

Shaping Unity in Diversity: A Missiological Approach to Theological Education in Asia

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Christianity has had a long history in Asia. Although it is generally assumed that it took a very long time for the Gospel to reach Asia because Christianity moved westward since the time of Paul's missionary journeys, Christians might have arrived in China as early as the end of the first century.¹ There is also evidence of St. Thomas's mission to India, Armenia's declaration of Christianity as the state religion, and the strong missionary movement of the Syrian Orthodox Church (Nestorian Church) to the East.² Regardless of this long history, Asia was known to the West only as a mission field.

From the latter part of the twentieth century, however, dramatic changes began to occur in Asia regarding its relationship to Christianity. This is especially significant because we have seen in the last century Christianity breaking out of its Western cultural boundaries. Today, Asia have become an important center of the Christian faith and is rapidly emerging as a significant force for missions. For instance, the Chinese Church is continually growing amidst persecution, and the Korean Church has become the most influential presence among Asian churches. Furthermore, waves of revival are spreading across the borders of Cambodia and Vietnam, while Protestant churches in the Philippines are growing fast.

Despite such remarkable growth, the Asian Church is still struggling to provide quality theological education and is lagging behind in theological research. As some scholars have pointed out, Western patterns of thought and theology still dominate Asian theological discourse

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1. Samuel H. Moffett, *A History of Christianity in Asia*. vol. 1: *Beginnings to 1500* (New York: Harper Collins, 1992), 288.

2. J. Herbert Kane, *A Concise History of the Christian World Mission* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978), 12-15.

and theological education.³ The purpose of this paper, therefore, is to examine theological education based on Asia's contextual characteristics and propose a missiological approach to theological education in Asia. A missiological approach, in brief, is that which recognizes both the text and the context and moves toward critical realism in providing theological education. This approach will allow people to understand and accept the diversity of Asia, while preserving the unity of the Christian faith.

Asia's Situational Characteristics

The Asia of today is quite different in character from the West, which traces its roots back to the common heritage of Christendom. While the West modernized over a span of several centuries, Asia has undergone rapid modernization compressed into a few decades. For this reason, pre-modernity, modernity, and post-modernity coexist in all areas of life in Asia. Moreover, unlike other people groups in the Two-Thirds World, Asians have been able to preserve highly developed philosophical, ethical, and religious systems. This may be the major reason why Western Christianity has not easily been able to replace Asian traditional belief systems.

Therefore, using a diachronic system or a diachronic analysis developed in the West to understand Asia can create confusion because Asia has undergone revolutionary changes in all aspects of society in a remarkably short period of time. In other words, Asia must be understood in light of the events that have shaped its history and identity, especially because traditional Asian philosophy and ethics are being reinterpreted in diverse ways by contemporary Asians.

Collapse of Asian Traditional Cultures and Rapid Westernization and Secularization

Until they were defeated by the British in the Opium Wars, China thought of itself as the center of the world and that it represented the pinnacle of civilization. After all, Confucius had come from China and had constructed a sophisticated system of philosophy 500 years before Christ. Further, during the "Warring States Period" of China (8th – 3rd century BCE), the "Hundred Schools of Thoughts" had developed philosophies and ideas that are recognized to be the forerunners of the

3. Ken R. Gnanakan, "The Training of Missiologists for Asian Contexts," *Missiological Education for the 21st Century*, ed. J. D. Woodberry et al. (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1996), 114.

Enlightenment.⁴ China was indeed the center of the world until the thirteenth century.

By the latter part of the nineteenth century, however, China had to come to terms with what was absolutely bewildering and inconceivable, that is, the remarkable advancement of the West. In fact, the Opium Wars marked the downfall of Imperial China, which was followed by the collapse of traditional oriental culture. Further, Western colonialism marked by cruelty and subjugation contributed to the erosion and confusion of traditional ways of life in Asia.⁵ When Marxism was introduced in Asia at the beginning of the twentieth century, many political leaders of the formally colonized Asian nations embraced it and forcefully restructured their countries according to Marxist ideology. These radical events destabilized the dominance of Eastern traditions.

At the turn of the twenty-first century, Asia was confronted by another major sociopolitical shift: the collapse of the Soviet Union in Central Asia and China's implementation of the Open Door Policy in economics. Most significantly, Asia was forced to contend with globalization without the adequate resources to manage transition and lost an opportunity to shape gradually its own identity against the currents of Western influence.

Today, it is evident that contemporary Asia is undergoing a state of cultural uncertainty and confusion. Efforts to preserve traditional values while keeping up with the currents of westernization have proven to be extremely difficult and have created confusion in values and belief systems. The younger generation of Asians who were educated in the Western system tend to embrace readily Western values, whereas the older generation still prefers to live by traditional Asian values. As a result, these changes have profoundly destabilized social order and norms in Asia.

Wounds from Wars and Revolutions

During the twentieth century, Asia experienced numerous wars and revolutions: the Boxer Rebellion (1900), the Russo-Japanese War (1904), the Second World War (1939-45), the Nationalist-Communist Civil War of China (1948-49), the Korean War (1950-53), the Vietnam War (1960-75), the Cambodian War (1979-89), the Soviet War in Afghanistan (1984-89), and the border disputes between Pakistan and

4. Hyo Baek Kang, *China? China, China!* (Seoul: Yejunsa, 1995), 205-238.

5. Although Japanese colonization of Asia was no less inhumane, it is not discussed here because it did not begin until the beginning of the twentieth century.

India (which remain unresolved to this day). These conflicts, which left deep scars in Asian history, occurred in the context of Asia's complex political systems and international relationships. The entire Asian continent was affected by the wars fought between nationalists and imperialists, between imperialistic nations competing for colonial occupation, between nationalists of different religions or ideologies, and between communists and democrats.

The nature and causes of these wars show how Asian countries struggled with an unprecedented, full range of ideological shifts and rifts developed in the twentieth century. For this reason, extreme political factions have arose in Asia, each claiming its heritage in feudalism, Marxism, democracy, nationalism, or individualism. As a result, constant political conflicts and tensions have become a part of daily life for this generation of Asians.

Rapid Industrialization and Informatization

Asia was poor and underdeveloped in the 1960s. However, from the 1970s, Asia experienced rapid economic growth as exemplified by China in the 1980s and India in the 1990s. Today, Asia continues to grow as a global economic power. Asia has become the undisputed Mecca of the IT industry as evidenced in Japan, Korea, Taiwan, Singapore, and India. Especially, in China and India, where highly advanced technology was introduced suddenly, people are having to redefine their identity and restructure their lifestyle. In these countries, one can easily encounter people who have no access to electricity residing in the same neighborhood with those who have satellite telecommunication and high-speed internet access.

Coexistence of Premodernism, Modernism, and Postmodernism in Daily Life

For the West, the twentieth century was the era of modernism, characterized by epistemological positivism, realism, and absolute truth.⁶ This of course was replaced at the end of the twentieth century by postmodernism and relativism. In Asia, however, these two different trends emerged simultaneously, much of premodernism forcing Asians to deal with them concurrently. For example, it is common for young Asians to hold postmodern social and cultural values with a modern mind-set because of their Western education; yet, they are more likely to conform

6. Paul G. Hiebert, *Anthropological Reflections on Missiological Issues* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 20.

to premodern kinship tradition and behavior at home because of their elder generation, especially in times of crises.

Revival of Nationalism and Traditional Religions

After the demise of colonial rule, nationalism resurfaced in many Asian nations. The contributing factors include the rise of Asia in economy and politics and the break from feudalism and dictatorship. This new political atmosphere has allowed contemporary Asians to re-cultivate meanings and values from their previously dismissed or suppressed traditions. The restoration of Confucianism in China and anti-American and anti-Western sentiments exemplify this popular trend. Other examples include the revival of traditional religions such as the “Saffronization Movement” and the rise of the Hindutva Group (upper classes in Indian caste system) in India.⁷ Unfortunately, the rise of nationalism in these regions has led to persecution against Christian missionaries and churches, despite their formal acceptance of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Coexistence of Globalization and Anti-Globalization

Globalization is unavoidable in Asia especially because Asia has become the world’s factory equipped with a highly educated yet relatively cheap labor force. Indeed, the Western world would not be able to maintain its current living standard without Chinese-made products. In this sense, Asia is benefiting more from globalization than Latin America or Africa. Although Thomas Friedman, a champion of globalization, emphasizes that globalization does not imply Americanization or westernization, it is nonetheless equated with these two movements in many parts of Asia.⁸ Among Asian nationalists, those who espouse political liberalism are now taking a stance against the globalization movement and Americanism.

In actuality, however, Asia as a whole seems to exhibit signs of globalization and anti-globalization simultaneously.⁹ While Western influences in economy, politics, philosophy, society, culture, and education are

7. Joseph D’Souza, “Indian Church and Missions Face the Saffronization Challenge,” *Global Missiology for the 21st Century*, ed. W. D. Taylor (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 391-392.

8. Thomas Friedman, *The World is Flat*, trans. Sand C. Kim et al. (Seoul: Chang Hae, 2006), 21-26.

9. One must keep in mind, however, that Asian experience is far too complicated and complex to identify definitively all of the newly emerging trends.

visibly present in Asian society, there is also a strong resistance against Western domination or influence. Contemporary Asia is like a monster whose body parts were assembled in different periods of history. It is no surprise, then, that Asia has become a serious spiritual battlefield of pluralism. The challenge of the Christian Church is to work prophetically to provide a system of theological education that fosters biblically sound theology and ministry.

Problems in Theological Education in Asia

The world continues to change swiftly in the twenty-first century, but the developing trends are anticipated to move negatively rather than positively for Christians.¹⁰ Theological education must prepare the Church to minister effectively in the midst of anticipated adversities. However, evangelical seminaries in Asia have largely failed to produce proper theological responses to deal with the secularization of contemporary Asia. The following section explores some of the reasons.

Loss of the Integrity of the Gospel

Korean churches are gradually losing their social influence and credibility in society. Public criticism against Christianity has been steadily increasing in recent years, partly due to the hostage crisis in Afghanistan and the “candle-light demonstrations.” This reaction was not formed suddenly but over time by those who believe that Christianity has been a negative influence on Korean society. Unfortunately, such criticism is not limited to Korea. Today, the Gospel continues to spread geographically, but its inherent transforming power is not being made apparent because of hypocrisy in the Church.

John Stott states that the evangelical churches of today are in urgent need of recovering the “visibility of the gospel.”¹¹ Losing the integrity of the Gospel in society is not merely a problem of the Christian life; it is also a theological problem. It reflects the weakness of evangelical theology and theological education, namely, the problem of compartmentalizing faith from daily life.

10. Young Chul Park, “The 21st Century and Theological Education of Evangelicals,” *Bible and Theology* 22 (1997): 261.

11. John Stott, “Twenty Years after Lausanne: Some Personal Reflections,” *IBMR* (April 1995): 53-54.

Impersonalization in Theological Education

In the early stages of theological development, doctrines were not separated from the life of the church. Theological education in Asia, however, is gradually losing its original purpose by emphasizing academic scholarship over against personal piety and ministry training. Kun Won Park notes, "Theology is no longer a study for all people, but an academic course only for a few people who aim to be ministers."¹² Seminaries have become a religious ivory tower of philosophy and theology. This tendency is growing in Korea as seminaries and Christian organizations stress academic scholarship over against practical training. Seminaries of higher academic standards tend to exclude field education from their curriculum. Young Chul Park states, "Because a theory oriented inclination of theology is so chronic and powerful, it may not be solved just through re-emphasis on practical aspects of theology."¹³ Therefore, Asian theological education needs to be reassessed and rebuilt in order to offer theologically proper or balanced training for ministry.

Failure to Respond Properly to Emerging Theological Paradigms

It is generally believed that evangelical churches in Asia are strong and vibrant. This recognition, however, does not necessarily mean that churches in Asia are not affected by changing theological paradigms. For example, Latin American Liberation Theology has affected Asia in diverse ways. In Korea, it contributed to making political changes. Also, the Roman Catholic Church in Asia has quietly made prudent and successful changes in its ecclesiology and missions based on the tenets of Liberation Theology.¹⁴ Asian evangelical churches, however, regarded the new theological paradigms as passing controversies inherited from the West and chose not to engage them critically. Moreover, this neglect has prevented them from providing relevant theological answers and ministries to the people who are struggling with life's challenges.

Inadequate Responses to Practical Problems

As previously mentioned, Asia is experiencing tremendous cultural upheaval: rapid westernization, secularization, wounds from wars,

12. Kun Won Park, "New Horizon of Theological Education for World Churches," *Christian Thoughts* (March 1993): 30-32.

13. Park, "The 21st Century and Theological Education of Evangelicals," 276.

14. Stephen B. Bevans and Roger P. Schroeder, *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2006), 286-295.

industrialization, the IT boom, the mixing and matching of premodernity with modernity and postmodernity, the revivals of traditional religions and nationalism, and the clash between globalization and anti-globalization. All of these are part of the dizzying reality that make up Asian society. Although theology should be a reflection of God's Word projected into the *Sitz im Leben*, Asian evangelical theology has not sufficiently addressed the questions that come from the real life situations of Asia.

In fact, by uncritically accepting theologies of the West, Asian evangelical theological institutions and their theologians seem to be content with perpetuating the old colonialism. They have not yet given adequate responses to Asian problems and challenges. Unfortunately, such aloofness in theology has caused Asian Christians to develop individualized, mystical beliefs. As a result, evangelical churches in Asia have become less influential in their communities and are even accused of being socially irresponsible and irrelevant. These accusations indicate that theological education in Asia has generally failed to teach its constituents to apply biblical principles to practical life.

Inadequate Responses to Pluralistic Society

Religious pluralism is nowhere more obvious than in Asia, and its influence is unavoidable in every aspect of Asian life—cultures, values, ideologies, economics, and politics. Evangelical theological institutions, however, have simply criticized pluralism and inadvertently taught their students to avoid it or react in hostility. Instead, they must train seminarians to respond to pluralism constructively without compromising the integrity of the Gospel.

Failure to Respond to the Challenges of Traditional Religions

After the arrival of postmodernism in the twentieth century, people's interest in and commitment to religion increased significantly.¹⁵ Asia, as the birth place of the world's major religions, is inescapably religious. Asian societies in general are composed of multiple religious systems, including tribal religions. From a missiological perspective, the coexistence of the world's major religions in Asia is quite significant.

In the last part of the twentieth century, there was a remarkable growth in missions worldwide, but this phenomenon did not impact the

15. Hyun Mo Lee, *Understanding Contemporary Christian Missions* (Daejeon: Korea Baptist Seminary Publishing, 2007), 38-39. Interestingly, with the coming of postmodernism, the Asian population has actually increased.

areas that are dominated by the world's major religions. For example, the Roman Catholic faith syncretized with shamanism in Latin America, and with indigenous tribal religions in Africa. In the former Communist bloc, people returned to their traditional religions. Missiological breakthroughs have yet to occur among fundamentalist Muslims, Hindus, and Hinayana Buddhists.

Evangelical theological education in Asia, however, has failed to construct a comprehensive and consistent method by which to address religious pluralism in the Asian context. A group of evangelical scholars developed a theology of world religions, but their works have not been successfully adapted by Asian theological education.¹⁶ In short, proper theological training in world religions is urgently needed for strategic mission.

As we evaluate these challenges, theological education in Asia has the following needs. First, there is a need to preserve the essence of the Gospel. Second, the practical structure and dimensions of theology must be emphasized in theological education. Third, theological education must provide sensitive and effective responses to Asian society without compromising biblical teachings. These changes cannot be achieved by a simple revision of the seminary curriculum. Fundamental changes are necessary in the areas of access to and conceptualization of theological education. The next major section of this paper, therefore, explains why a missiological approach to theological education is needed in Asia.

Why a Missiological Approach?

A "missiological approach" is defined as an effort to contextualize the eternal Word of God in the changing world. Harvie Conn calls it a "trialogue in theology, anthropology, and mission."¹⁷ A key question for the missiologist is, "What would be the words that God would give to the people in a specific context?"¹⁸ This bridging of theology and culture is a major concern for missiologists.

16. Harold A. Netland, *Dissonant Voices: Religious Pluralism and the Question of Truth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991). See also Harold A. Netland, *Encountering Religious Pluralism: The Challenge to Christian Faith and Mission* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2001); and Chris Wright, *Thinking Clearly about the Uniqueness of Jesus* (London: The Evangelical Alliance, 1997).

17. Harvie Conn, *Eternal Word and Changing Worlds: Theology, Anthropology, and Mission in Trialogue* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 128.

18. Tite Tienou and Paul G. Hiebert, "From Systematic and Biblical Theology to Missiological Theology," in *Appropriate Christianity*, ed. Charles H. Kraft, trans. John Kim et al. (Seoul: Word of Life, 2007), 204.

Evangelical Christians have long thought of the Gospel as being against culture. From the beginning, cultural anthropology adopted and utilized models of developmentalism and diffusionism.¹⁹ Because liberal scholars adopted these models quickly, evangelicals resisted importing them into their theology. During the nineteenth century, evangelical missionaries were accused of holding to religious and cultural imperialism because they failed to critique the way mission and colonial rule went hand in hand. Because evangelical missionaries at that time were more concerned about protecting the Gospel's integrity from syncretism, they accepted uncritically the Western form of Christianity. As a result, conservative Christians were led to understand culture to be in opposition to the Christian Gospel.

However, in the 1950s, through Christian anthropologists such as Eugene Nida, the evangelical view of culture began to change.²⁰ At first, evangelicals were against contextualization because of its ecumenical origins; however, they eventually recognized that a faithful Gospel presentation and appropriate contextualization are both the core tasks of mission. Therefore, they recognized that a change in epistemological presupposition was necessary.

On Epistemological Methods

Paul Hiebert explains the epistemological issues in theology, anthropology, and missions and stresses that epistemological change is not about supporting liberalism or conservatism.²¹ However, because evangelicals tend to equate a change of epistemology with liberalism, they fail to recognize a need to change outdated paradigms.

Traditionally, theology was seen as a product of idealism which stood in opposition to realism or materialism. Idealism is the view that asserts that the "idea" takes precedence over the real or material in theory and in practice due to the presupposition that the latter cannot exist as independent objects.²² In idealism, it is assumed that the human subject can know the absolute truth (universal concept). Because of this, idealism easily lends itself to theism. Idealist theologians, therefore, emphasize systematic theology and focus on unchanging structures of the universal truths.²³ This approach assumes that the ultimate truth can be known

19. Conn, *Eternal Word and Changing Worlds*, 61-65.

20. Conn, *Eternal Word and Changing Worlds*, 143. Eugene Nida contributed to the development of the study of linguistics into the discipline of anthropology within the evangelical community.

21. Hiebert, *Anthropological Reflections*, 31-32.

22. *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, s.v. "Idealism."

23. Hiebert, *Anthropological Reflections*, 33.

through human reason and that this truth is non-historical and non-cultural. Also, it adheres to a unique systematic understanding of the ultimate truth as being theoretically consistent and ideally logical.²⁴

Because the idealistic theological system does not take seriously the historicity of the events in the Bible, those who espouse idealism also fail to engage adequately with emerging trends in a given historical and sociocultural context. Gerhard Ebeling, therefore, comments that the systematic methodology constructed after the Reformation is actually identical to medieval Scholasticism.²⁵

However, theology is emphatically not the same as revelation; it is a reflection of the Bible performed in a sociocultural context. Any approach that would identify the established Western theologies as revelation is clearly inappropriate. As Donald Stultz affirms:

The time has passed when Western theologians have all the “definitive answers”; Asian theologians now bear that responsibility and willingly accept it. The latter have discovered that Western “definitive answers” do not automatically fit the Asian situation and often answer questions not asked in Asia.²⁶

After the age of idealism, realism became the new methodology of theological studies. Realism is the view that material objects can exist independently of our senses, and these objects are recognized as the purpose and norms of proper cognition.²⁷ Biblical theology was, then, constructed on the basis of this realistic approach.²⁸ Realism, however, creates a crucial concern in the area of the biblical authorial intent. This approach assumes that the essence of revelation is historically distinctive. In other words, it assumes that written revelation in history is the Bible, and that the Bible is the absolute truth. Though idealism and realism seem to be in contrast to one another, both have similar limitations. Naïve realism as well as idealism fails to answer the problem of specific cultures and peoples of today. Therefore, Paul Hiebert states that neither idealism nor naïve realism is suitable for embracing contemporary culture.²⁹

24. Thomas N. Finger, *Christian Theology: An Eschatological Approach* (Scottsdale: Herald, 1985), 19.

25. Gerhard Ebeling, *Word and Faith* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1963), 82-83.

26. Donald Stultz, *Developing an Asian Evangelical Theology* (Manila: OMF Literature, 1989), 23.

27. *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, s.v. “Realism.”

28. Hiebert, *Anthropological Reflections*, 33.

29. Hiebert, *Anthropological Reflections*, 33.

Asian culture demands different theological answers. Both idealism and realism have failed to provide answers for Asia's unique problems and challenges. Douglas Elwood states, "In pure academic and philosophical areas, Asian theology has nothing to provide. It could not be constructed from knowledge of books. Rather it gains legitimacy from the work places where day-by-day life is verified."³⁰ Simply put, Asian theology must be proven daily in the *Asian* work place. However, thus far, Asian theological education has been content to import impractical and irrelevant Western theologies.

The missiological approach advocated in this paper is not founded upon the Western idealistic or realistic epistemological methods. Rather, critical realism is suggested as the preferred alternative.³¹ Critical realism perceives both the transcendental truth and the outer object (culture) as substance and makes a distinction between theology and revelation. It acknowledges the Bible or revelation as the definite source and norm of the Christian life and the ultimate standard of theological truth. It also sees theology as a product of human understanding and interpretation of the Bible and thus requires theology to account for the changes in life situations and circumstances.

Furthermore, the critical realism approach accepts social sciences, such as cultural anthropology and sociology, as maps or models that can help theology. It places one "map" over another in order to understand the substance of and access to theological truth.³² This method is comparable to an architectural drawing that has multi-layered blueprints. Although a finished building is a single entity, it would have included numerous drawings that accounted for electric power lines, plumbing, lighting, foundations, and mechanical constituents. To see the whole building, we would have to look at all of the drawings simultaneously by placing one drawing over another. Although each drawing would show a real part of the building, it would not be able to show the complete structure. Likewise, a missiological approach that adopts critical realism aims to utilize various kinds of knowledge in overlapping ways to produce a complete picture of theology.

Theological education in Asia must be built on a new epistemology. We must admit the limits of Western idealism and realism. Critical realism can be a new method of perception that can make possible the

30. Douglas J. Elwood, *Asian Christian Theology: Emerging Themes* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1980), 75.

31. Although Harvie Conn had introduced critical realism in advance of Paul Hiebert, he asserted that it has no effect in a religious area. Paul Hiebert has adopted this concept in the area of missiology. See also Conn, 30; and Hiebert, 41.

32. Hiebert, *Anthropological Reflections*, 41

dialogue of theology, anthropology, and mission, and offer a method by which Asian theological education can be reassessed and restructured.

On Theology as Practice

The confrontation between theory and practice of the 1960s and 1970s has resurfaced in the 21st century. Gustavo Gutiérrez criticizes traditional theology as an orthodoxy that seeks legitimate doctrines when what is needed is an orthopraxis that seeks legitimate and critical practices in context.³³ Evangelicals, however, refused to accept the concept of praxis because Gutiérrez advocates political liberation and the use of righteous violence to achieve liberation.

Today, evangelicals are encountering new difficulties in Asia as well as in other parts of the Majority World as Christianity is gradually losing credibility, integrity, and holiness. When the hypocrisy of churches make the evening news because of their non-involvement or tacit approval of social injustice, however, the Gospel's power to transform societies cannot be made effective. It is likely that this hypocrisy is rooted in the individualization of faith that neglects to build responsible communities in a given society.³⁴

The Chinese Church is growing healthy despite persecution. However, if it also accepts hypocrisy as a natural side effect of Church growth as in other Asian Churches, it too will shortly face the problem of credibility. In order to fix this problem, we must get away from theory-oriented theology. Originally, *Theologia* was never separated into theory versus practice. Rather the two were integrated as theory *and* practice, spirituality *and* intelligence, and mission *and* scholarship; this is what today's seminaries must teach.³⁵

Precisely because Western intellectualism is Western, it is largely irrelevant to theological education in Asia. Asia needs a systematic praxis that will meet the needs of contemporary Asia. A sound evangelical praxis must be based on the Lordship of Christ and a proper understanding of sanctification and glorification in soteriology. If a practical theology is established, theological education will also embrace praxis in addition to theory. These demands to implement practice-oriented disciplines have existed for a long time.³⁶ However, in order for it to

33. Gustavo Gutiérrez, *Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1988), 8.

34. Leslie Newbigin, *Truth to Tell: The Gospel as Public Truth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 65-90.

35. Dong-Sup Bang, "How to Teach Missiology in the Seminary?" *Journal of Missions and Theology* 1 (2003): 74.

36. Kun-Won Park insists that theological education should be changed to be more practical in order to overcome the dichotomous thinking dividing

happen, the traditional structure of theological education must recognize the need for integrating vibrant practical training into theological education. We must understand that seminary education bent on theory cannot produce effective pastors.

Defining the Missiological Approach in Theological Education

For a long time, most seminaries in Asia have followed the “fourfold pattern” of theological education.³⁷ As great a tool as it may be, however, it is inadequate to address the existing problems in Asia because it is based on traditional Western epistemology. Tite Tienou and Paul Hiebert have proposed a missiological approach that can help us to build a new paradigm of theological education in Asia. Their approach, which is based on critical realism, explains how to integrate theology and mission in three stages.³⁸ This section attempts to apply these stages to theological education in Asia.

The first stage involves analyzing and understanding the current contexts from the perspective of cultural insiders. Tienou and Hiebert call this stage *phenomenology*.³⁹ Thus far, evangelical theological education has used a “from above” theological approach, which emphasizes the presence of a transcendental God and revelation. Evangelicals have separated theological studies from cultural studies because of the belief that the latter are secular and un-theological. Moreover, idealism and realism have also kept cultural anthropology, sociology, statistics, history, and general science outside of the theological sphere.

However, there are two aspects of reality that we must consider in order to understand life. First, there must be academic endeavors to evaluate, from a sound Christian perspective, the scientific approaches to cultural anthropology, sociology, and history. However, many secular studies cannot be used as tools of theology because they are based on materialism and evolutionism. Still, it is possible to reconstitute a missionary anthropology by changing the premises of secular anthropology

practice and theory. Park, “New Horizon of Theological Education for World Churches,” 30-32.

37. Edward Farley, *Theologia: The Fragmentation and Unity of Theological Education* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 49 and 74-80. The fourfold pattern refers to the disciplines of Bible (text), church history (history), systematic theology (truth), and practical theology (application).

38. Tienou and Hiebert, “Missiological Theology,” 208-210.

39. Tienou and Hiebert, “Missiological Theology,” 208. Tienou and Hiebert borrowed this term from cultural anthropology. See also Conn, *Eternal Word and Changing Worlds*, 28.

in the same way that Eugene Nida has. To be relevant, theology must embrace studies that help us to understand life as it is lived.

Second, the *emic* and *etic* perspectives must be balanced.⁴⁰ Theology in Asia, preferring Western epistemology, often understands its contexts from an *etic* perspective. Losing the *emic* perspective results in the failure to answer our own problems; however, an excessive reliance on the *emic* perspective would deprive us of the ability to come up with a meta-cultural answer to our problems. Theological education must acknowledge that theology cannot be properly constructed without an analysis and understanding of the real problems of the world.

The second stage focuses on a biblical study concerning the revealed problems. A biblical study at this stage must synthesize all knowledge of systematic, biblical, and historical theology. Consider the metaphor of a judge examining the constitutional, statutory, and case/common laws.⁴¹ Systematic theology is comparable to the Constitution, biblical theology and church history are comparable to statutory laws, while case studies are comparable to common laws. This is a process in pursuit of answers to problems. Starting with revelation as the acknowledged eternal truth, we move to a biblical theology which shows the works of God in specific historical situations, and finally end with church history as divine providence revealed in history. If it is necessary, concrete situations can be studied as specific case studies. This missiological approach pursues practical answers to the real problems of the world while seeking absolute truth. The purpose is to examine problems and attempt to change them by re-analyzing the problems in the light of biblical revelation. Biblical answers should have the power to reform situations at the root of problems and not simply provide solutions to symptomatic problems. Seminaries must develop curricula to train students in this process.

The third and final stage is the implementation of these results in local churches and communities. It is the development of forms of praxis. In this process, critical realism is the method of cognition that integrates biblical theology and church history with systematic theology, in addition to practical cases and scientific knowledge (anthropology, sociology, statistics, history, etc.), thereby constructing the whole building, to continue the metaphor, with the many blueprints.

40. The *emic* perspective stands for the perspective of insiders or participants of a culture, while the *etic* perspective refers to the outsiders of a culture.

41. Tienou and Hiebert, "Missiological Theology," 205-207.

Shaping Unity in Diversity

Asian theology must provide Asian answers to Asian problems. The West cannot do this. The missiological approach allows for the contextualization of theology into society and culture. This means that these theologies would differ according to location and context. It is very difficult to accept such results through idealism or realism. Where is the truth, if we recognize different answers? Is the Bible only a case book?

Several theologians in the Majority World have already confronted this question.⁴² The limits of local and contextual theologies have been pointed out,⁴³ settling on the idea of “unity in diversity.” An emphasis on praxis results in a diverse yet applicable set of answers. We should be able to admit and assimilate such diversity and, at the same time, strive for unity. The unity should center on the eternal Word of God; its authority should not be compromised. Where this unity does not exist, we cannot expect to have a biblically sound answer to our problems. Recently, the conflict within evangelicalism has been expressed in terms of local and global theology.⁴⁴ Local theology and global theology must balance each other out for unity and mutual benefit.

Conclusion

This paper analyzes the problems of theological education in Asia and proposes an alternative. Theological education in Asia must be conducted in the spirit of seeking biblically sound answers to real problems arising out of Asia. The proposed missiological approach in this paper requires a change in epistemology, a decision that cannot be made easily. However, Asia desperately needs a new theological epistemology that is conducive to restructuring Asian theological education. It will not be easy to break from Western traditions and influences because many leaders in Asia are steeped in the traditional epistemological stances. For the most part, evangelicals in Asia are generally not familiar with new epistemological paradigms used in theology. They are also disinclined to embrace praxis-oriented theological/epistemological paradigms, even the ones that are compatible with evangelical tenets. But Asians must remember that Christianity is not a product of the West.

The Asian evangelical church has a responsibility to study and provide theological answers that befit Asian problems, no matter how pains-

42. Hiebert, *Anthropological Reflections*, 30.

43. Timothy Tennent, *The Theology in the Context of World Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 11-12.

44. Harold A. Netland, “Globalization and Theology Today,” *Globalizing Theology*, ed. C. Otto and H. A. Netland (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 25-30.

taking the task. It is imperative that Asian theological educators render a keen analysis of what pertains to Asian religious life and begin to construct tangible, relevant ways to address Asia's own theological issues and concerns. In doing this, they must utilize contemporary scientific knowledge with wisdom and discretion in order not to compromise what is essential to evangelical beliefs about the Bible. In the twenty-first century, voices from the Asian Church are expected to be more significant than ever before, but this cannot be done responsibly unless theological education in Asia is restructured to address first Asia's own theological challenges.