

AFTER BOSCH: TOWARD A FRESH INTERPRETATION OF THE CHURCH IN THE 21st CENTURY WORLD OF EAST ASIA

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Introduction

David J. Bosch brought to the writing of his major work, *Transforming Mission*,³ a rich background of training and experience. He earned his doctorate in 1957 under the great New Testament exegete, Oscar Cullmann, at the University of Basel.⁴ Following doctoral studies he returned to South Africa and served as a missionary with the Dutch Reformed Church in the Transkei. In 1971 Bosch became professor of missiology at the University of South Africa (UNISA), Pretoria, where he taught until his tragic death in an automobile accident April 15, 1992 at 63 years of age. Nearly his entire career took place in the shadow of apartheid, a policy that he opposed throughout his life. He took great satisfaction in seeing apartheid dismantled in 1990.

Transforming Mission is based on two assumptions. In the first place, Bosch had a strong sense that the Christian movement, of which mission is a non-negotiable essential, at the end of the twentieth century was in fundamental crisis and he wanted to provide guidance to Christian leaders as they worked through this phase. Second, he believed that the key to solving this crisis was a reformulation of the definition of mission so that it would be more biblical and, at the same time, appropriate to the dynamically changing context.⁵ His survey of “historical paradigms of mission” (*TM*, Part II) demonstrates that each conceptualization of mission reflects the conditions and perspectives of the era in which it was formulated. Inevitably paradigms, models, and definitions are shaped by the historical moment and cultural context in which they are developed. For this reason each generation must ask and answer two basic questions: (1) What is mission? (2) What does missionary faithfulness entail in this particular context? These questions are biblical-theological, on the one hand, and historical-cultural, on the other.

The theme of the “crisis of missions” is well established in mission history. In 1886 a leading American promoter of missions, A. T. Pierson, wrote *The Crisis of Missions*

³ David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1991).

⁴ David J. Bosch, *Die Heidenmission in der Zukunftsschau Jesu: Eine Untersuchung zur Eschatologie der Synoptischen Evangelien* (Zürich: Zwingli Verlag, 1959).

⁵ In the Introduction to *Transforming Mission*, Bosch indicates his main thesis: “The thesis of this book is that it is neither possible nor proper to attempt a revised definition of mission without taking a thorough look at the vicissitudes of missions and the missionary idea during the past twenty centuries” (8).

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in which he called for comprehensive mobilization of the church to carry out the Great Commission.⁶ Many others imitated Pierson's example in seeking to rally support for missions by decrying, on the one hand, the flagging zeal of the sending church, and, on the other, appealing to promising new opportunities that might galvanize mission supporters to new levels of commitment.

Pierson was by no means the first to propose a formula for total mobilization of the Christian population to complete the task of world evangelization. But his proposal is of interest for the way it reflected the prevailing *modern* perspective in the late nineteenth century. He argued that "the problem of missions" was "the lack of men and of means to occupy the field and to accomplish the work."⁷ He then calculated how the task could be accomplished by mobilizing the total Christian community. Pierson charged, "Nothing can be plainer, without argument, than that the church of Christ has never yet attempted to solve the problem of missions."⁸ He was convinced that "A spirit of consecrated enterprise should apply to this giant problem the best and soundest business principles."⁹ Pierson's vision reflects the confidence of his age in the ability of human rationality to solve whatever problem was at hand. Repeatedly, he urged that the principles on which sound business enterprise was based should be employed in the conduct of missions.

Two generations later the Dutch missiologist, Hendrik Kraemer, gave the theme of "crisis" substance and currency in his major work, *The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World*. He wrote this book at the request of the International Missionary Council (IMC) as the study volume for its 1938 assembly at Tambaram, India. Kraemer stressed that the crisis facing the church and the world at a particular moment represented the rising to the surface of forces and issues that had long been at work but were largely hidden from view. An apt analogy here would be the phenomenon of earthquakes. An earthquake is the culmination of long-term and hidden shifting of tectonic plates deep within the earth. "Strictly speaking," said Kraemer, "one ought to say that the Church is always in a state of crisis and that its greatest shortcoming is that it is only occasionally aware of it."¹⁰ The church's relation to the world ought to be marked by an "abiding tension between its essential nature and its empirical condition."¹¹ Typically, this will be experienced as a profound, and perhaps threatening, tension between the church and the world.

A fundamental antagonism separates the church from the world. The church has been placed in the world because the world does not recognize and honor its Creator. The

⁶ New York: Baker and Taylor, 1886.

⁷ Ibid, 321.

⁸ Ibid, 322.

⁹ Ibid, 327.

¹⁰ Hendrik Kraemer, *The Christian Message in the Non-Christian World* (London: Edinburgh House Press, 1938), 24.

¹¹ Ibid, 25.

church should understand itself to be a “divine-human society” living “between the times,” that is between Pentecost—the moment when the church was instituted—and the Eschaton—when the reign of God will be consummated. What is of interest to the church, at any given moment, therefore, is not the fact of a crisis per se; rather we should concern ourselves with discerning the nature of the present crisis and the kind of response that Christian faithfulness requires. Kraemer was writing at the time when National Socialism was gathering force and World War 2 was about to break out. The entire world, including missions, would soon be thrown into turmoil.

But the end of World War 2 did not result in tranquility for the world. A decade after publication of Kraemer’s book, Christian missions were plunged into a new crisis that would last into the 1960s. This crisis was triggered by the geopolitical changes that followed World War 2. The world quickly became polarized between the Soviet-led communist bloc and the United States-led Western bloc. Added to this was the growing momentum for the political independence of peoples who had been colonized by European colonial powers. Indonesian nationalists led the way with their declaration of independence in 1945—not to be realized until 1949—and India became a sovereign nation in 1947. But the main act in this drama was the Communist takeover in China and the consequent expulsion of all foreigners, including missionaries. What made the “closing of China” the “main act,” so far as Christians were concerned, was the fact that in the twentieth century more foreign missionaries were assigned to China than any other country. For many mission observers the credibility of the entire missionary enterprise was tied to the success or failure of the missions in China. The “loss” of China cast doubt on foreign missions generally.

Indeed, the expulsion of missionaries from China quickly became proof positive of the “failure of Christian missions.” The Indian historian and diplomat, K. M. Panikkar, devoted one chapter in his book, *Asia and Western Dominance*,¹² to Christian missions in Asia. Panikkar concluded his survey of missions with the assertion: “It cannot be denied that the attempt to convert Asia has definitely failed. In China, where conditions seemed to be particularly favourable, the collapse has been most complete.”¹³ He suggested that this failure was not inevitable and buttressed his conclusion with five observations that are worth noting. First, the missionary’s witness was undercut by an attitude of moral superiority and self-righteousness. The core problem, according to Panikkar, was the exclusive Christian claim to divine truth, a claim “alien to the Hindu and Buddhist mind.” Second, the close association of Christian missions with imperialism inevitably linked the missionary with the deeply resented interference in national affairs by foreign powers. Third, the attitude of European superiority toward other cultures that led to missionary attempts to introduce

¹² K. M. Panikkar, *Asia and Western Dominance: A Survey of the Vasco Da Gama Epoch of Asian History, 1498-1945* (London: George Allen and Unwin, Ltd., 1953).

¹³ *Ibid*, 297.

Western education and science was experienced as “Western cultural aggression.” Fourth, the multiplicity of Christian churches and “sects” undermined Christian credibility. And, fifth, the rise of unbelief in Europe from the nineteenth century on was a part of the growing crisis of Western civilization that came to a head in World War I and the Russian revolution. This weakening of Western culture, said Panikkar, contributed to the failure of Christian missions.¹⁴ Typical of many critics of Christian missions as essentially one facet of Western expansion and global domination, Panikkar could not concede the possibility that an indigenous Christianity might develop so that through indigenous agency resources of leadership and community life were being developed that would mark the Christian faith as unmistakably Asian.

Critical reflection on Christian missions in China was not left to secular experts alone. Mission agencies and scholars of mission studies undertook extensive post-mortems. One of the early assessments was David M. Paton’s *Christian Missions and the Judgment of God*, a searching examination of the missionary enterprise in China published the same year as Panikkar’s book.¹⁵ Paton argued that the recent “closing of China” was God’s judgment on Christian missions because of their close alliance with Western expansion and conquest of other peoples.

The “China debacle” continued to occupy scholars for another twenty years. Because contact with China was limited and reliable information was difficult to obtain, it was not easy to determine the actual situation. What was known was that the Chinese churches and individual Christians were among the special targets of the communists, with many Christians having been persecuted and imprisoned. Consequently, few people were prepared for what came to light following the “opening” of China in 1979: a church tested in the fires of persecution that had not only survived but grown. Convincing and heroic evidence was now at hand that the Christian movement had indeed taken root in the soil of China with sufficient strength that it had withstood systematic and sustained oppression over a period of thirty years without being stamped out. Every indication was that in spite of persecution the church in China had grown substantially.

Even a cursory review shows that momentous changes have taken place over the past two centuries. Modernity has aged and passed into a new stage—variously called hyper-modernity, radical modernity, or postmodernity. Regardless of the term one prefers, in reality modernity is not what it once was. Similarly, geopolitical realities have been transformed. The intellectual vision of the Enlightenment seemed destined to put an end to religion. But by the 1960s it became evident that religion had not disappeared. On the

¹⁴ Ibid..

¹⁵ David M. Paton, *Christian Missions and the Judgment of God* (London: SCM Press, 1953). Cf. Chao Fu-San, “The Penitence and Renewal of the Church in China,” in David M. Paton, ed., *Essays in Anglican Self-Criticism* (London: SCM Press, 1958), 86-98.

contrary, religion was thriving but there were puzzles to be solved. What enabled some religions to adapt to the changing culture successfully while others were dying out?

Already by the end of the nineteenth century the established church in Europe, the historical heartland of Christendom and mother of the modern mission movement, was in visible decline. And a century later this trend has not been reversed. At the same time, in other parts of the world the church was being established in many cultures where, historically, the Christian faith had not previously been found. Andrew Walls has theorized that over the course of the past two millennia, Christianity has developed serially.¹⁶ Unlike Islam whose identity is linked to territorial control, the Christian movement has repeatedly become extinct in areas where once there was a thriving church. Each wave of expansion has been followed by decline. The church has survived because fresh mission impulses have relocated the vital center of the Christian movement. Our task here is to reflect on the emerging new empirical situation and to ask what this means for the future of Christian faith.

The New Empirical Situation

Three features of the new empirical situation seem particularly important as we seek to understand the next phase of the Christian movement: (1) globalization, (2) the changing demographic reality, and (3) the new locus of initiative.

Globalization: the new environment. The perception that the world is being bound ever more closely together through systems of transportation, communications, and relationships is not new; but the pace and scope of this process has accelerated as modernity has continued to develop and extend its influences worldwide. “Modernity is inherently globalizing,” asserts Anthony Giddens.¹⁷ The modern economy has been one of the main engines driving globalization. The global economic system continues to modify the production process so that the old ideas about “economic nationalism” are becoming passé. Yet we can also exaggerate the degree to which the world has, in fact, become a “global village.”

The Cold War dominated the post-World War 2 period during which the world was divided into two power blocs. This bipolar pattern characterized the world system from 1945 until 1990.¹⁸ The collapse of the Soviet bloc around 1990 brought this period to an abrupt end and opened the way for accelerated globalization of the world socio-economic system. At the same time globalization set in motion countervailing impulses that are stimulating local, ethnic, and regional forces to assert themselves over against perceived

¹⁶ This is a recurring theme in Walls’ writings. See, e.g., Andrew F. Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission and Appropriation of Faith* (Orbis Books, 2002), especially chapt. 1.

¹⁷ Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 63.

¹⁸ See Wilbert R. Shenk, *Changing Frontiers of Mission* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1999), chapt.

powerful external threats. For this reason we cannot speak about the global without also taking account of the local. To understand these processes we must consider the relationship between culture and globalization.

“Globalization lies at the heart of modern culture; cultural practices lie at the heart of globalization,” according to John Tomlinson.¹⁹ Globalization is comprised of the systems and processes that are leading to increasing degrees of “complex connectivity” and this is directly reflected in culture. Modern culture and globalization exist in a symbiotic relationship. Since culture consists of those practices that structure life—economics, mass media, politics, family life, education, and religion—the effects of globalization are evident in each area. Not only are goods and services being transported all over the world, but millions of people are migrating from one continent to another continuously. Globalization means that the local is always in tension with the global. The one cannot be understood in isolation from the other.

Changing demographics: shifting southward and eastward. When the landmark World Missionary Conference was held at Edinburgh, Scotland in 1910, approximately seventy-six percent of all Christians lived in the historic Christian heartland with twenty-four percent in Asia, Africa, Latin America and Oceania. Christian consciousness was shaped by the perception that leadership and resources would continue to flow from the West to the rest of the world. The slogan adopted by the Student Volunteer Movement in 1886—“The Evangelization of the World in this Generation”—still found strong response among young people so that by 1920 the SVM had recruited some 20,000 European and American students for foreign missions service. Nonetheless, World War I was a watershed event and by the end of the war the historical tide began to turn against a Eurocentric world.

Although modern missions had started in the late eighteenth century, after more than a century their long-term impact was not yet evident to most people. Occasionally, someone like William Temple, on the occasion of his enthronement as Archbishop of Canterbury in 1943, would remark about “the great new fact of our time,” namely, that the church had become a global reality. But this “fact” did not register with the vast majority of Christians throughout the world. Western Christians continued to assume that they were operating from the center and all other Christians understood that they were on the distant periphery. This perception was reinforced by two devastating world wars conducted by nations that comprised the *modern* world. This world controlled industrial, economic, scientific, political, and military power. Other peoples had to pay tribute to them.

Nonetheless, a counter-movement was taking shape. In 1970 David B. Barrett published an article that announced, “A.D. 2000: 350 Million Christians in Africa.”²⁰ Barrett’s statistics caught many readers by surprise and generated some controversy. If

¹⁹ John Tomlinson, *Globalization and Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 1.

²⁰ *International Review of Mission* 59 (January 1970):39-54.

Barrett was right, something extraordinary had been happening. The number of Christians on the periphery was growing impressively while Christian adherents in the West had been declining throughout the twentieth century. Indeed, based on the trends Barrett had identified, it seemed likely that by the year 2000 the majority of Christians would be found in Asia, Africa, Latin America, and Oceania. It is now clear that Barrett's predictions were quite accurate and this shift had indeed taken place so that at the beginning of the new millennium sixty percent of the two billion Christians in the world were located outside the West. Not since the "evangelization" of Europe and its emergence as the heartland of Christendom some fifteen hundred years ago has such a decisive shift occurred. We are only beginning to understand and assess its implications.²¹

Changing locus of initiative. One of the most important implications of this southward and eastward shift is the redistribution of power and initiative from the historic center, i.e., Europe and North America, to the emerging new centers. In other words, the old center-periphery pattern is breaking down and the emergence of multiple centers is already beginning to relativize the importance of the old center in the West. To be sure, by virtue of its financial and institutional resources the West continues to exert influence; but what should be noted are the emerging trends that are redefining Christian reality.

By 1850 mission leaders like Rufus Anderson (1796-1880) and Henry Venn (1796-1873) were insisting that the aim of missions was to establish the church where it was not present. But they added an important qualification. They had observed that churches that were replicas of the churches in Europe or North America—the churches that were sponsoring the missionaries—were doomed to fail. Transplanting the "mother" church inevitably resulted in churches that could not take root in the host culture. Such churches would not survive. Venn and Anderson called for establishing *indigenous* churches and set forth three criteria by which to measure how effectively the missionaries were doing their work. An indigenous church was one that was supporting itself, governing itself, and evangelizing its culture.

The history of missions of the past two centuries is filled with accounts of missionary failure in too many situations to produce indigenous churches. But let us be clear. It would be quite unfair to assign blame for this outcome to the missionaries alone. They were the agents of a worldview that held that modern Western culture was superior to other cultures and was the appropriate cultural wrapping in which the Christian message ought to be presented. Given the historical-cultural baggage the missionaries carried along with them from the West, it is not difficult to understand that they created a system that

²¹ Already by the 1960s Andrew F. Walls drew attention to this global transformation of Christianity. See the Introduction and chapter 6 of *The Missionary Movement in Christian History* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1996). Cf. Dana L. Robert, "Shifting Southward: Global Christianity Since 1945," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 24:2 (April 2000):50-58; and Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

encouraged dependence on the mission from the outset; and once this pattern was established, it was exceedingly difficult to root out. Yet the story is not one of unrelieved failure. It has been mitigated in two important ways: (1) instances where missionaries established churches with a healthy sense of self-responsibility from the outset; and (2) the fact that much of the work on the ground was done by indigenous Christians, not the missionaries.

The Korean churches are an outstanding example of churches that had a sense of self-responsibility from the beginning. It is generally agreed that the brief visit by John Nevius (1829-1893) to Korea in 1891 was pivotal. Nevius had served as a missionary in China since 1854 and wrote a small book based on his experience of planting indigenous churches. The fledgling missions in Korea were eager for help in laying a proper foundation for their work. These missionaries took to heart Nevius's ideas for establishing an indigenous church from the outset—i.e., before the patterns and habits of dependence on the mission got established. Note that this was essentially a missionary problem, not an inherent weakness in the new church.

One of the egregious gaps in mission history is the lack of documentation of the role of indigenous evangelists, catechists, Bible women and Christian lay people without whom the missionary would have been unable to work. Mission archives, annual reports to the home board, and missionary biographies seldom record the names of this large corps of dedicated Christian workers. It becomes evident, for example, that when missionaries were forced to leave China in 1949 and the future of the church was entirely in the hands of the Chinese, this group of people was indispensable in transforming a dependent church into a self-reliant movement.

These exceptional cases did little to overcome the widespread feeling that modern missions had failed to solve the problem of establishing viable indigenous churches. Consequently, it was difficult for Western missions and churches to believe that their counterpart churches in Asia, Africa, and Latin America might eventually outgrow the old patterns and discover new ones. Today we can cite a host of examples of churches that demonstrate that the ideal advocated by Rufus Anderson and Henry Venn was not only achievable but, indeed, was indispensable to being a viable church.

One indicator of the changing locus of initiative is the emergence of new centers of missionary sending by the churches of Asia, Africa, and Latin America. The sheer variety of patterns indicates that these are not mere copies of the classical mission methods of the past two centuries. The Korean churches have been leading the way in sending missionaries abroad. More than 10,000 Koreans are in missionary service on all continents today.²² A contrasting example is that of India where a reported 24,000 Indians, sponsored by 182

²² Steven S. C. Moon, "Korean Missionary Movement: A Record of Growth, and More Needed Growth," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 27:1 (Jan. 2003):11-17 .

indigenous mission agencies, are serving as *cross-cultural* missionaries throughout India.²³ Among Mennonites two trends can be observed. On the one hand, the number of cross-cultural workers sent from Europe and North America the past two decades has been declining. On the other hand, during the decade of the 1990s Mennonites launched fifty new missions and more than half of these new initiatives were taken by Mennonite churches in Asia, Africa, and Latin America.²⁴ Some of these new ventures are being carried out cooperatively with resources contributed by churches from several continents. Others rely on the support of one sponsoring church.

The New Agenda

The modern mission movement has effectively ended and a new stage is emerging. The “crisis of missions” of the past fifty years appears to be giving way to a new phase in which the West will no longer be the dominant influence. New centers of initiative are emerging and models and patterns of mission geared to the new situation are being introduced. In light of the new empirical situation, it is appropriate to ask what are the priority concerns. Within the scope of this paper we will confine our consideration to two important areas that are central to Christian identity and mission.

Historical studies. During July and August, 1998 Professor Andrew Walls, from Edinburgh, Scotland, spent six weeks traveling up and down the Indian Sub-continent discussing with Indian church historians the importance of teaching church history from the viewpoint of the Indian experience. Seminaries in India, governed by an Indian accrediting association, are required to follow traditional church history syllabi that assume that church history is concerned primarily with the history of European Christendom. Indian church historians have not been allowed to develop a curriculum that reflects the nearly 2,000 years of Christian developments in India. The problem is not a lack of rich and valuable materials; rather it is the mindset that says that church history is concerned with what took place in Europe while developments in India are “mission” history. The latter is regarded as inferior to the former and there is no suggestion that Western scholars have thought seriously about the possibility that a mission-founded church can ever gain the status of a fully legitimate church.²⁵

²³ Reported in K. Rajendran, “Developing the Future Leadership of the Church/Missions for impacting India,” *Indian Missions* (April, 2003), 24-35.

²⁴ Wilbert R. Shenk, *By Faith They Went Out* (Elkhart, IN: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 2000), 83-85.

²⁵ Cf. Andrew F. Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1996), chapt. 11, “Structural Problems in Mission Studies.” In this clear-eyed analysis of “structural” problems, Walls shows the blinders Western academics wear and their almost congenital inability to recognize the way the Christian world has changed. Consequently, they have yet to consider what this will demand in terms of fundamental revisions of curricula in various fields. Philip Jenkin’s new book, cited above, is a welcome challenge to the Western academic establishment.

Philip Leung, professor of history in Chinese University of Hong Kong, drawing on his own experience as a Christian Chinese scholar, has described the evolution in his own understanding.²⁶ When Leung began doing historical research and writing in the early 1970s, he accepted uncritically the “mission history” approach pioneered by Kenneth Scott Latourette in the 1920s. For his doctoral dissertation he wrote a well-received study of Young J. Allen, a leading nineteenth-century Methodist missionary to China. Gradually, Leung realized that this approach effectively excluded major aspects of the Chinese part of this history. At the same time he recognized that his quest was more than merely an academic exercise. He was “motivated by a sense of duty as a Christian historian and as a concerned member of the Chinese church engaged in a passionate search for self-identity.”²⁷ His search was personal, intellectual, and professional.

Leung allied himself with other scholars who shared the goal of making China, Chinese men and women, and the Chinese church subjects—i.e., actors—rather than objects of scholarly investigation. They were determined to do this without falling into the opposite trap of studying only the Chinese dimension of this history. They recognized that the development of the church in China has been a collaborative undertaking. To tell the story in all its richness the historian must work with the cause-and-effect interactions that shape this history. Leung asserts that the historian must always ask: who is represented and who is omitted from a particular account? This provides a safeguard against historical reductionism.

Nothing less than the reconceptualization of Christian history is required. The first step is to free the history of the Christian movement throughout the non-Western world from the old categories. The next step will be to see that history in relation to developments in the West. The territorial and ecclesiastical assumptions associated with historical Christendom are a serious impediment to understanding Christianity as a global movement that exists in diverse contexts, each part of which must be understood on its own terms as well as in relation to the whole. We should start by recognizing that the history of the Christian movement is a particular stage in the unfolding history of the People of God. In

The Strands of Christian History

Expansion of Christianity
Historical theology and doctrine
Role of scripture
Congregational life
Ecclesiastical structures: Local-National-Continental-Global

²⁶ Philip Yuen-Sang Leung, “Mission History versus Church History: The Case of China Historiography,” in Wilbert R. Shenk, ed., *Enlarging the Story: Perspectives on Writing World Christian History* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2002), chap. 3.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 55.

Ecumenics
Renewal movements
Monastic movements
Spirituality
Biographies of leaders
Heresies
Church in relation to cultural and political
The arts, music, iconography

other words, the history of the church cannot be written without reference to its antecedents—the people of Israel and the Christ event. Furthermore, the history of the church consists of multiple strands, as depicted in the chart.

History that will serve the needs of the church in a particular locale or nation must be based on the materials generated by that church. This will, of course, be supplemented with materials that show linkages with churches elsewhere and place the history of the local church in the wider sweep of the Christian movement. The need for this kind of local and regional history has been recognized for at least a generation.

Church history projects were initiated in the early 1970s in India and Latin America.²⁸ The Church History Association of India has already published eight volumes. But this kind of work has only begun. There are urgent concerns about the assembling and preserving of primary source materials in parts of the world where archives have not yet been established and climatic conditions make the preservation of archival materials difficult. And the sheer scale of the task has increased exponentially over the past century. ***Theological and missiological studies.*** To serve the community of faith theology must engage the life-issues that concern that community in its day-to-day existence. A main concern up to this point is that the Western inheritance continues to exercise great influence over the church in other parts of the world. It is a disabling and disempowering influence to the extent it distracts the non-Western churches from focusing on their own theological and missiological issues. When Masaya Odagaki concludes in the 1990s that Japanese theologians have not yet begun to address the Japanese context effectively, I take this to

²⁸ I summarize briefly the main examples of these initiatives in my article, "Toward a Global Church History," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 20:2 (April 1996):54.

mean that theology and missiology in Japan still has not found its stride.²⁹ Although their situation is different in important respects, I have heard Korean theologians express similar concerns about Korea. In both cases there is a sense of depending too much on foreign theological capital. This situation presents an important opportunity: *The churches in East Asia ought to address directly this need for a contextually appropriate missionary theology for East Asia by setting up a project that would sponsor such a development over the next ten years.* In doing this it is worth reviewing initiatives that have already attempted to address aspects of this concern.

One of the most important developments since 1970 has been the introduction of the concept of contextualization. It represents an attempt to overcome key elements of the seventeenth-century Enlightenment. This innovation has influenced both academic study and applied ministry. According to the Enlightenment the goal of intellectual labor was to formulate universal principles that met rigorous scientific standards and would be applicable everywhere.³⁰ Since context was suspect, the goal was to derive knowledge that was independent of context. This perspective guided and inspired the modern intellectual enterprise and, inevitably, Western missionaries were shaped by this view. Missionaries assumed that the theology they took with them to other lands was normative.³¹ The model of theological education used the world over has, of course, been Western. But such training produced results that were troubling to astute observers. This kind of theology did not help the non-Western churches grapple with their own cultures and develop an identity that enabled an Indian, or Indonesian, or Chinese, or Japanese believer to be fully Christian and culturally authentic

One such defining moment occurred in 1900 as a result of the Boxer Uprising in China. A young Anglican missionary living adjacent to the British Legation in Beijing observed the whole terrifying affair at close range. Roland Allen (1868-1947) was greatly

²⁹ Masaya Odagaki, "Theology After 1970," in *A History of Japanese Theology*, ed. Y. Furuya (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Co., 1997), 113-40. Cf. Wilbert R. Shenk, "Recasting Theology of Mission: Impulses from the Non-Western World," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 25:3 (July 2001):98-107.

³⁰ Cf. Stephen Toulmin, *Cosmopolis: The Hidden Agenda of Modernity* (New York: The Free Press, 1990).

³¹ A colleague once told me that he took along to his mission assignment a full set of Barth's *Church Dogmatics* but never opened the books during his years of service. This style of European theology seemed out of place in Asia. In a dynamic situation new issues were continually being presented.

disturbed by the fact that the Boxers singled out Christian Chinese as a special target, charging them with being disloyal because they had embraced a “foreign” religion. In 1912 Allen published his seminal work, *Missionary Methods: St. Paul’s or Ours?*³² Allen argued that something is fundamentally wrong when the so-called gospel robs converts to the Christian faith of cultural authenticity.

In subscribing to the Enlightenment idea that knowledge could be separated from context, the Western missionary movement had fallen into the trap of presenting Western culture as the normative expression of universal knowledge and the standard for Christian practice. Allen attacked this fallacy because he believed it was subverting the development of authentically Christian churches in the non-Western world. The missionary movement was producing proselytes rather than converts. The issue debated and decided by the Jerusalem Council, as reported in Acts 15, had come back to haunt the churches founded by the modern mission movement.

The Theological Education Fund formally initiated the contextualization movement in 1972, but, as already noted, this was preceded by years of ferment and search by such people as Roland Allen, J. H. Oldham, Shoki Coe, D. T. Niles, and others. The contextualization movement was launched at the same time that liberation theology was emerging as a significant new theological force. The fact that these two movements coincided meant that each benefited from the other. Within a decade a range of liberation theologies had been introduced from Latin America, North America, Africa, and several countries in Asia. Each insisted that it was responding to the issues of injustice and oppression of its particular context. Significantly, both contextualization and liberation theologies influenced virtually all ecclesiastical traditions—from Roman Catholic to evangelicals and Pentecostals.

The theological anchor of contextualization is the incarnation, demonstrated in God’s sending of the Son into the world (John 1:14). The gospel can only be enacted and experienced in culture. People always encounter the gospel in their life situation. Reflection on this encounter cannot be done in the abstract and at a distance. It must be carried out in the ebb and flow of life. The contextualization movement has stimulated a

³² Reprinted by William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1962.

new awareness of the importance of theological and missiological reflection. Yet in a world of accelerating and radical change, there is a need to extend and intensify these efforts.

The Latin American Theological Fraternity (LATF) provides one model for promoting theological and missiological development related to the life of the church. Instead of accepting theology and missiology from the ecclesiastical and political center in the “North,” the LATF took on the challenge of rethinking missionary theology from the standpoint of people on the periphery, i.e., the South.³³ To guide this process the LATF adopted a platform statement that affirmed:

we should seek with equal care to avoid theological imperialism or theological provincialism. A church’s theology should be developed by the community of faith out of the Scripture in interaction with other theologies of the past and present, and with the local culture and its needs.³⁴

In developing such a theological and missiological program, Samuel Escobar has proposed a two-pronged approach: (1) a *critical task*, and (2) a *constructive task*. The critical task involves critical interaction with the various contemporary theologies. For example, in the 1970s several Latin American evangelicals interacted with the Roman Catholic and Ecumenical liberation theology movements and formulated an evangelical theology of liberation.

The constructive task will involve developing a theology that supports, guides, and motivates the church in its missionary engagement with its culture. Such constructive work entails a reconsideration of the main themes of theology: the Kingdom of God, Christology, ecclesiology, social ethics, and evangelization.

³³ A major contributor to this process of reorientation was Orlando Costas (1945-1986). His last book, *Liberating News* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W. M. Eerdmans Co., 1987), published posthumously, develops the analytical framework effectively based on the Galilee-Jerusalem typology.

³⁴ Cited by Samuel Escobar, *Changing Tides: Latin America and World Mission Today* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2002), 114. Escobar’s book contains many other ideas that would be useful in any attempt to develop the kind of initiative suggested above.