

Crucial Issues in Asian Mission

Issue 16 Editor: Kang San Tan

Asia comprises over 60% of the world's 6 Billion people, with China and India representing over 2.3 Billion people. The cultural heritage of Asians lies in its religious and cultural roots, which are very different from Western Judeo-Christian traditions. The number of Christians in Asia increased from approximately 22 million adherents in 1900 to nearly 351 million people today.



In this edition of Encounters we are pleased to offer you a feast of stimulating studies on a variety of issues facing Asian missions reflected through different approaches spanning North Asia, South Asia and South East Asia! These careful studies are worth further discussion and interaction from readers, and I would encourage you to firstly, give us your comments, and secondly, forward relevant articles to your churches and mission colleagues.

I start the discussion with an article addressing a complex missiological problem: "The Problem of an Alien Jesus for Asian Christianity." The implications of this problem for contextualisation, for mission training and the way we do mission are wide ranging. Closely tied to the issue of Alien Jesus is the need for language and worldview training. Dr Paul Woods, Advocate and Advisor for Language, Culture, and Worldview Acquisition for OMF International based in Chiang Mai, Thailand critically evaluates the kind of outmoded language and cultural training prevalent in many mission contexts. He challenges the readers, especially new workers and those in leadership, to rethink the way we prepare new generation of missionaries.

During November and December of 2006, Redcliffe College was privileged to welcome Rev. Anthony Loke as our Scholar in Residence. Anthony teaches Old Testament at Seminari Theologi Malaysia and is currently conducting his PhD research in Old Testament studies. Anthony reflects on how an Old Testament exilic text, Isaiah 40-55, can be read in the light of and allowed to speak to a contemporary situation: the post-1987 Operation Lallang Malaysian Church. This is a rare study not merely offering unique insights into the political challenges facing Christians in Malaysia, but also demonstrating serious biblical and contextual reflections of an Asian scholar on political theology.

For the Winter Term of 2007, Rev. Dr. Pervaiz Sultan, Principal of St. Thomas' Theological College, Karachi is with us as Scholar in Residence. Dr Sultan contributes an article on "Reconciliation as Mission." Following Dr Sultan's article, Peter Rowan, a theological educator in Malaysia reflects on "The Malaysian Dilemma: Where is the Racially Reconciled Community?". Rowan argues toward a case for multicultural church in a plural context such as Malaysia.

For Western Christians, Asia is no longer "out there" overseas. Rather, Hindus, Buddhists and Muslims from Asia are found in most major cities of Europe and North America. Robin Thomson, one of the key leaders with South Asian Concern offers us his reflections on "The South Asian Diaspora: a missed opportunity?"

Last, but not least, Dr Julie Ma, Research Tutor at the Oxford Centre for Mission Studies presents a study on "The Growth of Christianity in Asia and Its Impact on Mission." Julie, in a

brief survey, brings us up to date with the amazing growth of Asian Christianity and ably illustrates for our readers how Asian missionaries have made an important contribution to the expansion of the church.

I would like to thank our contributors for the time taken in offering such high quality and thought provoking materials in the midst of their busy lives. Again, may I encourage our readers to show our appreciation through careful reading and responding with further engagements through our website discussion?

Finally, I have an exciting new development to announce to our readers! In response to the rapid rise in the economic, political, and cultural significance of Asia in a globalizing world, Redcliffe College will launch a new Masters course in Intercultural Studies in Asian Contexts. Subject to validation, we hope to start the MA programme beginning in September 2007. Please help us spread the word! This course will examine major issues for mission in Asia arising from the situation in Asia generally and through regional specialisation (broadly, South, South East and North East Asia). It will draw on cultural, regional, theological and other studies with a view to understanding Asians in Asia as well as drawing from Asian Diaspora studies in the West. The interdisciplinary emphasis of the programme is an innovative approach in equipping students to address the kind of complex and wide-ranging issues highlighted by writers in this edition. If you would like more information please do write to me (kstan@redcliffe.org) or go to [MA in Asian Studies](#).

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Go to the Encounters website at www.redcliffe.org/mission to read what others are thinking on the Discussion Board. Use the Voice your comments form to add to the debate.

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The Problem of an Alien Jesus for Asian Christianity

with Special Reference to Chinese Buddhists



Author: Kang San Tan, Head of Mission Studies, Redcliffe College.

“Who do people say I am?... Who do you say I am?” (Mark 8:27, 29)
“For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you,
that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread...” (1 Cor. 11:23)

Why is the Problem of an Alien Jesus critical?

On the first week of January 2006, I went to the Tate Museum in London to enjoy an art exhibition featuring how French and British painters influenced each other during the 18th and 19th Centuries. One section of the exhibition showed paintings portraying the decadent period of French and British societies during the 19th Century. One painting showed the blurred and disfigured face of a child abused by an adult male. Another depicted vividly estranged the relationship between a husband and wife. Most of the paintings in this section are filled with distorted human faces or figures, and complicated human relationships.

Jesus came from Asia. Culturally, one may assert that Jesus is more Asian than Western in his outlook and values. But why is Christianity viewed as a Western religion by the majority of the Buddhist world? One reason could be due to the fact that Christianity was brought to Asia predominantly by Western missionaries. Did Western missionaries faithfully deliver the Jewish Jesus to the people in Asia or did they betray Jesus and his message by presenting a Western Christ?

The problem of an alien Jesus has to do with the many portraits of Jesus communicated through cultural accretions, with minimal contextualization, resulting in Jesus being viewed by a majority culture as alien and foreign to the local people. Although the incarnate Christ is able to enter into all cultures and therefore, is at home in all cultures, successive attempts in the history of Christian transmissions, have exhibited tendencies toward monolithic paintings of Christ. The problem of an alien Jesus should confront all thinking Christians who are interested in the effective communication of the Christian gospel to Buddhist people.

Why is an alien Jesus a serious missiological problem? Firstly, if Jesus is presented in Western dress, Christianity will remain categorized as a foreign religion to Chinese people. Christianity will not take root in the hearts, minds and aspirations of subsequent Chinese believers. In the process of gospel transmission, various writers have shown that 19th Century Protestant missions largely ignored local cultures. This critique of cultural additions to Christ is not a new issue, but one made since the spread of Protestant missionary work. For example, Keshub Chunder Sen, an Indian religious reformer observed:

It seems that the Christ that has come to us is an Englishman, with English manners and customs about him...Is not Christ's native land nearer to India than England? Are not Jesus and his apostles and his immediate followers more akin to Indian nationality than Englishmen? Why should we then, travel to a distant country like England, in order to gather truths which are to be found much nearer our homes? Go to the rising sun of the East, not to the setting sun of the West, if you wish to see Christ, in the plenitude of his glory.

Possibly a “betrayal” is too strong a word because most missionaries came to Asia with deep love for Christ and the local people. Asians are grateful to God for the sacrifices of our Western Christians. However, the sad record of history is something we cannot change. We cannot change the past but we can change the meaning of the past when we begin to learn from the past in the way we do missions today.

Learning from the past leads to my second reason as to why a discussion on alien Jesus amidst other religions is long overdue and is of critical missiological importance. The reason being that newer sending countries face the same danger, as past Western missionaries of old, of adding their own cultural images of Jesus. Some of these contributions are valuable and helpful, while others add to an already confusing and complicated situation of alien Jesuses. Lest the readers think that I have unfairly single out my attacks Western mission bodies, newer sending countries such as Chinese Christian and Korean mission worlds face the same dilemma. The Chinese church herself exhibit split personalities in this matter by both rejecting Western cultural accretions on the one hand, and rejecting many good and neutral aspects of Chinese culture on the other. Some well meaning foreigners will find that local Christians themselves can be the biggest stumbling block in any effort to introduce indigenous forms of Christianity.

Therefore, when looking at China as a mission field, Christianity’s image as a “foreign religion” is now perpetuated not only by Western Christians, but also by missionaries from Korea, Singapore, Hong Kong or the Philippines. When these Chinese churches send out missionaries, whether within mainland China (to minorities or Muslims in West China) or beyond their national boundaries, they too face the same dangers of exporting their foreign interpretations of Jesus. History repeats itself when these Asian missionaries impose a Jesus alien to local contexts. Enthusiastic Asian churches are adopting national workers and sending short term workers without an adequate cultural understanding of local beliefs. Leadership of these mission groups tends to be in the hands of pastors of supporting churches rather than local missionaries living in the midst of non-Christian cultures. Because these mega-churches pay the salaries of national workers, newly formed churches are perpetually dependent on foreign funding. With money and power, the identities of new mission stations are inseparably linked with foreign forms of denominations, leadership styles, and church structures which project an alien Jesus to Chinese Buddhists. Sadly, Christian mission from a position of power continues to ignore local cultures. Are new transmitters of the Christian gospel, whether from the East or the West, better equipped in their understanding of local religions? If it is of any indicator, the growths of religious studies Departments are not matched by an equal interest from Christian missionaries to study Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam seriously.

Who do Chinese Buddhists or Indonesian Muslims Say that I am?

The immediate context for my reflection grows out of my background from a South East Asia’s migrant Chinese community. However, many of the issues raised and implications drawn in this paper will hopefully be applicable to other Asian contexts.

In this section, I will explore Chinese perceptions of Jesus and illustrate how traditional Christian mission approaches need to engage with these portraits of Jesus. For a start, Chinese Buddhists universally view Jesus as a moral teacher, someone as great as Buddha, Confucius, and Lao Tze. Traditionally, this has been bad news for Christians who impatiently pointed out that Jesus is Lord and God of the universe. While Jesus as a moral teacher may be a bad place to end, it is not a bad place to start! The moral teachings of Jesus in the Bible can be studied and discussed with Buddhists, just as Christians need to study the moral teachings of Buddha and Confucius. The Sermons on the Mount, Parables and the

teachings of Jesus in the gospels, stories of Jesus' interaction with the poor and marginalized are powerful stories for presenting Jesus as a moral teacher. Superficially, Christians have been doing this but they did it in the spirit of evangelism rather than a genuine acceptance of Jesus as a moral teacher. Secondly, they share the teachings of Jesus from moral perspectives of Western religion and ethics. For example, most parables of the Bible are to be interpreted within their first century Jewish context. However, the parables are often interpreted as moral teaching rather than presented as a tool for the worldview transformation of the Jewish world. Jewish hearers naturally identified themselves as the lost son in exile, and the Samaritans as the elder brother who remained in the land. But at another level, some of them had to grapple with the possibility of identifying themselves as being the elder brother when they did not welcome followers of Jesus as followers of God. The parable of the Lost Son presented in this story-worldview form functions potentially at a deeper level of transformation for the worldviews of Chinese Buddhist rather than presented typically as an evangelistic call for conversion. A Chinese Buddhist who has the opportunity to encounter the real Jesus of the Jews may see himself or herself as the prodigal son who had gone to a far away country. At another level, he or she may identify with the elder brother who refuses to welcome Christians as having some form of revelation from God.

Another common portrait inherent in many Chinese is the perception that Jesus is a semi-deity similar to the Goddess of Mercy, Bodhisattvas, or "Tua Pek Kong" (Great Ancestor). For those Chinese influenced by Buddhist thinking, Bodhisattvas looks after the well being of followers, including blessing them with material prosperity and emotional well being. Meditation, chanting, and daily thoughts of the Buddha are important spiritual disciplines. Waking up early in the morning to pray and meditate, and ending one's day with another session of prayers and meditations show devotion and commitment to the teachings of Buddha. In addition, the follower shows his or her acknowledgement that there are cosmic powers and there are realms beyond the control of ordinary sentient beings. The human's role is to accept their place and do what is required of them in these cycles of existence. Human disasters such as Tsunamis, floods, fires and the transitory nature of life such as death, sickness, and aging reminds the Buddhist that there are many things in life which are beyond our control. Viewed as a semi-deity by Chinese Buddhists, Jesus has the capability to protect sentient beings from harm. He is the one we should turn to if we are sick, or need protection from the evil spirits. Jesus controls certain realms of existences and nature. He is to be respected and sacrifices can be offered to him. Although such Chinese perspectives on Jesus may fall short of our beliefs in his deity, Christians often fail to recognize that Jesus as Cosmic Deity is a powerful image for the Chinese Buddhist. Rationalist rejections of the supernatural and the playing down of Jesus' roles as a healer and controller of nature came about as another classic case of the blurring of the biblical Christ to suit Western enlightenment thinking.

Third, the Chinese are pragmatics and our psychology for responding to God or spirits is on the basis of how a religion or deities help us in our daily lives. Core questions in Chinese Buddhist thinking revolve around these immediate issues: will this deity help us overcome fears? Will following this religion improve our chances of going to a better world? Will our families be protected, and will these acts of devotion bring pleasure or displeasures to our ancestors and extended families? At the risk of oversimplifications, Chinese Buddhist responses can be crudely reduced to whether this religion works, and does it work for me? These observations of the Chinese Buddhist psyche have critical implications for Christian evangelistic approaches. Western philosophies are deeply influenced by the Greco-Roman philosophical separation of being and doing. The result is Christian ethics being taught, while the application is up to the individual. Buddhists are interested in the outworking of doctrines and emphasize doing first, rather than conceptually understanding the doctrines. The credibility of the gospel suffers a serious blow when Christians preach ethics before

practicing those ethical teachings. Therefore, the short hand for “Jesus is Lord” has to do with Christians practicing what they preach and demonstrating higher ethical standards in their workplaces. When Buddhists see such radical and self-giving lifestyles, they will be interested to know about such a religion that works itself out in real life. Upon closer encounters with the Christ of the Bible, they will stumble upon the mystery of the gospel that it is not about self-fulfilment, but about following Jesus on the way of the cross.

In Search of Asian Faces of Jesus: Implications for Mission Training

Speaking of Western theologies, Andrew Walls observed that “Our (Western) existing theologies of church and state were carved out of the experience of Western Christendom, and were never meant to deal with anything as complicated as the networks of political and economic structures that will characterize the twenty first century” (Walls 2002: 113). Walls goes on to argue that African and Asian Christianities have more experience than Western Christianity in dealing with the issues of suffering, ethnic and religious identities, problems of corruption, power struggles, principalities and spirit worship. If Chinese churches are to mature as an agent of transformation in society, then Chinese Christian thinkers need to understand and engage with the real issues of Chinese societies. One positive hope for change must be the release of Jesus Christ from Western captivity and images. Missionaries do this by encouraging local Christians to see Christ related dynamically to local Chinese culture. Those who are educated in the West need to be re-trained to see Christ through Japanese eyes, Chinese eyes, Filipino eyes and Indonesian eyes. Such diverse imageries and interpretations of an Asian Jesus will not only present deep and rich understandings of an indigenizing Jesus but will also serve to counteract the image of Christianity as a Western religion.

How can missionaries, from Asia and the West, preach a faithful and biblical portrait of Jesus that is both true to his Jewish roots and dynamically related to the hearts and minds of Chinese Buddhists? How can we facilitate the acceptance and developments of Asian faces of Jesus? What kind of mission training is needed for Christians seeking to work among Indians, Japanese or Thai peoples? First, new missionaries need to be minimally self-critical of themselves and their own religious traditions. Academic disciplines and good mission training endeavour to develop such critical lenses and attitudes. The growth of fundamentalist conceptions of Jesus permeates major segments of Korean and Chinese Christianities. In addition, the discipline needed for self-critiques is particularly difficult if missionaries work within mono-cultural or mono-tradition groups. For example, if all the mission team consists of predominantly Southern Baptists from Texas, CMS missionaries from Britain or Methodists from Singapore, then these mission groups need to work very hard in discerning whether their forms of Christianity are appropriate in the new mission field. This may not be an easy task because most of us are not always conscious that our cherished religious heritage is culturally conditioned. Sometimes we forget our own prejudices and are not aware of our ignorance of those positive elements in other cultures.

If the first task dealt with the missionary’s own cultural blindness, the second task has to do with non-Christian’s misunderstandings of the portraits of Jesus. Christian training centres, whether in local churches or training institutions, need to study non-Christian religions on their own terms. Today, “Who do people say that I am?” is still a valid starting question for new missionaries. Whenever Christian workers enter into new Buddhist cultures, they are not preaching Jesus into empty minds. Instead, they will encounter existing portraits of Jesus commonly held by local peoples. Some of these portraits are cultural misunderstandings (Jesus is a Westerner), while others are derived from non-Christian teachings or scriptures (Jesus as a mere prophet in the Quran). If the first task had to deal with cultural misunderstandings from the transmitter’s culture, the second task relates to

cultural misunderstandings associated with the recipient's culture. The Jesus Christ of the Bible must take over these non-Christian beliefs and misunderstandings. Therefore, missionaries need to learn how to address these socio-religious misunderstandings of who Jesus is.

To do this task of cultural understanding, the missionary needs to develop an Emic (insider) Perspective among Chinese Buddhists. An "Emic" approach represents an attempt by foreigners to understand local Chinese perspective of realities in order to accurately describe situations and behaviours. Such an approach is contrasted with logical, linear, simple perspectives, which may be completely off-target! An insider's method to presenting a Jesus for the Chinese takes a phenomenological approach. Although supported outwardly, such an approach is still resisted in many quarters, particularly among conservative Evangelicals, who make no distinction between the Christ of the Bible and the Christ of Western culture. As an example, I have observed foreign missionaries who outwardly championed the need for contextualization of the gospel among Asians, but whose attitudes, relationships and lifestyles demonstrate a message that Jesus can only be accepted as Lord if one becomes a Westerner.

Why is it difficult for foreigners to develop an emic perspective even if one desires to? I would offer two basic reasons. First, I believe an emic perspective compels the acceptance of multiple perspective of reality. This ability to accept different interpretations of reality requires oneself to reject ethnocentric biases. Naturally, we are nurtured in our traditions, in our ways of seeing things and sometimes in our prejudices. Christians, like everyone else, find it difficult to accept that there are differing perspectives of God, of religious beliefs, and of realities. Second, most missionaries identify with local peoples externally through outward behaviours but very few are able to enter into deep and meaningful bonding relationships with locals. Those who have bonded with nationals have a genuine a sense of being at home with nationals, they are accepted by locals, and possess the ability to understand and empathize with local ways of thinking.

The third task in the process of discovering an Asian Jesus is finding cultural bridges that connect the relevance of Jesus Christ to existing indigenous beliefs. For example, Gani Winoyo developed a Javanese Face of Jesus based on the popular eschatological messianic Javanese figure of Ratu Adil (1999: 65-79). Winoyo researched and discovered deep seated beliefs within Javanese worldviews of "Ratu Adil," who will be the deliverer, and "harmonizer" of society. He then appropriated the Jesus of the Bible as someone who is able to bring deliverance, hope and reconciliation in Javanese society. To do this job well, missionaries must view their roles as changing from a "Pearl Seller to Treasure Gatherer." Vincent Donovan, in his work among the Masai people in Tanzania argued that "The task of the missionary is to present the gospel, the task of the people is to express the gospel and its meaning in their own language and thought forms....The field of culture is theirs and ours is the gospel." (Donovan, 1995) Language and cultural learning, spending time in bonding relationships with nationals, and the study of local philosophies and belief systems are no longer optional extras but preliminary prerequisites for serious professionals in this complex trade of transmitting the gospel accurately.

Last but not least, these Asian perspectives of Jesus need to be subjected to the test of the scriptures, and found not in contradiction with historical images of Jesus accepted in other Christian communities. The Asian Jesus cannot be inculturated to Asian soil to the extent that he is unrecognizable from the Jesus found in the Bible or apostolic Christology. Therefore, efforts to present Christ as an incarnation of Buddha will cause more confusion than clarity for Buddhists. Among first generation Christians, former converts of Buddhism and other religions tend to see everything in their former religion and cultures in a negative light. We left our former religions in order to follow Christ.

Enoch Wan, in his article, "Jesus Christ for the Chinese: a Contextual Reflection" represented an Evangelical approach where he contrasted the "Jesus Christ from the West" with "Jesus Christ for the Chinese". Wan's goal was not to mix Jesus in an Eastern cultural pot but to allow Jesus to flourish and grow in a Chinese Buddhist context. Wan explains,

"Jesus Christ from the West" is Western Christianity transported to China by military force, with foreign concepts, cultural elements, etc.; whereas "Jesus Christ for the Chinese" is contextual Christianity being transplanted in the cultural soil of China and the spiritual soul of the Chinese. The former is historical reality whereas the latter being an ideal with strong desirability.

A Christological Question: Who do you say I am?

Our search for an Asian face of Jesus is ultimately an issue of the Lordship of Christ. The issue is not just what non-Christians think of Jesus ("who do people say I am?") but who is Jesus to Asian Christians ("who do you say I am?"). This Christological question penetrates into the depth of Christian worship and discipleship where one's loyalty to Christ is not confined to safe religious boundaries. The answer that Jesus is Lord cannot be verbalized merely by individuals in the privacy of their bedrooms but are to be discussed in public spaces. Contextually, our answers to the question of who Jesus is cannot be completely disconnected from questions about Jesus commonly held by our Muslim and Buddhist neighbours. Likewise for Asians, Christian portraits of Jesus should emerge from the sufferings and heart struggles of Asia rather than a Christology developed in 16th Century Reformation Christianity. Radical discipleships must result in Christ penetrating every aspect of socio-economic and political world of Asia. The Apostle Paul has these multiple dimensions of Christ's Lordship when he proclaimed that "Jesus Christ is the first born of all creation; for in Him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or authorities - all things were created through Him and for Him" (Col. 1:15-16).

In the introduction, I referred to French and British paintings during 19th century to illustrate the tragedy of blurred and distorted images of reality. But the dialogical influences between these French and British artists offer a second lesson for our discussion. That is no one person or group can offer an accurate or full portrait of reality. In particular, the task toward a true portrait of Jesus must be undertaken by both foreigners offering etic perspectives as well as by locals offering emic perspectives. We need practitioners as well as missiologists; Buddhist scholars as well as Bible scholars; Western and Eastern perspectives, in this joint-enterprise of portraying a Jesus who is both true to scriptural revelation, in continuity with Christian theology and tradition, and yet dynamically related to local images and cultural contexts. The process of presenting an authentic image of Jesus can only be undertaken in the context of intercultural engagements with local cultures as well as with each other within various Christian traditions. Each group is valued for its distinctive contributions because no one group can fully represent the Christ of Scripture, the Christ in the history of gospel transmission, and the Christ who is related to diverse nations and cultures.

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Mind the Gap



The Ongoing Need for Language Learning in Missions Training

Author: Dr Paul Woods, Advocate and Advisor for Language, Culture, and Worldview Acquisition, OMF International.

'Same same – but Different'

Sitting in my house on Christmas Day, I heard a strange, digital rendition of a Christian hymn coming from outside. I realised after a few seconds that this seasonal music was coming from my neighbour's mobile phone. Perhaps this might be a little strange in post-modern, post-Christian Europe, but it is even stranger in Chiang Mai in Thailand, where I live. What is even more curious is that the phone is owned by an Indian businessman who is a devoted Sikh. This is one more example of globalisation, a guiding motif of the early 21st century.

However, things are a little more complicated than this. When my children took a little present next door, the neighbour's children had no idea why, and my kids had to explain that it is Christmas and the gifts are a tradition reminding us of God's gift of Christ. *Oh yes, Christmas. We've heard of it in school.* Still more complex is the fact that although my children are welcome in our neighbour's house, with its plethora of Sikh symbols and paraphernalia, the Indian children have never set foot in our house, despite repeated invitations, food, and birthday parties.

Here we see a snapshot of the challenge that we face in missions. At one level, globalisation is a reality and is affecting the lives of millions, but at another, more profound and arguably more significant level people's beliefs and worldview remain surprisingly unchanged. I have taken to describing these two opposing trends, one surely a reaction to the other, as globalisation and regionalisation. As small regions of the world struggle for independence and autonomy, and regional accents, customs, and allegiances are promoted, what do these two mutually opposing trends say about communicating the gospel across cultures?

Don't they all Speak English these Days?

In a sense the very choice of words used to communicate the focus of this article represent something of my struggle as I equip, train, and challenge new missionaries and an older mission organisation. The phrase *language learning for missions* was used in the original email to me, and this epitomises my problem. In fact *language learning* is one of my favourite soapboxes.

How important is language learning, in an age of globalisation, MTV, and Internet access? Do we still need to spend many painful hours struggling with strange syntax, weird words, and petrifying pronunciation? After all, all foreigners speak English anyway, don't they? And we do have an urgent task of bringing God's message of redemption to the lost. So why waste years on language learning?

A number of thoughts come to mind. Back to our neighbours. The husband runs a seed business and sells his products into various parts of Indochina. The family has two cars and went home to India for 3 weeks in the Summer. These upper class Indians have connections to the globalised world that most of their fellow countrymen do not. Millions of people in rural India, China, Indonesia, and Thailand remain disconnected. And this is not a question purely of degree of urbanisation. My former Thai teacher, a delightful university graduate with fairly broken English, does not have a computer, rarely surfs the Internet, and hardly ever reads in English. Globalisation is affecting the world, but not the whole world, and not to the same degree all over. Indeed in many parts of the East Asian region (and presumably many others also) only a small part of the population is genuinely plugged into the power of globalisation,

and an even smaller part is willing to be swept along by a foreign, western, and arguably American agenda. Many, many people in areas where missions is going ahead remain either oblivious to, uninterested in, or even antagonistic towards the phenomenon of globalisation.

Where I am typing now is about 100 metres from one of hundreds of Buddhist temples in Chiang Mai. Thailand is an open, relatively modern country, where the gospel is preached freely and where westerners come to play, make a living, and even retire. Yet the nation remains deeply Buddhist. Like many people in East Asia, Thais are familiar with western things and use many English words in their language. They like their ice cream, hamburgers, and jeans, but they remain very Thai. 'Same same – but different' is a slogan on T-shirts here. It is striking even how little western popular music is heard here – Thailand is Thai, through and through. Regional and religious loyalties remain strong.

Taxi Drivers Who Can't Drive

In this day and age churches back home want value for money (mission is expensive!) and want to hear numbers of converts and baptisms. Whenever I hear people say that the task of evangelism is so urgent that they have no time for language learning I share my analogy of the taxi driver. If we dream of being a taxi driver, using our perfect knowledge of the city streets to take passengers speedily to their destination, while at the same time making a decent living, there is a certain prerequisite: the ability to drive. To contemplate being a taxi driver but without the ability to drive is to misunderstand fundamentally and fatally the core elements of taxi driving. And today, increasingly, we are doing something similar in missions. There are many people out there who really want to be cabbies, but simply do not have the time or the interest to learn to drive. Language learning is and should remain central to missions training and initial orientation.

Back to my struggle with the notion of *language learning*. My current job title is longer than I am tall: *Advocate and advisor for language, culture, and worldview acquisition*. Quite a mouthful. Yet I (and many others who do similar jobs in missions) am usually called the *language guy* for short. It is in this very term that I see the need for change.

Quite simply, far from being willing to dispense with or shorten language learning times and programmes, I have come to believe and argue that language *per se* is not enough. For years many mission groups have tried to emphasise the importance of language and develop good language learning and teaching programmes, spending money, producing materials, and training locals willing to help. Many of the best language programmes have adopted and adapted methodologies and ideas from EFL/ESL English language teaching experience and practice. But all too often, very little was done in the area of culture and worldview familiarisation and understanding.

A training agenda which seeks proficiency in language alone is flawed. Language is of course central to communication cross-culturally. But it is also the key to unlock culture and worldview, and a means to engage at a deeper level with what makes people tick.

Our Great Omission in the Great Commission

The importance we attach to culture and worldview in addition to language learning is, I believe, related to our understanding of the task of mission and evangelism. The Great Commission does not tell us to make converts, but disciples. Further, we are told to be Jesus' witness in ever-broader circles centred on Jerusalem, and radiating out unto the ends of the earth. These two more famous statements of Jesus' commission are very instructive. He wants us to help bring people to a state of obedience and submission to Him and His principles and agenda, within the context of their own cultures and worldviews, which show incredible diversity and variety across our planet. The Risen Christ commands us to take His

unchanging and now validated and celebrated message of redemption into cultures to which it is strange and unfamiliar.

As soon as we attempt to take a message into an alien culture or environment we need the basic communication tools to actually convey the message, but also a deep understanding of the issues faced by the recipients as they grapple to make sense of what we are telling them. If we have language without culture, we have no way of knowing whether what we say is actually what they hear, not in terms of movements of air molecules in their ears, but in terms of concepts and ideas within their hearts and minds. Consider the simple statement: *The vest is in the boot*. Are we saying that a singlet that is worn under a shirt is in the back of a car, or perhaps in an article of footwear that we wear for heavy work or wading in water? British listeners would be clear about the nature of the clothing, but unsure about the location of the item. Or are we talking about a waistcoat being placed inside an article of footwear, but definitely not in the back of a car? This is what our American friends would understand by the statement. And what would occur in similar transatlantic communications, such as *The trunk is the boot*, *The vest is on the hood*, and *The bonnet is on the hood*. In these cases the linguistic forms are similar, but if cultural knowledge and reference are missing or misunderstood, then we face difficulty.

Now expand and extend that to the more serious business of mission. If I talk about *sin* and *eternal life* then you might assume that I am adopting the Bible as the intellectual and conceptual basis of our conversation. But in some cultures, sin as we understand it is irrelevant because an absolute Creator is not acknowledged; sin is when you get caught! Even in our own culture, these days sin has more to do with rich chocolate cake than falling short of the moral perfection of the Creator. And for the Buddhist *eternal life* has almost the opposite flavour to that which we would like to convey from a Christian perspective. According to Buddhist karmic principles eternal life, life which never ceases, sounds like an infinite cycle of birth and rebirth from which there is no escape into the bliss of nirvana. Come and believe in Jesus and be trapped in a closed cycle of karmic condemnation forever!

Such examples of cultural mismatch are not just anecdotal curiosities that are interesting when missionaries are on furlough. They are the stuff of everyday life as we take the message of Christ across cultures. Consider the parable of the two sons in Matt 21:28-31. The father asked them both to work in the vineyard, and received two different responses. The first said he would not go, but later changed his mind and went. The other son said he would go, but did not. The one who did right was of course the first. But people in Indonesia thought that the second son behaved better because he did not cause disharmony or loss of face to his father. What about the tribe in Papua New Guinea who thought Judas the hero of the gospel story because he was crafty enough to betray his friend and make a quick 30 pieces of silver. Finally, what about Peter's huge catch of fish in Luke 5. When Peter saw the fish in the boat (v.8), *he fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!"* When this story was taught in Thailand the people knew exactly why Peter was so ashamed and so conscious of his sin. Of course, it was because he had killed so many fish and violated a fundamental Buddhist principle about not taking life. The sanctity of life is important here: in a market near our house you can buy caged birds and earn merit by setting them free.

Be sure that the interactions summarised above took place in the languages of the target people. We could not have such conversations without speaking Indonesian, a Papua New Guinea language, or Thai. But what is happening under the surface? What is happening under the bonnet (*hood* if you're from North America)? Without understanding of the beliefs, culture, and worldview of the target people we risk huge misunderstanding and even incorrect teaching.

We need to Update our Thinking and Approach

The world has changed a great deal since the traditional missionary enterprise began, and our thinking must also reflect these developments and enable us to cope with them. Transport is much faster and cheaper than ever before. For a relatively small outlay, Christians from developed nations can travel across the world or region and engage in mission activity. In recent years we have seen a huge increase in short-term missions, particularly of the intra-regional kind, where for example, Singaporeans and Malaysians travel to Thailand for one or two week mission trips. Politically, the world has changed such that we can visit far more countries than ever before, and the tourist infrastructure has improved in many places, including so-called creative access nations, where it is still not permitted to preach the gospel openly.

More people than ever before are able to visit mission fields which were traditionally quite inaccessible or were considered suitable only for real pioneers. These days it is not unusual to have short-term teams from western countries going to China, or Singaporeans spending time in Vietnam. But we need to have great wisdom in how we deal with short-term missions. If a group of non-Thai speaking teenagers spend a week in Chiang Mai somehow trying to communicate the gospel to the local people, is this really a mission trip? Has the ability to reach geographical locations been somehow confused with the ability to reach people? By no means should we discourage short-term visits, because these are excellent ways of bringing missions exposure and planting the importance of missions in people's hearts. But we need to ask how effective such short-term trips are in terms of the precise commands of Jesus in the gospels and the beginning of Acts. And in too many cases the short-term missions mentality is being carried over into the thinking of those who would come for longer periods of service.

In this complex day and age we need complex and eclectic approaches to training in language, culture, and worldview for missions. We need to think very carefully about who our target people are. Even those who accept the concept of missions among UPGs (*unreached people groups*) should be identifying which sector of the society they are trying to reach. If we work with university students in some countries, then maybe we can be of considerable service to God by using English. That is to say, in some places language may not pose the huge problem that it does in others. But even if we find a group of students in China (for example) who can communicate in very reasonable English, we will fool ourselves and them if we think that we can communicate gospel concepts across a huge barrier of culture, religion, politics, and history. The consequence of understanding this issue can be very liberating. If we identify our target people as English-speaking students, then by all means use English to reach them, and perhaps learn a few phrases of the national language, for the purposes of politeness and ice-breaking. However, to engage in a true mission encounter we would still need to do a great deal of reading and learning about their history and worldview, in order to understand where they are coming from. In some cases we may be able to save time and effort on the language requirement, but we cannot cut corners on the steps we take to understand the heart.

Back to the Future

I am passionate about a return to traditional standards of training in language, culture and worldview for missionaries and Christian professionals. At the same time I want us focus our training and equipping for the job we feel called to do, while making use diverse, effective, and modern methods.

In missions these days we find our listeners more educated than ever before, generally speaking. They are more familiar with western culture and thinking than before, and may have partly justifiable prejudices and misconceptions about links between Christianity and the West. In many parts of the world the Christian message is not new and may even have a bad reputation. There is a desperate need for what we say and how we say it to be credible and effective. Also, the days of western dominance of missions are numbered and we rejoice already in the rainbow coalition of partners and colleagues in missions. As we evangelise in unreached or partially reached areas we need to envisage that those we reach now may one day be colleagues and local or even national leaders. Our task is to train these people and help them work out the gospel in their own context, working ourselves out of a job. Such an agenda requires a deeper and more rounded knowledge of culture and worldview than ever before. It is one thing to visit Burma and throw tracts out of a car window, and quite another to work patiently and over the long term to mentor, train, and empower local folks who have come to love Jesus and want to take their part in His Great Commission.

If anyone remains in any doubt as to the importance of language, culture, and worldview for missions, consider the case of One who was the Word made flesh. Who came to a specific people, in a specific culture, at a specific point in history, and worked among them with a deep knowledge of their culture and religion, in their language, and taught them using illustrations that made sense to them. May we all seek to honour God and what He has done for us by working hard in language, culture, and worldview. And may this whole agenda be genuinely part not only of field-based equipping but also seminary-based training.

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There and Back Again

Reading an Exilic Text for the Post 1987 Operation Lallang Malaysian Church



Author: Rev. Anthony Loke, Seminari Theoloji Malaysia.

Introduction

The task of the paper is to show how an Old Testament exilic text, in this particular case, Isaiah 40-55, can be read in the light of and allowed to speak to a contemporary situation: the post-1987 Operation Lallang Malaysian Church.

1. The Post 1987 Operation Lallang Malaysian Context

I begin with a clarification of a few terms. Operation Lallang was the code name used by the Malaysian government in 1987 to refer to the employment of the Internal Security Act (or in short, ISA) to arrest without detention almost a hundred persons. This was not the first time the ISA has been used in Malaysia, as it has its origins during the days of the Emergency in the late 50s to the early 60s when the country was beleaguered with the communist threat. The initial aim of the ISA was to use to detain without trial (up to two weeks) persons suspected of communist sympathies. This was to enable the Government to extract, it hoped, vital information from the detainees as well as prevent them from further contact with their sources. Of late, the ISA has been used for other reasons, for example, to detain without trial persons involved in drug convictions, those involved in the forgery of identity cards and passports, and so on. Hence, the Opposition parliamentarians have been unequivocally vocal in demanding that the ISA be abolished. Their argument was that other laws could be utilised to arrest people under the various categories of offences. To detain a person without trial was against the personal rights of a person, as enshrined in the universal laws of human freedom and dignity.

In a single day in October 1987, the Malaysian Government swooped almost a hundred persons of different races, religions and political persuasions under the draconian ISA. Among the pickups were the usual opposition parliamentarians, including the famous Opposition Leader, Mr. Lim Kit Siang, from the Democratic Action Party (DAP) and a few Malay politicians. However, what was unusual this time was the detention of a number of Christians. Some of them were Christian social activists who were accused by the government of being Marxists in orientation. One of the Christians arrested worked with the Council of Churches Malaysia (CCM) in the Research Unit, one was a University lecturer accused of being involved in evangelism to the Malay Muslims, another was a Baptist pastor similarly accused. Among the detainees were two Muslim converts to Christianity, Joshua Jammaluddin and Hilmy Mohd Noor. For the first time in Malaysian history, Christians were detained under the ISA for crimes of either being Marxists or for attempting to convert Malay Muslims to Christianity or for being Christian converts from Islam. In the past, from the time of independence in 1957, no Christians have been detained under the ISA for such reasons. The church, which always cherished her religious freedom and the choice to propagate the Gospel, found itself antagonised by the Government's action. The Malaysian Church had always thought that it would never be 'touched' by the Government. After all, two of the mainline denominations are registered by an act of parliament, while the majority of the other denominations are legally registered with the Registrar of Societies. Now the Malaysian church was found vulnerable and not even spared from the draconian powers of the ISA.

How did the Malaysian church respond to this national crisis? Unfortunately, it was not too well. The morning edition of the Star national newspaper showed a blackened photo, to protest against the Government's use of the ISA. While the rest of the nation raised a hue and cry against the injustice, the Malaysian church was unduly silent. In the days and weeks that followed, the Malaysian church did not respond in its Christian magazines and publications or local church newsletters with the single exception of the Catholic Asian News (CAN) which openly called all Roman Catholics to pray and hold masses for those detained, regardless of whether the detainees were Roman Catholics or not. The self-imposed muzzled silence of the rest of the Malaysian church was perplexing and baffling. Why did it respond in this manner? Was it purely out of fear? Fear of further repercussions from the Government, which was already emboldened to use the ISA and which, it was felt, would not hesitate to use it again? Was the self-muzzling an act of restraint lest the more vocal prophetic voices within the church lashed out against the Government's actions and caused more harm in that volatile situation? From hindsight, we are better able now to judge the response of the Malaysian church. But at that time, what would have been our response in the midst of the confusion, despair and despondency that had crept into the church?

2. Reading the Exilic Text of Isaiah 40-55

Here is where we come to the reading of the text, from 'there and back again'. Let us go 'there' first, to the biblical text. I have chosen the block of sixteen chapters which make up Isaiah 40-55, which has been commonly accepted as a unified block of material relatively untouched by later redactions. Isaiah 40-55 are some of the most captivating chapters in the Old Testament, speaking as they do a message of salvation to despondent exiles who have lost all hope in Yahweh's deliverance from the Babylonians. Although from a critical viewpoint, the author of these chapters remains an enigmatic figure, Second Isaiah is recognized as a superb author and poet with immense literary gifts of expression. The poetry that he employed scaled new heights as he sought to lift his despairing fellow exiles from their doubts and discontent. This raises some pertinent questions: What made his message so buoyant and hopeful? Was it the poetry that he employed in the hope of evoking a hopeful response from the exiles? Was it the content of the message that he delivered that greatly encouraged them? Underlying his message, was there a rhetorical strategy that gave his poetry a discernible structure and pattern that was so appealing, not just to his fellow exiles but to others? I think the answer is 'yes'. It is a rhetorical strategy which enables the prophet to promote his message to the exiles by first winning their hearing, capturing their attention and then meeting their deepest needs. If this is so, then it may be workable even today, as the church seeks to win the hearing of those who are despairing of and despondent with Yahweh, to continue to capture their attention and to meet their deepest needs with a message that will comfort and bring hope. The relevance of this rhetorical reading strategy for the Malaysian church today deserves further exploration.

The whole sixteen chapters of Isaiah 40-55 is a powerful rebuttal to the charges of the exiles against Yahweh. Yahweh's message through the prophet is both one of disputation with the charges brought by the exiles and one of proclaiming salvation to them. The message of the sixteen chapters is in the form of a proclamation of salvation where every lament and charge is answered convincingly on Yahweh's behalf. He refutes these charges by counter-arguments, use of analogies and vivid imagination, and appeals to past events and Yahweh's power in nature. The prophet in delivering Yahweh's message to the exiles also employed various rhetorical devices to heighten the sense of the message: parallelisms, chiasms, metaphors, anthropologisms, and repetitions. The sixteen chapters are not just a transcript of an encouraging speech to the exiles about their hopeful future but also a vision of national restoration. The prophet also made use of strong symbolic language to transfigure

the present historical landscape to the near future. It encouraged the use of a strong imagination to envisage what the future would be and could be like.

3. Relevance and Insights for the Church Today in Malaysia

We now proceed to the 'here', the present reality in Malaysia. Walter Brueggemann speaks of the Exile as a powerful metaphor for communities facing or already in exile. He draws a 'dynamic equivalence' between Israel's exilic situation and that of the church in America today. Thus it is possible to read the American church as being similarly 'in exile'.

It may be correct to argue from analogy, albeit a partial analogy, that the Malaysian church today is similarly 'in exile' although the exile metaphor seems to have little bearing on the situation in Malaysia. What has something that happened almost 2,500 years ago to do with the Malaysian situation? In what sense is today's Malaysian church 'in exile'? The church is basically middle-class, generally well off and prosperous and is not accustomed to seeing herself as being in exile. Yet the church in Malaysia may be considered so, for Exile does not simply need to be a geographical fact but can also be 'a theological decision'. Exile also does not always need to mean being in an alien and hostile environment. There is a debate whether the Jewish exiles were really in 'exile' in Babylon since from Jeremiah 29:5-7, they seem to have been better off than what is generally envisaged. We will not enter into this debate but to note that a community can still be in 'exile' even if external conditions are not hostile.

The Malaysian church is a community in an 'alien' environment in the sense that the God it worships is not regarded as the ruling god or power. Consequently, the Malaysian Church is often seen as an 'alien' religious institution, an image it needs to be constantly aware of and to shed. As a minority in a multi-pluralistic and multi-religious society, the adherents of other religions and faiths overshadow it. It is constantly bombarded by definitions of reality shaped by consumerism and materialism that are fundamentally alien to the gospel. The church faces negative propaganda and treatment from many quarters, sometimes including the Government. Increasingly, the future for the church does not seem to be rosy and bright. The church being in exile raises some theological problems. It faces a crisis of faith where Christians question the ability and willingness of Yahweh to act in these present difficult circumstances. In a multi-religious society, which and whose god is in control? Being the God of a so-called minority, can Yahweh really rescue the 'captives from the mighty'? Under Muslim rule in the past, the dhimmi system was applied to non-Muslims. Although the people of the Book (Jews and Christians included) were protected, being a dhimmi implied a second-class citizenry. Can Yahweh ensure a bright future to those who seek to obey him while living in such oppressive circumstances? Will he ensure that the dhimmi system will not be implemented by the Government or whichever political group when it takes over the political reins? Or has Yahweh given up on his people, leaving them to be in exile on their own?

The church's response to these external threatening forces has been to deny, accommodate to, resign itself to or resist them. Firstly, to deny that the church is in 'exile' is to be like the proverbial frog in the kettle slowly being boiled alive, or like the ostrich burying its head in the sand. To deny that the church is in exile does not solve anything. Secondly, to accommodate to the general prevailing socio-economic-political-religious climate often means that the church becomes unaware of its exilic status. One needs to be wary of the guise of religious toleration as it may lead to the demise of the institutional church. In the past, in Muslim-dominated lands, churches stripped of their active Christian witness often met its demise through negative growth. Thirdly, to be resigned is to bring in a climate of pessimism and cynicism within the already depressing socio-political conditions, to lose all hope of the future and possibly even blame Yahweh's seeming lack of action and initiative in putting right their

present troubles. Hence, many well-to-do Christians choose the option of emigration to foreign lands where the grass seems greener and the future seems more secure. Fourthly, to resist, like some of the exiles in Babylon who did not accept the foreign culture and domination, would be to seek to actively rebel against these forces or to actively pursue their downfall.

But there is another way to respond instead of denying reality, accommodating to the situation, being resigned to their fate or actively resisting the powers to be. Let us go back 'there' to the biblical text. The rhetorical strategy employed by Second Isaiah in Isaiah 40-55 is to present a positive picture of the future and to evoke a positive response from the exiles. There is no need to lose all hope and go into despair and despondency. 'Fear not' is a constant message of Second Isaiah to the despondent exiles. Yahweh will do a 'new thing'. He will open a way through the desert and lead his people home. This brings us back to the 'here'. This message can be extremely relevant for the church in Malaysia. In fact, it offers a fifth alternative to the Malaysian church - to counter these forces of change by providing hope and encouragement, challenge and renewal, and obedient and faithful living. It means presenting to the Malaysian church a positive picture of the future (what can the future be?) and evoking a positive response from it (how can it make it happen?). It entails providing the church with an alternative hopeful imagination of what the future could be if only it seeks to trust in Yahweh. This strategic reading of the text would seek to counter the negative charges brought by the church about Yahweh's inability and unwillingness to intervene and help in the present difficult circumstances. It would seek to show and demonstrate from past acts in nature as well as in history that Yahweh is able and willing to help his people. It would seek to counter the disillusionment and doubt faced by the church, which are generated by the prevailing culture and climate. It would seek to lift up the church from the downward spiral of self-pitying and helplessness and thrust it forward beyond the difficult circumstances to a glorious and hopeful future. The reading strategy is a workable alternative to draw the Malaysian church out of an exilic mentality. It is indeed a paradigm for encouragement, comfort and renewal and possibly even future survival for the Malaysian church.

Thus, in our reading of the Exilic text of Isaiah 40-55 and the present socio-political-economic-religious situation in Malaysia, the 'here' and 'there', we realize that there are immense possibilities of bringing a text constructed centuries ago for a different group of people for a different purpose, to bear upon present realities. The post-1987 Operation Lallang Malaysian church can find a fresh, relevant and applicable message from an old text that may seem initially to have little relevance today. The hermeneutical gap of almost 2,500 years can be bridged by reading the ancient written text into our present living textual situation and by bringing our situation into the written text, the 'here' and the 'there' interacting in a hermeneutical continuum.

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Introduction and background overview

The Church in its mission stands in the Biblical/Prophetic tradition, walks in the footsteps of the Lord Jesus Christ, and lives by the light and example of the Apostles and the early Church. It manifests a dynamic commitment to the human situation for positive change of thought and practice. This is an attempt to understand and meet the standards of the Kingdom of God in terms of its values and the demand to 'love the neighbour as yourself'. The Church in its mission at the global level, because of its on-going commitment to the ever changing world situation, has also adopted different discourses, e.g. evangelical, liberal and ecumenical and different paradigms: proclamation, dialogue or/and inculturation, etc. This has led current missiologists to think wholistically and pragmatically. Keeping in view the oppressive human structures and societal institutions, liberation theologians, especially during the 1960s, pleaded the case of 'liberation' of the oppressed and demanded emancipation of all those who have been vulnerable through the ages and have struggled for their release from bondage. Liberation theology has not been accepted as a 'package of commitment' by all Christians, yet the majority of them have accepted the need for the liberation of oppressed individuals and communities.

Recently it has been assessed that 'liberation of the oppressed' on its own, does not meet the full demand of Christian Mission. The wounds of oppression also need to be healed and there needs to be forgiveness of the oppressor on the part of the oppressed. Recent missiologists have identified the need for transformation of the oppressor as well as of the oppressed. For example, Michael Nazir-Ali, Bishop of Rochester, believes that human development hinges profoundly on inner transformation and renewal and therefore transformation and renewal need to come about first in the oppressor and then in the oppressed. Nazir-Ali is concerned that the oppressed may be a worse oppressor if he or she gets a chance to oppress those even less fortunate than them (Nazir-Ali, 1995:45-56). Robert Schreiter, Vatican II Professor of Theology at Catholic Theological Union, University of Chicago, pleads the case of a theology of reconciliation and peacemaking for mission, and highlights the place of seeking forgiveness of wrong done to the victim on the part of the wrongdoer. He says that the wrongdoer must repent of the wrongdoing and seek forgiveness from the victim. The victim also needs to forgive the wrongdoer and then there is reconciliation (Schreiter, 2004:16). Nazir-Ali wrote in the context of 'development' and Schreiter in the context of a 'theology of reconciliation'. Both have clearly upheld that reconciliation is a paradigm of mission.

Social bases as well as wrong doing have also kept people apart from one another. In African countries it may be the case of HIV/AIDS, in India an on-going practice of caste, or in Pakistan 'party-bazi', groups formed to oppose each other for personal gain. There is social discrimination on the basis of involvement in menial jobs in many developing countries. As an effect of secularisation in Western Europe there is discrimination against religious communities. For example, Christianity is hated most by the so called 'agnostics', and Islam is discriminated against on account of their stand on modesty of women signified by the wearing of veils or young women wearing scarves in schools.

Hatred harboured due to past events, e.g. the Crusades of the middle ages and Western colonisation of most of the developing countries during the last several centuries, is being

passed down in the hearts of those who adhere to certain geographical, religious or ideological boundaries. There is also a fresh layer of manipulation of world resources seen in the approach of institutions such as the World Bank, IMF and multinational companies. Global reforms are introduced in the name of 'a new world order' which actually have defended the privileges of certain nations and manipulated the remaining resources of developing nations. Free market trading and rapid sharing of information and technology through globalisation has widened the gulf between the rich and the poor.

All this poses great challenges to the notion of reconciliation of communities and for the understanding and practice of accommodating others within one's own world view. The Bible, however, condemns the imperialism of the past. This essay explores a missiology of reconciliation.

The biblical and theological basis of reconciliation as mission

Looking in the Bible, one finds God's concern for peace and reconciliation of all humanity as a permanent theme. God created humans in his own image (Gen 1: 26-27). By that very act of creation God reconciled humans to himself even before their fall. After the fall, God has always wanted Israel, a stiff-necked nation, and other nations, to be reconciled to him, by sacrifices in the Old Testament and the divine sacrifice of his own Son, Jesus Christ, on the cross. The theologies of election and covenant between God and Israel through Abraham, the father of all believers, carry the divine plan of including all nations for God's salvation, justice and righteousness (Gen 17:2, Isaiah 42:6).

Exclusivism of any kind is not appreciated in the Biblical accounts. We note Isaiah's vision of international reconciliation: "In that day there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria...In that day Israel will be third, along with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing on the earth. The Lord Almighty will bless them saying, 'Blessed be Egypt my people, Assyria my handiwork, and Israel my inheritance'" (19:23-25). Israel as God's inheritance is mentioned in relation to Egypt and Assyria as God's people. Both Egypt's and Assyria's assault and oppression on Israel in the form of Egyptian slavery and Assyrian captivity are harsh experiences for God's people. But God wants a reconciling spirit among these three nations. This sounds like an eschatological hope which has current meaning and linkage. In the New Testament Christ called all people to himself saying, "Come unto me all who are heavy laden and I will give you rest". 'Rest' is a blessing linked with 'shalom', an Old Testament concept. And then sending his disciples into the world, he said, "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit..." (Math 28:19). Reconciliation in terms of salvation is for all nations.

Regarding social alienation, the stories of Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10), the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-37), and the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32), are recorded to show Luke's particular concern for reconciliation of those who were alienated from society's mainstream on the basis of sickness, gender, race, colour, creed, etc.

Christ's healing ministry focused on reconciliation between God and man. The healing of the paralytic (Matt 9:1-8) was recorded with a focus on forgiveness of sins by Jesus, with an additional command to take the mat and go home. The sending home of the healed paralytic was a manifestation of Christ's concern that sick people are forgiven by God where they have committed sin and should be accepted by the family, clan and friends. The same concern should apply to people who are sick today with diseases such as HIV/AIDS which carry with them a stigma.

St. Paul has a great commitment to reconciliation of humans to one another and to God. He mentions the role of the Church in reconciliation saying:

So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. Therefore, if any one is in Christ, he is a new creation; and the old has gone, the new has come. All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation (2 Cor 5:16-19).

This has implications for the Church's role as reconciler among different communities separated on the basis of some historical grievance or present crisis, or even some future speculation. The Church as the ambassador of Christ has a role to bring communities together in human unity, thereby establishing God's kingdom, so that God's will may be done on earth as it is in heaven – the prayer the Lord taught his disciples.

The horizon of reconciliation

Healing of broken relations or traumas of the past are contributory aspects of reconciliation. This reminds us of the Biblical accounts such as the healing of enmity between Jacob and Esau, the traumatic experience of Tamar who was assaulted by her own half brother Absalom, the grief of Naomi after returning to her homeland, and the mending of the cracks in the life of the Prodigal Son in the parable. The main issue in all these experiences is that forgiveness is not sought at the expense of mere forgetting the events and happenings, neither is it expected as a free pardoning of the torturer. Rather, justice is sought for the victim. Schreier raises three areas of concerns and points of attention – (1) truth-telling (2) the pursuit of justice and (3) healing the memories; forgiveness is the key issue in the process of healing the traumas of the past.

In truth-telling he says that the hidden secret during the conflict should be told and discussed. For example, people often are not allowed to speak of the atrocities they have experienced in totalitarian regimes, says Schreier. Or there may be unspeakable experiences of men and women working under the control of private managements. In the name of efficiency and managerial skills people are looked down upon and controlled like animals in many developing countries where human rights of employees are not respected. Even in homes, the rights of children are not accepted and the role of women is not appreciated. Gender and role discrimination creates situations where poor people, women, children and other vulnerable people lose their personal identities and experience conflicting situations.

Pursuit of justice is a biblical concern. The books of Micah and Amos are full of economic, political and social concerns. "To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God", is Micah's understanding of what God desires from his people. In the same way, Amos raised the issue of judicial justice saying, "Maintain justice in the courts". In many places things are not done justly and love and mercy are not maintained. Furthermore judicial procedures are adopted to cripple certain groups, such as religious and ethnic minorities. Discrimination against any social and religious group creates a situation of on-going oppression which is the cause of conflict. There is a place for both punitive and restorative justice. Take for instance the case of Mukhtaran Mai, a Pakistani woman who was raped and made to walk naked in her own village in front of her people by a group of village leaders. This was on the pretext that Mukhtaran's younger brother (who was under age) had crossed boundaries of relationship with a young woman of the village (this comes under the practice

and custom of maintaining 'honour'). Mai's case was highlighted at national and international levels. She received both punitive and restorative justice. Her assaulters suffered legal punishment and she received support to establish an institution where she is educating young women and helping them to live honourably.

Healing of memories and forgiveness according to Schreiter involve not forgetting the past but remembering it in a different way. What happened during the wars between different countries can be a point of hatred during the whole of the nation's life. But in many situations, new levels of relationship can also develop and people, without forgetting their past, can cherish this new development. In the Sub Continent of India and Pakistan, despite the three wars between them and their traditional rivalry in areas such as cricket and hockey, Pakistanis and Indians have learned to respect each other and are coming closer to each other day by day. Similarly, the Germans cannot forget the wounds of separation of the Berlin Wall but they have cherished the reconciling experience since the wall was demolished in 1989. It is an accepted fact that many of the past and recent wars and conflicts in the Middle East have arisen because of the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians and the other Arab nations. If these issues are talked through fully, and if reality and justice are pursued, reconciliation will take place and peace will be established.

Peace is the end product of reconciliation which is both a socio-political and religious and spiritual experience. Shalom, in the Hebrew language carries a comprehensive expression of inner and outward peace of individuals and of the nation. It involves both religious as well as economic well being and socio-political stability. It therefore carries the connotations of development, prosperity and spirituality. The New Testament writers are equally committed to peace through reconciliation with God and humans. Mere religious observance is not salvific, unless the one involved in presenting the sacrifice is reconciled to his or her angry brother, according to Jesus (Matt 5:23-24).

Conclusion

A commitment to inter-religious dialogue, a development of understanding and an enhanced level of acceptance of 'the other' among different religions and social groups, would be positive steps towards international reconciliation and peace. There is no need to worry about one's uniqueness because there is no compromise on that required in this process. The issue is that religion must not be used to promote hatred, and give birth to new conflicts. Rather, people should come forward with new aspirations to forgive and forget the conflicting aspects of the socio-religious atmosphere. Soon they will discover that there are more commonalities than differences among different religions. These very commonalities can be exploited for international peace.

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The Malaysian Dilemma

Where is the Racially Reconciled Community?

Author: Peter Rowan, Lecturer at Malaysia Bible Seminary, Malaysia.

The Situation

This is arguably one of the most consistently discussed topics in Malaysian public life -- explored by academics, filmmakers, politicians and newspaper editors alike. Here is an issue that is always current and potentially explosive but which is only occasionally discussed in theological circles, and rarely addressed in the congregational setting of many Malaysian protestant churches: racial integration.

The diversity of Malaysian society is well known: a majority Muslim country with significant Chinese, Indian and indigenous communities. On the verge of celebrating 50 years of independence, Malaysia has much to be proud of. But substantial racial integration remains illusive.

Significant complexities surround this issue and these brief comments will barely skim the surface. But by way of approach, consider the following questions: What role do churches have in a divided society in search of racial integration? And is our approach to such an issue more a matter of strategy when it ought be a matter of spirituality?

Since Malaysia's independence, many have pinned their hopes on the education system to provide the necessary foundations for racial integration, and on the local school as a place where such integration can be seen in action, preparing each generation for the reality of Bangsa Malaysia. [1] But recent research has shown that in this aspect at least, the education system may have failed. [2] Of course, it continues to be a worthy goal for schools to pursue. We need to provide contexts in which our children learn to interact with their peers from other ethnic groups and to appreciate from an early age the diversity of Malaysia's multicultural life. Research has shown that people who have experienced significant "prior interracial contact in schools and neighbourhoods [are] more likely, as adults, to have more racially diverse general social groups and friendship circles." [3] But if schools (and neighbourhoods) are providing only superficial rather than significant prior contact, where can the latter occur and where can a racially reconciled community be seen in action? One answer, surely, is the local church. But are Malaysian churches functioning as models to the wider society of what reconciled communities look like, or are they just as racially segregated as the world around them?

I would want to argue that since reconciliation is at the heart of the gospel, and since the gospel transcends the barriers of race, ethnicity and culture, and since the church is the most inclusive community on earth, the local church is a community of hope in a fragmented world. In Malaysia, the church has the task of not only proclaiming the message of reconciliation to all Malaysians, but of embodying the concrete implications of that message in its community life, so that Malaysians of all races can look at a local church community and see the gospel fleshed out in a racially reconciled group of people who can work, worship and witness together. But several objections, or at least concerns, may be raised. Let me offer a response to three, followed by several modest recommendations.

Objections

1. Surely Malaysian society is too diverse for us to expect any sort of multiracial, multiethnic local church to take root and realistically function? We might ask if such a phenomenon has happened elsewhere and can solid examples be provided? In response we would do well to remind ourselves that the first century Mediterranean world in which the church took root was arguably a more complex and diverse place than 21st century Malaysia. We often think of that ancient world as comprising of just two distinct groups, Jew and Gentile, forgetting the great diversity not just of the Gentile world but of Judaism itself. And yet, in such a diverse world, multiracial and multilingual Christian congregations were planted and grew.

A study of the NT churches would show that the overwhelming evidence supports the view that early Christian congregations were indeed multiracial and multilingual and that this diversity was intentional rather than accidental. [4] In terms of its multicultural inclusiveness, Pentecost was no ecclesiastical blip. The Holy Spirit propelled the church in the direction already set in the OT concerning the ingathering of all nations into the people of God (Gen. 12:1-3; Isaiah 19:16-25; 60; Jer. 12:14-16; Zeph. 3:9; Zech. 14:6). What Abraham saw by faith, was now reality – the multicultural, multiracial church of God. John Stott says of Pentecost: “Nothing could have demonstrated more clearly than this the multiracial, multinational, multilingual nature of the kingdom of Christ.” Pentecost therefore “symbolized a new unity in the Spirit transcending racial, national and linguistic barriers.” [5] Indeed, the two-volume work of Luke-Acts speaks powerfully to the issue of race within the church. Luke provides examples of how the gospel challenges us to abandon culturally driven worldviews about racial prejudice. “As a pattern of true discipleship, Luke reminds the Church today that the gospel demands that we forsake our inherited culturally driven racial prejudices, and accept all people – especially those different from us – as integral parts of the church.” [6] The early Christian churches of the NT were marked by cultural diversity. There was an intentional strategy to build racially inclusive communities that were united by faith. In their wonderfully stimulating and thought-provoking book, the authors of *United by Faith* underline how, “Together these congregations produced a movement for social unity across the great divide of culture, tradition, class and race. Ultimately, the unity of the first-century church was the result of the miracle of reconciliation...” [7] You may think he puts it rather strongly, but in Tom Wright’s view, “If our churches are still divided in any way along racial or cultural lines, [Paul] would say that our gospel, our very grasp of the meaning of Jesus’ death, is called into question.” [8]

2. Am I suggesting that we relinquish our cultural distinctives? Is not a uniraical congregation the best context for the fullest expression of my God-given culture? Apart from the fact that culture is never static and always changing, we should understand that the reconciling of different racial groups into one congregation does not inevitably have to lead to dull uniformity. Developing a multi-racial congregation is not about excluding diversity or uniqueness from the life of the church. The corporate worship of a racially, ethnically mixed congregation needs to include the cultural elements of more than one group. By using different styles of music, varying the language, liturgy and form of the service, and the degree of participation invited – such inclusiveness and creativity can be enriching and can lead the congregation to a broader understanding of God himself. So then, rather than a dull, lowest-common-denominator type culture dominating the church, a unique hybrid culture can develop that utilizes the best of all the representative cultures in the congregation. And this can bear fruit in the total life of the congregation, not just in its corporate worship. The aim is integration, not assimilation.

3. Is not evangelism and church planting more effective when conducted by a uniraical congregation? There is truth in the oft-quoted observation of Donald McGavran that, “men

like to become Christians without crossing racial, linguistic or class barriers”. [9] From this he developed the Homogeneous Unit Principle which basically says that people should be able to hear the gospel without having to cross a cultural or social barrier in order to become a Christian. The question, however, is not whether such a principle is effective in terms of evangelism, but is it biblical? Of course, humanly speaking, people gravitate towards their ‘own kind’. But are we correct to turn a sociological observation into a missiological principle without providing an adequate biblical foundation? Should it be normative in our church practice? And are ethnically united churches essential for evangelism and defensible biblically and theologically? I take the view that they are not. However, I acknowledge that working with one cultural group is a useful starting point in evangelism and in the early stages of church planting. But in the sharing of the good news itself and in the discipleship that follows, new Christians and young congregations need to know that they are part of the multiethnic, multicultural people of God and that they need to be integrated or at least connected in some way, if at all possible, into a more multiethnic church or network of churches.

Ways forward

With racial and ethnic diversity being a hallmark of 21st century Malaysian life, do more to equip Christians to think biblically and theologically about this issue. Make it the focus of a preaching series; give more attention to it in discipleship classes and seminary courses. For example, how do we think Christianly about national unity, the concept of *Bangsa Malaysia*, race and the education system, interracial marriages and family life, etc?

Given the racially mixed communities in which many local churches are located in Malaysia, aim to develop more racially mixed leadership teams in local churches.

Be more intentional in broadening the fellowship of uniethnic congregations, so that instead of remaining in isolation, they reflect something of the universality and diversity of the body of Christ. Perhaps we can organise worship services and activities that bring these congregations together on a more regular basis to express, celebrate and make visible, their unity in the faith. Practical difficulties such as language differences can be more easily overcome these days with simultaneous translation becoming more accessible and affordable.

Finally, while churches can and should be spearheading initiatives in their local communities that help create contexts for greater racial integration, there must be a commitment to sharing the gospel with all the peoples of Malaysia because ultimately, only in Christ can true reconciliation be found and the multiracial dream come true.

In racially diverse contexts where problems of ethnicity are always present, the local church has the responsibility of demonstrating the social implications of the gospel of reconciliation to the local community; demonstrating what a racially reconciled life really looks like.

Notes

¹ The phrase *Bangsa Malaysia* was used by the former Malaysian Prime Minister, Mahatir Mohammad in 1991 to express the desired goal of national unity. It is the first of nine strategic challenges contained in *Vision 2020* – the vision for Malaysia to reach developed nation status. *Bangsa* is a Malay word meaning ‘race, nationality; belonging to a race, or nationality’. *Bangsa Malaysia* means “Malaysian nationality”, “Malaysian People” or “United Malaysian People”.

² See Lee Hock Guan, "Globalisation and Ethnic Integration in Malaysian Education" in *Malaysia: Recent Trends and Challenges* ed. Saw Swee-Hock and K. Kesavapany (Singapore: Institute of South East Asian Studies, 2006), 230-259.

³ Michael O. Emerson, Rachel Tolbert Kimbro, George Yancey. "Contact Theory Extended: The Effects of Prior Racial Contact on Current Social Ties". *Social Science Quarterly*. Vol. 83 Issue 3 (September 2002), 745.

⁴ See Paul J. Achtemeier, *The Search for Unity in the New Testament Church: a study in Paul and Acts*. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987). Also, Rene Padilla, *Mission Between the Times: Essays on the Kingdom*. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1985), 142-169.

⁵ *The Message of Acts*. The Bible Speaks Today Series. (Leicester: IVP, 1990), 68.

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The South Asian Diaspora

A Missed Opportunity?



Author: Robin Thomson, South Asian Concern.

Introduction

South Asians [1] have always been on the move. Buddhist and Hindu missionaries carried their message in all directions in early centuries and the whole South East Asian region was influenced by Indian trade, culture and religion. Much later, in the 19th and early 20th centuries, Indians spread through the British Empire, to work on plantations, to build railways or to trade, particularly in East Africa.

In the early post-war years there were new waves of migration, resulting partly from the violence of India's partition, partly from the need for workers in countries like Britain. They came directly from India or the new nation of Pakistan (including what later became Bangladesh). The expulsion of the East African Asians in the early 1970s brought another large group of entrepreneurs and professionals to Britain. Civil strife in Sri Lanka was responsible for a steady stream of refugees from the mid 1980s. By 2000 the South Asian population was around 1.8 million. The early years of the 21st century have seen significant numbers of professionals arriving, as the UK government has sought to meet demand in the healthcare and IT sectors. Today the South Asian population in the UK is somewhere above 2 million, around 4% of the total population (exact figures are impossible to obtain).

South Asian Population in the UK

(based on the 2001 census)

Indians	1,053,411	1.8%
Pakistanis	747,285	1.3%
Bangladeshis	283,063	0.5%
Other Asian – not Chinese	247,664	0.4%
Tamils (Sri Lankan & Indian)	100,000	0.18%]

The British Asian [2] scene

Today the British Asian scene has been transformed. Those who arrived in the UK with little more than the clothes they were wearing are well established and prominent in business, professional life and the media. TV programmes like *Goodness Gracious Me!* and films like *Bend it like Beckham* have propelled Asians into the mainstream. Asian music is increasingly popular, while 'Indian' food [3] is still the nation's favourite.

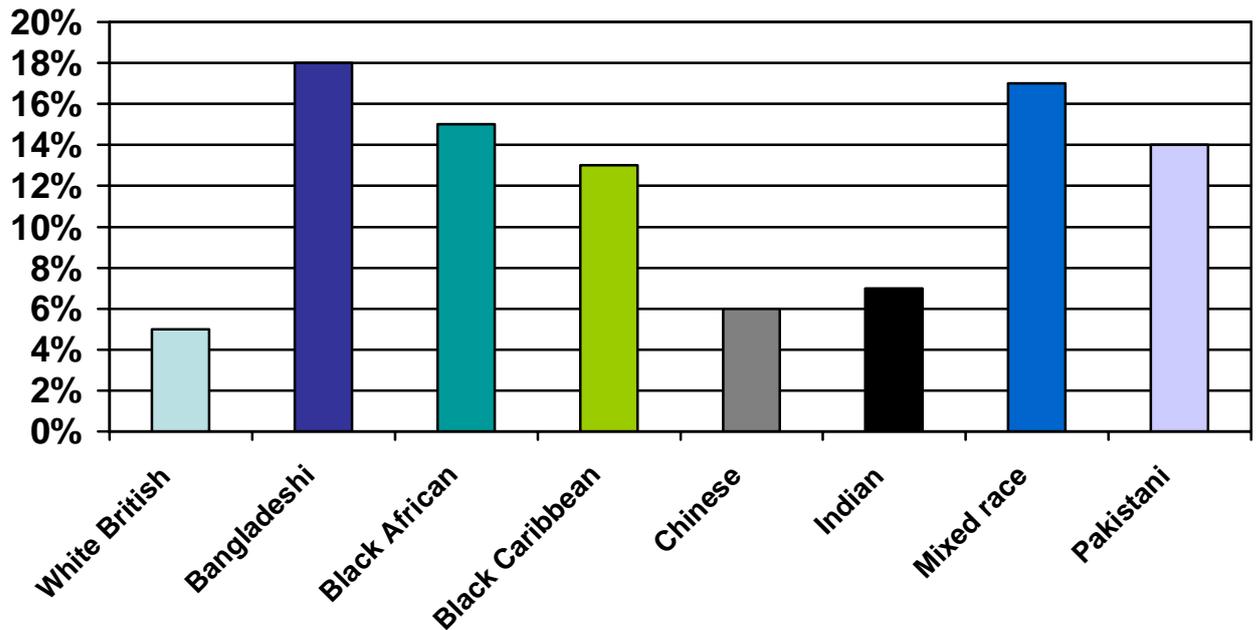
Diversity

But the use of blanket terms like Asian or South Asian should not distract us from the great diversity among the South Asian communities. The most obvious differences are *geographical* and *linguistic*. South Asians in Britain are predominantly Punjabi (from both India and Pakistan, Muslim, Sikh or Hindu), Gujarati (from E Africa or direct from India,

mostly Hindu), Bangladeshi, or Tamil (mostly from Sri Lanka). There are wide differences of language, food and clothing, along with the deep underlying similarities.

While almost all South Asians are concerned for the *education* of their children, there are large differences in *employment* rates, with Indians near the national average, while Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities are significantly worse off. These two communities also have a much *younger profile*, with around 35% under 16, compared to the Indian communities (22%) and the white communities' average of 19%).

Comparative unemployment rates



Religion is another obvious difference. 92% of Bangladeshis & Pakistanis are Muslim, while Indians in Britain are more diverse religiously:

- 45% Hindu
- 30% Sikh
- 12% Muslim
- 5% Christian

South Asians have a strong sense of community. But sometimes this can be exclusive and it is difficult to relate to people of another group, increasingly other faith communities. 9/11, and then 7/7, changed a lot for British south Asians. For some it meant there was no alternative to radical Islam. For others it opened up old wounds and divisions. Many Hindus today do not want to be called 'South Asian' or 'Asian' as they do not want to be identified with terrorists - or by implication with their predominantly Muslim communities.

Identity

Identity is still the number one issue for young British South Asians.

Dipu is a management consultant. She's 26, intelligent, successful, travelling on six continents. She has a smart flat in Fulham, and a steady boyfriend. Not the sort of person you would associate with problems. But when it comes to identity she says :

"My parents don't have a problem. They came to this country 30 years ago. They know where they came from and why they are here. I was brought up here; I'm English all the way through - my education, thinking, attitudes. But when I meet people their first question is "where do you come from?" Just because my face is a different colour. Where do I come from? I don't belong in India. I thought I did belong here...." [4]

Identity is linked with *family*, which can be a source both of strength and cohesion but also of tension between generations. This is often expressed in connection with arrangements for marriage (not necessarily the same as 'arranged marriage'!) Where the parents' and young people's expectations coincide, things work well, ranging from a traditional arranged marriage to one where the young people have complete freedom to make their own choice. Where expectations do not match, there is tension, even sometimes violence, as seen in forced marriages, or so-called 'honour killings', which are often linked to relationships between people of different faith communities.

The alienation between generations was starkly expressed in the riots in cities like Oldham and Bradford, and even more in the 7/7 bombings. Here the issues were not just generational but also linked with identity and citizenship. 'What does it mean to be British? Do I want to have that identity? Even if I do, there may be others who want to exclude me'. *Racism* is also a part of every South Asian's experience, whether it is a subtle 'glass ceiling' or more overt and physical.

Christian faith?

Many are attracted to the person of Christ. There is great openness to the Gospel when it is seen as relevant to Asian culture. Many are looking for some kind of synthesis that combines what they see as the best in all faiths, without excluding any. In today's climate of pressure for community cohesion, many - even Muslims - are happy to acknowledge the Christian faith and even include aspects of it in their own.

But it is a different story to become a 'Christian and part of the 'church'. The 'church' and 'Christian' are seen as a different community, part of 'Western' culture, with all its positive and negative connotations.

South Asian Christians

South Asian Christians are a 'minority within a minority'. Figures are difficult to come by. Estimates are usually between 35-50,000, but this is simply an estimate and research is needed to establish more accurate numbers.

The largest number of Protestant Christians are Punjabi, from both India and Pakistan. Many are part of 'Asian Christian Fellowships' meeting separately, sometimes on Sunday afternoons so as not to clash with 'church', and worshipping in Urdu/Punjabi languages, with traditional music and styles. There are hardly any Gujarati fellowships of this kind, but an increasing number of Tamil churches. More recently the presence of newly arrived professionals from South India has meant an increase in Malayalam churches and fellowships. Some professionals, especially those who do not live in a strongly South Asian area, may be part of local churches from the host community, usually in twos or threes.

Roman Catholic groups are mostly from Goa and more recently from Sri Lanka or South India.

Apart from the Tamil churches, the vast majority in these fellowships and churches are from a Christian background. The Tamil churches have found an openness among their fellow country people, and there are significant numbers of first generation followers of Christ. But apart from these, those South Asians who have become followers of Christ from a Hindu, Muslim or Sikh background have done so as individuals and may find difficulty in remaining within their community.

Effective evangelism approaches?

What is the way forward in reaching the large numbers of South Asians in Britain? The following paragraphs from a recent publication [5] are still accurate:

Effective evangelism approaches among the South Asian Diaspora communities hardly exist. By and large the host country churches have found it difficult to relate to people of a different culture and established faith and have either given up or left them alone. Work with young people, for example bible clubs, has been fruitful in a number of countries. Several of today's leaders came to Christ as school or university students. However, for the vast majority of South Asians, Christianity is seen as essentially a part of western culture. Jesus (however greatly they respect him) is the god of white and black people. Effective approaches will require:

- Conviction that Jesus is Saviour and Lord for people of every culture and race, including South Asians from Buddhist, Hindu, Jain, Muslim, Sikh or any other faith background
- Willingness to build bridges of friendship and trust through loving service, sharing common concerns and personal relationships. This is necessary to overcome barriers of suspicion or fear (for example with Muslim communities) and to get behind the misperceptions of 'Christianity' and focus on following Christ rather than becoming a 'Christian'
- Commitment to allow people to follow Christ within their culture and community. This will include awareness of family and community, rather than just individuals. It will be sensitive to forms of worship and religious language. It will consciously seek to develop new forms of church in which people can follow Christ in a way that is open to other members of their community, rather than separating them off. These forms will of course vary greatly.

The number of churches and groups doing this are still a handful. But there is growing evidence that their approach is beginning to bear fruit and will multiply in the next ten years.

The reasons for this lack of response are largely cultural. As already noted, most Asians have a high regard for Jesus. But they may have very negative perceptions of Christianity:

- It can be seen as essentially the same as Western culture. In Asian culture, religion, culture and community are tightly linked. You are born into your community and therefore into your culture and religion.
- Christianity is regarded as a religion in which there is freedom, but probably too much freedom, which leads to permissiveness. Whatever some Asians see of Western culture in the media they assume to be Christian. They want what is good in Western culture while retaining their own cultural identity.

- Hindus and Sikhs see all religions as essentially the same – different ways to God. So leaving your religion/community is unnecessary and wrong.

When people speak about “*becoming a Christian*” or “*coming to church*” Asians may hear them saying “*become Western*” or “*join our community*”.

Ram Gidoomal’s experience as a new follower of Christ could be echoed by many:

I still remember the awkwardness of my first visit to church - the looking back, nervous, worried about what my friends and family would say. Would they disown me?

Was I betraying my community and culture, by going to what we saw as a Western institution - because for many of us, Jesus Christ was the white man’s God. I even pictured him as a city gent, complete with pin-striped suit and bowler hat!

I had become a follower of Christ during my third year reading Physics at Imperial College, London. Although I had been a Christian for several months, I still had not been to a church service. Coming from a Hindu background, I was not sure which church I should go to. Had I become a Protestant or a Catholic? Or a Baptist? Or an Anglican?

It was some months later that I was invited to a worship service in a church. My first instinct when I entered the church building was to remove my shoes, as I had always done before entering a holy place - but everybody else was keeping their shoes on. Then I saw a carpeted area - perfect for sitting on to worship God. I headed towards it, but was directed to wooden pews which were most uncomfortable. And then to top it all, the organ started playing - and I thought, “My goodness, who’s died?” because I associated the organ with funerals. I struggled through the service until the sermon was preached - I was hooked. I came back week after week, just to hear the sermon and suffering through the other bits, but I would make sure to leave without talking to anybody. [6]

Along with this, some Asians may have had **bad experiences of racism**. Many may be quite content to remain **within their own community**.

At the same time Asians may be experiencing considerable tension and looking for answers. If our aim is for them to see that Christ can be the answer, then clearly there is a need for new approaches. These could be summarised as:

Building bridges

It is important to take the time and trouble to build bridges of friendship and relationship. This is both an expression of service and a step towards building relationships of trust. In other words it is a mark of our love, as well as justice. It generally involves finding common concerns that are relevant to all communities, and working together, for example in projects relating to young people or discrimination, racism, leisure activities and so on. It requires time to get to know people and get behind the stereotypes.

Fresh expressions of church

We need to find ways of working with families and groups rather than only individuals, and encouraging people to remain within their community culture when they follow Christ. One example is among a group of Gujarati Hindus who meet for a weekly *satsang* or *bhajan* group (*satsang* is a common form of group that meets for singing, prayer or discussion of religious topics). This group is called ‘*Isu satsang*’ because its focus is on *Isu* or Jesus. They sit on the floor, sing and pray in Gujarati. Over several years a number have become followers of Christ but they do not consider themselves ‘Christians’. They know that Christians are generally white (or black) people who go to churches and sit on benches and

they do not want to be that. Within their local Gujarati community, which is strongly opposed to 'Christian' culture and ways, and would not want its young people to identify with them, they are accepted, though not without initial suspicions that they were going to be 'converted'.

Such an approach opens up new possibilities. But it also raises questions. Where are the boundaries? What about baptism and communion? What symbols are appropriate? What about teaching from the Bible? (they study and teach the Bible in the group) Also, this model is highly contextualised on a certain type of Gujarati community. It is relevant to them, but only to them. How do you balance this with the truth of the unity and equality of all believers in Christ?

But there is no question that fresh approaches like this are needed. A good question to ask is 'When people come to Christ, what do you want them to become, culturally?' The answers could range from 'White British' to 'Black British' to 'South Asian Islamic or Hindu' to...?

Reaching British South Asians for Christ - is it a missed opportunity? The task sometimes seems impossibly large. So little appears to have been done. But there are signs that the churches are beginning to realise the challenge and opportunity. A growing number are willing to try fresh approaches and make use of resources from specialist organisations. [7]

Further resources

Resources are available from organisations in the Faith to Faith network (0121 633 8860, office@faithtofaith.org.uk) and from South Asian Concern (020 8770 9717, info@southasianconcern.org). Below is a list of South Asian Concern resources.



Belonging, Believing, Behaving

British Asian Discipleship in the 21st Century

What does it mean to be an Asian disciple of Jesus in Britain today? Material from the July 2000 Jewels in His Crown conference. £3.00

The British and How to Deal with Them:

Doing business with Britain's ethnic minorities

Ram Gidoomal, Deepak Mahtani & David Porter

A fascinating overview of UK ethnic minority business communities, with practical suggestions for further integration whilst preserving the unique qualities of the various communities. £16.99

Catalyst for Change: the South Asian Diaspora

Over 20 million South Asians live outside South Asia. This includes reports, stories and creative ideas to help the church understand and relate to this significant group. £3.00

Changing India: insights from the margin

Robin Thomson

Stories of people who are contributing to India's transformation.

"...well worth a read since it discusses carefully the all important and hotly pursued issue of the day in religious circles – conversion."

Bimal Krishna Das, National Council of Hindu Temples, UK £4.99 paperback, £8.00 hardback

Chapatis for Tea: Reaching Your Hindu Neighbour - A Practical Guide

Margaret Wardell & Ram Gidoomal

"It is the best book I have read for sharing the Gospel with the Hindu community." Vijay Menon £4.99

Good News for Asians in Britain

Sally J Sutcliffe (Editor)

Grove Booklet explaining how Jesus is Good News for Sikhs, Hindus and Muslims with contributions from those involved in ministry. £2.95

Lions, Princesses and Gurus

Ram Gidoomal & Margaret Wardell

Helpful to those who want to reach out in friendship to Sikhs, providing information on their spiritual heritage. £5.99

Looking for Directions: towards an Asian spirituality

Asks some of life's 'big' questions and offers a perspective, taking into account the concerns that young Diaspora Asians may have, but allows the reader to form their own judgement and response. £5.00

The New People Next Door

The 20th and 21st centuries have seen unprecedented movements of peoples, creating new and often intense challenges. This report from the 2004 Forum on World Evangelism combines analysis, Biblical principles, case studies and recommendations for creative involvement. £3.50

Sari 'n' Chips

Ram Gidoomal with Mike Fearon

This underground best-seller reveals the social issues of the British Asian community. £3.99

Sri Guru Granth Sahib Discovered (Hardback)

Hakim Singh Rahi

A reference book of quotations, for those who want to learn what the Sikh scriptures say about important religious topics. (hardback) £15.00

The UK Maharajahs (Hardback)

Ram Gidoomal

Looks at the Asians behind the tiger economy in Britain, one of fast and accelerating growth. Who are they? What's the secret of their success? £15.00

A Way of Life: Introducing Hinduism

Ram Gidoomal & Robin Thomson

An introduction to Hinduism as it is practised today - both in India and the Diaspora, concluding with Christian reflection on the issues raised. £6.99

Lion Handbooks - available in English and various Asian languages (£2.00 each):

Discovering Prayer: Gujarati / Hindi / Punjabi

Real Life Christianity: English / Hindi / Punjabi

User's Guide to the Bible: English / Hindi / Punjabi

What Christians Believe: English / Punjabi

Vishal Mangalwadi books:

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Notes:

¹ South Asia refers to the countries of the Indian sub-continent. The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), established in 1985 as an economic and political organisation, includes Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. (Afghanistan was included in November 2005. Myanmar (Burma) has close ties with the region, as well as with its neighbours in South East Asia).

² The expression 'British Asian' has become the common term for 'South Asians', for a variety of reasons. Though it is inaccurate - particularly in view of all the other Asian countries represented in the UK - it has been included in this paragraph simply to draw attention to its use. Elsewhere in this article we will use the term 'South Asian'. NB this term has also become problematic for some - see below.

³ About 90% of 'Indian' restaurants in the UK are run by Bangladeshis - they choose to call themselves Indian because the name is obviously better known - while the flavours they use are largely Punjabi. A welcome variation has come from the more recent growth of South Indian and Sri Lankan restaurants

⁴ *Looking for Directions: Towards an Asian Spirituality*, South Asian Concern, 2006, page 135

⁵ *The New People Next Door*, Lausanne Occasional Paper 55: Issue Group on Diaspora and International Students, South Asian Concern, 2005, pages 87-88

⁶ *Looking for Directions: Towards an Asian Spirituality*, South Asian Concern, 2006, page 125

⁷ *Faith to Faith* is a network that brings together most of those involved in outreach to South Asians in Britain. Many also co-operate through *Jewels in His Crown*, a conference every two years. Recently *Christian Vision for Men*, an evangelistic organisation, has appointed a Director for Asian outreach.

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The Growth of Christianity in Asia and its Impact on Mission



Author: Dr Julie Ma, Research Tutor (Missiology), Oxford Centre for Mission Studies.

1. Introduction

The gospel arrived in different parts of Asia at various times, and in many cases it blossomed through the collaborative work between missionaries and nationals. In spite of the errors and flaws of missionaries, and struggles between the two parties, the Holy Spirit has been at work in dispersing the gospel through fragile human agency.

To most Asians, Christianity was a foreign religion very different from their traditional religions such as Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Taoism and animism. It is a contrast between monotheism (except Islam) and polytheism. The latter believes in more than one god or spirit, thus allowing room to incorporate a new religious belief into the existing ones. This makes most traditional religions incredibly flexible and versatile. On the other hand, Christianity, with its absolute claims, has no such flexibility. As a result, when a conversion takes place in a family, it immediately causes friction and disharmony between the new Christian and the rest of the family who find it difficult that he or she now follows a “western” religion, and one that is stubbornly inflexible.

Another critical issue of the gospel bearers is the insensitivity to or even ignorance of the receptor’s culture and its practices. When one comes to Christ, the expectation of his or her church is for the new believer to abandon old religious practices immediately. We know that they should eventually be removed, but time should be allowed to make a gradual shift in his or her religious orientation, as the Word provides a basis for understanding and Christian fellowship provides an encouraging environment. Despite human errors and difficulties in the process, churches grew in number and influence, and some of them have become strong missionary-sending bodies. Western missionaries and the Asian church have come a long way.

In this brief study, I will highlight two aspects: the growth of Christianity in Asia, with particular examples coming from China and Korea, and the rapid development of Asian missions.

2. Christian Expansion in Asia

The book of Acts presents a pattern: where the gospel is heard, house churches are formed initially among a small number of believers. When the churches grow larger, members are sent to share the Word of God, and this in turn results in almost an automatic process of a house church movement. This pattern of expansion is noted in many parts of Asia.

2.1 China

China is regarded as the world’s most fruitful single mission field today. In spite of political suppression of religion, including Christianity, for decades, churches have been rapidly growing. The estimate of Chinese Christians current ranges anywhere between 20 million to 120 million, and some observers propose still higher numbers. [1] It is further noted,

According to the Chinese government itself, perhaps 20 million people, 1.6 percent of the total population, worship in government-registered churches, but that figure is an absolute minimum, which takes no account of unapproved congregations and private house churches. ... In its annual survey of International Religious Freedom, the U.S. State Department suggests that the total Chinese Christian population may run as high as 8 percent of the whole, 100 million souls. ... That would place the Christian population on par with the far older-established Chinese religion of Buddhism. [2]

If this statement is correct, then Christianity has not only survived under such inauspicious circumstances, but it has in fact enjoyed something of a population explosion through two generations of often violent anti-religious persecution. By this gauge, China today has ten times as many Christians as it did when Mao Zedong's forces began its control of the country in 1949. [3] What is more amazing is the missionary zeal among Chinese Christians. The popular "Back to Jerusalem" commitment, for example, has brought several scattered house church networks together for a higher goal.

Christianity has made rapid progress among overseas Chinese as well. In fact, the flourishing network of Chinese communities throughout the Pacific Rim makes the global role of Chinese Christianity more likely. Such a network not only mobilizes Chinese both within and without the country, but also provides an infrastructure for the missionary expansion of Chinese Christianity. Among other features, training programmes for missionary work are mushrooming in many countries.

2.2 South Korea

One immense Christian success story in Asia is South Korea. Christianity was first introduced to this "Hermit Kingdom" in the 1590s, initially as part of the broader Catholic missions to the Far East. Protestant missionaries came later, in the nineteenth century. The number of Christians in the country was only about 300,000 in 1920, but it has now ascended to 10 to 12 million, about a quarter of the national population. [4] It is stated that,

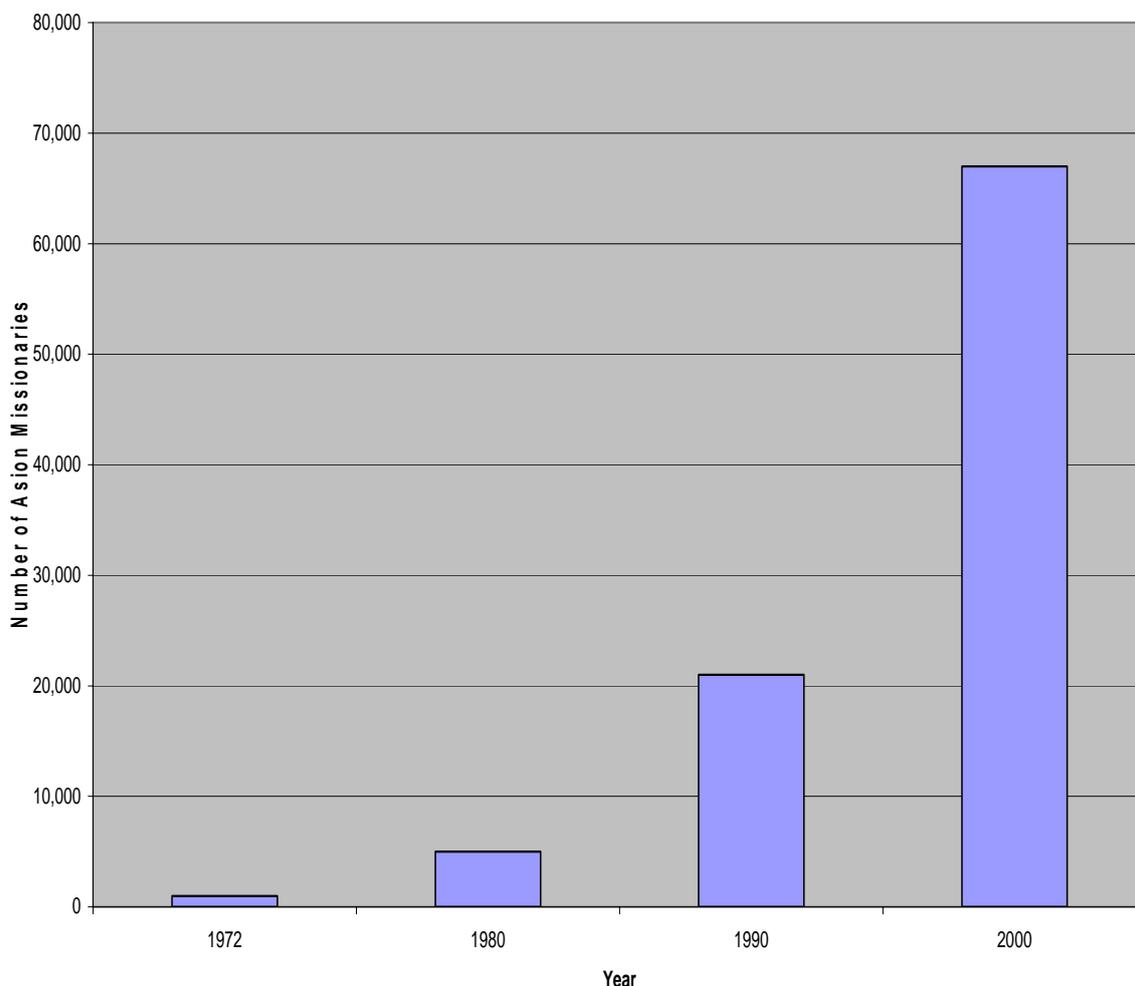
Korean Protestants outnumber Roman Catholics by about three to one, and, as in Latin America, protestant growth has been largely Pentecostal. At the time of the Korean War, the nation's Pentecostal believers could be counted only in the hundreds, but by the early 1980s, their ranks had swelled to almost half a million. [5]

Yoido Full Gospel Church in Seoul currently reports having 750,000 members, gaining it a place in the Guinness Book of Records as the world's largest solitary congregation. The Kwang Lim Methodist Church began with 150 members in 1971; it had 85,000 members by the end of the century. Many Protestant denominations have also recorded an exceptional growth. Today, there are approximately twice as many Presbyterians in South Korea as in the United States. [6] There are other mega churches across denominations. Korean churches indeed experienced spiritual and material blessings. With increasing economic success, the Korean church has become a strong missionary force, now deploying around 14,000 missionaries to over 180 countries. It has replaced the United Kingdom as the second largest missionary-sending country in the world.

3. Growing Missionary Movements in Asia

Since the 1960s, churches in the Two-Thirds World have gained the missionary vision and mission burden to send their own cross-cultural missionaries to other countries. Three billion people in Asia constitute 60% of the total world population, and fewer than 10 percent are Christian. Undoubtedly the spiritual need of Asia brings enormous challenges to the Christian church in Asia today. In 1975, there were 3,411 missionaries from the Two-Thirds World working in 86 countries and representing 209 mission agencies. [7] However, the number of missionaries sent each year has increased, achieving an average annual growth rate of 15.4 percent. [8]

Year	Number of Asian Missionaries	Note
1972	1,000	
1980	5,000	368% growth
1990	21,000	
2000	67,000	



4. Missionary Movements in Several Asian Countries

The increase of missionary commitment among several Asian nations is briefly discussed below.

4.1 Increase

According to the 1990-91 Directory of Korean Missionaries and Mission Societies, Korean churches sent 1,123 cross-cultural missionaries to 87 countries from 54 mission agencies. It is stated that “the Korean Church is financially capable of sending at least 5,000 missionaries, if churches in Seoul (7,000) offer only 10% of their total budget.” [9] Christianity Today forecast that the Korean church will soon be the most missionary-sending church. South Korea already sends more missionaries than any other countries but the United States of America, And it will be number one missionary sending nation before long. [10] The Korea World Missions Association (KWMA) has released current statistics of the Korean mission. The figure of Korean missionaries as of February 2006 is 14,086 in 180 countries (about 19,000 according to non-official counts). [11] The Korean church and mission agencies made a commitment to send one million tent-making missionaries by 2020 and 100,000 missionaries by 2030. [12] Although the above presented figure is beyond one’s imagination, with the Spirit of God it can be feasible. It is a bold faith projection, but not an impossible task.

There are 604 Filipino missionaries, working in 23 countries. Among several, one outstanding mission agency called the Asian Center for Missionary Education under the leadership of Met Castillo, has been used to train Filipino missionaries. [13]

More than 5,000 missionaries have been sent by the Indian churches to reach the numerous Hindus and Muslims inside and outside India. The India Evangelical Mission alone has 307 missionaries working on 52 stations. Funds come not from the West: they are supported through the sacrificial giving of Indian Christians. The motto of IEM, shared by Theodore Williams, the General Secretary, reflects this principle, “Vision, Faith and Sacrifice.” This indigenous missionary principle has become an important inspiration in bringing dynamic mobilization for mission. [14]

The Indonesia Missionary Fellowship which Petrus Octavianus directs has 280 missionaries. [15] Perhaps the current number of missionaries will become higher as more mission agencies and missionary fellowships are formed. The Indonesian Bible Institute in Batu-Malang of East Java has also actively been training missionaries.

4.2 Missionary Work

Several ministries characterise typical Asian missionary work.

4.2.1 Pre-Evangelism

There are many tools to bring people to Christ. One of them is pre-evangelism. Prior to actual evangelism, relational groundwork is crucial as this provides an excellent opportunity to know target people and their felt needs. The key is to identify a need which the missionary can really do something about. Personal involvement with the community’s problems is necessary before trying a large-scale evangelistic programme. Talking to social workers,

government officials, and newspaper reporters to find out the critical needs is helpful. For instance, if a town or community encounters a serious problem with an increase in drug addicts, holding a series of drug prevention seminars would aid people to open their hearts to Christians. Personal interactions between the seminar conductor (a missionary or any Christian resource person) and town people during the session will be a wonderful way to open their hearts to the gospel. Soon a house church can be established.

4.2.2 Power Evangelism

People in Asia in general are more person-oriented than westerners are. They tend to look at the universe and natural phenomenon, like storms and typhoons, as personal. Also the underlying religiosity of Asia is animism. In this milieu, the message of God's love is best expressed in the manifestation of his love in his power. As traditional Asian religions are centered on the concept of power, such ministry demonstrates God's supremacy over their deities.

For instance, the Irogort tribes in the Philippines, like many tribes, tend to be under the grip of fear. They view the spirit beings as inhabiting, and having control over, nature. Spirits, especially malevolent ones, are believed to cause sickness, volcanic eruptions, accidents, sudden death, bad luck, success or failure. [16] Often the spirits are vengeful and capricious. Naturally animists seek the help of spiritual power to have control over their environment. In such settings, one of the most biblical and effective approaches is the demonstration of God's power through healing, miracles and exorcism. This needs to be well complemented by the presentation of God's truth. The book of Acts shows this pattern: the two key biblical methods are power manifestation and preaching.

4.3 Social Concern

Western missionaries have engaged in a variety of social ministry, including education, orphanages, health clinics and hospitals, medical assistance, AIDS education, job training, drug rehabilitation, child care facilities and others. Asian missionaries are now engaged in diverse social ministries. In China, for example, Asian English instructors gain an easy access to the country and its people. In several countries, children's programmes such as feeding and caring for street children have proved to be significant mission work. Social development in Cambodia and relief work in disaster areas are some examples of growing ministries, often in partnership between Asian and western missionaries.

The Word of God should be in the centre of these works. We have to remember that all social concerns and development have its fulfillment only when Christ is presented as the Saviour.

5. Expansion of the Church: Emphasis on Reproduction

At the heart of missionary work is the planting and expansion of local churches. According to Bruce Metzger, [17] the church geographically experienced expansion to six locations. The first was throughout Jerusalem (Acts 1:1-6:7), as Acts 6:7 says, "...the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith" (6:7). Acts 1:8 also notes, "...and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem...." The second region was throughout Palestine (6:8-9:31): "Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace. It was strengthened: and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it grew in numbers, living in the fear of the Lord" (9:1). The third geographic expansion was beyond the Jewish boundaries (9:32-12:24): "But the word of

God continued to increase and spread” (12:24). The fourth location that the apostles reached was throughout Cyprus and into Central Asia Minor (12:25-16:5): “So the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers” (16:5). The fifth place was western Asia Minor (16:6-19:20): “In this way the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power” (19:20). The sixth and last location was Rome. During his journey to Jerusalem, Paul was arrested, but finally arrived at his destination, Rome (19:21-28:31). Luke is not only focusing on church growth but also the triumph of the new and liberating faith as it “breaks through barriers that are religious, racial and national.” [18]

Out of my own experience in church planting among a tribal group for more than a decade, I can stress that an important goal of a new church is to equip it to become reproductive. Normally at a church dedication, there is a good opportunity to remind the church of this call. In the middle of the celebration and thanksgiving, we make it a regular practice of challenging the church to plant daughter churches in nearby communities. In fact, our agreement with the congregation is that only through the reproducing work, will our partnership continue. It was our pledge to assist or work with them in developing new churches. Such a covenant often serves to stimulate them to begin a new house church in a nearby village where there is no Bible-believing church. In fact, some churches, anticipating our firm expectation, had already started new ministry before their church building was dedicated.

Frequently a ground-breaking ceremony would take place with a handful of believers under a big mango tree which protected them from the scorching sunshine. To our surprise, one by one, villagers would come to join the joyful gospel choruses. The quickest response usually came from children. As they were not yet religiously oriented to their traditional animistic beliefs, they were considerably receptive and open to the stories of the Gospel. Of course, the children were always full of curiosity. Often a vacation Bible school was held in an entirely odd place, and this has proved to be an exceptionally efficient means for evangelism. Soon their parents who watched them from a distance joined in this new Christian gathering. Labilab, an Ibaloi tribal village in Benguet Province of the Philippines, is a typical case. A nearby Ibaloi church sent a team to this community to offer a vacation Bible school. By the time of its conclusion, a new church was born. Now the church has its own building with about sixty active members. They are now helping their “daughter church” to build their own church. According to my mission experience, it is very important for missionaries to be involved in planting churches that will reproduce. This is multiplication of God’s Kingdom.

6. Conclusion

In this short paper, I have illustrated how Asian missionaries have made an important contribution to the expansion of the church. As part of this growing missionary movement, I was privileged to serve in a neighboring Asian country. Truly the Spirit of God’s missionary vision is among Asian churches and missionaries.

However, the missionary movement in Asia is only at its beginning. There are many issues which the Asian church has to tackle: the mobilization of local churches, the recruitment and training of missionary candidates, their support and care, religious pluralism, poverty, wide spread corruption, lack of resources and many others. However, the strongest motivation for mission is the sense of calling and the ever increasing number of committed young believers. I pray Asian churches and mission agencies will passionately work closely with one another and with western churches to mobilize the Asian church for God’s mission.

Endnotes:

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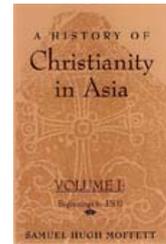
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A History of Christianity in Asia: Volume 1: From Beginnings to 1500 Volume 2: 1500 to 1900

By Samuel Hugh Moffett



Review by: Dr Kang San Tan, Head of Mission Studies, Redcliffe College.

Samuel Moffett's two-volume work on The History of Christianity in Asia is becoming a standard reference for students and missionaries interested in Asian Christianity. Previous history textbooks have generally not given adequate attention to the growth of Christianity in Asia, focusing instead on Western Christianity. Moffett's indispensable 2 volumes correct that imbalance.

The early presence of Christian communities in Persia, India, Pakistan and China are all fascinating discoveries for Asian Christians seeking historical legacies. Readers gain insights into the nature of the ascetic communities which became major mission forces from the third century onwards.

Although heavy reading with massive historical data, Moffett ably arouses the reader's interests with penetrating questions such as: What is the nature of "Nestorian Christianity" which went to China during the 7th Century? Were these Nestorian missionaries carrying an orthodox or syncretistic faith? Why did Nestorian Christianity disappear from China altogether, and what lessons for subsequent missionary work can we draw from these events? Of interest is Moffett's cautious support for the tradition that the apostle Thomas carried the gospel to India, which is treated as legend by many historians (pp. 25-39).

Volume 1 ends with a study of how Christianity survived during those challenging years from 1000 to 1500.

The second volume charts the growth of Christianity as a missionary movement in Asia, establishing the fact that Christianity was one of the truly great religions of Asia, alongside what was traditionally known as Asian religions such as Hinduism, Confucianism or Buddhism. Moffett explores how Christian missionary work advanced in the context of the Buddhist and Muslim kingdoms of South East Asia, and the successive persecutions of Christians in Japan in 1587, 1597 and 1614. He mixes historical narrative with personal stories of Christian martyrs.

The second volume is a tour de force covering the growth of Christianity in China, India, Korea, the Philippines, Ceylon, Burma and other parts of Asia, highlighting significant events, yet stopping to analyse some of the difficulties in the young church during these early periods. Moffett's study also makes an important contribution against the previously held belief that Christian expansion is synonymous with colonial expansion. While not denying its close relationship, Moffett offers repeated accounts where Western colonial masters could also be hostile against Christian missionary efforts.

His final concluding Epilogue, outlining 5 debatable generalisations regarding the history of Christian in Asia during the nineteenth century is worth further reflections and study. These are:

- 1) If the measure of growth is the number of Christian adherents, the nineteenth century was a great success
- 2) The nineteenth century was a Protestant century
- 3) A century of evangelism

- 4) A century of 'women in mission'
- 5) Its characteristic mission structure was the 'voluntary society.' (634-643)

Empires have come and gone, and yet the church of Jesus Christ remained and flourished despite persecutions.

These 2 volumes will strengthen the sense of Christian heritage for all Asian Christians. Both volumes give a resounding message for Christians worldwide, particularly in the Post-Christian West. Moffett concludes his massive 2 volumes with the following confidence claim:

Jesus Christ was born in Asia. Some say that Christianity has failed in Asia. Not so. The numbers tell us otherwise. And the mounting chorus of voices from Asia's Christians should remind us in the doubting West that God never fails.

Buy A History of Christianity in Asia: Vol 1 from [St Andrew's Bookshop](#).

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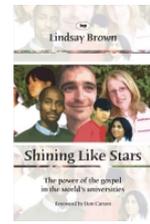
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Shining Like Stars: The Power of the Gospel in the World's Universities

by Lindsay Brown

Review by Tim Davy, Reviews Editor for Encounters.

Shining Like Stars is an account of the work of the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students (IFES) by its retiring General Secretary, Lindsay Brown.

It has a number of strengths. Firstly it is very well written with a clear, conversational style that draws the reader into the book and links the stories together very effectively.

Secondly, the whole book hangs together well using themes around which to structure the narrative. Issues covered include God's sovereignty and human effort, evangelism, world mission, social and political engagement, the power of the gospel to bring reconciliation and forgiveness, the call to sacrifice and the need to persevere. Each theme is reflected upon didactically and illustrated with rich examples of those principles in action in the student world.

Take, for example, the chapter on world mission. Brown begins by reflecting on the significance of universities for reaching into all people groups, noting the importance of international students on our own doorstep. Interestingly, he suggests that IFES was the first international mission organisation to appoint a non-Westerner as its leader (a Chinese Singaporean became its General Secretary in 1972). He highlights mission conferences as a key factor in students volunteering for the mission field and recounts a remarkable story of the 1991 mission conference in Nigeria where 1000 students came forward to go on a short term project to a Muslim country when the organisers only asked for 15! IFES, Brown says, has always sought to put cross-cultural work on the agenda of students. He then tackles some common objections to the missionary task and even reflects on the choice some have to make between keeping their families happy and obeying God's call on their lives. Finally, Brown considers the importance of integral mission and partnerships with other mission agencies. Most key points are illustrated by accounts of students putting these principles into practice; thus the reader is informed both by the stories themselves and explicitly (for example, in a box entitled: 'How to develop a world mission mindset').

Some of the stories Lindsay Brown recounts are deeply moving, but they are not overdone. The temptation, I am sure, would have been to cram in as many stories as possible, but each one seems to have been chosen carefully. They are taken from around the globe and emphasise the strength and importance of the non-Western church. It is perhaps a sobering thought that most of the stories recounted come from outside Europe.

Missionary biography is a tricky genre. How do you inspire without sounding judgmental or unattainable? How do you encourage readers to consider the importance of cross-cultural mission without playing down the reader's own mission situation at home or in the office? Lindsay Brown has done an admirable job at striking a balance between these things.

Shining Like Stars is a good read and full of practical wisdom into mission and discipleship. It would serve as a good narrative introduction to mission and, I suspect, will encourage the mission veteran with its realistic, yet confident assessment of the missionary endeavour.

Buy Shining Like Stars from [St Andrew's Bookshop](#).

Author: Lindsay Brown
Publisher: Inter-Varsity Press, 2006

ISBN: 1844741672

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