just as well be describing all the other Spanish missions.”³⁹ On the other side, the nationalists think that Christianity in the hands of the Spanish friars was employed as an effective ideological weapon of colonial domination. Some church historians in fact consider the pre-Hispanic “golden age” as an “idyll of innocence”⁴⁰ when there was still socioeconomic sufficiency. It was Spanish colonization that turned them into slaves in their own land.⁴¹ Using the nationalist script, that period in Philippine history represented the “fall”; and the “redemption-restoration” phase only came with the emergence of nationalist consciousness among Filipinos in the mid-nineteenth century. Although in polemics with other social historians of the nationalist agenda, the renowned Jesuit church historian, John Schumacher, also considers the emergence of national consciousness in the rise of a revolutionary clergy (1850–1903), the nationalist propaganda movement (1880–1895), all of which led to “the making of a Filipino nation.”⁴²

Whether Christianity is seen as the source of salvation by the Hispanophiles or as an instrument of exploitation by the nationalists, in both respects, the *indio* (the name given to the natives by the colonizers) remains a passive recipient of historical action. Recent directions in Philippine historiography, however, have attempted to get out of this impasse by recovering the voices of the people themselves in their local languages, cultural performances, and everyday lives. Beyond the voluntarist act of meaning-making by the historian lie some popular forms where history can be read anew, for instance, through epic poems or popular religious practices. These everyday linguistic transactions and their accompanying structural conditions can be interpreted to give fresh historical insights beyond what the archival sources afford us. Not directly coming from the field of church history but from the social sciences, the works of Reynaldo Ileto and Vicente Rafael⁴³ signal this “linguistic turn” in Philippine

historiography. For instance, the *Pasyon*—a distinctly Tagalog verse form of the whole salvation history sung by Filipinos for centuries was seen as an instrument of ideological control by Spanish colonizers. For as the *indios* sing the verses of the *Pasyon* each Holy Week, they are also led to accept their situation in silent submission following the subservient Jesus being led to the cross, or so the colonizers thought. Yet, in Iletto's investigation of texts and testimonies of revolutionary movements, it is the same *Pasyon* that fires their hopes for liberation. To use a postmodern language, the *Pasyon* and other folk religious practices have become empty signifiers, drained as it were of their intended colonial meanings and subverted by the "natives" to help them negotiate everyday colonial struggles and imagine that a new and different world is indeed possible. More recent studies follow the same arguments. Julius Bautista, for instance, examines how the devotion to the Santo Niño, the image of the Christ-Child given by Magellan to the Queen of Cebu as the colonizer's gift to their first converts, is "brought to bear on [revolutionary] causes and agendas that often outstrip the spiritual and theological functions for which [it] was intended."⁴⁴ Thus, if the ordinary Filipino is viewed as continually engaged in oblique resistance to the colonial regimes through their practice of popular religions, the "Golden Age-Fall-Restoration" framework does not anymore hold water, since there in fact was no wholesale "fall" awaiting redemption by the emergence of elite nationalist consciousness.⁴⁵ This direction taken by the "new history" that foregrounds the local and the indigenous as active agents within the structural constraints of their everyday lives has ushered in a different view of Filipino historical agency beyond the Hispanophile and nationalist frameworks. The challenge, however, is for church historians to follow the lead of the social sciences and intensify efforts toward this same direction.

ASIAN CHRISTIAN HISTORIOGRAPHY: CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS

Excavating "Lost Christianities" for the Future

The trajectory of Asian Christian historiography as exemplified above is decidedly deconstructionist in direction. The movement of Christianity toward the global South necessitates this shift in historical science. The traditional Christian history, a Western construct that imposes itself as a metanarrative of the whole Christian world, comes to be seen as a crucial (neo) colonial apparatus. In the process of its making, some memories were canonized, others condemned, distorted, or simply forgotten. Philip Jenkins's "lost Christianities" in Asia⁴⁶ are those that did not make it to the dominant orthodox script. Beyond Jenkins's retrieval of the Nestorian history of the first millennium, however, the challenge of Christian historiography today is to continually recover all voices of history's underside and their narratives of resistance and survival—the "heretics" and

the superstitious, women and children, indigenous religions, and folk religions—voices which established religion marginalizes in the process of narrating itself. Although Asian cultures are assessed to be sensitive to indigenous population,⁴⁷ there is a dearth of conscious historical, theological, and pastoral treatment about them and all the muted voices in Asian history. The project of genealogical recovery⁴⁸ also aims to present alternative histories, multiple memories, and several historical identities. This exercise of excavating historical consciousness is necessary on two counts. First, it aims to exorcise our historical past that continues to haunt us. The past is not over yet; its dark memories persistently structure the present. To exorcise its ghosts constitutes a liberating act. Second, to present multiple histories is also to open up to diverse and varied ways to live the future. For, an open historical consciousness can lead to new forms of respect for the other and of compassionate solidarity leading to inclusive and open communities free from prejudice, intolerance, and exclusion.⁴⁹

Narrating the Local

The “new history” in Asian historiography that foregrounds the writing of local histories beyond regional or national histories is also a contemporary direction in historical science.⁵⁰ Although there are stirrings toward this direction among church historians, the output is still negligible as my cursory survey shows.⁵¹ Church history courses taught in many seminaries or schools of theology are either Universalist or nationalist in scope. It is not a surprise to see students who are well versed in the history of the popes or the councils but without any knowledge of the history of their own parish or diocese. To a greater extent, it is also true of people at the grass roots. On commemorative occasions, people are at a loss about where to trace the beginnings or development of their specific church or movement. The relatively slow response by professional church historians might be caused by some obvious factors: a bias for the metropolitan center over and above the provinces, town, and villages; a bias for great personalities and elite patrons over and above the inarticulate masses; and the biased view that local histories are only for amateurs and not for professional historians.⁵² Yet unless the grass roots learns to articulate their own voice in the recounting of their histories by advancing a Christian history “from below,” one does not get a more holistic picture of the Christianity in the “rough grounds” of its praxis.

There are several challenges, however, toward the writing of histories of local churches. First, since the dominant history is the history of the center (universal or national), there is a danger that local histories will only echo the concerns and issues of the metropolis. In this case, local history becomes a mere extension of national histories, thus, becoming a conservative apologia of the same establishment. It loses its role of being a corrective to hasty generalizations and historical prejudices inherent to any view from the center. For local histories not to become “running footnotes to a national narrative” and an extensive repetition of the same, methodological reflexivity and conscious attempt at “theory building” from below appear to be necessary.⁵³ While

the accuracy of historical details from chronicles and local archival sources is crucial, what needs to be closely analyzed in local histories are the power dynamics present in local narratives and practices as people struggle and weave their stories and lives within the context of the more powerful sociocultural, political, economic, and religious forces from the metropolis.

The second challenge is about who writes local histories. Professional historians can play a great role not only in directing their energies and research agenda toward local communities but also in democratizing the historical profession itself. As in theology where grass-roots communities are considered to be “theologians” in their own right, history too needs to be written by the people on the ground—those in the local churches who possess the capacity to articulate their stories of faith. Professional historians can act like midwives as they assist in the technical formation and the honing of analytic capacities through “history workshops” in the parish or diocesan levels. Church historical commissions can also provide resources and structures to facilitate these programs. But the historical profession can be greatly helped when the trained people at the grass-roots learn how to write their own histories themselves.

The third challenge follows: what forms shall local history take? In the context of the grass roots where the culture is predominantly oral, local history can be “done” by taking advantage of oral traditions. This may provide valuable sources that classical historians may not be familiar with. Beyond the archival materials which do not likely exist in a local community, local history can make use of oral history,⁵⁴ which analyzes eyewitness accounts or oral traditions like epics and genealogies, hymns and prayers, popular religious practices and cultural performances, and so on. Historians of Asia are starting to recover these resources for historical analysis. But also like archival materials, oral, visual, and performative sources also need to be critiqued and corroborated by other sources to ascertain their authenticity. Moreover, a special sensitivity is needed in order to see that these practices are located in crucial intersections of power where the political, economic, and religious forces of the empire interact with the resilient resistance of the historical agents from the ground, and how local agents subvert, modify, and appropriate them to their own contexts.

More Methodological Issues

Aside from the ones mentioned above, there are a couple of methodological issues to consider in doing Asian Christian historiography today. First, it has been recognized that the search for sources is only in its “excavatory phase.”⁵⁵ The destruction and suppression of sources in Asia were precipitated both by the existence of other dominant religions in the area (Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, Shinto) and the Universalist view of Christianity promoted by the Western missionaries themselves. The former intends to delete the Christian influence on Asian cultures; the latter wants to obliterate the indigenous and contextual appropriation of the Christian discourse into the Asian context. In contemporary times, dictatorial military regimes in some Asian countries and religious

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CHAPTER 35

ASIAN CHRISTIANITY AND PUBLIC LIFE

The Interplay

FELIX WILFRED

THE NEW VIBRANCY of religions since the 1980s and the debunking of the secularization thesis and its claim as a universal model have catapulted to the center stage the discussion on the role of religion in public life. It has become a matter of animated debate among sociologists of religion, theologians, political scientists, and others. In the process there has taken place increasingly a conceptual clarification as to what is meant by “public,” especially in the context of religion being relegated to the “private sphere.” Postmodern thought, cultural studies, and especially feminist studies have contributed to radically review the traditional public–private distinction. Today, many areas of life once thought to belong to the private realm like gender relations, sexuality and issues of reproduction, health, and so on have become increasingly issues of public concern. This is true also of religions. They have become such an important force in most parts of the world—with perhaps the exception of Europe—that it is no longer possible to think of them as private. From the perspective of history too, religions in Asia have been viewed as a public force affecting almost every segment of individual and societal life. The relationship of Christianity to public life in the Asian continent has its unique characteristics and problems. Concretely, the experience of Asian Christian communities shows how the history of a people, of a nation, and the identity of the Christian community in a definite context condition the extent of its public role and defines the space of its interventions. On the other hand, the conditions in the public space also define to what extent Christianity has been able to intervene in issues of common interest. Hence, it is important to view the relationship in terms of interplay rather than in terms of the Church’s impact on public life. It is obvious that given the constraint of space, I can only highlight some selected aspects of this vast issue without any claim of comprehensive treatment.

have contributed to ease, at least in some areas of the country, the anti-Christian attitude and view the contribution of Christians for public life more positively. As regards the major problem of ethnic divide in Sri Lanka, between Sinhalese and Tamils, many critical observers are of the view that Christian churches could have contributed more to the resolution of the problem, which did not happen. Probably the division within the churches and Christians themselves is one of the chief reasons for failing to make crucial public intervention in a matter affecting peace and tranquility of all the people. In general, the Christians of Sinhala origin did not take a position as *Christians* vis-à-vis the majority Sinhala-Buddhist community; rather they tended to side with them playing up their *Sinhala identity*—barring some exceptions—which could not but cause a rift between the Sinhala and Tamil Christians, curtailing thus any scope for Christians as a body contributing to the resolution of the ethnic conflict.

The Environment of Centralized States

To be able to understand the structural limits of Christianity in present circumstances to play any critical public role, we need to take into account how it is viewed as a private affair in the Asian centralized states—China, Vietnam, North Korea, Myanmar, and so on. When we speak of “privatization” of religion in China and other centralized Asian states, this needs to be distinguished from the liberal discourse on privatization. This latter tradition is concerned to protect the autonomy of the realities of the world from unwarranted intervention on the part of religious agents and institutions, something that is best exemplified in the case of European history. It is also inspired by Enlightenment tradition whose spirit does not permit anything that compromises rationality.

In China and other centralized states, privatization of religion is understood with reference not so much to rationality as to the state and its control over every realm of activities, including the religious ones; it is *raison d'état*. There is no room for the ethical aspects of Christianity to come out into the open in public affairs and concerns, much less the possibility of playing any critical role with public institutions and policies. In China and Vietnam, there was a transition from total exclusion and denial of religion to tolerance of them as long as they remain under state control and in the private realm. This is taken care of by the Religious Affairs Bureau in China and similar bodies in Vietnam and Myanmar. Such institutions were created as a part of the strategy of penetration, regulation, and control. Part of this process was also the confiscation of Christian institutions, which still had some public role, and forcing conformity to the state-sponsored Three-Self Movement. Such a control was important in the case of Vietminh also because of the embeddedness of Catholicism in the peasant culture, and the political force it represented. In these countries under communist regimes, there is a certain amount of space for developmental and charitable works on the part of Christians and religious groups. But the space is closed when Christians and other religious groups want to express themselves on social and political issues based on their

religious convictions. In short, a system was put in place in these centralized states that immobilized any attempt to play a political or other public role by Christians. The state/communist party in China and Vietnam would encourage Christians to get involved in neglected social areas (such as care for the mentally retarded or the eradication of leprosy) and to dedicate themselves to rescue work in times of disaster. The state views this as a contribution of Christians toward the “united front,” that is, the state-controlled cooperation between all religious or civic groups for the common good of the country under strict state/communist party control.

In this model of centralized states, there is also a limited understanding of religious freedom. It is understood solely as freedom of conscience to profess in private one’s belief, and it does not allow the freedom of any religion, including Christianity, to come out in the open and interact with other systems of the society—politics, economy, culture, and so on. Document 19, issued in 1982 by the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), reads: “The crux of policy of freedom of religious belief is to make the question of religious belief a private matter, one of individual free choice for citizens.” All this applies in a very special way to Christianity because of its global connections and apprehension of it being used by foreign powers for political purposes. A case in point is the Sino-Vatican relationship, and especially the issue of papal approval for the ordination of bishops. On the whole, the expectation from Christianity is that it accommodates to the state and follows its directives for its survival. If at all there is any room for a public role of Christianity, it is the contribution it could make to create a harmonious society, as defined by the state. While the party-state tries to bend religion to its own ends, Christianity, especially the Protestant Christianity, seems to accommodate to the state, on pragmatic grounds, which gives room to speak of “mutual adaptation.”⁴

The Secular and Democratic Environment

Democratic and secular situations—at least in terms of Constitution—prevail in India, Korea, the Philippines, and Japan. Many democratic elements such as equal treatment of religions in secular spirit, democratic elections at the local and national levels, independent judiciary, basic freedom of expression through media and other means of communication characterize the democratic environment these countries share. This creates the possibility of Christian intervention in public life. And yet the situation is quite different and unique in each of these cases.

Christianity in the Philippines, as a secular and democratic country, shares the same kind of freedom for public intervention, as in other countries with a similar political environment. But within this general model, the Philippines is still quite distinct and unique. For, here is a secular country that has also at the same time a large majority of Christians whose history is connected with Iberian mission-expansion. Christianity acts in the public realm as the religion of the majority. Hence, it has some traits of the European history of altar and throne issues. The support of the Church means a lot for

the political powers. This has been the case during the colonial period and with the successive governments in the Philippines since Independence. As history shows, benign dictators are welcomed when they try to bring order out of chaos and evoke public support with promises. Not different was the case of the Church in the initial stages of Marcos martial regime. But then, as the regime began to show its true colors and the suppression of freedom and violation of human rights became widespread, the Church woke up to this reality and even became a rallying point of resistance culminating in the People's Power Revolution of 1986 that overthrew the Marcos regime. There is also the danger that the institutional church becomes too conscious of its public influence and believes that it could evoke popular opposition against some state policies such as in the case of Reproductive Health Bill. The more recent developments show that more and more Christians begin to think on their own and take a position, unmindful of the official position of the Church.

The Philippines is not all Christian; it is a country in which an entire region—Mindanao—is shaped by Islamic history, culture, and tradition. The challenge of the public sphere here is complex and entwined in political, religious, economic, and cultural issues. How Christianity acts in public life in this region cannot but be a matter of great interest. In a conflict-ridden situation of Mindanao to which the deep traditional Christian prejudices as well as the political domination of two imperial forces—Spain and later United States—have contributed, the most important public role of Christianity cannot but be that of *peace-building*. What have been the efforts for peace-building and how effective have these been? Seen from a historical perspective the public intervention of Christianity in that part of the country has to come to terms with such issues as the forced alienation of the Moros from their ancestral lands, the planned policy of the various regimes to settle Christians in the traditional lands of the Moros with the threat of the latter being reduced to minority. This requires a process of dialogue both at the grass-roots as well as at the level of leadership. At the grass-roots level, there have been several initiatives, among which is to be singled out the Silsilah Dialogue Movement in Mindanao initiated by the Roman Catholic missionary priest Sebastiano D'Ambra.⁵ At the level of leadership, the Bishop-Ulama Conference, which brings together Muslim, Christian, and indigenous religious representatives for promoting interreligious understanding and peace has been taking place since 1996.

The Japanese invasion and occupation of different countries of Asia during the Second World War has left indelible marks on the peoples of China, Korea, Taiwan, Indonesia, and so on. Tragic incidents like the massacre of Nanjing and the killings of a large number of Koreans are still very alive even today in the minds of neighboring Asian peoples. Although Christian churches in Japan, by and large, did not speak out at that time and even accommodated to Japanese militarist expansion, nevertheless, in the past few decades the different churches have been in the forefront in expressing their repentance and promoting public apology for the wartime wrongs and injustices. This open and robust confession and acknowledgment of wrongdoings contrast with the vague and faint-hearted statements of apology by the state authorities, and even challenge them. This has contributed to the reconciliation, for example, with Korea by addressing the

The legacy of evangelical Christianity in Asia, as in the rest of the world, is paradoxical, as regards the relationship to public life. That may be explained by two different strands within evangelicalism itself. One strand of evangelicalism speaks against any public intervention and this stems from the evangelical insistence on personal piety, conversion, and individual ethics. The same trend of evangelicalism has a penchant for conforming to the political status quo and to established order based on a biblical fundamentalism that interprets Romans 13:17 along these lines. All this conjoined with the understanding of mission as rescuing souls from a world of sin and danger leads to an apolitical attitude and practice. But there is another streak of evangelicalism especially in its charismatic form with millennial connections which has strong political impact and is even subversive in nature. Historically, in Asia we could refer to the Taiping Rebellion (1850–1864) and in Korea to the apocalyptic movement inspired by Kil Son-ju (1869–1935). In both cases, strands of indigenous popular religious motives of eschatology exerted influence in the development of a revolution against colonial governments.

There have been few studies on the public and political role being played by evangelical Christianity in China and in the developing world at large. One may not undermine this variant of Christianity, since Pentecostals and evangelicals appear to be, as in many other parts of the developing world, the fastest growing Christian group. The available evidence suggests that evangelical and Pentecostal Christianity does help promote democratization, human rights, and pluralism in difficult conditions. The same seems to be true also in China and other parts of Asia under centralized and totalitarian states. In Asia, the evangelical groups who, as noted, were traditionally concerned about personal conversion, piety, and so on have been provoked by denial of religious freedom, or infringement of minority rights as in the case of India, to intervene publicly in the political field using new means of communication.

In China the struggles of Evangelical Christianity to create an autonomous space for itself is contributory to the development of civil society in most trying and oppressive conditions. In addition, a theology and faith-motivation oriented toward alleviation of poverty and search for prosperity resulting in greater self-confidence and the bonds of communitarian life have led to valorization of democratic processes and goals in these churches. It may be recalled here that, as noted earlier, while most churches conformed to the Japanese state-ideology, some evangelical groups were taken hold off by a certain eschatological vision and resisted the state-ideology and suffered persecution. A case in point is what happened to the subversive Jehovah's Witnesses (*Todaisha*) movement and its open rejection of the Japanese state-ideology and its idolatry.

The transnational characters of Catholicism with its strong institutions perhaps do not have the kind of agility as the evangelical churches when it comes to effective intervention in public life. Many considerations stand in the way of any challenge to the established authorities as critical interventions in public life may warrant. These include the need to have smooth rapport with the state authorities to be able to protect the institutional interests of the Catholic Church. Among critically thinking Christians this has been a point of criticism, namely that the institutional Catholicism places its

institutional interests above the issues affecting the people, and hence tends to be apolitical. Such a criticism is loud, for example, in India.

How can the increasingly greater public role being played by evangelical Christianity in Asia be explained? There are reasons specific to a particular region or country that could have triggered this upsurge for public involvement. For example, in Indonesia we may refer to the democratic fermentation in the civil society leading to political transformation, to the economic crisis aggravating the suffering of the poor, communal conflicts, Islamic resurgence, and so on. Besides these, we need to look for the changes taking place at the global level in evangelical theology that has helped overcome isolation and ghetto mentality, and take up seriously political and economic issues with a sharper sense of social justice, thanks to a developing theological shift. As a recent study observes,

Indonesian Protestantism has undergone substantial change in its relation to the political sphere, not so much through any kind of direct participation in electoral politics as through the gradual development of broader vision of social and political responsibility. . . . Civic engagement does not take the form of churches actively making political endorsements or engaging in partisan activity. But there is increasing emphasis among evangelical churches on community service, on learning about civic affairs, and on forming links with leaders from other religious traditions as part of building a stronger civil society.⁸

As for contemporary Asian Catholicism, if the institutional Church tends to be apolitical, the Basic Christian Communities (BCC) or Basic Ecclesial Communities (BEC), on the other hand, seem to serve as a concrete pastoral strategy for believers to acquire democratic and participatory mindset and skills for collaborative praxis. In the context of ethnic, caste, and linguistic diversity, these communities have created bridges of communication and provided bonds of communion and collaborative participation, which becomes schooling in democracy and participatory practices.

The openness to the world or “temporal realities”—politics, economy, culture—initiated by Vatican II had also its repercussion in the Asian churches. The conviction was reinforced that from a faith perspective, the believers are required to engage themselves in the affairs of the world. Although there have been some efforts on the part of Asian Catholic churches to put the insights of Vatican II into practice, as for example, through the Office of Human Development and other bodies of FABC, nevertheless, the public interventions have been done more effectively by believers at the grass-roots level when they join various social movements and commit themselves to the transformation of public life. The Christian or Catholic identity is not something that matters most to them—especially if it hinders their effective intervention in political, economic, and other related fields—but the reality and experiences of the actual conditions of life which call for transformation to which they respond out of their faith conviction.

From an institutional point of view, we need to also take into account the inner ecclesiastical situations that condition Asian church leaders and others when they respond to public issues. When the official Church speaks out, it is constrained by the preoccupation

religious convictions may be true nor reject the right of their devout fellow citizens to couch their contributions to public discussions in religious language.”¹⁰ By way of example, I may adduce here how Habermas shows the importance of Christian doctrine of creation for the strengthening of human dignity and rights. He also sees its importance in addressing biomedical technological issues as the genetic enhancement. Theological beliefs could throw light on this intricate question and contribute to the present and future well-being of humanity.

John Rawls on his part speaks of “*comprehensive doctrines*.” By comprehensive doctrines is meant a system of thought that claims to give a full-range and exhaustive explanation of the world, nature, society, their origin, value, their future, and so on. Rawls transforms Kant’s ideal of moral autonomy (see his *Critique of Practical Reason*), in an inter-subjective manner. Here is a question of abiding by those laws and arrangements that find acceptance among all concerned in a polity on the basis of their public use of reason. Moral autonomy is not simply to be free from coercion; it has a necessary reference to the other and to the public. This moral autonomy is linked to political autonomy. A religious group is politically autonomous not simply when it is free from any coercion, but when it is able to abide by what the common good requires and what finds acceptance among all concerned in a particular society. Contribution to public reason means that the religious traditions take a distance from their internal convictions and belief systems and have before them the general interest of the people. It would involve a kind of translation into secular language those beliefs which have public significance. The beliefs and convictions held by religious groups need to be supported by public reason, if they are to have any role in public life. We could, for example, take the creation narrative to support the equality of woman which is a secular issue in the polity; or the same creation story to support the cause of human rights, because according to Christian belief, human beings are endowed with dignity since they have been created in the image of God. The question then is: Should religions be denuded of their beliefs to reach a ground of neutrality where they could enter into conversation with other religious groups in the polity? Do not we lose in this way the richness the religious beliefs and myths contain? Why not the religions carry these with them and enter into conversation with others, and thus through a mutuality that touches deeper chords reach consensus and understanding? This is a point which many Western theologians like Linda Hogan, Nigel Biggar, and others contend when responding to the position of Rawls and Habermas in relation to public reason or overlapping consensus. Linda Hogan notes, for example, “A fundamental flaw in the idea of public reason lies in the manner in which it requires the speaker and listener to believe both the self and the other to be, or to act as though he or she is *rootless*.”¹¹

Asian Debate on Religion in Public Life

The positions of Rawls and Habermas are at the level of the normative and are abstracted from concrete factual context with which we started our discussion on the relationship

Church and state; separation of the two; and finally marginalization of the Church and religion from public life as of no consequence. Asian history appears to be one of accommodation of religion in public life. What is important is not so much the religious tenets or “comprehensive doctrines” and their place in public life. Rather the question is to be situated within the broader concern of the *participation* of various segments of the society with their different conceptions of good life in the construction of the common good. Since religions in a very significant way determine the outlook on life and values, it is important that religious groups also play a role in contributing to the common good which means that they go beyond the interests of the respective groups. This way of considering breaks the framework of minority and majority. On the contrary, if one were to look at the question in terms of majority-minority, it turns out to be an issue of power conflict. In other words, the practical question of religion vis-à-vis public life becomes an issue of *power*, and less of doctrines.

A second question concerns specifically Christianity and its participation along with other religious groups for the public good. The difficulty with Christianity is that it is viewed as a religion “foreign” to Asian societies. So, the question is, should a foreign religion like Christianity be considered on par with other religious traditions and therefore have a share with others in deliberating on public good? This is especially the case where there is established religion (Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, etc.). In many Asian societies, because of the issue of power, Christianity is not viewed as a partner in the deliberation for common good.

The principles of democratic governance which recognize equal rights to individuals and groups would go against any such exclusion. Here historical memory overtakes political justice of equal participation. The alleged connivance of Christianity with the colonial rule makes many citizens skeptical about the participation of Christians in the discourse on the contribution to the welfare of the nation. There is an undercurrent that a religious group cannot participate in the common good unless it subscribes to the nationalist expectations. This is how a Chinese writer expresses himself on this point: “Chinese Christianity should participate in the cultural enterprise of Chinese nationalism in order to achieve a ‘common outlook’ by abandoning its insistence on being seen as ‘different.’”¹² But in fact, “foreignness” and being “different” alone do not seem to be sufficient reason for the exclusion of Christianity from being part of a national dialogue on common good. For, the same societies have had no difficulty in accepting Western science and technology as contributing to the welfare of the nation. And in the case of China, it is not only science and technology but also its official ideology of Marxist communism was a Western import, but then it has been deployed to construct the political framework, ironically when communist systems have been abandoned in the West—in its place of origin.

It should be added here that we do have a different situation in a country like the Philippines with a strong presence of Christianity. Here, the “faith capital” of the people is important, since it is the same person who is a believer and at the same time who acts in the public sphere. Here the faith capital is to be deployed in such a way that it

contributes to public good while avoiding unwarranted intervention of the Church in politics that does not respect the autonomy of the secular sphere.

All this brings us back to the question: How could Christians and Christian communities bring to bear upon the public life the values and ideals which they think are important and necessary for the general welfare of the people? That leads me to the conclusion of this chapter.

CONCLUSION

Asian Christianity does not have any model to fall back on in its relationship to the intricate and varied sociopolitical situations. By trying to respond to the concrete situations, it has developed models and patterns that are appropriate to different circumstances obtaining in the continent. One thing that emerges from the overall experience of Asian countries is that the contribution of Christianity is most effective when it does not act as an institutional force—as churches confronting the state and other public institutions—but rather becomes an integral part of the larger movement of civil society. Whether it is an issue of democratization, human rights, or religious freedom, civil society offers a space for the contribution of Christianity to public life. In those cases where civil society is absent, or controlled by the centralized state, the fundamental challenge for Asian Christianity seems to be the contribution to the creation of a civil society and public space. This manner of indirect intervention in public life by such means as grass-roots activism instilling a sense of civic responsibility, implementing new educational practices, creating bridges of communication, and so on appears to be very important for creating a democratic environment. Measured by these means and yardsticks, the public influence of Christianity could be stated to be far beyond its numerical strength. At the same time, however, Asian Christianity faces also many challenges when it tries to intervene in public life, and these relate to its association with colonialism and the perceived threat that it could destabilize the established social and political order.

The results of the interplay would be optimal when there is a state focused on the good of the society, which does not overlap with the good of the state but goes beyond its objectives; and when there is a form of Christianity which is not isolated within its narrow religious confines but seeks to move beyond to the larger concerns and issues of the society. This is an ideal situation. The reality of daily life in Asia is that of a struggle between a public life that is being controlled by political powers centralized or under the grip of religious fundamentalist forces, and of a Christianity that is centered on its inner issues and questions. The recognition of religious pluralism as a value for public life, for its well-being, growth and for peace by the entire society and its various institutions, and the realization that every single religion could play a positive and constructive role will also brighten the chances of a fruitful interplay between the Asian public life and Christianity. So too, an Asian public theology open and sensitive to sociopolitical issues

will help the Asian Christian communities to open themselves up. This is again a project ahead than an achieved reality.¹³

NOTES

1. The term “public sphere” widely used in contemporary discussions go back to the seminal work of Jürgen Habermas. In the present contribution, I prefer to use the expression, “public life,” which is broader. It includes the realms of public life like politics, economy, culture, etc. It also includes what is meant in a restrictive way as “public sphere,” namely the space between family and the state; it is the space of civil society. Each context will indicate by the expressions “public life” and “public sphere”—interchangeably used—whether it is to be understood in the broader or narrower sense.
2. Cf. Chandra Mallampalli, “British Missions and Indian Nationalism, 1880–1908: Imitation and Autonomy in Calcutta and Madras,” in Andrew Porter, ed., *The Imperial Horizons of British Protestant Missions, 1880–1914* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003), 158–82.
3. Cf. W. Kang, “Church and State Relations in the Japanese Colonial Period,” in Robert E. Busell, Jr. and Timothy S. Lee, eds., *Christianity in Korea* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2007), 97–115.
4. Cf. Fuk-Tsang Ying, “Mutual Adaptation to Socialism: TSMP and Church–State Relations,” in Felix Wilfred, Edmond Tang, and Georg Evers, eds., *China and Christianity*, Concilium 2008/2 (London: SCM Press, 2008), 71–87.
5. Cf. Sebastiano D’Ambra, “The Mindanao Conflict and the Silsilah Dialogue Movement: Experience of Muslims and Christians in the Philippines Committed to Live and Promote the Culture of Dialogue and Resolution of Conflict through Active Harmony,” in Thomas Scheijaeck, ed., *Prekäres Christsein in Asien* (Mainz: Mathias Grunewald Verlag, 2011), 77–99.
6. Wong Wai Ching Angela, “Politics of Sexual Morality and Evangelical Activism in Hong Kong,” a paper presented at the Conference on Religions and Asian Public Life, organized by United Board for Christian Higher Education, Hong Kong, July 6–7, 2012.
7. It may be added here from a global perspective that in Sub-Saharan Africa, the American Christian Right exerts great influence on issues of homosexuality, abortion, family, etc.
8. David H. Lumsdaine, ed., *Evangelical Christianity and Democracy in Asia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 17.
9. Cf. Grace Davie, *Europe: The Exceptional Case: Parameters of Faith in the Modern World* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2009).
10. As quoted in Maureen Junker-Kenny, *Habermas and Theology* (New York: T & T Clark, 2011), 137.
11. Nigel Biggar and Linda Hogan, eds., *Religious Voices in Public Places* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 223.
12. Chin Ken Pa, “What is Sino-Christian Theology?” in Wilfred et al., eds., *China and Christianity*, 91.
13. Cf. Felix Wilfred, *Asian Public Theology* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2010).

CHAPTER 36

MIGRATION AND NEW COSMOPOLITANISM IN ASIAN CHRISTIANITY

JOSE MARIO C. FRANCISCO, S. J.

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

THIS chapter focuses on the nexus between Christianity, migration, and Asia involving tropes in current thought and practice such as the dynamic between religion and its social locus, between origin and destination, and between solidarity and diversity. It draws from both theoretical explorations and empirical studies particularly those of the often-unheard voices of migrant workers, and weaves facets of these multiple and complex tropes into a discussion on the impact of contemporary migration on Christianity in Asia as well as on Asian Christian communities elsewhere.

The first two sections provide broad overviews. The first establishes Christianity's engagement with the movement of peoples and its encounter with new contexts; the second focuses on the extensive movement of migrant workers in and from Asia since the 1970s. The third section describes the Christian practice of Asian migrants as situated "between here and there," while the fourth examines the challenges to Asian Christianity to be more cosmopolitan and catholic.

In order to understand the impact of contemporary migration on Asian Christianity, one needs to consider two important features of Christianity: first, the Christian ideal of universality with its inherent orientation to explore new terrains and attract peoples of diverse cultures, and second, the consequent transformation of Christianity as a result of its interaction with new social contexts. These features are best illustrated through some broad aspects of earlier waves of Christian mission to Asia, Christianity's expansion in the ancient world, and the sixteenth-century entry of European Christianity in the New World.

First, the ideal of universality propelled Christian mission to move with peoples and to follow the extensive sea and land routes into urban trading centers of the ancient world. Christianity appropriated the Hebrew Scriptures and aimed at a religious ethos not bound by ethnic, economic, or other divisions. Greco-Roman cities were thus revitalized because Christianity “provid[ed] new norms and new kinds of social relationships able to cope with many urgent urban problems.”¹

With the same ideal to preach to all peoples, sixteenth-century European Christianity rode the much greater tides of colonialism and commerce. Christian mission sailed with competing European forces first into South and East Asia, and then “along the great arc of the Malay peninsula and across into the Pacific along the Indonesian archipelago [Spice Islands].”²

This involvement had an ambivalent impact on its mission. Religious missionaries like the well-known Jesuit Francis Xavier (1506–1552) traveled to the far corners of Asia, and many ministered to both Europeans and natives especially tribal peoples and the “untouchable” Dalit natives of South Asia. At the same time, competing political and economic interests among the colonizers, traders, local elite, and even church personnel often compromised the Christian ideal of universal mission and further oppressed those already marginalized in colonial societies.

The second important feature of Christianity came from its dynamic encounter with various contexts, shown in its use of vernaculars like Hellenistic Greek in Syria and its contact with Gnostic and Manichaean thought. As new linguistic communities of Christians developed—for example, Antioch for the Greek-speaking and Edessa for those using Syriac—different forms of Christian thought and practice emerged. Thus differing views about the nature and person of Jesus Christ competed during the fourth- and fifth-century church councils and produced various “Christianities”: the Orthodox-Catholic-Chalcedonian based in the Roman Empire versus those considered heretical like the Nestorians in Persia and the Monophysite-Jacobite-Coptic, influential in Egypt and Ethiopia.³

These differing Christianities faced and appropriated even more diverse cultural and religious traditions in the vast Asian landscape—Islam in the Arab region, Hinduism in India, and Buddhism in China. For example, Christians used Arabic before Islamic leaders forbade it in the seventh century, and the Nestorians who flourished in China under the T’ang dynasty named the Christian God “Buddha” (635–638).⁴

The same dynamic operated between sixteenth-century European Christianity and new social contexts in the Indies. Missionaries like the Dominican Francisco Blancas de San Jose (d. 1614) in the Philippines and Jesuit Alexander de Rhodes (1593–1660) in Vietnam used the languages of Asia, often transposing them into the Roman alphabet and systematizing them in grammars and dictionaries.⁵

But cultural and political factors did not bring great numbers to the churches or effect significant changes internal to Christianity, except in the Philippines. In the middle of nineteenth century, the former high estimation of Chinese culture and way of life changed to the negative. The political decline of the Middle Kingdom brought about by the onslaught of the European colonialism changed the image of China in Europe into

the “opium smoking coolie” synonymous to Chinese in general. Missionary strategies aimed at civilizing and Christianizing the Asians. For instance, Portuguese Catholics condemned the historic St. Thomas Christians along the Malabar coast of India because of their connections with the Nestorians in Persia⁶ and probably also because of the absorption of local religious and cultural traditions into their Christian life. Alternative strategies such as those of Robert de Nobili (1577–1656) in India and Matteo Ricci (1552–1610) in China were criticized and eventually suppressed.⁷

Moreover, links with colonialism and commerce plus the divisions among European churches after the Reformation made the Christian churches more rigid and defensive as well as often allied with rulers through the patronage system. This conjuncture of politics, commerce, and religion made Christianity part of a totalizing historical formation which appeared at best as alien, if not thoroughly oppressive. This remains the dominant legacy of Christianity in Asia today. Although the faith of Asian Christians is deeply rooted and has produced many martyrs, Christianity remains a small percentage of its total population and is often seen as foreign to its landscape.

CONTEMPORARY MIGRATION IN AND FROM ASIA

Today’s massive movement of peoples and the resulting changes in the world are shaping the nature and character of Christianity. As in earlier periods, this social movement has not only provided the vehicle for Christianity’s inherent missionary impulse but also occasioned new forms of Christian thought and practice. Its extensive impact on the Asian geographical and social landscape has made Asia a privileged place for the study of migration and its interaction with Christianity.

Migration—Its Nature and Scope

The very definition of contemporary migration is elusive and even contentious because the movement of peoples today engages the competing agencies of migrants themselves, business interests in recruitment and placement, and national and international organizations involved in its regulation and support. In its broadest sense, it has been described as “crossing the boundary of a political or administrative unit for a certain minimum period.”⁸ This general description includes migrants seeking better-paying jobs, refugees escaping various forms of violence, and immigrants desiring upward mobility. Although these different groups cross borders for varying reasons, migration—whether internal, regional, or international—is primarily driven by global economic factors, in particular, the disparity in levels of income, employment, and social well-being between places of origin and destination. Thus, aside from constituting the greatest number of

But these imported practices are often modified due to particular conditions or the status of Christianity in their new destinations. In London, the Filipino practice of enthroning statues of saints from house to house involves transporting them through the underground, much to the consternation of other passengers.

In contexts where Christianity is accepted or, at least, tolerated, feasts of migrants' hometowns—for example, of the *Sto. Niño* [Holy Infant Jesus] of Cebu or of St. John the Baptist of Tanauan, Batangas—are commonly celebrated in churches like St. Patrick Church in downtown San Francisco, California. In migrant destinations like Abu Dhabi where religious freedom is curtailed, clandestine religious services are held under the guise of secular celebrations. People congregate, eating and drinking as in a birthday party, while Mass takes place in an inner room.

These changes do not simply indicate a transfer of location but signal the liberation of faith from geographically delineated localities and the creation of new sacred spaces between here and there. In labeling a grotto of the Blessed Virgin Mary outside Beirut as Baclaran, the popular Manila shrine to Our Lady of Perpetual Help, Filipina domestic workers re-live the Filipino devotion to Mary in a new context and, at the same time, appropriate the Beirut grotto as their own. This dynamic is what constitutes new sacred space that is more than geographical.

Moreover in spaces like this, the Christian practice of Asian migrants assumes new forms. "Pilgrimage for a Cause" founded in 1996 by two Catholic Filipina migrants in Israel provides an exceptional illustration. Its organized visits to well-known sites offer a transforming fusion of migration, tourism, and pilgrimage: "Filipino migrants typically narrate their migration moves to Israel as the outcome of both economic need and a desire to travel, to see the 'beautiful places' depicted in the Bible and experience the 'holy land' familiar to them as Christians from early childhood."²⁷

This fusion shows in the conduct of their pilgrimages. Groups composed of many Filipinos and some from other countries are led by a chaplain or guide familiar with the religious significance of each site. Like typical Filipino tourists, they shop and socialize with much singing and dancing. But unlike others, they tend to stay longer at the sites, engage in some prayer and often collect mementos like rocks or leaves to be blessed by the chaplain and kept either for themselves or their families.

This fusion of migration, tourism, and pilgrimage creates for them an "imagined connection between a post-migration (including refugee) population and a place of origin and with people of similar cultural origins elsewhere."²⁸ They construe links between peoples and places as aspects of religious experience, reaching out with donations to orphans in Manila, victims of the 1995 mudslides in central Philippines, and the homeless in post-Katrina New Orleans.

Israel is thus no longer just a destination country of migration for them: "Being pushed into the shabby urban spaces of southern Tel Aviv and denigrating care and domestic work, though unwilling to give up hope, Filipina migrants continually seek to discover the *real* Holy Land, since there has to be more to it than meets the eye upon arrival."²⁹ In this specific context, migration can be interpreted as a pilgrimage, as it constitutes a journey that becomes imbued with sacredness.

First, new major church offices now address migrant concerns which before the 1970s were hardly acknowledged in official church structures. For instance, with the establishment in 1970 and further elevation in 1988 of the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant Peoples, all national conferences of Catholic bishops followed suit with their own commissions for the same purpose. Protestant churches have undertaken similar efforts such as the 1991 Hong Kong “Consultation on the Mission and Ministry to Filipino Migrant Workers” involving international bodies like the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) and Asian Migrant Workers Center (AMWC) as well as national church groups from both sending and receiving countries.

Countless documents on migration have been issued with varying levels of authority and have raised serious questions over human dignity and rights of migrants. One such example is the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences (FABC) 7th Plenary Assembly which “affirm[ed] that migration and refugee movements, which result in depersonalization, loss of human dignity and the breakup of families, are moral issues confronting the conscience of the Church and that of our Asian nations.”³⁵ In 2011, the World Council of Churches (WCC) Working Group from Southeast and South Asia as well as the West Asia and Gulf regions insisted that “churches in the receiving countries and contexts . . . be open and inclusive communities. If they are not, they are mere religious cults.”³⁶

Second, programs and services for migrants support these pronouncements. At the places of origin, parishes and dioceses with a considerable number of migrating members initiate programs preparing would-be migrants and their families for the psychological, social, and religious consequences of migration.³⁷ Many Roman Catholic and Protestant groups are engaged in efforts to explain migrant issues to church constituents, to collaborate with other institutions on pastoral training programs for ministers of migrants. They also work with government and nongovernmental organizations to ensure enactment and implementation of beneficial laws and government practices, and to protect migrants from the illegal and unjust conduct of private recruiting agencies.

At the places of destination, some churches in cosmopolitan centers and remote villages in Asia offer migrants, Christian and those of other faiths, social services, legal protection, and pastoral care. There migrants find or initiate groups through informal networks or established organizations, especially in major cities such as Hong Kong and Tokyo in Asia, Los Angeles and Chicago in North America, and London and Rome in Europe.

One notable example of local church support is the Archdiocesan Pastoral Center for Filipino Migrants, popularly known as the Filipino Catholic Center (FCC), established by the Archdiocese of Seoul and organized and managed by Filipino religious personnel and volunteers. Unlike in West Asia where the religious practice of the Christian minority is severely restricted, the Korean local church provides a whole gamut of religious and social services including short-term shelter, legal advice, and continuing religious formation. Although its constituents are predominantly Filipino, it helps migrant workers from other places who are invited to join their activities.³⁸

National church bodies at places of destination have also helped through their advocacy programs. In 1993, the Chinese Bishops’ Conference of Taiwan protested that civil

laws and practice regarding migrants violate the 1948 UN Declaration of Human Rights on twenty-two counts. Together with other nongovernmental organizations, it has succeeded in changing some laws, especially the ones prohibiting women migrant workers from marrying or getting pregnant and running the risk of abortion, whether forced or voluntary.³⁹

Third, links between churches at places of origin and of destination have been initiated. Christian churches are unavoidably international because of their ideal of universality and have often developed extensive service networks. However, its social mission in the service of migrants needs to become transnational, that is, to forge stronger systematic links between churches of origin and of destination. Given the impact of contemporary migration in both places of origin and of destination as well as the location of migrants' Christian practice between here and there, seamless links between these churches would provide more effective service. For example, transparochial organizations like El Shaddai or Couples for Christ have established chapters in places of destination connected to their Philippine headquarters. Transnationalizing its social mission by linking churches at both ends of the migration flows facilitates a more holistic Christian approach to complex migration issues.

Embodying Diversity

Given the enormous volume of peoples from various contexts living and working in shared spaces of cosmopolitan centers, Asian Christianity is called to embody diversity in community, that is, to integrate it into the Church as the Body of Christ. This call to greater catholicity is echoed within and between churches at places of origin as well as of destination.

Churches in both places have been changed by multiple forms of diversity due to migration. No longer confined to a religious ethos often rural, Christian communities at places of origin have been transformed by being sources of migrants. They have become part of the migrant narrative from departure to return through their support programs for left-behind families and by accepting support for local church activities.

Churches at places of destination have experienced greater diversification. Marked differences exist between the Christian practices of the local community with that of migrants which are often organized around traditions of national or regional origin. For instance, the formal atmosphere of religious services in Japan seems "like going to a funeral wake" for Filipinos used to lively singing at church.⁴⁰ Furthermore, such differences are amplified by factors other than national or ethnic culture such as social status (discrimination against the poor), age (obedience to the elder), and gender (low regard for women).⁴¹

These multiple diversities threaten the catholicity of churches at both ends of the migration process. In traditional Philippine town of Baliwag, Bulacan, the old rich did not readily welcome to its centuries-old Holy Week procession new religious floats [*carrozas*] sponsored by migrant families; and in Singapore or Hong Kong, Filipino

world of Asian migrants generated prospects for its theological activity. Together with the Christian practice of Asian migrants, migration's challenges to Asian Christianity have opened specific strategic paths for reflection as well as a different theological paradigm for understanding who we are and who God is for us.

Doing theology in the context of contemporary migration in and from Asia takes experience as its *locus theologicus*, that is, the site of its reflection. It aligns with many forms of contemporary theological activity from Asia and beyond, such as theologies of liberation. Three theological paths have been opened with migrant experience as their starting point—migration as “an image of the ‘existential exodus’ of human beings,” “a special ‘place’ for the encounter with the ‘Other,’” and “a permanent challenge to the ‘Catholicity’ of Christ’s Church.”⁴⁶

The first employs migration as an image of the human journey. It identifies characteristics of migrant experience as constitutive of the human condition and views as migrants all of humankind as well as each individual, whatever be their concrete circumstances in life. This theological lens of migration has allowed Christians to see their traditional narratives, symbols, and doctrines in terms of migrant experience. Many biblical stories, for example, have been read accordingly: God’s accompaniment of the Israelites in exile as consolation to today’s refugees⁴⁷ or Deutero-Isaiah’s vision of homecoming (40:1–11) as source of hope for immigrants.⁴⁸

The second theological path focuses on migration as a special “place” for the encounter with the “Other.” Efforts along this path frame intercultural encounters made inevitable by contemporary migration within the biblical notion of hospitality to the stranger and of God as totally other yet hospitable to all because of God’s presence in the *anawim*. This is reflected, for instance, in how religious institutions in Houston facilitate the integration of Asian immigrants into other ethnic communities as well as into the wider Houston and American society.⁴⁹

The third path considers migration as a continuing challenge to the “Catholicity” of Christ’s Church. Although some theological work has tackled this in doctrinal terms such as the social doctrine of the Trinity, greater emphasis has been devoted to the pastoral and spiritual dimensions of making the church a “house of prayer for all people.”⁵⁰

Behind these paths of theological activity lies the theological paradigm of an Asian Christianity shaped by contemporary migration. This paradigm takes as its locus the Christian experiences of migrants between here and there as well as the twin challenges of new cosmopolitanism and greater catholicity; it similarly locates itself between here and there.

This singular location for Asian Christian reflection is more than just the link in religious practice between places of origin and of destination or the resulting negotiated landscape. Just as early Christianity expressed its faith in new cultural and linguistic forms, Asian Christianity has sought to do the same at its location—the very dynamic of space and time generated by the movement of peoples. Here is where it articulates who Christians are and who God is for them.

In articulating who Christians are as located between here and there, Asian Christianity projects a Christian identity that has been called hybrid.⁵¹ This identity

is constructed not by pasting together static elements from diverse social or personal identifications with no regard for solidarity, but by freely negotiating on equal terms with others within the spatial and temporal dynamic brought about by migration. Thus can diversities from multiple sources find expression through and, at the same time, be relativized within such a Christian identity. Asian Christianity becomes more catholic in this process which gathers both the migrant and the local into the Body of Church.

Its articulation of who God is similarly bound to finding God between here and there. Believing in God's Word made flesh and dwelling among us, it recognizes the sacramentality of its location between here and there as well as rejects binding divine presence to this or that place. It locates the transcendent God in movement, not different from that involved in migration.

As a result of the challenges to be more cosmopolitan and catholic, Asian Christianity finds itself in a privileged position of examining whether the spaces within it or those that it offers others are unrestricted and open to diversity. In locating who we are and who God is between here and there, it helps make Christianity no longer foreign to Asia or anywhere in our global world.

NOTES

1. Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity: A Sociologist Reconsiders History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 214.
2. Samuel Hugh Moffett, *A History of Christianity in Asia*, vol. 1, *Beginnings to 1500* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1998), 60.
3. Cf. Ian Gillman and Hans-Joachim Klimkeit, *Christians in Asia before 1500* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999), 13–19.
4. Cf. Sangkeun Kim, *Strange Names of God: The Missionary Translation of the Divine Name and the Chinese Responses to Matteo Ricci's "Shangti" in Late Ming China, 1583–1644* (New York: Peter Lang, 2004), 125–26.
5. Cf. Francisco Blancas de San Jose O.P., *Sermones*, ed. Jose Mario C. Francisco, S.J. (Quezon City: Pulong, Sources for Philippine Studies, 1994); and Peter C. Phan, *Mission and Catechesis: Alexandre de Rhodes and Inculturation in Seventeenth Century Vietnam* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1998).
6. Cf. Samuel Hugh Moffett, *A History of Christianity in Asia*, vol. 2, *1500–1900* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005), 6.
7. Cf. Anand Amaladass, S.J., and Francis X. Clooney, S.J., trans. *Preaching Wisdom to the Wise: Three Treatises by Roberto de Nobili, S.J., Missionary and Scholar in 17th Century India* (St. Louis, MO: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2000); and Gianni Criveller and Cesar Guilen Nunez, *Portrait of a Jesuit: Matteo Ricci* (Macau: Matteo Ricci Institute, 2010).
8. Stephen Castles, "International Migration at the Beginning of the Twenty-First Century: Global Trends and Issues," *International Social Sciences Journal* 52, no.165 (Sept 2000), 270.
9. Cf. Graziano Battistella, "Labour Migration in Asia and the Role of Bilateral Migration Agreements: Market Access Facilitation by Informal Means," paper presented

CHAPTER 37

IN THE LIGHT OF ASIA

Reflections of a Western Christian

FRANCIS X. CLOONEY, S. J.

AS A MEMBER of this Handbook's Editorial Board, it has been my privilege to read the various proposals, drafts, and polished forms of these essays. I have profited from their erudition and insight; by their individual merit and due to their cumulative impact, they might well change how we think about Christianity in Asia and globally as well.

The Handbook offers an extraordinary wealth of information and insight into what Christianity has meant on the vast continent of Asia over two millennia and now. It documents how Christianity in nearly all its forms flourishes across Asia in accord with multiple distinctive identities, in accord with the range of environmental, cultural, social, and political issues faced by both the minorities and majorities of Asia. New insights shed light on old practical and theoretical dimensions of Christianity as religion and community. Even strands of Asian Christianity clearly indebted to missionary foundations, such as Catholic or Lutheran or Orthodox, have clearly grown beyond those origins. The names "Western Christianity" and "Asian Christianity" no longer quite fit, once we see that the churches of Asia have new histories, complex lived realities, and robust theologies that simply cannot be traced back to European origins. After Asian Christianity's richness has been examined so diversely and comprehensively yet in a single volume, Christians in the West (now realized as a part of "Christianity outside of Asia") too are challenged to think anew about what it means to be Christian.

"Asia" as such is of course too large and unwieldy an idea to hold in one's mind as a single thing. It is hard to think all at once about Israel, the Palestinian people, Syria and Iran, along with India and Sri Lanka, Vietnam and Japan, Korea and China and the Philippines. Given the enormous differences in culture and history and religion, appeals to "Asia" in the Handbook have necessarily to be taken as a shorthand for large and complex contexts. Contributors have had to admit how very formidable it has been to write on any of the themes or areas they take up. For the sake of the volume's larger purpose, just about every issue, interestingly explored with respect to one part of Asia, has had to be further tested in some other Asian cultural context. It need be no secret that all those

involved in the project found it a great challenge to write even on particular aspects of so large and complex a theme. Everyone experienced the difficulty of writing with sure authority on certain matters in certain regions, but then too extending that knowledge to a wider range of examples and contexts. As a result, the volume is a unique instance in which we see experts reaching beyond their grasp for the sake of an important, shared project.

The Handbook calls into question histories of mission that tell only the story of the spread of relatively modern churches from the West to the East. It makes ever so clear why we cannot treat the ever-longer period of postcolonial Christianity in Asia as simply a series of footnotes to the global spread of the Western churches. Histories of past violence and colonial rule haunt Christianity everywhere in Asia; so even forward-looking reflections can hardly escape the duty of rethinking that history in light of political and economic realities relevant then and now.

The Handbook makes it impossible for us to think about Christianity in Asia in abstraction from what Asia is today. Indeed, it is a distinguishing feature of the Handbook that it does not separate religious and theological issues from matters of history, or the social, political, and economic issues which are often the driving force in society. In the short run this leads to complications, reminding us that Christian communities are usually experiencing the tensions every human grouping undergoes in a modern society. In each cultural context, Christians (and other religious communities) are facing the considerable pressures of modernization, globalization, economic change, and the trajectory to secularization and a post-religious identity—even as more traditional religious forces stubbornly reassert themselves. Fortunately, the Handbook thus helps us to think more integrally about that more complex Asian reality in which Christianity and other religions play parts that cannot be easily separated out. Christianity in Asia is all the more clearly part of the religious history of Asia. It is hard but interesting work then to identify topics that pertain more distinctively to Christians in Asia, and it is to the credit of the Handbook's contributors that they regularly do get to the heart of a particularly Christian dimension of a larger and more complex social or cultural reality.

Globalization has necessarily affected the churches as much as any other institutions, and ideas constantly flow back and forth across the world. Western influence still matters greatly in Asia in regard to politics and religion, social and cultural norms, attitudes toward women, and human rights more generally. Even if the churches of Asia have grown beyond any Western foundations they may once have had, they are still interconnected with Christians elsewhere, and rightly so. The Handbook also helps us to reappraise the relationship of the churches of Asia to those of the West as intellectual partners necessarily in a two-way dialogue. We still need not imagine a purely Asian Christian view on any topic of import to the Christian communities. But the still necessary conversation about Westernization, Asian Christianity, and globalization will be better nuanced once we observe, as this Handbook permits, how Western ideas, religious and theological included, have for generations been "Asianized," received and reconstructed in accord with the needs of the Asian context.

RELIGIOUS ADHERENTS IN ASIA BY COUNTRY, MID-2010 – STATISTICS TABLE

Religious adherents in Asia by country, mid-2010

Country	UN region	Population 2010		%		%		%		%
Categories			Agnostics		Atheists		Baha'is		Buddhists	
Afghanistan	South-central Asia	31,412,000	6,900	0.0	710	0.0	16,500	0.1	6,300	0.0
Armenia	Western Asia	3,092,000	117,000	3.8	31,700	1.0	1,200	0.0	310	0.0
Azerbaijan	Western Asia	9,188,000	315,000	3.4	12,800	0.1	1,700	0.0	0	0.0
Bahrain	Western Asia	1,262,000	4,800	0.4	440	0.0	2,800	0.2	2,800	0.2
Bangladesh	South-central Asia	148,692,000	106,000	0.1	11,500	0.0	9,600	0.0	921,000	0.6
Bhutan	South-central Asia	726,000	200	0.0	0	0.0	74	0.0	610,000	84.0
Brunei	South-eastern Asia	399,000	4,600	1.1	140	0.0	1,200	0.3	38,600	9.7
Cambodia	South-eastern Asia	14,138,000	321,000	2.3	35,100	0.2	16,700	0.1	12,007,000	84.9
China	Eastern Asia	1,341,335,000	437,155,000	32.6	97,643,000	7.3	6,000	0.0	206,898,000	15.4
Cyprus	Western Asia	1,104,000	40,000	3.6	8,100	0.7	1,200	0.1	6,400	0.6
Georgia	Western Asia	4,352,000	159,000	3.6	20,100	0.5	1,600	0.0	0	0.0
Hong Kong	Eastern Asia	7,053,000	1,316,000	18.7	171,000	2.4	1,100	0.0	1,074,000	15.2
India	South-central Asia	1,224,614,000	14,194,000	1.2	1,954,000	0.2	1,896,000	0.2	8,772,000	0.7
Indonesia	South-eastern Asia	239,871,000	3,168,000	1.3	269,000	0.1	22,800	0.0	1,944,000	0.8
Iran	South-central Asia	73,974,000	217,000	0.3	7,900	0.0	251,000	0.3	440	0.0
Iraq	Western Asia	31,672,000	160,000	0.5	56,400	0.2	3,800	0.0	280	0.0
Israel	Western Asia	7,418,000	317,000	4.3	36,900	0.5	12,000	0.2	28,500	0.4
Japan	Eastern Asia	126,536,000	12,873,000	10.2	3,630,000	2.9	15,600	0.0	71,307,000	56.4
Jordan	Western Asia	6,187,000	155,000	2.5	30,400	0.5	15,700	0.3	0	0.0
Kazakhstan	South-central Asia	16,026,000	795,000	5.0	245,000	1.5	7,000	0.0	18,400	0.1
Kuwait	Western Asia	2,737,000	19,000	0.7	480	0.0	9,000	0.3	0	0.0
Kyrgyzstan	South-central Asia	5,334,000	432,000	8.1	91,700	1.7	1,400	0.0	24,800	0.5
Laos	South-eastern Asia	6,201,000	53,200	0.9	18,000	0.3	13,400	0.2	3,236,000	52.2
Lebanon	Western Asia	4,228,000	138,000	3.3	34,000	0.8	3,900	0.1	87,500	2.1
Macao	Eastern Asia	544,000	68,200	12.5	15,400	2.8	180	0.0	93,900	17.3
Malaysia	South-eastern Asia	28,401,000	105,000	0.4	31,500	0.1	67,500	0.2	1,502,000	5.3
Maldives	South-central Asia	316,000	290	0.1	21	0.0	120	0.0	2,000	0.6
Mongolia	Eastern Asia	2,756,000	475,000	17.2	76,700	2.8	55	0.0	1,493,000	54.2
Myanmar	South-eastern Asia	47,963,000	214,000	0.4	19,200	0.0	78,900	0.2	35,823,000	74.7

Country	UN region	Population 2010		%		%		%		%
Categories			Agnostics		Atheists		Baha'is		Buddhists	
Nepal	South-central Asia	29,959,000	78,000	0.3	17,300	0.1	4,400	0.0	3,441,000	11.5
North Korea	Eastern Asia	24,346,000	13,648,000	56.1	3,793,000	15.6	0	0.0	369,000	1.5
Oman	Western Asia	2,782,000	6,400	0.2	200	0.0	10,000	0.4	21,600	0.8
Pakistan	South-central Asia	173,593,000	139,000	0.1	8,200	0.0	87,300	0.1	107,000	0.1
Palestine	Western Asia	4,039,000	224,000	5.6	4,200	0.1	2,000	0.1	0	0.0
Philippines	South-eastern Asia	93,261,000	687,000	0.7	182,000	0.2	275,000	0.3	107,000	0.1
Qatar	Western Asia	1,759,000	39,800	2.3	1,100	0.1	2,700	0.2	33,400	1.9
Saudi Arabia	Western Asia	27,448,000	176,000	0.6	8,500	0.0	5,100	0.0	89,600	0.3
Singapore	South-eastern Asia	5,086,000	235,000	4.6	7,300	0.1	8,000	0.2	753,000	14.8
South Korea	Eastern Asia	48,184,000	721,000	1.5	48,300	0.1	33,100	0.1	11,954,000	24.8
Sri Lanka	South-central Asia	20,860,000	96,800	0.5	15,100	0.1	15,500	0.1	14,378,000	68.9
Syria	Western Asia	20,411,000	391,000	1.9	23,800	0.1	430	0.0	0	0.0
Taiwan	Eastern Asia	23,216,000	975,000	4.2	43,400	0.2	16,300	0.1	6,145,000	26.5
Tajikistan	South-central Asia	6,879,000	152,000	2.2	34,900	0.5	3,100	0.0	4,400	0.1
Thailand	South-eastern Asia	69,122,000	1,224,000	1.8	35,200	0.1	65,100	0.1	60,298,000	87.2
Timor-Leste	South-eastern Asia	1,124,000	4,400	0.4	0	0.0	1,000	0.1	2,100	0.2
Turkey	Western Asia	72,752,000	746,000	1.0	61,000	0.1	21,300	0.0	35,400	0.0
Turkmenistan	South-central Asia	5,042,000	151,000	3.0	33,300	0.7	1,100	0.0	710	0.0
UAE	Western Asia	7,512,000	74,200	1.0	11,600	0.2	38,400	0.5	149,000	2.0
Uzbekistan	South-central Asia	27,445,000	933,000	3.4	256,000	0.9	800	0.0	39,400	0.1
Viet Nam	South-eastern Asia	87,848,000	11,109,000	12.6	5,810,000	6.6	389,000	0.4	43,212,000	49.2
Yemen	Western Asia	24,053,000	19,400	0.1	4,800	0.0	1,300	0.0	130	0.0

Country	UN region	Population 2010		%	%	%	%	%	%			
Categories			Chinese Folk	Christians	Confucianists	Daoists	Ethnoreligionists					
Afghanistan	South-centra. Asia	31,412,000	0	0.0	32,400	0.1	0	0.0	0	0.0	4,300	0.0
Armenia	Western Asia	3,092,000	0	0.0	2,891,000	93.5	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Azerbaijan	Western Asia	9,188,000	0	0.0	304,000	3.3	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Bahrain	Western Asia	1,262,000	0	0.0	94,300	7.5	0	0.0	0	0.0	320	0.0
Bangladesh	South-centra. Asia	148,692,000	3,200	0.0	739,000	0.5	0	0.0	0	0.0	689,000	0.5
Bhutan	South-centra. Asia	726,000	0	0.0	6,700	0.9	0	0.0	0	0.0	24,500	3.4
Brunei	South-eastern Asia	399,000	20,900	5.2	54,800	13.7	7,500	1.9	0	0.0	40,200	10.1
Cambodia	South-eastern Asia	14,138,000	417,000	2.9	343,000	2.4	0	0.0	0	0.0	648,000	4.6
China	Eastern Asia	1,341,335,000	408,959,000	30.5	106,035,000	7.9	0	0.0	5,483,000	0.4	57,890,000	4.3
Cyprus	Western Asia	1,104,000	0	0.0	793,000	71.8	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Georgia	Western Asia	4,352,000	0	0.0	3,703,000	85.1	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Hong Kong	Eastern Asia	7,053,000	3,236,000	45.9	957,000	13.6	71	0.0	0	0.0	480	0.0
India	South-centra. Asia	1,224,614,000	161,000	0.0	57,265,000	4.7	0	0.0	0	0.0	45,891,000	3.7
Indonesia	South-eastern Asia	239,871,000	2,126,000	0.9	28,409,000	11.8	0	0.0	0	0.0	5,521,000	2.3
Iran	South-centra. Asia	73,974,000	950	0.0	270,000	0.4	0	0.0	0	0.0	4,400	0.0
Iraq	Western Asia	31,672,000	610	0.0	489,000	1.5	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Israel	Western Asia	7,418,000	27,600	0.4	180,000	2.4	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Japan	Eastern Asia	126,536,000	286,000	0.2	2,601,000	2.1	121,000	0.1	0	0.0	9,900	0.0
Jordan	Western Asia	6,187,000	0	0.0	171,000	2.8	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Kazakhstan	South-centra. Asia	16,026,000	1,700	0.0	4,212,000	26.3	0	0.0	0	0.0	26,300	0.2
Kuwait	Western Asia	2,737,000	0	0.0	241,000	8.8	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Kyrgyzstan	South-centra. Asia	5,334,000	0	0.0	412,000	7.7	0	0.0	0	0.0	22,400	0.4
Laos	South-eastern Asia	6,201,000	22,200	0.4	181,000	2.9	0	0.0	280	0.0	2,654,000	42.8
Lebanon	Western Asia	4,228,000	0	0.0	1,507,000	35.7	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Macau	Eastern Asia	544,000	320,000	58.9	39,300	7.2	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Malaysia	South-eastern Asia	28,401,000	5,220,000	18.4	2,527,000	8.9	0	0.0	0	0.0	982,000	3.5
Maldives	South-centra. Asia	316,000	0	0.0	1,400	0.4	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Mongolia	Eastern Asia	2,756,000	16,500	0.6	46,000	1.7	0	0.0	0	0.0	512,000	18.6
Myanmar	South-eastern Asia	47,963,000	123,000	0.3	3,786,000	7.9	711,000	1.5	0	0.0	4,575,000	9.5

Country	UN region	Population 2010		%	%	%	%	%	%			
Categories			Chinese Folk		Christians	Confucianists		Daoists	Ethnoreligionists			
Nepal	South-central Asia	29,959,000	20,900	0.1	908,000	3.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	3,922,000	13.1
North Korea	Eastern Asia	24,346,000	15,200	0.1	393,000	1.6	0	0.0	0	0.0	2,990,000	12.3
Oman	Western Asia	2,782,000	0	0.0	120,000	4.3	0	0.0	0	0.0	560	0.0
Pakistan	South-central Asia	173,593,000	2,400	0.0	3,784,000	2.2	0	0.0	0	0.0	195,000	0.1
Palestine	Western Asia	4,039,000	0	0.0	75,100	1.9	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Philippines	South-eastern Asia	93,261,000	54,700	0.1	84,769,000	90.9	2,200	0.0	0	0.0	2,172,000	2.3
Qatar	Western Asia	1,759,000	0	0.0	168,000	9.6	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Saudi Arabia	Western Asia	27,448,000	24,600	0.1	1,196,000	4.4	0	0.0	0	0.0	50,000	0.2
Singapore	South-eastern Asia	5,086,000	1,987,000	39.1	964,000	19.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	1,100	0.0
South Korea	Eastern Asia	48,184,000	34,000	0.1	16,105,000	33.4	5,270,000	10.9	0	0.0	7,062,000	14.7
Sri Lanka	South-central Asia	20,860,000	830	0.0	1,841,000	8.8	0	0.0	0	0.0	1,000	0.0
Syria	Western Asia	20,411,000	0	0.0	1,061,000	5.2	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Taiwan	Eastern Asia	23,216,000	9,995,000	43.1	1,397,000	6.0	0	0.0	2,929,000	12.6	59,000	0.3
Tajikistan	South-central Asia	6,879,000	0	0.0	98,300	1.4	0	0.0	0	0.0	6,600	0.1
Thailand	South-eastern Asia	69,122,000	644,000	0.9	845,000	1.2	251,000	0.4	0	0.0	1,559,000	2.3
Timor-Leste	South-eastern Asia	1,124,000	1,800	0.2	961,000	85.5	0	0.0	0	0.0	113,000	10.1
Turkey	Western Asia	72,752,000	12,700	0.0	198,000	0.3	0	0.0	0	0.0	11,600	0.0
Turkmenistan	South-central Asia	5,042,000	0	0.0	77,400	1.5	0	0.0	0	0.0	840	0.0
UAE	Western Asia	7,512,000	0	0.0	944,000	12.6	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Uzbekistan	South-central Asia	27,445,000	450	0.0	344,000	1.3	0	0.0	0	0.0	55,700	0.2
Viet Nam	South-eastern Asia	87,848,000	878,000	1.0	7,430,000	8.5	0	0.0	160	0.0	9,104,000	10.4
Yemen	Western Asia	24,053,000	0	0.0	41,400	0.2	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0

Country	UN region	Population 2010		%		%		%		%		%
Categories			New Religionists		Shintoists		Sikhs		Spiritists		Zoroastrians	
Nepal	South-central Asia	29,959,000	0	0.0	0	0.0	10,500	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
North Korea	Eastern Asia	24,346,000	3,135,000	12.9	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Oman	Western Asia	2,782,000	280	0.0	0	0.0	18,400	0.7	0	0.0	0	0.0
Pakistan	South-central Asia	173,593,000	0	0.0	0	0.0	44,600	0.0	0	0.0	8,700	0.0
Palestine	Western Asia	4,039,000	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Philippines	South-eastern Asia	93,261,000	9,400	0.0	0	0.0	23,900	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Qatar	Western Asia	1,759,000	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Saudi Arabia	Western Asia	27,448,000	15,000	0.1	0	0.0	52,700	0.2	0	0.0	0	0.0
Singapore	South-eastern Asia	5,086,000	76,100	1.5	1,200	0.0	22,300	0.4	0	0.0	250	0.0
South Korea	Eastern Asia	48,184,000	6,853,000	14.2	28,900	0.1	1,200	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Sri Lanka	South-central Asia	20,860,000	1,000	0.0	170	0.0	3,100	0.0	0	0.0	2,500	0.0
Syria	Western Asia	20,411,000	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	110	0.0
Taiwan	Eastern Asia	23,216,000	1,567,000	6.7	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Tajikistan	South-central Asia	6,879,000	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	2,500	0.0
Thailand	South-eastern Asia	69,122,000	16,500	0.0	420	0.0	56,000	0.1	0	0.0	0	0.0
Timor-Leste	South-eastern Asia	1,124,000	510	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Turkey	Western Asia	72,752,000	129,000	0.2	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Turkmenistan	South-central Asia	5,042,000	630	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
United Arab Emirates	Western Asia	7,512,000	3,800	0.1	0	0.0	18,000	0.2	0	0.0	0	0.0
Uzbekistan	South-central Asia	27,445,000	130	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	1,000	0.0
Viet Nam	South-eastern Asia	87,848,000	9,705,000	11.0	180	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Yemen	Western Asia	24,053,000	0	0.0	0	0.0	130	0.0	0	0.0	1,200	0.0
Total	Asia	4,164,252,000	58,971,000	1.4	2,691,000	0.1	22,688,000	0.5	2,000	0.0	167,000	0.0

Source: World Religion Database, Todd M. Johnson and Brian J. Grim, eds., Leiden, Brill, 2013.

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