

Introduction

IT HAS BEEN WELL established that the centers of Christianity have moved to the parts of the world known as the Majority World or the global South. Whereas up to the first half of the twentieth century, the main theaters of the global Christian movement were European and North American cities such as London, Geneva, and New York, today they are found in southern metropolises such as Seoul, Buenos Aires, Nairobi, and Sao Paulo. As historians of missions have been reminding us of late, after some four hundred years of Western dominance, Christianity has entered a period of Western retrenchment and non-Western advancement.¹

This historic change in the landscape of global Christianity has already begun to be felt in various areas of the life of the worldwide church, including theology. As recently as the middle of the twentieth century, the theological reflection that was produced in Europe and the United States enjoyed virtually total hegemony over the rest of the world. Following the early period of the Christian movement, when many of the leading figures of Christian thought came from North Africa, theology essentially flowed from North to South.² For this reason, Majority World theologians were educated and trained in Europe and North America, and, in the main, their theological endeavors consisted in importing European and American theologies to their lands of origin. But as time elapsed, this foreign theological diet proved less and less satisfying to the inhabitants of the non-Western regions of the globe. While Christians in the global South have undeni-

1. See for example Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History*; Walls, "Christian Scholarship and the Demographic Transformation of the Church," 173, 174; Sanneh, *Whose Religion is Christianity?*

2. In his book entitled *How Africa Shaped the Christian Mind*, Thomas Oden has shown that Christian thought began to develop in Africa centuries before it penetrated Europe and America.

ably learned much from mainstream European and American theologies, they have found them lacking in many ways. Increasingly, they see in these theologies features that are merely reflective of their own geographical and cultural contexts. As a consequence, they find them inadequate to address the burning realities of other regions of the globe. Some even argue that aspects of the theology produced in the West are less than faithful to the biblical witness about the reality of the triune God and the gospel.

As the twentieth century passed its midpoint and was rushing toward its end, a growing number of Majority World theologians came to realize that they could, in fact, do theology in their own contexts for the benefit of their own people. Thus, from the 1960s onward, theologians in the global South have embarked on a form of theological reflection which has some time been described as “contextual” reflection or “contextualized theology.”

The first major modern attempt at the formulation of a homegrown Majority World theology occurred in Latin America and was called “liberation theology.” This theology purported to be a theology of liberating praxis that speaks from the viewpoint of those who live at the margins of the dominant social structures.³ From its very inception Liberation Theology has generated a great deal of controversy, both on the Latin American scene and abroad. But despite the concerns it evoked, it is undeniable that liberation theology did provide a platform and an impetus for Majority World theologians in various parts of the globe to raise their own voices for a genuinely global theological engagement. One should not lose sight of the fact that it was in the aftermath of the launch of liberation theology that a body such as the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT) emerged. Also, following the launch of LT, social groups in various parts of the world, who became conscious of their own condition of disenfranchisement, have found in the new theology a way to interpret Christian faith and a channel to press for the redress of their situations. Of the many examples that could be cited one thinks of Dalit theology in India, African liberation theology, particularly the anti-apartheid theology of South Africa, *Minjung* theology of South Korea, and feminist theology in its various forms and expressions. And besides these theologies that lean toward a liberation perspective, there are others that were motivated by a search for cultural identity and anthropological affirmation.⁴

It has been pointed out that some of these theologies have shown the influence of philosophical underpinnings considered extrinsic to biblical

3. Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation Revised Edition*, xxix.

4. This is by and large true for instance of the theological thought that developed in Sub Saharan Africa.

revelation, either because they allegedly reflect the influence of Marxist sociopolitical and economic analysis, which is grounded in the notion of an ongoing class struggle, or because they are deemed too bound to the cultural contexts from which they emerged. Based on this critique, some doubt that these theologies can pass the test of orthodox Christian theology.

It is very important to appreciate, however, that since the 1970s, theologians in various parts of the Majority World have sought to conduct the theological task in a manner that has endeavored to be faithful to Scripture and responsive to the needs of their own cultural and social contexts. A prime example of this is the International Fellowship of Evangelical Missions Theologians (INFEMIT), which has endeavored to articulate an evangelical missiology in the context of the majority world that accords prime place to the features of holism and transformation.⁵ These efforts have resulted in a theological reflection which, we believe, would be beneficial for Christians in other parts of the world to know about. It is this conviction that motivates the production of this book. Convinced of the importance of the theological reflection that is now taking place in the Majority World, the editors of this book have invited a group of Majority World theologians to share their reflections on several themes of Christian faith from their own socio historical perspectives but with an unswerving commitment to the authority of Scripture. We hope that this modest effort will be used by Christians in the West to engage the perspectives of fellow believers in the global South and benefit from their reflections on our common faith.

The book consists of four parts, each dealing with a set of theological themes. The themes selected for treatment are: God and Humanity, Christ and Salvation, the Holy Spirit and the Church, and Eschatology and Mission. Each set of themes is addressed from a variety of perspectives. For example, Part I, which focuses on the twin themes of God and humanity, explores these foci from an African perspective (Abel Ndjérareou), a Caribbean vantage point (Burchell Taylor), and an Asian perspective (Ng Kam Weng). Part II zeroes in on the themes of Christ and salvation and explores them from the lenses of an Asian theologian (Carver Yu), a Latin American thinker (David del Salto), and two Caribbean theologians (Delano Palmer and Dieumeme Noelliste). Part III discusses the themes of the Holy Spirit and the Church and broaches these loci from an African vantage point (Isaac

5. INFEMIT was established in 1987 and embraces three continental evangelical movements from the majority world, namely, the Latin American Evangelical Theological Fraternity, the African Theological Fraternity and Partnership in Mission Asia. See Tizon, *Transformation After Lausanne*, especially chapter 4; Yung, *Mangoes or Bananas?* 196; and Samuel and Sugden, *Mission as Transformation: A Theology of the Whole Gospel*.

Zokoué) and a Latin American perspective (Dario Lopez). Finally, Part IV focuses on eschatology and mission and offers the reader an African view and two Asian perspectives on these themes. The African understanding is provided by Abel Ngarasoulede of Chad and the two Asian perspectives are offered by Tony Siew of Singapore and Dongri Wu and Yuehua Chen from mainland China.

In Part I, Abel Ndjérouou of Chad tackles the themes of God and humanity and seeks to bring to the fore the relationship that exists between the two. It is Ndjérouou's view that African theologians should discuss these theological themes against the backdrop of African Traditional Religions (ATR). He deems this important because, as he sees it, it is impossible to formulate a genuine and authentic African theology without a proper appreciation for the perspective provided by the ATR. For Ndjérouou, Africans learned from African traditional religions that there is a Supreme Being which they identify with the God of Christianity. Furthermore, these religions teach that humans were created by the Supreme Being. It is this background that enables African Christians to resonate with the biblical account of creation without difficulty and to view the God of the Bible as their Creator. With respect to humanity, African traditional religions have emphasized that humans are essentially communal beings. Thus, in the context of African traditional religions, family and community play a decisive role in the formation of human identity. This communitarian orientation of African traditional religions is resonant with the Christian view of God who is a triune communion.

Speaking from an Asian perspective, Ng Kam Weng embarks on a comparative study of Christianity's concept of God and humanity and Islam's view of Allah and humanity. In his study, Weng found that while Christianity and Islam are both monotheistic faiths, there are fundamental differences between them with respect to their views of God and his relationship to human beings. For example, while Islam stresses Allah's transcendence and fatalistic predestination and human beings' nonnegotiable responsibility to submit to Allah's absolute sovereignty, Christianity emphasizes the possibility and reality of a personal and mutually loving relationship and fellowship between God and human beings, without compromising God's transcendence. Weng's comparative discussion of the idea of God can prove helpful to Euro-American theologians and Christians who are interested in detecting convergences and divergences between Christianity and Islam.

Addressing these loci from the vantage point of the Caribbean, Jamaican theologian and churchman, Burchell K. Taylor, launches on a search for a view of God that can help humans face the existential problems of life, particularly the vexing issues of pain and suffering. In his exploration,

Taylor argues that neither the dismissive posture of the New Atheism nor the transcendence-skewed perspective of traditional theism can provide such a concept. For him, the solution lies in the biblically sanctioned notion of God as the “Ultimate Self-Revealing Subject” who is actively engaged in the historical domain for its redemption and liberation. This God, Taylor argues, exhibits his liberating power eminently in Jesus Christ, his ultimate self-expression, who both endured and conquered suffering and pain. In him, God presents himself as the hope of all suffering humanity.

In Part II, Carver Yu, a theologian and theological educator from Hong Kong, engages with the theme of Christ and salvation from a Chinese perspective. In particular, given the current crisis and disintegration of Chinese culture, Yu focuses his discussion on the relationship between Christ and culture, arguing that the gospel of Christ can make a significant contribution to the transformation of Chinese culture. Yu endorses the Reformed model of Christ as Transformer, contending that Christ should be regarded as the fulfiller and judge of culture as well as the restorer of full humanity. In the process of his argumentation, Yu offers insightful comments on the comparison between Confucianism, Daoism, and Christianity in the area of truth claims.

Moving across the seas to the Caribbean region with its history of slavery, colonization, and neocolonialism, theologians Delano Palmer of Jamaica and Dieumeme Noelliste of Haiti offer a perspective on Christ and salvation that, they believe, might respond to the aspiration of the Caribbean people for the experience of complete freedom. With a focus on aspects of the writings of Luke and Paul, they argue for a perspective that views Jesus Christ as the bearer of a multifaceted salvation which persons experience when they come under the sway of the life transforming Spirit that the risen Lord poured out at the conclusion of his messianic mission. Such an experience sets the believer on a course toward full transformation into the likeness of Christ which is the essence of full liberation. But because both the messianic salvation and the transformation that it unleashes share the eschatological tension of the “already” and the “not yet,” they argue that the experience of full liberation, at both the personal and social level, will remain an eschatological hope.

Still on the same themes, but with a clear stress on the doctrine of Christ, Latin American theologian David del Salto of Ecuador introduces the reader to the Christology of Rene Padilla and Orlando Costas, two pioneering thinkers of an earlier generation of Latin American evangelical theologians who conducted their reflection on the platform provided by the Latin American Theological Fraternity in the last quarter of the twentieth century. Proceeding comparatively, del Salto found that the motivation for

Padilla's Christology is, among other things, ethical and pastoral. Del Salto interprets Padilla as being particularly concerned with challenge that Latin American Christians face when it comes to relating their faith to social, economic, and political matters "due to a lack of an adequate Christological foundation for action and thought." Padilla, he argues, seeks to fill this void by underscoring the importance for Christology of the historical rootedness of Jesus and the message of the kingdom that he came to inaugurate and proclaim. For his part, while appreciating the need to recover the historical Jesus for Latin America, Costas' main concern was to search for a Christology that puts on a firm footing a theology of mission and evangelization. He finds the linchpin for that Christology in the cross.

Tackling the themes of the Holy Spirit and the Church, African theologian Isaac Zokoué of the Central African Republic directs the reader's attention squarely to the Bible. Speaking specifically from the standpoint of Francophone Africa, Zokoué argues for a perspective that is scripturally anchored and consciously integrative. According to him, since there can be no church without the Holy Spirit, a robust ecclesiology needs to be forged with a constant gaze on pneumatology. Conversely, because the church is the sphere where the promise of the Spirit found its fulfillment, and the primary domain of the Spirit's activity, Zokoué is convinced that, to be enriching and substantive, a doctrine of the Spirit must be formulated in close connection with the church. Such an approach, he avers, necessitates a parting of the ways with the fragmentary and atomizing methodology which, under the influence of modernity, has characterized much of Western theology.

Writing from the vantage point of Latin America, Peruvian theologian Dario Lopez agrees with Zokoué on the need for "an intimate relation between the Holy Spirit and the church." But his treatment of the themes is avowedly missiological. Taking his departure from the missionary praxis of Jesus (which he sees reflected in the early Christian communities), Lopez sees the church as a "liberated and liberating community" that is entrusted with the mission of loving and defending life—particularly the life of the poor and the excluded. It carries that mission in the power and fullness of the Spirit. The church then is a missional and pneumatic community that represents a radical alternative to the dominant culture. Her uniqueness, Lopez contends, stems from her kerygmatic nature which incorporates the values of inclusiveness, equality, empowerment, subversiveness, and prophetic critique. In the view of Lopez, when measured by these yardsticks, the Latin American evangelical church fares well with the first three criteria, and badly in the latter two. For according to him, the Latin American church's "destabilizing" and "prophetic" witness vis a vis the sociopolitical order still remains weak.

Part IV, which focuses on the themes of eschatology and mission, opens up with a contribution by Abel Ngarsoulede of Chad. With a sharp focus on the African continent, Ngarsoulede begins with a challenge and endorsement. He challenges John Mbiti's denial of the presence of any futuristic element in the African understanding of eschatology and endorses Byang Kato's position that the African popular view is akin to the biblical perspective on the subject. Having said this, however, Ngarsoulede goes on to bemoan the fact that missiologically this feature of the African culture, which could be an asset in the establishment of a robust Christianity on the continent, has not been put to good use. He argues that while the notion of a *postmortem* existence in a world beyond the present one is very much part of the belief system of most Africans, the manner in which the gospel was communicated to the Africans by the Western missionaries did not sufficiently exploit that cultural asset for the emergence of a vibrant Christianity on the continent. He believes that, combined with the arrival of secularism and the posture of skepticism regarding the relevance of the gospel for the here and now, this initial missionary *faux pas* has contributed to the rise of enormous challenges for the conduct of the missionary task in the African milieu. According to Ngarsoulede, the answer to this problem lies in an eschatologically driven missiology which, while endeavoring to be attentive to the realities of the transient world, seeks to elevate the minds and hearts of Africans to the world beyond and to Christ whose lordship encompasses both domains.

With feet firmly planted in South East Asia, Tony Siew of Singapore broaches the themes of Eschatology and Mission exegetically and contextually. In his study of various passages of the book of Revelation, Siew argues that the proclamation of the gospel will be part of the mission of the church during the final stage of the end times—a task which will grow more and more difficult as the End approaches. Applying this understanding to his region, Siew challenges the church in South East Asia to summon the courage to preach the eternal gospel despite the constraints and opposition that it is likely to encounter. To carry out this mandate effectively, Siew argues that the church needs to make full use of modern technological advances, particularly social media, in addition to working collaboratively, and employing the dominant language of the region—Malay—as the medium to communicate the gospel.

While not delving into a discussion of eschatology, Dongri Wu and Yuehua Chen from mainland China introduce us to the new field of Sino-theology. They define Sino-theology as “an academic movement committed to the investigation and research on the Christian faith in the Chinese language.” Alongside their discussion of the emergence, development, the current state, methodology, and major characteristics of this fairly new

discipline, the authors highlight the potential that Sino-theology holds for a pertinent missional engagement in the Chinese context. They argue that Sino-theology should facilitate a dialogue between Christianity and Chinese native religions in an effort to forge a public theology that could serve as a missional tool to stir the interest of the Chinese people in the Christian faith and its contribution to larger Chinese society. At a time when Chinese Christianity is gaining in public attention and Chinese churches are becoming more and more cognizant of the responsibility to develop a homegrown theology that is faithful to the Word of God, Wu's and Chen's article represents a timely and welcome contribution.

From our survey of the content of the chapters that constitute the book, it is clear that our authors take a variety of approaches to the themes they chose to address. While some adopt a strictly exegetical approach, others prefer to frame their reflection more in the systematic theology fashion, while still others proceed by way of comparative religions. Also, it should not escape our notice that our authors did not feel bound to devote equal attention to the set of themes covered in their essays. This, to us, is not insignificant. For in our view, both their choice of methodology and the particular theme(s) they deem worthy of emphasis contribute to the perspective they bring to their treatment. Theologically, this speaks of their concern to scratch where their particular context itches. Their reflections clearly show that the theology that is currently being done in the majority world is by no means monolithic. Far from being homogeneous, these essays show that it is expressed in various and, dare we say creative, voices. We hope that Christians in the West will find their perspective beneficial and enriching.

Dieumeme Noelliste and Sung Wook Chung