

Zhang Lisheng: Evangelist, Apologist,
Theologian, Prophet

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Zhang Lisheng 章力生 (1904-1996): A Chinese Theologian for Today

His life¹

Early life: Zhang Lisheng was born into a traditional Chinese family. His mother was a devout Buddhist and taught him Buddhist literature when he was young. His father had given up his business pursuits in order to concentrate on Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism, and became a religious master in their region.

Education

After excelling in primary and secondary schools, Zhang studied at Shanghai Baptist University until, disgusted with the compulsory chapel, he transferred to Fudan University, from which he graduated. He identified Christianity with Western culture and imperialism and was swept up into the anti-Christian movement in the 1920s.

From 1925–32, he was a “legalist, believing that better laws would create a better Nation, to maintain peace and order, and to safeguard righteousness and justice.”² Chang thus went to France for advanced studies in Law at the University of Paris, and on to further research on political and legal sciences in Belgium, England (London, Oxford, and Cambridge), Germany, and Switzerland from 1927–29. Upon his return, he taught law at the National Central University of Law in Nanjing.

From 1932–37, he taught at Suzhou University, Fuzhou University, and Jinan University,³ devoting himself to the study of Confucian and Neo-Confucian thought. He lectured widely to promote “‘the unity of knowledge and action’ of the Neo-Confucian philosopher Wang Yangming, and a spirit of self-determination.”⁴ Beginning around 1932, he realized that an effective legal system had to be built on a moral foundation.

After the nation’s humiliation at the hands of Japan’s military forces in 1931 and 1932, he saw that “the root cause of our national humiliation was not external but

¹ Daniel T. Chan, “Quest for Certainty: The Life and Thought of Lit-sen Chang.” PhD diss, Boston University, 2000. A full biography of Zhang Lisheng by Daniel Chan has been published in Chinese.

² Chang, *Strategy of Missions in the Orient*, 220.

³ All these schools are in East China.

⁴ James H. Taylor III, foreword to Lit-sen Chang, *Asia’s Religions*, xxii.

rather internal, i.e., our moral degeneration.”⁵ He became a Confucianist, seeking moral perfection both for himself and for “national regeneration.”⁶

In 1937, he married Ling Nie, the daughter of a former tutor to the last Emperor. She soon bore him two sons, Chang Qi (John Key) and Chang De.

During the Anti-Japanese War, he served with the Nationalist Government in Chongqing. In 1937 he turned to Daoism, then in 1941 to Zen Buddhism.

After the war (1945 Chang was elected as a member of the convention; he became a signatory of the final document. After a long period of deep introspection and re-thinking, however, he came to the conclusion that the human problem did not lie in politics, but in the heart of man, so he gave up politics, resisting repeated requests to join the cabinet. He was “intoxicated” with Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism, as were many other Chinese scholars who had not given their sympathies to the Communists. Returning to his childhood village of Taihu, he became the founding President of Jiangnan (Kiang Nan) University, which was to be the center of a resurgence movement of Asian religions and culture. His purpose was “to revive Asian religions and to destroy Christianity.”⁷ He was forty-five years old.

Conversion

In 1949, he was invited by a university in India founded by the Indian philosopher Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941) to give a series of special lectures on “Asia’s Destiny.” He accepted, aiming to persuade the religious leaders of India to join him in launching his religious renaissance movement. Unable to obtain a visa to India, he found himself stranded in Java, Indonesia, where his family moved into a house just beside a church that was under construction.

Chang and his family often took a walk together after supper. One evening in 1951, they heard beautiful music coming from within the church, so the children suggested that they find out what was going on inside. A deacon of the church came out to talk with them, and invited them to attend the building dedication service on the coming Sunday, knowing that Chang was not a Christian and would not want to go to a regular worship service. Out of curiosity, however, Chang

⁵ Chang, *Strategy of Missions in the Orient*, 221.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Chang, *Asia’s Religions*, 290.

decided to attend the special ceremony. To his amazement, during prayers he was “deeply touched by the Holy Spirit; and from that time on, [he] could not stop going to church, and was eager to search the truth and to read the Bible avidly, often with tears of repentance and joy.”⁸

In 1956, after two years of teaching at several seminaries and Bible colleges in Asia, he entered Gordon Seminary. When he graduated *summa cum laude* in 1959, he was immediately invited to join the faculty. For twenty years, he lectured on missions and comparative religions.

Writing

During these years, he endeavored to write as many words promoting and defending Christianity as he had attacking it and promoting Asian religions. He succeeded, composing volumes that came to five million words.

His works

Chinese

Pre-conversion: Fifty works on law

Post-conversion

Systematic Theology. 系統神學

+ Eight volumes. Reprinted as two volumes by Singapore Every Home Crusade, 2011-2012. This book is being read in the mainland today.

Comprehensive Apologetics. 總體辯道學

- In four volumes: 1. Fundamentals. 2. Philosophical. 3. Religious. 4. Cultural.
- *The New Bible Commentary* (co-translator)
- *The folly of Ancestor Worship*
- Two dozen other works, some of which were incorporated into *Systematic Theology* and *Comprehensive Apologetics*.
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- Translated into English
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- *What Is Apologetics?* Translated by Samuel Ling. P&R Publishing, 1999.

⁸ Chang, *Asia's Religions*, 291.

- *Asia's Religions: Christianity's Momentous Encounter with Paganism*, translated by Samuel Ling. P&R Publishing, 1999. An analysis and Christian critique of Asian religions.
- *Critique of Indigenous Theology*, translated by G. Wright Doyle, and *Critique of Humanism*, translated by Samuel Ling, in *Wise Man from the East: Lit-sen Chang (Zhang Lisheng*

English

Strategy of Missions in the Orient .(For an analysis, see [\(99+\) \(DOC\) Lit-sen Chang \(Zhang Lisheng\), Strategy of Missions in the Orient | Wright Doyle - Academia.edu](#))

Transcendental Meditation: A Mystic Cult of Self Intoxication.

Zen-Existentialism: The Spiritual Decline of the West was written in response to a plea from Carl Henry to write works to address the rise of existentialism.

His thought

Biblical

Chang begins with the Scriptures as fully inspired by God and both ultimately and uniquely authoritative for all mankind, including Christians. Rather than starting with culture, religion, or philosophy, he tries to build his theology on the foundation of Scripture. The thought forms and even the words of the Bible are the lens through which he views and evaluates all human systems. His works are replete with quotations from the Bible.

Orthodox

Chang holds to the orthodox Christian faith, as expressed in the ecumenical Creeds. That is, Nicene Christianity. He sees this faith as central to Christianity and non-negotiable.

Reformed

Chang follows in the theological tradition of Augustine, Luther, Calvin, and their heirs. That means, first, that he sees the Bible as determinative for Christian belief and practice, as we have seen. He does not accept the additions of the Roman Catholic tradition, nor the subtractions of liberal theology, nor the comingling of biblical and cultural concepts as equally valuable resources for theology.

Like the Reformers, he believes that the Bible speaks to all domains of life and culture. Its principles apply to every sector of thought and society, including government, philosophy, art, education, and ethics.

In other words, he reflects the influence of Dutch Neo-Calvinism more than the narrow approach of Cornelius Van Til and some other theologians at Westminster Theological Seminary.

Missional

Thus, in his *Strategy of Missions*, he criticizes Fundamentalists for being too narrow in their understanding of the Christian faith, as well as criticizing theological liberals for denying central doctrines. On the contrary, he argues for a full-orbed presentation of Christianity that will address questions of philosophy, religion, government, and society. He wants biblical truth to “take root downward and bear fruit upward,” as he often says.

From the scope of his major works, we see his wide-ranging interests and learning. He set out not only to construct a coherent *Systematic Theology* for the church, but to analyze and evaluate competing worldviews in his *Comprehensive Apologetics*.

Evangelical

After his dramatic conversion to Christianity from a lifelong commitment to Chinese religions, Zhang Lisheng’s passion was to see his compatriots, especially intellectuals who were still trapped in what he considered the darkness and bondage of paganism or humanism, to find the same freedom of new life in Christ.

His significance for today

A non-Christian scholar with a doctorate in Chinese religions said, “China needs this man, because Christianity still has a foreign flavor to most Chinese people, and Chang is so thoroughly and authentically Chinese; he understands us and can speak to our hearts and our minds.

He sought to reach intellectuals. He also longed for the transformation of Chinese society and culture. He was immersed in Chinese classical works and conversant with current Chinese thought, including Christian writings. His religious background was wide and deep.

He is relevant also to the phenomenon of Sino-Christianity, or Sino-Christian Theology, a movement among Chinese intellectuals that has flourished over the

past three decades.⁹ Some scholars are interacting solely with the Western theological tradition, seeking to “translate” it into “Chinese” words and thought forms. These contemporary thinkers could benefit from Chang’s perceptive analysis of the weaknesses of all liberal theology and humanistic philosophy.

Many others who write on Sino-Christianity Theology directly address the question of how Christianity, traditional Chinese religions, and philosophy can be related to each other in a way that preserves the essence of biblical faith while acknowledging the value of Chinese thought over the millennia.

Clearly, Lit-sen Chang’s burden for a Christianity that would be both faithful to the Scriptures and also fully “Chinese,” is relevant today.

As for his style of writing, Dr. Samuel Ling, translator of *Critique of Humanism*, says that Chang’s Chinese language was “rich, beautiful, elegant, and clear.”¹⁰ Daniel Chan quotes Calvin Chao,¹¹ who said that his books had “very high scholarly value,” and they received favorable reviews at the time of publication.¹² I can testify that he constantly employs Chinese idioms and formulaic phrases. He wrote in a semi-literary style, so his books are hard to read and to translate, but they are worth the effort.

I highly commend him to you as a Chinese theologian for today.

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⁹ See, for example, Lai and Lam, *Sino-Christian Theology*; and Yang and Yeung, *Sino-Christian Studies in China*.

¹⁰ Chan, “Quest for Certainty,” 272.

¹¹ Zhao Junying, a Chinese evangelist in the 1940s and later a prominent overseas Chinese Christian leader.

¹² Chan, “Quest for Certainty,” 258.

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Four Lectures

Holy Light Lit-sen Chang Lectures 2013

Lecture One: Strategy of Missions in the Orient Introduction

I thank God for giving me this opportunity to share with you some of the precious thoughts of Lit-sen Chang (Zhang Lisheng). I have found his books to be most helpful in understanding my Western culture, Chinese culture, and how the Bible can help us critique our cultures. He has also helped me to understand how to share the gospel more effectively, especially with Chinese.

In 2006, at a meeting of the American Society of Church History, I was talking with a representative of a well-known academic press, Wipf and Stock. At that time, they specialized in re-printing books that had gone out of print but that still deserved to be read. I told him that I was a missionary to the Chinese. He said, “We want to introduce Chinese theology to the West. Is there a Chinese theologian whose books you would recommend that we re-print?”

I immediately answered, “Yes! Lit-sen Chang.”

“Who is he?” he asked.

“He was a very important Chinese theologian in the latter half of the twentieth century, but now most people don’t know about him. I was greatly influenced by his books at key points in my ministry. Actually, P&R Publishing has recently issued translations of a couple of his works, including *Asia’s Religions* and *What is Apologetics?* I personally think that Chang’s book is the best introduction to Asian religions from a Christian point of view. But there are others which were published in English that I wish could be available again.”

“What are these books?” he asked.

“First, *Zen-Existentialism: The Spiritual Decline of the West*,” I responded. “It is a brilliant analysis of Western culture and how Christianity can address its decline. Then, *Strategy of Missions in the Orient*, which shows how we can more effectively spread the gospel in Asia.”

That conversation started a close cooperation with Wipf and Stock to republish these works.

They have already re-published *Zen-Existentialism: The Spiritual Decline of the West*, and they plan to re-print *Strategy of Missions in the Orient*. Both of these books were originally written in English. In addition, they asked me and one of my co-workers to be co-editors of a series called *Studies in Chinese Christianity*. Aside from Chang’s book, Wipf and Stock has also published seven other volumes with us: three books of stories of how Chinese Christians have been “salt and light” in their society, a collection of papers from a conference; a biography of Liang Fa, the first Chinese evangelist; *Timothy Richard’s Vision*; *Builders of the Chinese Church: Pioneer Missionaries and Chinese Christian Leaders.*, and *Wise Man from the East: Lit sen Chang (Zhang Lisheng). Critique of Indigenous Theology, Critique of Humanism*, edited by G. Wright Doyle.

After we decided to republish the two books by Chang to which I referred, I learned from his oldest son, Dr. John Chang, , that another of his father’s works had been translated by Dr.

Samuel Ling: *Critique of Humanism*. The publisher thought that we should publish this, too, but it seemed a bit too short to make a book just by itself, so I asked Dr. Chang whether there was another short volume by his father that we could translate and publish along with the *Critique of Humanism*. He suggested the *Critique of Indigenous Theology*, so I agreed to translate that as well.

I had no idea how difficult this task would be. Chang's writing is not easy, since it is partly written in a literary style (*ban wen yan*). I had to have a lot of help, but I eventually finished the project. The book came out in 2013. It is called *Wise Man from the East: Lit-sen Chang (Zhang Lisheng)*, and includes both his critique of indigenous theology and his critique of humanism, plus an introduction by me.

While I was working on this translation, Dr. Chang graciously invited me to give the Lit-sen Chang Theological Lectures in Taiwan. I was highly honored, and I wanted to let more people know about Lit-sen Chang, so I agreed. And of course, I am always happy to return to Taiwan, which is where my heart is.

The four lectures were first composed in English, and then translated into Chinese; what follows is the English original.

This lecture will introduce *Strategy of Missions in the Orient*; the second lecture will review *Zen-Existentialism*; the third will cover Chang's *Critique of Indigenous Theology*; and the last will compare him with his friend, Carl F.H. Henry, who in the opinion of many was the most outstanding American theologian of the twentieth century, and who encouraged Chang to write *Zen-Existentialism: the Spiritual Decline of the West*.

I should forewarn you that Chang is a learned and profound thinker. His writing, though eloquent and powerful, can sometimes be a bit hard to understand, and the topics he discusses are not simple and superficial, but very complex and deep. I believe you will find this to be worth the effort, however, because Chang is one of the most important Chinese theologians in history and he has a great deal to say to us today.

Strategy of Missions in the Orient

Christian Impact on the Pagan World

Written and published in 1968 for the Asia-South Pacific Congress on Evangelism, Lit-sen Chang's *Strategy of Missions in the Orient* at the request of Billy Graham. At the time, Chang was special lecturer on missions at Gordon Divinity School (now Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary), near Boston. This important work came to my attention in 1980, after my wife and I had returned from our first two years of service in Taiwan with Overseas Missionary Fellowship (OMF). When I read it, I thought that Chang's analysis of missions history and strategy, especially in Asia, was quite helpful.

Although some conditions have changed since publication, the basic message of the book remains relevant today, perhaps even more so than in 1968, for the following reasons: (1) Asian religions have experienced a great resurgence, and non-biblical thought has further weakened the Christian church in Asia, (2) Christianity has still not "taken root" in the soil of Asian culture, and (3) Christians are still unclear about the true nature and purpose of evangelism and missions.

Chapter One: A Bold Look at the Mission Field: Fruits of Our Failure

Failure in the Past: The Seeds We Have Sown

We must note that Chang assumes that the Christian mission in Asia has failed, because Christianity is still a minority faith.)

Oriental Background of Christianity

Christianity was once strong in places like Turkey, the Middle East, and North Africa, but Islam conquered these areas in part because of internal weaknesses in their Christianity. The church

was corrupt. It was a priest-centered church with corrupt clergy and more focus on ritual than on living the Christian life. Controversies sapped the vitality of the churches, and destroyed their unity. They disagreed on important matters, which are legitimate, but they did so in a very unloving way, and often used political power to impose their convictions on other churches. This resulted in resentment and lasting alienation. There was also a lack of spiritual depth: The people didn't have the Bible in their own language and they didn't study it on their own. It was a "foreign" religion to them: Roman, Greek, but not Asian.

Christianity was brought to Asia early several times, including China during the Tang, Yan, and Ming dynasties, but failed to take root. In the Tang Dynasty, Nestorian missionaries made two mistakes. On the one hand, they mixed biblical ideas with Buddhist concepts, and therefore confused the Christian message. On the other hand, they preached the gospel mostly to foreigners in China, and they also failed to translate the Bible into Chinese. Therefore, Christianity was considered a "foreign" religion. Twentieth-century Chinese critics also connected Christianity with Western imperialism.

Missions in Crisis: The Situation We Face

When Chang was writing, Christians were facing external crisis. The Cold War was at its height, which meant that Christians from the West could not enter countries like Russia and China. Christianity was not growing as fast as other religions and the influence of communism was increasing all over the world. The foundations of Western civilization were crumbling. "The whole world is bankrupt, politically, economically, socially, and morally. World chaos is beyond human control."¹³ Although today the political climate may be different and Christianity is

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spreading in Asia (perhaps at the same rate as other religions), Chang's assessment of the state of the world is as true today as when his words were written.

Christians also faced internal crisis. Chang said, "The real crisis of missions is not in an external menace; it is in the internal corruption."¹⁴ This internal menace comes from modern theological deviation, which is just as serious today as when Chang wrote this book. These theological deviations include liberation theology (now also including feminist and black theologies); theological syntheses of sacred and secular; and the loss of a sense of the transcendence of God, of the distinction between good and evil, a sense of moral absolutes, and of belief in a final judgment and the separation of the wicked from the righteous forever. We can see this now in the failure of preachers to talk about hell or call people to repentance. Chang wrote, "The problem of God now stands before us as the critical problem ..., and it is the fundamental issue of all mankind."¹⁵ Carl Henry also saw this clearly, and dedicated two volumes of his great work, *God, Revelation, and Authority* to the doctrine of God. This is one reason why he is so important for Chinese Christians. Training of Chinese students in liberal Western seminaries brought Western liberal theology back to China in the early part of the twentieth century, and continues today.

Paganism in Resurgence in Asia

Huge numbers of people are untouched by the Gospel in Asia (including China). Furthermore, the influence of pagan religions in Asia is growing. There are several causes for this growth: the loss of Western power and prestige; the rise of Asian nationalism; the resistance to Christianity as foreign (i.e., Western); and the emphasis upon local religions as essential to national culture.

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Everywhere in Greater China, we see the resurgence of Buddhism, with large Buddhist temples and schools dotting the landscape, publications proliferating, and enthusiastic adherents who engage in proselytizing. There are more Confucianists today than in Confucius' day.

Confucianism teaches self-perfection without God and is central to China's national heritage.

Hinduism and Islam are also increasing in strength. The Hindu Nationalist Party has taken full power in India. It opposes Christianity as a threat to national unity and engages in persecution of Christians. Hindus believe that all faiths lead to the same God. When I shared the gospel with one Hindu taxi driver in Taiwan, he said, "All religions are the same; they all exhort us to do good."

Chapter Two: An Objective Evaluation of Missions: The Reasons for Our Failure

Chang believed that one of the main hindrances to successful missions in Asia was a lack of vision for missions in the Orient, mostly because Christianity is still viewed as a Western faith. While he acknowledges the "unfeigned faith, unbearable hardships and significant achievements of the evangelical pioneer missionaries in the past,"¹⁶ he nonetheless suggests that there has been a failure to separate Christianity, and therefore missions, from any geo-political or cultural borders. Christian missions, according to Chang, "is a worldwide task, a world-wide conflict, a world-wide struggle. . . It is the divine plan of salvation." It is "intrinsically a super-national . . . movement," not for or against any race or nation. Furthermore, Chang said "it is worldwide now, because paganism has made inroads into the West and "the West is now undergoing a process of

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paganization.”¹⁷ There are only two humanities: those in Christ and those still in Adam. Only Jesus can bring us to God and to each other.¹⁸

Indeed, Chang identifies this problem as the “Atlanto-centric attachment” of Christianity. But Christian mission is not just a Western movement, for God has also been bringing the gospel to the east through others.¹⁹ This Atlanto-centric understanding has been an unnecessary stumbling block, as many Asians themselves believe that Christianity is a Western religion, and “identify it with Western culture.”²⁰ Asian religions claim to be truly indigenous, while Christianity is perceived as foreign and “Western.”²¹ Thus, rather than seeing Christianity as a religion that transcends geo-political boundaries, race, and culture, it is seen as just another Western encroachment into Asian life. While things have greatly improved since Chang wrote, his basic criticism still holds true.

Chang’s solution to this problem of the conflation of Christian missions and Westernization was not to remove Christianity from culture. Indeed, he believed that another reason for the “failure” of Christian missions in Asia was a lack of penetration of Christian values into the culture. The transformation of a humanistic culture was absolutely necessary. We need not only to preach, but also to give “practical application of the Gospel.” It is “intrinsically spiritual, but it also has its social, cultural and intellectual implications.”²² We should seek not only to win souls, but also to “transform the quality of [the culture’s] anthropocentric, ‘sensate culture’ by radical

¹⁷ 54; Chang wrote about this situation in the West in *Zen-Existentialism: The Spiritual Decline of the West*. I shall discuss this book in the second lecture.

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redirection.”²³ Christianity should help infuse new values into culture to save it from itself.²⁴

Take, for example, the extreme individualism in American culture. Christians must remind Americans that we should live not only for ourselves, but also for others and for God. Christian missions, therefore, is “the only true revolution.” It is “the ‘most efficient way’ to save the world from chaos and destruction.” “It is a dynamic power in the world, the power of God unto salvation.”²⁵

Calvin and other leaders of the Reformation movement saw the cultural implications of the gospel, but later Christians did not build on this. That is, they did not draw out the implications of Christian truth for all aspects of human life, but restricted their teaching to how individuals can be saved and how churches should be organized.²⁶ Christians should engage in “theological penetration” into culture. “Whenever a people relinquish their old religion and begin to embrace a new faith, there are many cultural problems to be dealt with and to be solved.”²⁷

Individual regeneration is primary, for it is the only way “in which real social improvement can be accomplished.”²⁸ But we also need to “speak in the realm of culture. The church should be the mother of the best elements in culture.”²⁹ We see this, for example, in the music of Bach and Handel; the poetry of Milton and Herbert; the painting of Rembrandt; Blackstone’s

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commentaries on British common law; the U.S. constitution; and the influence of Noah Webster and McGuffey on American language and education.³⁰

We must not be distracted from evangelism and biblical teaching, which are of greatest importance, but we must not neglect our duty to our culture, which is “sick and in a state of disintegration and dying.” (He is speaking here of the West, but his words are true of Asia also.)³¹ The goal is to “make humanist cultures and civilizations subservient to the will of God, to the truth of Christ...”³² We can question Chang’s view of the role of culture transformation in missions, but I think there is a valuable point here that is worth considering.

Finally, the failure of many Christians to value the “supreme uniqueness of Christianity” has been a stumbling block to the success of missions. Not only have Western Christians identified Christianity with Western culture, but they have not understood “the true nature of religion.” They have failed to distinguish between true and false religions, not realizing that all non-Christian religions are simply the inventions of man.³³

Biblical orthodoxy is confused with humanistic liberalism in theology, which has resulted in syncretism or even a complete turning from the gospel.³⁴ Some Roman Catholic and Protestant theologians say that believers of other religions are really Christians, but anonymously.³⁵ There is also a growing belief that all who do good works will go to heaven, not just Christians. This sort of thinking has been expressed by leaders like the former Archbishop of Canterbury, the

³⁰ For the influence of Christianity upon American culture, see G. Wright Doyle, *Christianity in America: Triumph and Tragedy* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2013).

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President of Union Seminary, and even some evangelical theologians today.³⁶ To succeed in spreading the gospel throughout the world, Christians must distinguish it from any human culture or civilization and declare that all must repent and believe.³⁷

Chapter Three: A Creative Approach to Christian Missions—A New Orientation

In the East, we need to “interpret the truth of the gospel so that the non-Christian will be led to accept Christ as the Way, the Truth, and the Life,” and in the West, to turn the tide of paganization and dechristianization. In this chapter, Chang discusses how to differentiate Christianity from culture, philosophy, and pagan religions. This is the basic problem that must be answered in the theology and strategy of missions. To do this, we must differentiate between general revelation and special revelation. The former is insufficient, so non-Christian religions will be inadequate to save us.³⁸ There are three approaches to general revelation, non-Christian religions, and philosophy, which Chang explores in this chapter: eclectic, expulsive, and evangelical.

The Eclectic Approach: The Suicide of Missions

The eclectic approach “is entirely humanistic and holds ... that all religions are good and are different avenues to the same God.”³⁹ This approach is used by liberal Christians today, but it is not new; in fact it appeared very early in Christian history. Apologists of the first and second century thought that “the tenets of Greek philosophy could be adjusted and be adopted” by Christians. Justin Martyr wrote, “The same Logos works all over the world, enlightening the

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³⁷ 75; Acts 17:31.

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millions of Egypt, Rome, Greece, through the considerations of philosophy; they who have lived with Logos are Christians.”⁴⁰ According to this way of thinking, the Buddha could be considered the Enlightened One. Clement of Alexandria (150-213) said that Greek philosophy was the Greeks’ “schoolmaster to bring them to Christ.” In the eighteenth century, Deists claimed that all religions held some common notions, such as the existence of a Supreme Being, and “the unity of that sublime intuition of the human heart.”⁴¹ The philosophers Leibnitz and Schopenhauer held that Oriental religions were superior, especially Buddhism.

William Temple, Archbishop of Canterbury in the mid-twentieth century, declared that all men are divinely enlightened.⁴² Yuan Zhiming, though holding to orthodox Christian beliefs, is a modern example of this approach, teaching that the Dao of Lauzi is the same as the Logos of the Bible.

Rethinking Missions, published in 1932, declared that Christianity was not unique, nor was it the only possible avenue to God. We may note that this idea seems to be similar to that of Karl Rahner’s “anonymous Christian.” Most American Christians today hold this view. *Theology of the Christian Mission*, edited by Gerald Anderson (1961), proposed that Christianity was the fulfillment, rather than contradiction, of the heathen religions, and emphasized the good in all religions.⁴³ Paul Tillich taught that Christianity was latent in paganism, humanism, and Judaism. Others have said that world religions should unite us, not divide us. The World Council of Churches meeting in 1961 declared that the uniqueness of Christianity is questionable.⁴⁴ But

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Chang asserts that only Christ has broken down the wall of sin that separates us from God by his death on the cross.⁴⁵

Tertullian asked, “What has Athens to do with Jerusalem? . . . Christianity alone is the revealed religion; other religions are untrue and devoid of any value.”⁴⁶ Augustine, in the *City of God*, said that there is truth in Greek philosophy because God does not cease revealing his glory.⁴⁷

Man, however, can never grasp the truth because he is always hindered by his own nature, especially his pride.⁴⁸ Calvin wrote that God has planted a “seed of religion” in our hearts. This explains the existence of pagan religions. But we have “injured it and tried to supersede it with other ‘gods’ in our own image. God also “revealed his divine wisdom and majesty also in the works of his hand” (Romans 1:19–20).⁴⁹

We continued to suppress this truth, however. Liberals overemphasize the similarities between various religions and Christianity. Pagan religion is only “a moon in the water” which is not the real one in heaven.⁵⁰ Philosophical and religions systems are now the chief obstacle of the gospel, so we must share the gospel in a way that relates to these systems of faith and thought, showing how Christianity answers their questions, corrects their errors, and completes what is lacking in them.⁵¹

The Expulsive Approach: The Suffocation of Missions

Pietism, narrow-minded fundamentalism, Neo-orthodoxy, and dead orthodoxy all emphasize the unique truth of Christianity. True, Christianity is exclusive, unique, and supreme, but Chang

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says, “We are not isolated from the world and from culture; for we are still in the world, although we are not of the world.”⁵² These Christians have a “one-way traffic strategy,” which separates the gospel too much from culture, and suffocates missions.⁵³

Pietists focus on the Bible alone and neglect theology and philosophy; they have no dialogue with culture or society.⁵⁴ Among Chinese Christians, examples are Watchman Nee, as well as many Chinese fundamentalists and some charismatics. The result of this approach is that Christian truth seems irrelevant to modern man.⁵⁵ Therefore, we should be familiar with both the Bible and culture. “We should not only know and believe the biblical truth, but we should also know how to apply the biblical truth.”⁵⁶ In other words, theology should explain truth in current terms.⁵⁷ J. Gresham Machen wrote, “In persuading people to trust in Christ, emotion and zeal are not enough; intellectual labor is necessary also.”⁵⁸ Christians have failed to lead in culture and philosophy.⁵⁹ To evangelize the world, we must “understand the all-embracing nature and cultural significance of Christian missions.”⁶⁰ “We must take positive leadership to transform the culture which is antagonistic to the Christian truth.”⁶¹

Neo-orthodox Christians, on the other hand, had a “radical divine transcendence strategy.” They believe that there is no revelation in other religions; they also maintain that the Bible is itself only a witness to revelation and is not in itself the Word of God. Examples of this position include Barth, Brunner, and Heinrich Kramer. The Bible, however, tells us that there is general

⁵² 95, John 17:14–16.

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revelation,⁶² which has been given to all people in order to make the Gentiles feel that they are the “offspring of God,”⁶³ make them seek God,⁶⁴ make them see God’s eternal power and deity,⁶⁵ and render them without excuse for disbelief.⁶⁶ There is, however, no fundamental point of contact between the Bible and human reason or virtue, as liberals wrongly claim. All the same, God’s mercy and work are seen in general revelation, and there are some points of contact at the superficial level between pagan religions and biblical truth.

We should be gentle, therefore, with unbelievers, who are lost without Christ. This is the strategy of Paul:⁶⁷ “He started from a point of contact in view of the relationship between general revelation and special revelation, but he went on by warning the Gentiles to repent, and pointing out the absolute difference between general and special revelation, and emphasized the supreme uniqueness and finality of Christianity.”⁶⁸ So we, too, must admit the value of general revelation, while preaching the uniqueness and finality of Christ. We must say that general revelation is insufficient, but use it as a point of contact. Through faith and by the light of the Bible, we “see God’s hand in nature and His footsteps in history.”⁶⁹

The Evangelical Approach: The Surging of Missions

We can’t just repeat old slogans; nor can we forsake the use of reason. We must have a new and creative approach.

First, we must move from general revelation to special revelation. Natural man cannot know God,⁷⁰ but general revelation is meant for “divine judgment,” to render men without excuse for

⁶² Acts 14:16, 17; Rom 1:18–20.

⁶³ Acts 17:28

⁶⁴ Acts 17:27

⁶⁵ Rom 1:19, 20.

⁶⁶ Rom 1:20; Acts 14:16; 17:30-31. 101-102

⁶⁷ Acts 14–15. See 103

⁶⁸ 104

⁶⁹ 105

⁷⁰ Rom 1:21.

disbelief.⁷¹ Then, we must move from fallacy to truth. We should admit that there is some truth in other religions, but assert that they have only partial truth, which can be very misleading.

Pagans don't know God and have gone astray.⁷²

We must also move from darkness to light. Yes, light shines in the darkness, but the darkness does not comprehend it.⁷³ Men love darkness rather than light,⁷⁴ and Satan has blinded them.⁷⁵

Therefore, religious leaders are not really “enlightened ones.” For example, the Buddha was an atheist and his “fourfold truth” was a “philosophy of pessimism.”⁷⁶ It was also superficial, since he didn't know the root of suffering, which is sin. Ephesians 4:17–18 shows that pagans are in darkness. Pagans' notions of man, sin, the world, and redemption are at best incomplete.

Finally, we must move from death to life. Chinese religions cannot lead us to life. Confucius could not answer questions about death.⁷⁷ Laozi knew better than to trust humanistic philosophy, but he could not give a clear definition of the Dao.⁷⁸ Buddha could not raise a mother's son to life; his religion is a “way of death,” not life.⁷⁹ Buddha himself died. “The wages of sin is death,” but “the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”⁸⁰ Jesus died, but rose again, so we can have life in him.⁸¹ The church's job is to declare to the world that it is lost and needs Jesus, the only Savior.

⁷¹ 109

⁷² Acts 14:16.

⁷³ John 1:5

⁷⁴ John 3:19

⁷⁵ 2 Cor 4:4

⁷⁶ 113

⁷⁷ Analects, IV, 8; V, 12; XI, 11.

⁷⁸ Dao De Jing, 1, 25, 42.

⁷⁹ 116

⁸⁰ Romans 6:23.

⁸¹ John 11; Matt 28, etc.

Christianity is unique, but also all-embracing. We urge people to leave their “broken cisterns” and come to “the fount of living waters.”⁸² We want to allow the grace and mercy of God to lead lost souls to the Savior. Christianity is not narrow, for “there is no truth or good in the non-Christian religions which is not found in purer and fuller form in Christianity.”⁸³ In Christ all wisdom is found,⁸⁴ and Christians have the great privilege of knowing him and being heirs with him. We have the responsibility not to neglect this salvation or withhold it from others. We must watch out for dangerous heresies,⁸⁵ contend for the faith,⁸⁶ and disciple all nations.⁸⁷

Chapter Four: The Strategic Center of Christian Missions—A New Frontier

Divine Revelation of the Second Front

“Today’s “‘second front’ is not merely geographical, but also cultural and spiritual. In other words, it is the second eventful encounter with oriental humanism—the first being that with Greek and Roman humanism.”⁸⁸ Christianity is “not a system of speculative philosophy,” but a revealed faith.⁸⁹ We must ask, Why has Christianity not been received in the East and is now considered a Western religion? Christianity had its origin in Asia. The entire narrative of the Old Testament, and most of the New, takes place in Asia, not Europe. “The gospel was carried to the West by Asians. The Christian faith came to Rome and Greece as an Asiatic religion. It was later on that the West set its missionary sights on the Orient,” with William Carey, the Judsons, and J. Hudson Taylor, for example.⁹⁰ “The inception of missionary work in Asia was in the first century,” with the missionary travels of the apostle Thomas (who was himself Asian) went to

⁸² Jeremiah 2:13.

⁸³ 119, quoting Robert Speer.

⁸⁴ See Scripture quotations on p. 120.

⁸⁵ Matt 24:5, 24; 2 Pet 2:1.

⁸⁶ Jude 3.

⁸⁷ Matt 28:19.

⁸⁸ 122

⁸⁹ 123

⁹⁰ 123.

India, and perhaps even to China. The resemblance of Mahayana Buddhism to Christianity suggests ancient historical contact between the two, as Dr. K. S. Latourette pointed out.⁹¹

“God’s main strategy . . . has been to reach nations through centers of cultural, religious, social, and political significance.”⁹² Examples in the Bible include Babylon, Nineveh, Ephesus, Philippi, Corinth, and Rome. “Every major city in which Paul worked had four distinctive features. Each was: (1) a center of Roman politics; (2) a center of Greek civilization; (3) a center of Jewish religion; (4) a center of world commerce.”⁹³ “From the historical records of the Christian church, we receive a vision that we must encounter the old highly-civilized nations such as China and India, the major centers of human culture.”⁹⁴ They have shown a “remarkable toughness, self-consciousness, and consistent tendency to remain true to their original types.”⁹⁵

The Urgent Need for the Second Front

“We are entering a momentous struggle with heathenism, a conflict now world-wide in nature, a life and death struggle between light and darkness, truth and error.”⁹⁶ The time is favorable for the spread of Christianity in Asia because immense changes have made people more receptive to new ideas. “Now most of the people in the Orient are in a state of national crisis. Their old traditions and customs have lost their vitality. Their old religions are beginning to disappear; their societies are becoming more and more secularized, so that atheism and materialism find a fruitful soil. So they are hewing out broken cisterns that can hold no water.” They need the water of life.⁹⁷ Several noted Christian leaders have claimed that the future of Christianity will be

⁹¹ *History of Christian Missions in China*, 48-49. 124

⁹² 124

⁹³ 125

⁹⁴ 125

⁹⁵ Hendrik Kraemer, *The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World*, 57. 126

⁹⁶ 127

⁹⁷ 130-131.

decided in Asia.⁹⁸ The struggle has always been between Christianity and paganism.⁹⁹ In order for Christianity to flourish in Asia, we must leave the past Atlanto-centric approach and mobilize the churches of the East.¹⁰⁰

The Opportune Time for the Second Front

Christianity is in recession in some regions of the world, but this always presages a new advance. (We may note that he was writing in the 1960s, and we can now see the truth of this statement; he was prophetic here.) “We are not at the end of our missionary enterprise in the Orient, but rather at the most opportune time to sow the seeds of the Gospel while the fallow ground has been broken.”¹⁰¹ Christianity is being thwarted by Communism, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, but it will not be stopped. In the days of the early church, “when the Roman conquerors failed, when the Greek philosophers failed, when the religious leaders and the false gods failed, then a Savior was born to us.”¹⁰² We look not to circumstances, but to God, with whom nothing is impossible.¹⁰³

The kingdom of God will prevail; the gates of hell cannot prevail against it.¹⁰⁴ After Jesus had died, all seemed hopeless, but fifty days later, the Holy Spirit came and started a new movement. Even though the time was apparently not favorable to them, the early Christians conquered by faith. We can, too. “God might have seen fit to close the door in 1949; but once the door opens again, He will also raise up a very strong church [in China] ‘for a witness to all the nations,’ and

⁹⁸ E.g., Prof. Oscar M. Buck; Billy Graham;

⁹⁹ 128

¹⁰⁰ 130

¹⁰¹ 133

¹⁰² 135

¹⁰³ Luke 18:27

¹⁰⁴ Matt. 16:18

‘this Gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world,’ and then we ‘shall see the son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory’!”¹⁰⁵

The Real Problems of the Second Front

God raised up Paul to meet the cultural challenge of Greek philosophy and Jewish religion.

Buddhism, Hinduism, and Confucianism are formidable challenges to the gospel, and we need

“learned missionaries.”¹⁰⁶ We can only advance the gospel by “conquering” the heartlands of

these religions and philosophies. “We must know the cultural and intellectual implications of the

Gospel in addition to its spiritual and theological truth,” like Paul on Mars Hill.¹⁰⁷ “Now,

questions still remain unanswered in the hearts of Eastern intellectuals, who are eager and thirsty

as they seek after the mystery of life and the universe.”¹⁰⁸ “Moreover, Christianity in the East has

been relatively unproductive along theological lines.”¹⁰⁹ “We must speak to those for whom the

“cultural heritage has provided the very core and fibre of life itself.”¹¹⁰

When we preach, we must address cultural problems that underlie people’s world view, value

system, and understanding of life.¹¹¹ We need to “create a social and cultural medium that is

favorable to the reception and the rooting of the Gospel.”¹¹² (This is not a social gospel, but an

awareness that we need to speak to assumptions. These assumptions include, for example, the

nature of sin and of human nature; how we know—facts only, intuition only, experience only, or

revelation from God contained in Scripture; the nature of reality—material only, or also spiritual;

¹⁰⁵ Matt 24:14, 30. 138

¹⁰⁶ 139.

¹⁰⁷ 139.

¹⁰⁸ 140.

¹⁰⁹ 140. Lit-se Chang worked hard to change this, as have many in Taiwan and elsewhere since then.

¹¹⁰ 141.

¹¹¹ It is good to preach Christ and forgiveness through him, but we must also start with the sovereignty of God, as Calvin and Luther did; and with epistemology, to show that our faith is founded on God’s truth, and that this truth is superior to other world views. Carl Henry saw this, and began his great work, *God, Revelation, & Authority*, with four volumes on epistemology.

¹¹² 143.

the value of this world and this life—ultimate, or relative. We must tell people that a next life is coming.) We must stress not only the subjective side, but the objective: The reality of God and of absolute truth and its application to all of life. (For example, we must speak about family; finances; communication; human relationships; business; and leadership.) We need not only to save souls, but also to “emphasize the gigantic task of crucifying and baptizing the social, economic, and cultural systems . . . to reintegrate and renew its culture in the light of Christ.”¹¹³ Association with the West has crippled Christianity in Asia and elsewhere. Christianity must become fully integrated into [Chinese] culture in order to grow. We don’t need missionaries to withdraw, but we do need to see: (1) “the end of professionalism, the domination by a heroic minority, and the ecclesiastical foreign-aid program”;¹¹⁴ (2) the full independence of the national church; and (3) the mobilization of the entire church to take the initiative and assume responsibility in each aspect of her respective front (i.e., Chinese taking responsibility for Chinese).

Chapter Five: The Future Perspective of Christian Missions

We can’t just integrate Christianity and pagan religions, but we must “make genuine attempts to meet our rivals with higher understanding and deeper introspection.”¹¹⁵

Theological Penetration of Culture

“The program of Christian missions has shown insufficient knowledge of the non-Christian religions and of the people and culture of the Orient. There has been a lack of profoundness and a lack of theological penetration. The emphasis has been upon externals—upon activity at the

¹¹³ 143. We need to assess this statement critically. What does he mean? If he means influencing the culture with a new world view, as Christianity did in Rome and then Northern Europe, especially Britain and the United States, we can agree; if he means domination or salvation for the culture, then we have questions. My book, *Christianity in America: Triumph and Tragedy*, discusses this question as it relates to America.

¹¹⁴ 147.

¹¹⁵ 149.

expense of inwardness.”¹¹⁶ “The religious heritage of the Orient is so deeply rooted that we cannot brush it aside with a sweep of the hand.”¹¹⁷ In general, advances of the gospel are made when “divine power is generally exerted by appeal to the faculties of the mind.”¹¹⁸ Students in universities generally ignore the gospel now. “The chief obstacle to saving faith today lies in the sphere of the intellect.” We have neglected this area and are paying the price.¹¹⁹

God has placed us in difference cultures, and wants us to spread the gospel within these cultures. “Though Christianity puts emphasis first upon spiritual regeneration, it also needs to speak in the area of culture.” “Mankind has suffered because of Christianity’s isolation from culture; and culture has always sickened and died when it has lost its relationship with its divine origin. The modern chaos has resulted largely from our failure in culture leadership [in the West] . . . We must assume responsibility for becoming leaders in society if we are to rescue it.”¹²⁰

“We must enter into encounter with cultures of countries which boast ancient civilizations, such as those of China and India.”¹²¹ “The church also has a cultural mandate. So the task of our mission is not only religious, but also cultural. We need a thorough knowledge of the whole issue in order to accomplish our task.”¹²² Especially, we must know what Chinese intellectuals are thinking, for their influence is crucial.¹²³ Buddhism succeeded in China partly because of “its cultural and doctrinal penetration. It reached the most thoughtful intellect and penetrated into the deeper layers of the Chinese mind.”¹²⁴ “Christian theology is . . . a vigorous discipline.” Lit-sen

¹¹⁶ 150. Lit-Sen Chang worked hard to dispel this ignorance in his works on Chinese and Indian religion and philosophy.

¹¹⁷ 151.

¹¹⁸ 152, quoting Machen.

¹¹⁹ 153.

¹²⁰ 154.

¹²¹ 154.

¹²² 155.

¹²³ 155.

¹²⁴ 156.

Chang looked to the day when “a genuinely evangelical theology will become the cornerstone of the hierarchy of human knowledge—under God the Creator.”¹²⁵

The Christian Challenge to Paganism

People of the East have been confused about Christianity because they have read works by confusing writers like Kierkegaard, Dewey, Russell, and Toynbee, and have been influenced by rationalism and naturalism. Westerners have been confused about Eastern religions because the study of them has been in the hands of non-evangelical scholars, who emphasize similarities between them and Christianity rather than differences. The church has been lazy and has not studied Eastern religions closely enough to understand them and speak to them with the gospel. Liberal writers have compromised the finality of Jesus Christ. Evangelicals will need to take note: “Wisdom and learning, and conviction and penetration will be required if we are to vindicate the truth, to make the Christian message thoroughly understood, and, above all, to make the uniqueness of Christianity heartily accepted by pagans.”¹²⁶ (This happened in ancient Rome and Greece. The early church fathers understood their own culture well, and they gradually replaced Greco-Roman philosophy and religion with Christianity, by showing that it was a superior world-and-life view that answered the deepest questions we have and provided a thorough solution to our most difficult problems.)

A number of important thinkers in the West, many of them non-Christians, have admitted the greatness of Jesus Christ¹²⁷. John Stuart Mill said that Christ was “unique”; the “ideal representative and guide of humanity”; the world’s “greatest moral reformer.” H. L. Mencken (1880–1956) was one of the most influential American writers in the first half of the twentieth

¹²⁵ 156.

¹²⁶ 159.

¹²⁷ 160.

century, and a sharp critic of Christianity. About Jesus he said, however, that “His story is the most beautiful in all world literature.”

Non-Christian religions cannot point us to the Way, the Truth, and the Life, as Christ can. They cannot bring us salvation, as he can.¹²⁸ Christianity is special revelation from God. Apart from it, we cannot know God, as the Bible says; but in it the mystery of God is revealed. In Christ alone can we be united.¹²⁹

The Sweeping Impact of Christian Revolution

Human nature can't be changed, as history has shown. Revolutions have never brought the happiness that they promised; they only bring more misery. Jesus is the only hope for the world.¹³⁰ Christianity is the only real revolution.¹³¹ Christ is captain of our salvation.¹³² He alone is worthy to be redeemer of this world, through his death, resurrection, ascension, present rule, and promise to return and establish a new heaven and new earth.¹³³ Only as people are changed can the world be changed. Jesus brings non-violent revolution to individuals, then through them to all of society.¹³⁴

Justin Martyr wrote: “Within one hundred years, we are found among all races and nations.”

Tertullian said: “We have filled your cities, your towns, your islands, council halls, the palace, the senate forum.” Origen claimed: “Thousands have forsaken their idols and their philosophy

for Christ, despite persecution and suffering.”¹³⁵ All of this was accomplished using spiritual

¹²⁸ 162-3.

¹²⁹ 163. Eph 1:7–10.

¹³⁰ 165.

¹³¹ 165 ff.

¹³² Heb 2:10.

¹³³ 2 Pet 3:13; Rev 5:9; 21:1, 5

¹³⁴ My book, *Christianity in America: Triumph and Tragedy*, tries to show how Christians have influenced American society and culture over the past four hundred years. The series *Salt & Light: Lives of Faith that Shaped Modern China*, tells the stories of Chinese Christians who contributed to many sectors of Chinese society in the twentieth century.

¹³⁵ 170.

weapons only. Christians should not promote violent revolution. (Despite many Christians' belief in violent revolution, it does not work. There must be a renewal of the inner man, so that his conduct is changed and he influences society. As James Hunter, the sociologist, has demonstrated in his book, *To Change the World*, Christians can only change culture by living lives that reflect the character of God and by penetrating every domain of society with Christian ideas.)

The Ultimate Purpose of Christian Missions

Christianity is a creative force. The ultimate aim of missions is also cultural transformation.¹³⁶

The highest goal of missions is to be “prophetic, transformative, and creative.”¹³⁷

Christ is Lord over all, even now. Someday, all peoples will honor him as supreme ruler and rightful King.¹³⁸ John Calvin believed that the will of Jesus Christ must be acknowledged in all spheres of human life even now.¹³⁹ That is, Christians should be salt and light in this decaying and dark world. At the same time, the church must proclaim the Kingdom of God. That is, we need to explain that God is king of the whole world, that all people should submit to his laws, and that this is for our good. God's ultimate purpose is to “change all things and renew all things through the power of Jesus Christ.”¹⁴⁰

Evaluation

¹³⁶ 173 ff.

¹³⁷ 175.

¹³⁸ 176 ff. Eph 1:20-21; Phil 2: 10, 11.

¹³⁹ 176.

¹⁴⁰ 1 Cor 15:25.

At this point, I should add a few comments. Chang agrees with the Reformed view that Christianity should aim to change not only individuals, but also all of society and culture. That is because they think that God's will is good for all mankind, and his laws are beneficial for both individuals and nations. In addition to showing people how to find eternal salvation through Christ, therefore, we should also help them experience the blessings of obeying God in all spheres of life, both private and public. Since the Bible contains truths that apply to philosophy, government, economics, law, art, education, and culture, we should show how the principles of the Bible affect all these different areas of human thought and activity. As God's truth permeates society and changes people's thinking, then more and more people will enjoy the benefits of living under the rule of God's will.

I personally agree with this point of view, but we need to ask some questions. First, what is Chang's eschatology? Post-millennial? Is he too optimistic about how much change can actually take place in this fallen world? How much does he expect Christians to influence their societies? In other words, is he confusing process with product, effort with outcome? Though we can agree with him on the need for us to do our best to influence our society for good, perhaps we should focus more on our obedience than on the possible results of our preaching the gospel and practicing good works, leaving the results to God. In my book on America, I try to show that although Christians have exerted a very positive influence on America, they have also done great damage, partly by compromising with non-Christian values, and partly by trying to impose biblical principles by politics and power, rather than by prayer, persuasion, and practicing good deeds.

I think we can also ask whether the ultimate goal of missions is to transform culture, or whether it is to call out a people who are dedicated to God and who glorify God by their lives, thus being

a blessing to their society. It is likely, however, that Chang only meant to emphasize the necessity of proclaiming the truth in such a way that people's fundamental values, assumptions, and concepts are exposed and corrected by the light of God's revelation, and to stress the necessity of instructing God's people to apply the teachings of the whole Bible to all facets of life, both private and public. He stated his case strongly so that we would see how important this is. I don't think that he thought that all of Chinese culture would be totally transformed by biblical principles before the return of Christ. He only wanted us to seek to benefit Chinese society by showing how God's truth can bring light and healing to an entire nation, not just to individuals.

Chang concludes: The chaos of the world is increasing, and shows that a momentous event is about to take place.

That is, Jesus is returning soon! 179

But we must preach the gospel first!¹⁴¹

The ultimate purpose of missions is to evangelize the world before Christ returns.¹⁴²

Therefore, we must be ready.¹⁴³ Our duty now is to take the whole gospel to those who have not heard, and to teach them to obey all that the Lord has commanded us, in all spheres of life, private and public.

Even so, Come, Lord Jesus! Amen.

G. Wright Doyle

¹⁴¹ Matt. 24:14.

¹⁴² 179. Matt 24:14.

¹⁴³ Matt 24:44; Rev 22:20–21.

Lecture Two: Zen Existentialism

Introduction

In the 1960s, American society was shocked by a new phenomenon: Young people who wore their hair long—both male and female—and dressed in a shabby way, wearing sandals instead of shoes, for example. They listened to weird music, took drugs, opposed all social norms of morality, and engaged in sex before marriage. They were also very interested in Eastern religions, especially Zen Buddhism. They seemed to live only for themselves and only for the moment. We called them “hippies.”

At the same time, in intellectual circles, everyone was talking about Existentialism, which had come over from France. I remember reading books by existentialists while I was in college. After college, I studied in a liberal seminary, where my systematic theology teacher was a student of Paul Tillich, and my ethics teacher believed in the so-called “New Morality,” which said that anything you do is right if you just do it out of love. That would include pre-marital sex, of course, and taking drugs. During that time, the “Death of God” theology was also popular, especially in liberal churches.

After I graduated from seminary, I was pastor for three small country churches, one of which was in a town that had a small two-year college. I was chaplain to the students, and ran into several hippies who were interested in the gospel, and got to know them. My wife and I opened a coffee shop in our church, where we offered contemporary music and the walls were decorated with posters, which were popular at the time. We were trying to appeal to these students. I even wore sandals for a while! After that, I began graduate school. We attended a church with a lot of students, some of whom had been hippies and were now believers. I noticed that they still retained some ideas and habits from their former way of life.

Then, around 1971, I came across a book by Zhang Lisheng, *Zen-Buddhism: The Spiritual Decline of the West*. Its subtitle said it was a “positive answer to the hippies.” Immediately I bought it and read it, with great interest. Here was a man who understood both the East and the West. He could explain what was going on in my culture, and show me how the Bible could address the questions people were asking in a better way than Existentialism or Zen could.

Now, more than forty years later, though things have changed greatly in America, I must say that I think this book is still very relevant. No one talks much about Existentialism, Zen, or the hippies anymore, but these philosophies have entered deeply into our society. More than that, these ideas and habits have penetrated the church, not only the liberal church, but the evangelical church as well. And since American Christians have influenced churches around the world, including Taiwan, I find that this book, like all of Zhang’s writings, has some important things to say to us now.

The Influence of Zen and Existentialism Today

What are some of the current manifestations of the movements in the 1960s which Zhang Lisheng critiques in his book?

First and foremost, we see a radical focus on the individual self as the center of the universe. Whereas previous generations honored their elders, or tradition, or moral standards from such authorities as the Bible or Confucius, now the main source of authority, and the main focus of all choices, is the self. The self has become our god. For example, the Human Potential Movement claims that “individuals have the potential within themselves to change things, if only they can discover the secrets that will enable them to tap into their inner persons and unlock the power

that will help them to regain control of their lives.”¹⁴⁴ Another example is EquiSync, whose website says: “As you continue to meditate with EquiSync, over time you will eventually move to a state that we call ‘mental harmony.’ This is a state where you are always in the now, where there is a mindful acceptance of the present moment and you completely let go of self-conscious, judgmental thinking.” New Age spirituality also shows the influence of Zen and of Existentialism, since it teaches that god is to be found in our inner self.

Second, our culture has shifted from respect for ideas, words, concepts, and reason to a focus on images, experiences, and feelings. Not what we think, but how we feel, has become the main question. And not what *we* feel, but what *I* feel, is what counts in life. This means that rational discourse, arguments based on facts or reasoning, have little persuasive power. Images, pictures, music, and sensuous experience determine choices. We no longer have a word-based culture, in other words, but an image and sound-based culture.

Third, we expect pleasure, *now*. Our society is committed to hedonism. A popular commercial in America says, “Obey your thirst!” Satisfy your desires, and do it now! Of course, post-modernism also holds that there are no fixed and final truths, no lasting absolute values, no dogmas or doctrines that remain valid for all times and places and peoples. I am free to decide what is true, depending on how I feel such a choice will affect my pleasure now.

Other examples of the continuing influence of the 1960s include the very casual way in which people dress, and the very sloppy attire of musical performers; the widespread use of both legal and illegal drugs; sexual immorality; disrespect for history, tradition, and authority, as well as for

¹⁴⁴ DCRWW, 239–40. E.g., TM, New Age (assoc. with Zen), psychedelic spirituality, transpersonal psychology.

older people; coarse language in movies, TV programs, and public entertainment; and acceptance of homosexual behavior.

Zen, Existentialism, and the Church

In liberal churches, of course, the turn away from belief in the absolute truth of the Bible has only increased. This began in the late nineteenth century and has continued, so that very few theologians in non-evangelical churches and seminaries believe that the Bible is without error, or that traditional theology has any value today. The “Death of God” movement has passed, but it has been replaced by all sorts of theological movements that do not start from the Bible, but from some situation or personal condition: liberation theology, American Black theology, feminist theology, “theology of hope,” narrative theology.¹⁴⁵ All of these oppose the idea that the Bible is fully true and that its main doctrines can be clearly stated in a way that is valid for all time.

In the twentieth century, theologians continued to focus on the “imminence” of God rather than the transcendence of God, with a few exceptions. They thought they could find God through the use of human reason, as it meditates on human existence. Their focus was on man. Karl Barth challenged this, but his doctrine of revelation showed its debt to Existentialism by insisting that God’s revelation is personal, not propositional, and that the Word of God is only found in personal encounter with God, rather than in the Bible itself.

Strikingly, evangelicals too have imbibed the spirit of the age. In popular Christianity, we see the focus on personal healing rather than forgiveness of sins; we look for happiness now, rather than

¹⁴⁵ The “Death of God” movement arose from medieval mysticism, nineteenth century philosophy, and twentieth century experiences of destruction and the apparent lack of meaning in the world. Theologians in the twentieth-century movement claimed that, for most people, the traditional God of the Bible was functionally “dead,” and that there remained so sense of a transcendent God. Some of them also believed that, in fact, there is no transcendent God, but that “God” is beyond being, and thus, in reality, non-existent.

the return of Christ and a New Heaven and New Earth; the band has replaced the pulpit as the center of Christian worship; music, movie images, and emotional singing have replaced the sermon and the traditional hymns. Singers in famous Christian music groups dress in a way that resembles the hippies. In theology, there has been a strong reaction to Word-based doctrine. Theologians speak of stories, not of truths that are valid for all time. More and more, evangelicals question the inerrancy of Scripture, and reject the idea of propositional revelation in favor of personal encounter with God's Word, as with Barth. Indeed, Barth has become the most influential theologian among many evangelicals.

Perhaps the most obvious change is the way that the self has taken the center of attention. Preaching tells us how to be happy, *now*. Christian books tell us how we can succeed, enjoy life, and reach our full potential. Joel Osteen, who rarely mentions the Cross of Christ or salvation from sin, has become a popular Christian leader. In some extreme charismatic circles, people are encouraged to pray and worship, but not to read the Bible. Leading from God comes from inner prompting, not from the principles of Scripture. Believers seek spiritual experiences in emotional worship, not an encounter with God based on truth. Christians make decisions based on how they feel, and how they can be happy, rather than on what God's Word says or how we can become holy.

All these things are a direct result of the cultural changes that took place in the 1960s, and which Zhang Lisheng discusses in this book. Let us now turn to his analysis of Zen and of Existentialism in the West in the 1960s.

Zen-Existentialism: The Spiritual Decline of the West

Crisis of our age began when the French Revolution introduced atheism, as pantheism, into modern Europe. Another trend was altruism, or a mystical cult of the feelings, which taught that one could emancipate the inner life of the soul from all the restraints of intellectual criticism. Then one's self would be lost in the Infinite. Modern sensate culture is disintegrating. Material progress doesn't satisfy, however, so people are turning inward, to the psyche. Freudian psychology and its derivatives probe the inner self in order to find freedom from problems. Ever since the 1960s, there have been two predominant trends: the denial of God, and turning inward and emphasizing the autonomy and transcendence of man, sometimes through the use of drugs.¹⁴⁶

After science had proved to be incapable of solving our inner problems, Zen came along to offer a way out in the West, a way to transcend all opposites, bring about the unity of man and the universes, and produce a state of oneness in which there is no distinction between man and God. According to this view, we are each the Lord in hiding; we are all potential Buddhas.¹⁴⁷ The Death of God theology and the existential theology of Paul Tillich shared the iconoclasm of Zen.¹⁴⁸ They all claimed that contemplation was the highest of man's activities, ignored the problem of sin,¹⁴⁹ and turned against objective order and truth towards seeking to find truth in the inner self.¹⁵⁰

Chapter One: History and Nature of Zen¹⁵¹

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Zen teaches instantaneous enlightenment rather than a process of self-cultivation.¹⁵² It is “not Buddhism, but a Chinese anomaly of it.” Really, it was “a revolt against Buddhism.”¹⁵³ Zen “grew out of a combination of Mahayana Buddhism and Taoism,” and was “more deeply influenced by Taoism.” “The Central theme of Taoism is *wu-wei* (non-action).”¹⁵⁴ Zen is iconoclastic; it is a revolt against language. Books are like a “finger pointing to the moon.”¹⁵⁵ This resembles neo-orthodoxy’s view of Scripture as only a “witness” to the Word of God. Zen is also a revolt against reason. “It is an experience of Reality beyond doctrine.”¹⁵⁶ “Truth is not subject to logical analysis or to intellectual treatment. It must be directly and personally experienced by each of us in his inner spirit.”¹⁵⁷ Zen agrees with Madyamika Buddhism that “there is no objectively correct and definitive perspective on anything.”¹⁵⁸ This resembles some views of contextual theology, that theology is always totally determined by a particular context, and can never propound doctrines that are true for all times and places. We may also note that the current Dalai Lama is a radical skeptic.¹⁵⁹ Furthermore, “Anything that has the resemblance of an external authority is rejected by Zen.”¹⁶⁰

Chapter Two: The Teachings and Practice of Zen

“Zen’s way of teaching is to demonstrate Reality rather than to talk about it, and to avoid formally religious terminology and conceptual statements.”¹⁶¹ It overturns normal logic and

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¹⁵⁸ JJK, “Zen,” in Ted Honderich, ed., *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, New Edition.

¹⁵⁹ AC, “Buddhist philosophy,” in Honderich, ed., *Oxford Companion to Philosophy*. 114

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“teaches nothing.”¹⁶² Zen masters teach by actions rather than words.¹⁶³ There are two schools of Zen: the “gradual” school, which is defunct, and the “abrupt” or “instantaneous” school, led by Hui-Neng. This school advocates a leap in the mind, or “Seeing into one’s own nature.” It teaches that the original nature is not “God”, but “mind” (*xin*), which is the Buddha, the Way, the Zen.¹⁶⁴

“The aim of Zen is to take hold of the truth of Non-duality, which is the Absolute or the One Mind.”¹⁶⁵ It calls for “the intuitive realization of the Self nature which is the Nature of all things.”¹⁶⁶ “The truth lies in our inner being.”¹⁶⁷ “Reality transcends the duality.”¹⁶⁸ “Zen signifies the mystical experience in which subjectivity and objectivity merge.”¹⁶⁹ There is no distinction between I and Thou, This and That. Finite and infinite are one.” “Zen seeks that which lies beyond antithesis.”¹⁷⁰

“The essence of Zen consists in suppressing the activity of Ego, in emerging from the cocoon of self-centered thought and feeling.”¹⁷¹ The ego stops trying to improve itself. “Enlightenment lies in unconsciousness.” “The Unconscious is thus the Ultimate reality, the true form.” “Form is void and void is form.”¹⁷² Since there is nothing, there is no theory in Zen. Object of Zen practice is to attain enlightenment (*su*). **To be back within** oneself; to return home; to “acquire a

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new viewpoint and break the rules of the dualistic logical analysis, for the Reality transcends the duality.”¹⁷³

The practitioner of Zen seeks Satori: the “world of non-discrimination, non-differentiation; two-ness becomes one-ness and yet equally seen as two.”¹⁷⁴ “The self... must be transcended.”

Followers of Zen seek to “discipline and master the Mind.” They must relax and banish wandering thoughts. This is not merely meditation. You must “continually exert yourself without interruption.”¹⁷⁵ Zen masters employ *Koan*, which are paradoxical questions or situations requiring you to give up all intellectual effort.¹⁷⁶ “The worst enemy of Zen experience...is the intellect, which consists of and insists on discriminating the subject from the object.”¹⁷⁷ In Zen, the “will is more basic than intellect because it is the principle that lies at the root of all existence and unites them all in the oneness of being.” The basic will is “cosmic unconsciousness.” The object is to “let go” of your mind; this ‘is acceptance of life which is always free and spontaneous and unlimited.”¹⁷⁸

The result of Zen practice¹⁷⁹ is supposed to be enlightenment, in which all problems are apparently solved, there is a feeling of inner serenity, a sense of flow and of the rightness of all actions, willingness to let things happen, and a diminishing desire to control. Zhang believes that Zen is a technique to induce mental breakdown so you can be subjected to a new ideology. The master becomes a tyrant over the stressed disciple.¹⁸⁰

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Part Two: Crisis in the West: The Impact of Zen

Chapter One: Crisis in Culture: The Cultural Background of Zen's Impact

“With its alienation from the Christian faith, and its negligence in spiritual things, modern western civilization is breaking down.”¹⁸¹ Sorokin says, “The history of human progress is a history of incurable stupidity.” Hardly any revolution has achieved its purpose. For the past four centuries, “the main pattern of Western culture is sensate culture.”¹⁸² “Owing to its deviation from the Christian truth and faith in God, modern sensate culture is in the process of disintegration.”¹⁸³

Christianity has permeated all facets of Western culture since Augustine.¹⁸⁴ But since the Reformation, “Christian thinkers failed to take positive leadership in the realms of philosophy and culture.”¹⁸⁵ As a result, there was a split between Christianity and education, social philosophy, and the arts. “Humanism has introduced a new paganism.”¹⁸⁶ As Elton Trueblood said, “We live in a ‘cut-flower’ civilization.”¹⁸⁷ “Secularism and naturalism rule supreme.”¹⁸⁸ There are no absolute moral standards, so culture has been debauched, leading to “deepening pessimism and growing weariness.”¹⁸⁹ Machines have not brought rest. Spiritual poverty has

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resulted in over-work, “spiritual insecurity, moral nihilism, weariness and disquietness, lack of profound thinking and meditation, and lack of spiritual freedom and humanity.”¹⁹⁰

The twentieth century was an age of tension.¹⁹¹ “Though we have it easier than our forefathers, we have more uneasiness. Calloused hands were the badge of our forefathers, but a furrowed brow is the insignia of modern man. This generation is dying, not from external pressure, but from internal combustion.”¹⁹² “Anxiety is the natural result when our hopes are centered in anything short of God and His will for us.”¹⁹³ By excluding God, “modern Western culture despite its strength and growth, is now without spiritual vitality. It has no soul to transmit, no light to shine, and thus has become aimless and lifeless.”¹⁹⁴

“The rapid and worldwide growth of a psychological interest over the last two decades shows unmistakably that modern man has to some extent turned his attention from material things to his own subjective processes.” This shows that “man expects something from psychic life which he has not received from the outer world.”¹⁹⁵ Our problems are not simply psychological, they are ultimately spiritual, however. “Man is the crown of God’s creation and religion by nature must claim to be central in human life; so man’s heart still aches for God and hungers for a new authority or symbol to give meaning to life to occupy his spiritual vacuum.” But we have not turned to God, so we resort “to demonic and false religions to satisfy” our desperate needs.¹⁹⁶

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In the East, it is mistakenly thought that the two world wars came from Christianity and that Christianity is a Western religion.¹⁹⁷ At this point, Zen “steps in and appeals to Western minds weary of conventional religions and philosophy” by promising to “reduce the tension of all opposites.”¹⁹⁸ Existentialism and Zen in the West are “a protest of human nature against the idea of an objective order and the shallow rationalism which played a great role in Western philosophy and humanist culture.” However, this is only a turning inward, not upward to God. The human heart cannot save itself, but needs to be born again.¹⁹⁹

Chapter Two: Crisis in Philosophy: Philosophical Background of Zen’s Impact

“Non-Christian philosophy is immanent and anthropocentric by its nature. It begins by absolutizing and deifying a created aspect. So it is akin to the spirit of Zen.” It comes from man’s rebellious spirit, as do liberal theology and Western humanist culture.”²⁰⁰ Plato teaches that all knowledge is “innate in the mind.”²⁰¹ The mind becomes a “pseudo-maker.”²⁰² There are two fallacies in this teaching: “The Platonic man colonizes Reality with abstractions,”²⁰³ and “The...thinker runs the risk of becoming a prisoner of his own mind and no longer sees the things that are truly before him.”²⁰⁴ “Since the Greek concern is mostly with intelligibility over against the Hebrew-Christian concern with Reality, through Plato and Aristotle they lost their genuine sense of religious relationship with Reality. A living God thus became a mind-made

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concept.”²⁰⁵ After the Reformation, Christians did not make theology the leader of philosophy, and lost the cultural and intellectual initiative.

Modern Western philosophy started with Descartes, who “avowed his decision ‘to seek no other knowledge than that which’ he ‘was able to find “within” himself.” “Henceforth, moderns ‘live and move and have their [their] Being’ not in God (cf. Acts 17:29) but in a world of self-assertion.” Descartes “confused ‘an idea’ with the actual existence of ‘the object of the idea.’”²⁰⁶ Since Descartes, Western philosophy increasingly contradicted Christianity in epistemology. After the rise of the empirico-scientific method, Western man has been geo-centric and homo-centric.²⁰⁷

Today, Naturalism rules.²⁰⁸ Spengler says, “The urban spirit turns to look at itself in order to establish the proposition that there is no higher judgment seat of knowing beyond itself.”²⁰⁹ Now—when Zhang was writing, but also at present—we increasingly find outright atheism: Dewey, Russell, Heidegger, Sartre, and the New Atheists in the West today, led by men like [Richard Dawkins](#), [Daniel Dennett](#), [Sam Harris](#), and [Christopher Hitchens](#).²¹⁰ But because of the failure of humanism, people in the West are turning to Kierkegaard, once considered insane. This existentialism is “a departure from the naïve optimism and shallow rationalism of the preceding centuries.” It opposes belief in human reason and technical progress. But they don’t turn to God, but to man himself, like Zen.²¹¹

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The failures and disasters of the twentieth century led the masses to lose faith in old values, including Christianity, and open themselves to new thought.²¹² But Existentialism “remains in the slough of humanism,” which is “committed to a philosophical faith in the autonomous freedom of human personality.” Before, philosophers believed in the “redemptive power of reason,” but now they promote the “autonomy of human freedom.” There has always been a competition between humanistic and mystical tendencies in the West.²¹³ Now philosophy has again turned to skepticism.²¹⁴

Existentialism is in some sense new. It has been “denounced as the onset of a tide of despair and irrationalism, also as a justification for the individual libertinism and a disastrous surrender to Nihilism.”²¹⁵ At its core, it is “an attempt to reach the inmost core of human existence in a concrete individual fashion. It is essentially a turning toward, a probing of the layers of the self.”²¹⁶ It goes back to Delphic oracle in Greece, which had as its motto, “Know yourself,” and it flows from modern humanism.

The nineteenth-century Danish philosopher-theologian Kierkegaard taught that man holds his existence in his own hands, in his freedom to choose to transcend himself. “In free self-actualization, he is the free cause of his ‘becoming.’”²¹⁷ Kierkegaard was an extreme individualist. He said, “Individual subjectively alone is truth.”²¹⁸ According to him, real selfhood comes as a result of an existential leap, which Zhang Lisheng says is “Sudden Enlightenment, in

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the term of Zen.”²¹⁹ It goes beyond the rules of good and evil. Kierkegaard was against all system, routine, objectivity, and the intellect.²²⁰ Nietzsche was “a radical irrationalist.”²²¹ He advocated Nihilism and believed in the worship of power, valueless activism, driven by a fear of meaninglessness. Kierkegaard and Nietzsche are similar. They were both irrationalists, rejecting the supremacy of reason;²²² anthropocentric, seeking real being in human existence; and radically subjective and anti-social. In these ways and others, they anticipated, and even launched, twentieth-century existentialism.

Chapter Three: Crisis in Religion: Religious Background of Zen’s Impact

The impact of Zen on the West results more from the West’s “negativism” than from Eastern initiative. A “revolt against the rationalistic character of Western culture, the allegedly dogmatic exclusiveness of Christianity, cultural and religious snobbery, and a chase after the exotic, were some of the main aspects of this conspicuous self-negation in the West.”²²³

In the eighteenth century, Leibnitz proclaimed the superiority of Eastern natural theology.²²⁴ In the nineteenth century, Schopenhauer declared that Buddhism was superior to Christianity. Others did, too, claiming that “Buddhism has a deeper and higher wisdom by its freedom from unphilosophical encumbrance and that Buddhism is superior to Christianity.”²²⁵ The historian

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²²¹ 73 Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche (1844 – 1900) was a German philosopher and cultural critic.

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Arnold Toynbee agreed with this assessment also. Hermann Keyserling said that Buddhism was better because it was undogmatic.²²⁶

In the 1950s, a Unitarian minister in New York urged his congregation to accept Buddhism rather than Billy Graham's preaching. In 1932, the Layman's Foreign Missionary Inquiry Committee, headed by Dr. W.E. Hocking, published *Rethinking Missions*, which said that Christianity was not unique; we should search for truth together, along with other religions.²²⁷ *The Theology of the Christian Mission*, edited by Gerald H. Anderson, which contained the record of a symposium, said that there was good in all religions; all were paths to the same reality. Paul Tillich held to the same view.²²⁸

In the church, morality has been emphasized instead of "supernatural Christianity." Rationalism and Evolutionism have become popular, and man is believed to be "part of the God-present."²²⁹ In the early twentieth century, the Social Gospel was widely popular, with its belief in the idea of progress and the inherent goodness of man.²³⁰ It taught that man could become "the perfect man in his own power and by his own efforts."²³¹ Liberal theology basically eliminated divine revelation. "The homocentric theology of the psychologist has found sin to be a maladjustment that could be treated as a medical doctor treats an organic illness." This has found expression in the American evangelical church, which possesses a therapeutic culture which views people as hurt and in need of healing, rather than sinful and needing forgiveness and sanctification.²³² According to this perspective, "redemption does not come through the objective work of a

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personal Lord but through the human decision, and it is not a future victory, but a present adjustment.”

All too often, the churches are “just another branch of American democratic culture.” In place of the old gospel, there are new emphases on “healing, on peace of mind, on happiness, on prosperity, on success, on plenty, etc.” “Such a religious climate also explains why some people became easy prey of Zen Buddhism.”²³³ These same trends are even more prevalent in Europe, but there we see an attitude of indifference, which is really a sign of despair.²³⁴ In the 1960s Paul van Buren and Harvey Cox’s writings became popular. Van Buren wrote *The Secular Meaning of the Gospel*,²³⁵ in which he called for not repentance for sin, but liberation from political and social bondage. Evangelism was unnecessary; he focused not metaphysics, but on “the human, the historical, the empirical.”²³⁶ Harvey Cox recommended that we stop talking about God for a while.²³⁷ This was all simply a new embodiment of the old humanism.²³⁸

Lit-sen Chang believed that Western culture had changed for the worse, not the better.

Christianity was what brought Western civilization to its height. It encouraged creativity. At the end of the Roman Empire, Augustine “gave meaning and orientation to the new social order.”²³⁹

But these liberal theologians were “natural men who receive not the things of the Spirit of God and only look at the things which are visible and temporal, not things which are eternal.”²⁴⁰

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God's kingdom, however, though invisible, will grow and conquer. It is like a mustard seed. Secularism, on the other hand, does not see things as they really are.²⁴¹

Chapter Four: Crisis in Theology: Theological Background of Zen's Impact

Pantheistic Theology: The Oneness of God and Man

Today's theological confusion results from the nineteenth century, with "Schleiermacher's project of making the Gospel 'meaningful' as it is desired in our day." Recent Christologies "endeavor to point out the oneness of God and man."²⁴² Schleiermacher's theology was preceded by German mysticism in the Middle Ages, which was basically pantheistic theology. It was thus preparatory to Zen's impact in the West. Schleiermacher tried to build his theology "from within," to weave it out of the materials furnished by his own religious 'consciousness,' rather than upon the objective teachings of the Word of God."

For Schleiermacher, there was no dualism between God and man or the world. He ignored the Trinity, saying that Christ had no pre-existence.²⁴³ Incarnation was only the "introduction of the life of God into humanity rendering it divine."²⁴⁴ For Schleiermacher, Christ awakened the dormant good part of us. Lit-sen Chang believes that this is the "spirit of heathenism that man 'shall be as gods' (Gen 3.5) by self-improvement or self-deification, or in the term of Zen, self-enlightenment, 'satori.'"²⁴⁵ One critic said that he spoke of "immediate consciousness of the universal existence of all finite things in and through the Infinite, and of all temporal things in and through the Eternal." "Feeling" is "the consciousness of communion with absolute unity and

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totality that is granted to humanity by religion alone, an immediate consciousness of human being as being in God, in which an individual's free acts are but reflections of his or her finite particularity being freely determined by the Infinite."

The Theology of Immanence: The Sons of Schleiermacher

Neo-liberal theology depends on Schleiermacher. This is especially true of Tillich. These theologians may speak of transcendence, but they really mean "a deity immanent within experience and transcendent as the ground of experience."²⁴⁶ Redemption for them is not forgiveness of sins, but "the actualizing of human potential,"²⁴⁷ just as Zen seeks to "see into one's inner being, to seek an intuitive realization of the self nature, for everyone is a potential Buddha." J.A.T. Robinson, who wrote *Honest to God* in the 1960s, said that God is "the god of the depths, the ground of our being, for God is not a Being but the depth of our being." In effect, he admits that he is a humanist.²⁴⁸ Like Robinson, Zen teaches to see into one's own nature; the truth of Zen opens itself within.

Death of God Movement: Cult of Iconoclasm

The Death of God Movement goes further: "They are convinced that any god is unbelievable if he has to be placed in a transcendent realm."²⁴⁹ "Now man is his own redeemer." They hold to radical immanence.²⁵⁰ Thomas Altizer quoted Zen with approval.²⁵¹ He referred to "an original sacred and the radical profane." He followed Buddhism, saying that "contemplation is the

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highest of man's activity. For therein he can become God and therein can he become immortal." Nietzsche called man to an "absolutely autonomous mode of existence, and even dared to say that a transcendent God is Satan.²⁵² He "killed" God in order to attain "the Great humanity Divine or final coming together of God and man." This frees man from the fear of judgment and opens up total freedom to be ourselves and to be God to ourselves.²⁵³ In this way, all old moral laws are believed to be restrictive and are abolished.²⁵⁴

"Christian Atheism": The Strategy of the Old Serpent

True religion is not egoistical, for man, but for the glory of God.²⁵⁵ To be truly religious is to love and long for God alone. The views of Christian Atheism are fallacious, for you cannot have Christianity without a divine Christ.²⁵⁶ This is an ancient error, which the Bible warns is a sign of the end times. It is also self-destructive.²⁵⁷ We can't be independent of God. When we try, we wither and die, as our society is now doing. Lit-sen Chang uses the Bible to show that these men are dead in sin, false prophets who will be condemned by God.²⁵⁸

PART THREE: THE TWINS OF ZEN-EXISTENTIALISM: EAST MEETS WEST

DOOM OF AUTO-SOTERISM

The Points of Correspondence

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Zen appeals to the West because the West is in a state of crisis. Existentialism “is a philosophy of the meaningless of life, of the nihility and mortality of human existence which is devoid of any prospect or future.” It appeals to the “doubt, despair, futility and nihilism” of modern Western man. Twentieth-century catastrophes caused Western man to lose faith in his culture and religion. Zen is “a cult of revolt against reason and authority...” and thus finds points of contact.²⁵⁹ However, Zen and Existentialism are not the same. They are both not “-isms,” they have different backgrounds and terminologies, and they are difficult to grasp or define. Existentialism and Zen are similar, however, in their rebellion against reason and the word. But Lit-sen Chang thinks that “Zen is the most radical and ruthless form of Existentialism.”²⁶⁰

The Witness of Heidegger

Heidegger thought that he and Suzuki were saying the same thing.²⁶¹ One friend said that his philosophy was “a spirit of overwhelming solitude.” In this view, the only way man could overcome nihilism was by “his recuperating ‘genuine-selfhood’ now rooted in what Heidegger defines as metaphysical nothingness susceptible of effacing the antinomy between the subjective and the objective.” “Authentic selfhood is self-determination, self-projection, and self-transcendence.” We could be saved from unauthentic selfhood by “angst,”²⁶² which comes suddenly and shows the vanity of existence and freely accepts death which is the greatest potentiality of existence.” One may then “accept nothingness and the meaningless of life.”²⁶³ This way, one may face death without fear. In Zen, “it is the full realization of Mind, the opening

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²⁶⁰ 116

²⁶¹ 116. Daisetsu Teitaro Suzuki 1870 – 1966^[2] was a Japanese author of books and essays on Buddhism and Zen. His works helped to make these religions popular in the West.

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of the mental eye in order to look into the very reason of existence.” For Heidegger, “pure Being and pure Nothing are . . . one and the same.” In Zen, “form is Void, Void is form,” and the ultimate of all things is emptiness.”²⁶⁴ “Originally there was Nothing.” This is the essence of Zen.²⁶⁵

The Shift of Mentality

The recent shift to Existentialism is a turning point in Western culture, a turning away from faith in objective order. Zen teaches that one must discipline the mind, to master it, so that it sees “the unity of man and universes.” It advocates non-discrimination, non-differentiation, and non-duality.” In this way, it greatly resembles postmodern relativism. “This urge towards ‘inwardness’ marks all Existential Thought.”²⁶⁶ Kierkegaard wanted to reverse the order of philosophy from objective order to inward subjectivity, but this has all along been the mood of the East. Heidegger wanted to turn people away from the mundane things of daily life, too, as did Buddhism. He believed that authentic life was freedom from such attachment. This is called *Satori* (enlightenment) in Zen.²⁶⁷ Asian religions teach the unreality of this world and the folly of our attachment to it. “Since all is void, originally there was Nothing.” In Taoism, the Dao cannot be named. The origin of the universe is the unnamable Void. “Therefore, the mystery can only be grasped through unconsciousness.” Lit-sen Chang notes the similarity between Heidegger, the Dao, and Zen, which all teach that the origin of all things and essentially unnamable.²⁶⁸

Chapter Two: The Futility of Pseudo-Religion

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The Appealing Features of Zen

By opposing rationalism and humanism. Zen “transcends logic and overrides the tyranny and misrepresentation of ideas”²⁶⁹ Humanism can’t liberate man finally or satisfactorially,” but according to Lit-sen Chang, Zen is a form of humanism. Zen teaches self-denial and “great death,” which is the ego dying to itself in its radical negativity. This is not a total death but it leads to an awakening of the “inner life of man.”²⁷⁰ This fights against the modern “conspiracy against the inner life of man,” as Bernanos called it. Kierkegaard said that our bondage to others leads to loss of freedom, resulting in anxiety and self-centeredness. To escape, we must deny self and at the same time “elect” self as infinite and absolute and thus obtain salvation.

The Serious Inadequacy of Zen

First, although proponents of Zen claim that Zen “Supersedes the doctrine of a real Creator,” it is really “a very peculiar and subtle form of Atheism.” It identifies God with nature.²⁷¹ It posits an eternal “nameless and no-word” instead of the Christian understanding of the Word of John 1, which teaches that the Word is eternal,²⁷² and that Jesus existed before the beginning of the world, as Creator.²⁷³

Second, Zen engenders a spirit of mysticism “by taking refuge in its doctrines of radical intuition.” In Zen, there is “no dependence on words and letters.” It is mystical, too, in its revolt against reason and its similarity to the teachings of Meister Eckhart, “God and I are one in the act of perceiving him.” The mystic experience is profound but ineffable, with no content.

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“Furthermore, mysticism without divine revelation is dangerous and will lead men to destruction.”²⁷⁴ Without the written Word,²⁷⁵ we are ignorant of divine things. Yes, the Spirit is in some sense present to every man in general revelation, but “the fact that the Spirit is present with every human mind...Is no proof that He makes immediate supernatural revelations to every human being.” Furthermore, there is no objective criterion to judge the value of mystical experiences.

Third, Zen disregards the holiness of God. It is “a radical form of Iconoclasm.” In Zen, one can love God and love the Devil, too; clinging to one God or one truth is a narrow limitation. Sin against God does not exist.²⁷⁶ We must act according to nature, they say. Such an attitude leads to arrogance and eccentric behavior, like that of the hippies. Alan Watts, for instance, says that god and the devil are really friends.²⁷⁷ As Romans 1 says, this leads to degenerate conduct.

Lastly, Zen denies the need of a Savior. It is a radical form of auto-soterism. Heathenism denies God and affirms that man can save himself, as in the views of Bavinck.²⁷⁸ Thus, it is a type of self-pride and self-deification.²⁷⁹

The Utter Failure of Zen

Zen fails in seeing into one’s own nature. This cannot be done without knowing our original state in Adam and the state of sin into which we have fallen. All departments of our mind are infected

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with sin. We are not “vicious by custom,” but “corrupted by nature.”²⁸⁰ There is nothing good to be found by looking into our nature. It needs to be reformed, even put to death.²⁸¹

Zen also fails in the attainment of Enlightenment. We cannot be enlightened by ourselves. Our minds are already darkened.²⁸² Some men, including Chinese thinkers, have written perceptively about human nature, and this is by general revelation, but we cannot really know ourselves apart from special revelation.²⁸³ “The mental eye remains shut, until it is opened by the Lord.”²⁸⁴

Zen seeks unity of with universe, but this ignores the Fall, which has broken our relationship with God and with others.²⁸⁵ We are not at unity with the universe, for God’s wrath comes upon all unrighteousness. We can only be reconciled by Christ.²⁸⁶

Zen can bring some sort of sudden experience, but is it true or helpful? And can it save us from ourselves? “The roots of our problem are not in the mind only, but in the spirit.”²⁸⁷ The problem is not only with the mind, but with the will, which, as Augustine said, is not free.²⁸⁸ Zen seeks to discipline the mind and make it its own master, but this can’t be done apart from Christ.²⁸⁹

Salvation comes from God, not philosophy, and only through the God-man, Jesus Christ.²⁹⁰ 144.

Conclusion

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²⁸² Eph. 4:17–18

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Zen is “inadequate in its teachings but also futile in its effects.” It denies the “infinity and transcendence of a living and personal God by identifying Him with Nature.” Thus, it is a subtle form of Atheism. “It engenders a spirit of mysticism by taking refuge in its doctrine of radical intuition by looking into one’s nature.” Furthermore, “It denies the need of external rules of morality.”²⁹¹ Finally, Zen leads to “anarchic relativism.”²⁹² It “Rejects the grace of God and the need of a Saviour by exalting and edifying man.”²⁹³ Really, it is only self-intoxication.

Chapter Three: A Movement to Eternal Destruction

Disastrous Surrender to Nihilism

Zen is a radical form of iconoclasm. In a revolt against reason and authority, the mind is its own master. External authority is rejected; internal authority is all. It is “not bound by rules, but seeks to make its own rules.”²⁹⁴ For example, The Beatniks of the 1960s, who were influenced by Zen, became “proud rebels.” Zen is also “an irrational philosophy, based upon a faith in the autonomous sovereign person of man.” “This anti-rationalism permeates its subjectivism, its individualism, and its theory of nihilism.”²⁹⁵

According to Kierkegaard, “God is truth, but truth exists only for a believer who inwardly experiences the tension between himself and God.” This doctrine is a “destruction of Christianity’s historic historicity.”²⁹⁶ For Nietzsche, there is no norm except, “Be yourself.”

According to Heidegger, “the authentic man is conscious of the vanity of existence and accepts

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nothingness and the meaninglessness of life.”²⁹⁷ All this is a reaction against humanism and rationalism, which Christianity also rejects. But it replaces rules with itself as subject. We must replace man’s reason with God as subject and lawgiver.²⁹⁸ God has created the world with order, which is “law.” For reason to be stable, it must focus on and recognize this external law.

Existentialism withdraws from hearing God’s law and Word, and becomes anti-social as well, seeing man as an “autonomous being whose existence is considered to be a law into itself.”²⁹⁹

Because God created us in his own image, “there must be a rational relationship between us and God.”³⁰⁰ “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge”³⁰¹ There are two forms of knowledge: revealed knowledge and rational knowledge,” which are poles apart.³⁰² “Jesus Christ is not the enemy of reason, but only of the irrational arrogance of those who pride themselves on their intellect and of the irrational self-sufficiency of reason.” Augustine said, “I believe in order to understand.” “In faith itself both revelation and reason meet.” That is because we need reason to understand the Word of God which we believe. As Gordon Clark said, “Only by accepting rationally comprehensive information on God’s authority can one hope to have a sound philosophy and at true religion.”³⁰³ Zen is right in rejecting “shallow humanism and easy rationalism,” but it has serious flaws.³⁰⁴

Man’s Autonomy over against God

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³⁰¹ Prov. 1:7. 157

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“Zen is atheism, for it denies the infinity and transcendence of a living, personal God by identifying Him with nature,” and by denying man’s need for God. Existentialism also is also apostate, since it holds that “man is creator of his own norms.” For them, man is an “absolutely free being.” There are “no external laws.”³⁰⁵ All exists for man.³⁰⁶ By his free will, man also creates the world.³⁰⁷ That is why, according to existentialists, “human freedom requires the death of God.”³⁰⁸ But in fact, by sin, man turns away from God and makes himself “god.”³⁰⁹ He wants autonomy to live for himself alone, as we see in Psalm 2. But God’s wrath will come upon those who don’t want to serve him.

Sweeping Apostasy of Modern Man

Modern philosophy and theology turn away from the transcendent God to immanence.³¹⁰ although we may note that more recently, there has been some turning back to transcendence in theology. In modern systems of thought, there is no emphasis upon repentance.³¹¹ Instead, we have seen a massive turning away from God in the West.³¹² When man turns from God to self, however, he then deifies things like power, money, material possessions, or sex, which “brings him not salvation but rather destruction. He falls prey to lusts, passions, and desire and becomes enmeshed in sins and guilt.” This has brought “the doom that has broken upon mankind in all areas of life.” Pessimism rules, then despair, then decadence.³¹³

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The Urgent Message of this Generation

Modern men and women are like “sheep without a shepherd.” “The great neurosis of our time is emptiness,” said Psychiatrist Carl Jung.³¹⁴ Zen and Existentialism also fall into this category. At this point, Jesus says, “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life,” “I am the light of the world.”

The issue is this: Does man save himself, or must God save him? Heathenism preaches self-salvation, but as William Temple pointed out, “The disease is in the will. How can the diseased will provide the cure?”³¹⁵ The greatest mistake of heathenism is the denial of sin, which causes us to run from God. “From 500 BC to the 20th century there were 967 international wars and 1623 important civil wars. In the course of human history, several thousand revolutions have been launched, but none of them has ever achieved its purpose, whether to ‘establish a paradise on earth’ or to ‘end war.’”³¹⁶

God’s plan, however, is to save sinners and bring them back to himself through Christ.³¹⁷ Satan tries to lead us away from God in many ways. Today, one main way we are led astray is by the autonomy of self. As we hear so often, “Have faith in yourself.” But a blind man cannot show himself the way out of the forest.³¹⁸ He needs a savior. This is the Christian message.

Conclusion

The Highest Goal of Man: The Key to the Mystery of Life³¹⁹

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Men have always sought to understand “the creation of the universe, the redemption of man, and the consummation of the world.” They have tried various theories, but all have failed. The answer is Jesus: All things were created by him; all knowledge and wisdom is in him; he is “the answer to man’s pressing problems about his nature and destiny.” He is the sole redeemer. “All things proceed from God to be completed by God to move back to God.”³²⁰ “God is the creator of all things, the source of life, and the Father of all goodness.” “The highest goal of man, therefore, is knowing and glorifying God, instead of ‘seeing into one’s own nature’ as Zen stresses.”³²¹

Man “is the crown of God’s creation and was created in God’s image and likeness. . . . Man cannot be satisfied with what the corporeal world has to offer. He requires and seeks a goal which is spiritual, immutable, and eternal,” as Augustine said. We seek God but in the wrong way and in the wrong places, and we are in fact running from God. “Man is an enigma whose solution is God.”³²² God’s “eternal counsels are embodied in the eternal Word.”³²³ “The glorious vision that permeates all the Bible is the sovereign lordship of Jesus Christ.” “The Bible is the key to the enigma of man, the events of the world and the mystery of life; without it we are but helpless creatures groping and fumbling in the darkness without light and without hope.”³²⁴ All answers are in Christ the Lamb slain for us.³²⁵

The Vanity of the Mind

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Our faith “is not founded on man’s wisdom but in God’s power.” Science has failed to find the meaning of life merely through sense perception. “Non-Christian philosophy is immanentist and anthropocentric by its nature.” It deifies the mind of man but ends up being its captive. Because of our darkness, even when we seek God, we measure him by our own “carnal stupidity” and engage in vain speculation which never works.³²⁶ Because of sin, we are subject to all sorts of emotions, self-delusion and self-deception. Our thoughts are not only confused, but our understanding is darkened. “Sin is opposed to love,” so we cannot discern reality. Zen “closes its eyes to the terrible phenomenon of sin.”³²⁷

The Perversion of the Truth

Modern philosophers and theologians reject God’s revelation, but on what grounds?³²⁸ We may note that “Death of god” theology was a passing fad; as are others, though their influence lingers. This can be seen, for example, in the liberation theology of Barack Obama. Turning to science does not work since it is “a residue or a naïve 18th-century belief in absolute ‘laws of nature,’” but science has its limitations.³²⁹ Another fad was the “secular meaning of the gospel,” but Jesus is always “new” and relevant.³³⁰

The Divine Plan of Salvation

We are fallen. Our nature, as Augustine said, is “wounded, maimed and vexed.” “The only thing that is needed is genuine confession not false defense.” We should not try to see into our nature,

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but to have God renew our nature.³³¹ We need salvation, but cannot save ourselves. God planned for salvation and a Savior before there was sin.³³² He takes the initiative: “The Father thought our salvation; the Son bought it; and the Holy Spirit wrought it,” that is, worked it out in our lives.³³³ All we do in this is to “receive” by faith.

“The ultimate message of the gospel ‘is not demand but promise, not duty, but gift.’” God intends to make us like himself, in Christ. “God’s everlasting love from before the foundation of the world is the eternal fountain from which flows the river of salvation with all its manifold blessings from regeneration to glorification.”³³⁴ And Christ “occupies a place of central importance” in “God’s merciful plan of redemption.”³³⁵ “Seeing into one’s own nature” will only deceive us and keep us from real salvation in Christ.³³⁶

The Power of the Gospel

The gospel is not a system of ethics or philosophy, but a message of the entrance of God into this world in the coming of Christ. It is the power of God unto salvation. Within a hundred years, the early church had proclaimed the gospel to the “world powers of that age—the Roman Empire with its materialistic paganism, illustrious Greece with its philosophy and Jerusalem with its religion.” All were conquered by the message about Christ.³³⁷ The church has survived since then despite all sorts of internal errors and external persecution, all by the power of the Spirit.

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Lecture Three

Lecture Three: Critique of Indigenous Theology

From the beginning of Christian missions in China, there has been a strong desire to make Christianity a truly Chinese faith. Beginning in the nineteenth century, more “liberal” Protestant missionaries wanted to incorporate traditional Chinese customs and beliefs into Christianity, or somehow integrate the two. Missionaries like W. A. P. Martin and especially James Legge were accepting of the veneration of ancestors. They also thought that ancient Chinese ideas about God were like those of the Bible such that some of these missionaries held that the ancient Chinese knew and worshipped the true God. Legge believed that the true God was worshiped at the Temple of Heaven; Timothy Richard thought that there was much in Buddhism that was like Christianity. This effort is ongoing today.

Beginning in the 1920s, some Chinese Christians began a movement “Indigenous Theology,” which was portrayed as an attempt to make Christianity more “relevant” to Chinese. Among their leaders were Zhao Zhichen, Xie Fuya, and Wu Leichuan. They attempted to make the gospel more acceptable to Chinese by integrating it with concepts from traditional Chinese culture, especially Confucianism.

Lit-sen Chang (Zhang Lisheng) also strongly believed that Christianity should speak to traditional Chinese religion and philosophy. His early works quoted Chinese classics and his apologetic works described, analyzed, and tried to refute Chinese religions. At the same time, he strongly disagreed with the “Indigenous Theology” movement. His *Critique of Indigenous Theology* was written to oppose this movement, which was still influential. His critique still has value today, for this desire to make Christianity truly “Chinese” has not abated. Indeed, many

liberals will make compromises with traditional Chinese religions and even some evangelicals will try to emphasize points of agreement. Yuan Zhiming, for example, argues that the Dao of Laozi and the Logos of the Bible are the same.³³⁸ It is therefore needful for us to examine Chang's work that we may better understand and refute such syncretism.

Lessons of Old Testament History (From Chapter One)

Throughout the Old Testament, we find that every attempt of Israel to bring in foreign elements into the holy religion of the one true God is met with severe rebuke and judgment. The account of Nadab and Abihu is telling. "Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, each took his censer and put fire in it, put incense on it, and offered profane fire before the LORD, which he had not commanded them. So fire went out from the LORD and devoured them, and they died before the LORD."³³⁹ Even something as seemingly minor as incense dishonors God when it is at odds with his commandments. Chang writes that "Chinese indigenous theologians make idols out of secular Western and Chinese scholars, and take their theories as the bases of their own thought, while despising the Scriptures (God's Word), even to the point of defaming the truth. In the eyes of our most holy God, 'every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God' (2 Cor 10:5) is just like 'unauthorized fire,' and is an abomination that will incur God's wrath."³⁴⁰

Likewise, "in the period of the judges, the Israelites forsook the LORD, not wholeheartedly worshiping the one true God, but disobeying his commandments. They sought to 'Canaanize' theology ('indigenization') and make an idol out of God by fashioning images. As a result, idolatry was rampant, leading to various sorts of harm: in the realm of morals, life became

³³⁸ See his book, *Lao Tzu and the Bible* (Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse, 2010).

³³⁹ Lev 10:1–2.

³⁴⁰ 2 Cor 10:5.

corrupt, immoral and debauched, full of violence and wickedness. Politically, anarchy reigned, laws and moral standards ceased to be binding, and ‘everyone did *what was* right in his own eyes’ (Judg 21:25).”³⁴¹ This sort of corruption and idolatry continued in a regular pattern throughout Israel’s history. The kings led the people into idolatry, and the prophets warned them of judgment to come as a result. This judgment found its temporal completion in the exile of the people of Israel into Babylon.

We would do well to learn from the examples of God’s people before the coming of Christ. The entire Old Testament “was written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come,” and serve as a warning to us.³⁴² Many Chinese theologians have downplayed the authority of God’s Word.³⁴³ They depart from the Scriptures in their view of revelation, God, heaven, Christ, the Holy Spirit, and soteriology.

It is worth noting at this point that Chang, prior to his conversion, loved Eastern religion. In his youth, he trusted in the power of law to change and reform the nation. After World War II, he became “addicted” to the Three Teachings (Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism), and founded Jiangnan University to promote Eastern religion and exterminate Christianity. After his conversion, he preached widely, and probably would have promoted Indigenous Theology, but went to Gordon Theological College and studied theology, joining the faculty after graduation. While there, he learned the folly of Indigenous Theology, and wanted to warn its proponents to turn from error to truth.

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³⁴² 1 Cor 10:11.

³⁴³ Chang gives many specific examples, to which we shall return.

Sources of Indigenous Theology (From Chapter Two)

Heresies of the Early Church

“Ever since mankind fell into sin, human nature has been in rebellion against God, opposing the truth, following the course of this world, and submitting to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience.³⁴⁴ Men have used their science and empty nonsense, not according to Christ, but according to human tradition and the elementary principles of this world, to lead countless people astray (see Rom 1:18-20; Eph 2:1; Col 2:8).”³⁴⁵ This was no less the case during the time of the early church.

“The earliest effort to use human wisdom to confuse the truth; to degrade the exalted, holy, and heavenly revelation into the status of tradition and elementary principles of this world; to turn the truth into something secular, humanist, and indigenized (contextualized), was Gnosticism.”³⁴⁶ Its advocates used Christian terms and claimed to be preaching Christianity, but their teachings were not in accord with the Bible.³⁴⁷

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In reality, they turned Christian doctrine into something “with the name and not the reality,”³⁴⁸ because they denied key doctrines, such as the Incarnation and the saving work of Christ. “They

³⁴⁴ See Eph 2.

³⁴⁵ 25.

³⁴⁶ 25-26

³⁴⁷ Gnostics teach that the realization of Gnosis (or knowledge in the sense of mystical enlightenment) is the way to the salvation of the soul from the material world. They believe the material world was created through an intermediary being (the demiurge) rather than directly created by God.

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supplanted ‘faith’ with ‘knowledge,’ holding that the meaning of salvation was to put off foolishness and ignorance rather than to receive forgiveness of sins.”³⁴⁹

“With his great learning, Paul was especially chosen by God to combat Greek philosophy and actively to attack the fortresses of the philosophical culture of Greece and Rome and to prevent Christian doctrine from becoming Hellenized, that is, indigenized.”³⁵⁰ The Apostle John also combated some sort of incipient Gnosticism. Sadly, this sort of philosophy nevertheless flourished for quite a time, and because of the baneful effects of the Hellenization (indigenization) of Christian doctrine as well as its compromise with Greek philosophy, it serves as a warning to proponents of Indigenous Theology today.

The Errors of the Period of the Early Church Fathers

The early church fathers were courageous in preaching the gospel and in opposing heresy, even to the point of suffering, for which we are grateful. But some of them also held to some erroneous ideas which sought to reconcile Christianity with worldly philosophy. For example, Justin said, “The Logos is the Universal Reason that works throughout the world, through philosophical thought, enlightening countless Egyptians, Romans, Greeks, all reasonable men, all Christians. All who are Christians are reasonable, so Socrates and the others can all be considered Christians.”³⁵¹ Clement of Alexandria, likewise, “held that before Christ came, the Greeks had to obtain righteousness through philosophy, which was a tutor to lead them to Christ.”³⁵² For that reason, he employed Greek philosophy to organize his systematic

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³⁵² See Chang, *Zongti Biandaoxue (Comprehensive Apologetics)*, vol. 1, chap. 2. The biblical allusion is to Gal 4:1–2.

theology.”³⁵³ Likewise, Origen and Cyprian attempted to synthesize Christianity and Neo-Platonism.

The Middle Ages

“This trend of compromise intensified during the Middle Ages. Roman Catholic Scholastic thinkers like Thomas Aquinas repeatedly tried to harmonize divine revelation and human wisdom, in order to make theology ‘humanistic and Hellenized.’”³⁵⁴ Aquinas returned to the way of Aristotle, using reason to prove what was believed, such as the existence of God and the accuracy of the Bible. He even said that exegesis of the Bible should be based upon the foundation of church tradition. This was a markedly different approach from that of Augustine who, after his conversion, rejected Greek philosophy and took the Bible as the source for his ideas. His approach was one of faith seeking understanding. He did not start with human reason to find truth about God. Aquinas, on the other hand, started with human reasoning and stressed the authority of the Pope.

The Reformation and Beyond

During the Reformation, however, Martin Luther rejected all religious authority other than the Bible. John Calvin did the same, though he was fully aware of Greco-Roman philosophy and literature. Martin Luther, though well-versed in Medieval philosophy, which was heavily influenced by Aristotle, later declared that most of Aristotle’s works – the Logic being the major exception – were worthless for Christian theology, since they imported and even imposed alien categories not consistent with the Scriptures. Like Luther, Calvin valued logic as a tool, and even

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used some philosophical categories, but he always insisted the philosophy should be the handmaiden of biblically-based theology, not the master.

“Following the Enlightenment Movement of the eighteenth century, rationalism, empiricism, and naturalism increasingly gained strength, emphasizing the so-called liberation of the individual to oppose the restrictions of dogma, while advocating ‘reasonable’ theology and ‘rational’ religion. All departments of learning became subordinate to sensationalism, empiricism, materialism, and atheism, placing undue faith in the so-called scientific, empirical view of the universe and of life.”³⁵⁵

This sort of thinking overwhelmed the West. “The position of theology was turned upside down, for it came under the control of philosophy and became mingled with human wisdom.”³⁵⁶ “The Modernist theologians of the West took their own nations’ scholars’ opinions as their standard, not knowing how to rely on the omniscient, omnipotent, true God but following the lead of philosophy. From one standpoint, one could say that their theology was indigenized (contextualized), that is, stained by the colors of the secularized contextual theology of the West, and therefore turning Christian doctrine into something inferior.”^{357,358}

“Chinese scholars who promote ‘Indigenous Theology,’ even though they depend on the development of Chinese civilization to wash out the ‘stench’ of the bad name of ‘Western,’ are in this way deceiving their countrymen.”³⁵⁹ The fundamental nature of Western Contextual [i.e., Indigenous] Theology is humanism and naturalism, and is thus completely opposed to Christian

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³⁵⁷ Or “*passing off a fish’s eye as a pearl.*”

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truth, like fire and water, because Christianity is a revelation from heaven and its essence is supernatural. Liberal theology has followed this trend, downplaying the authority of the Bible and elevating the role of philosophy and other human thought systems. For example, liberation theology, which says that we must work for social and political change, and contextual theology, which is related to liberation theology. Both say that theology must start with context, rather than the Bible.

Proponents of Indigenous Theology make two mistakes: First, they are not aware of how much they are dependent upon traditional Chinese concepts, and second, they have been influenced by liberal Western theology that they studied abroad or have read. (The influence of liberal theology is now also strong in some evangelical publications and seminaries.) China is an ancient country with a long history and rich cultural tradition, which still affects the Chinese; furthermore, Chinese have been greatly impacted by Western ideas in the past 100 years or so. All of this forms the context of Christian theology and preaching in China today. We must be cautious, therefore.

Reflections on Chinese Christian History

In fact, Indigenous Theology is not new in China. In the Tang dynasty, missionaries came from the Church of the East, and were warmly welcomed. But they expressed their faith in terms borrowed from Buddhism, causing confusion and diluting the message of the gospel.

“Furthermore, they were seeking to ‘indigenize’³⁶⁰ their theology, wrongly employing many Buddhist terms that were incompatible with the Bible, such as calling God ‘Fo’ (Buddha); Jesus

³⁶⁰ Or *contextualize*.

‘Yishu’; Christians ‘Good Knowers’; baptism ‘initiation into monkhood.’”³⁶¹ “On the ‘Nestorian’ Monument, Jesus is only called ‘the divided Person (body) of our Three in One’³⁶² and ‘Luminous Messiah.’ Although the Cross appears on the monument, it is placed upon a Buddhist lotus blossom³⁶³, completely obliterating the teaching of the redemption of the world through the Cross!³⁶⁴” “They also shaved their heads; played the ‘wooden fish’;³⁶⁵ prayed for the dead; worshiped the saints; and showed reverence to images of emperors.”³⁶⁶

“Sometime after 1620, during the Ming dynasty, Roman Catholic Jesuit missionaries arrived in China; among them were Matteo Ricci, Jean Adam Schall Von Bell, and Ferdinand Verbiest. They conversed with the great scholars of China and held important posts in the government. At the same time, they sought to combine portions of Roman Catholic practice, such as veneration for Mary, with ancient Chinese customs like worship³⁶⁷ of idols, ancestors, and Confucius, in an effort to ‘indigenize’³⁶⁸ Christian doctrine; the result was a change in the quality of the faith, and even destruction of it.”³⁶⁹

Another example of Chinese indigenization is Hong Xiuquan. After reading Liang Fa’s *Good Words Exhorting Mankind*, he began preaching his own “indigenous theology,” which he called

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³⁶² Or *san fen shen*. Various interpretations have been given of this phrase. The one that Chang seems to accept is that it ascribes two persons to Christ instead of one, as the Nestorians were accused of doing. See Moffett, *A History of Christianity in Asia*, 1:516–17. Recent scholarship has questioned whether the Nestorians were actually “Nestorian” in their teaching, however. See Charbonnier, *Christians in China A.D. 600 to 2000*, 35–38, 50–51. There is no controversy, however, over whether the “Nestorian” missionaries used a great deal of Buddhist, Confucian, and Daoist terminology in all of their writings in China.

³⁶³ The Buddhist lotus blossom represents purity and enlightenment of the body, speech, and mind.

³⁶⁴ Broomhall, *The Bible in China*, chap. 1.

³⁶⁵ A Buddhist percussion instrument.

³⁶⁶ 44

³⁶⁷ The author uses the Chinese word *bai*, which usually means to bow and offer prayers, food, and/or incense to an image. It does not necessarily denote inner trust or reliance.

³⁶⁸ Or *contextualize*.

³⁶⁹ 39

“Taiping (*peace and tranquility*) Christianity,” even going to the extent of calling his movement the “Taiping Heavenly Kingdom.” He made up a canon of Scripture; engaged in far-fetched exegesis; employed ancient Chinese rites in his worship liturgy; built an altar; poured out offerings of tea; and worshiped “Shang Di” as an idol. His so-called “Taiping Christianity,” thus indigenized, merged with Confucianism into a “Christianity” that was neither fish nor fowl.³⁷⁰

In “1807, God sent Robert Morrison to China to translate the Bible and preach the gospel, and then, in the 1850s, J. Hudson Taylor, who later founded the China Inland Mission.³⁷¹ We can say that this was the first time that true Christianity was established and began to develop in China. Morrison was steadfast in his purpose to translate the Bible into Chinese. In this way, based upon a solid foundation, Christian truth was able finally to ‘take root downward, and bear fruit upward’ (Isa 37:31).”³⁷²

At the time, Chinese leaders called Christianity a foreign religion, but “characterizing Christianity as a foreign religion of Western invaders is truly a baseless slander. In the great famine in 1877 in Shanxi, with millions of half-starved people crowding the roads, and with the government helpless to aid them, foreign missionaries sacrificed themselves to provide assistance and initiated steps to address the crisis.”³⁷³ Later, in the 1920s, the same charge was made in the Anti Christian Movement. Lit-sen Chang agreed with the opponents of Christianity at that time.

³⁷⁰ Jing, *Zhongguo Jindaishi Lunji (Modern Chinese History)*, 178–256.

³⁷¹ The China Inland Mission was founded in 1865 after Taylor had returned to England from his first tour of ministry in China.

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³⁷³ 39-40

Now, “Proponents of Indigenous Theology claim that they are true believers; in the name of washing away the ‘stench of the West,’ they are trying to mobilize their countrymen. They believe that they are true to the faith. When we study the essence of Indigenous Theology, however, we find that it cannot escape the bondage to the pagan ideas that have been handed down by tradition, and that at the same time it has been stained with the poison of Western naturalism and modernist theology.”³⁷⁴

Fallacies of Indigenous Theology (From Chapter 3)

Modern Examples of Indigenous Theology

“Then there is the case of the former president of Yanjing³⁷⁵ University, Wu Leiquan,³⁷⁶ a leftist proponent of the Social Gospel. Though he was a holder of a *Jinshi*³⁷⁷ degree under the Manchu dynasty, he believed in Marxism, approved of dictatorship, and wanted to employ military force to seize political power. . . He thought that the kingdom of heaven proclaimed by Jesus was a sort of ideal society. For people to misconstrue it as ‘another world’ or ‘a heaven to be entered only after death’ was a harmful and deceptive superstition.”³⁷⁸ But Jesus said, “My kingdom is not of this world,” and also, after his ascension, the promise that he “will come again to take us to be where he is.”³⁷⁹

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³⁷⁵ Originally spelled *Yenching*.

³⁷⁶ Formerly spelled *Leichuan*.

³⁷⁷ The highest academic degree granted under the old imperial examination system, comparable to our PhD, though arguably much more demanding.

³⁷⁸ 49

³⁷⁹ See John 18:36; 14:3; Acts 1:11.

Also reflecting the colors of modernist theology is Zhao Zichen,³⁸⁰ former dean of the Department of Religious Studies of Yanjing University, who thought that Christianity could “help China preserve the ideal of ‘the whole world³⁸¹ as one community,’ and ‘the whole world as one family.’” “The church is an instrument³⁸² that can change with the times . . . Besides, many of its teachings are superstitions that can be considered excrescences, and to reject them is entirely proper! . . . God is revealed through man; man can reveal God, and be worthy of heaven; indeed, that the sage is worthy of heaven is an ancient and original Chinese idea.”³⁸³

“From now on, the Chinese Christian church needs to have a philosophy and a world view of life that is constructed by Chinese themselves.”³⁸⁴ He criticizes “fundamentalist Christians for making religion into a messy mass of old dogmas.” On the one hand, he promotes “accommodation to the spirit of modern science, emphasizing reason and the Social Gospel,” and on the other, he seeks to “obtain a way to provide a religious explanation from China’s natural experience,” urging that we “never forget to repay a debt of gratitude to our forebears for their thought, ethical concepts, and mystical philosophy.”³⁸⁵

“Yang Senfu, in his work, *Chinese Customs and Christian Faith*, when discussing the question of ‘understanding Chinese Christianity,’ offers several suggestions: ‘In the history of Chinese thought, or the history of philosophy, Christianity cannot, like Buddhism, occupy a dominant position. Although Buddhism is a foreign import, it has spawned the Tian Tai Sect, Tian Lun Sect, Jingtuo Sect, Zen and other forms of Buddhism, all completely indigenous, whereas, on the

³⁸⁰ T.C. Chao.

³⁸¹ Or *all under heaven*.

³⁸² Or *tool*.

³⁸³ Wu, *Jidu yu Zongguo Wenhua (Christ and Chinese Culture)*, 82–98.

³⁸⁴ See Zhao, *Zhongguo Minzu yu Jidu Jiao (The Chinese Nation and Christianity)*.

³⁸⁵ See Zhao, “Wo Duiyu Chuangzao Zhongguo Jiaohui de Jige Yijian,” (“A Few Thoughts on the Creation of a Chinese Church”).

other hand, Christian thought cannot influence the Chinese intellectual world or become part of Chinese thought.’ For that reason, he advocates an indigenized Chinese Christianity.”³⁸⁶

Furthermore, he emphasizes that “Augustine created his theology out of Platonism, and Thomas Aquinas re-interpreted Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* to build his theology. Why cannot Chinese Christian scholars re-interpret the Confucian, Daoist, Moist, and other writings?”³⁸⁷ He doesn’t seem to know that after his conversion, Augustine rejected Greek philosophy, warning believers against compromise or comparing incompatible things or joining them together.

Likewise, Xie Fuya begins with Chinese traditional ideas and tries to integrate them with Christian doctrines. He writes, “Whether it be Confucian or Daoist, or Chinese Buddhism, the excellent parts of this literary corpus are sufficient to merge with the religion of Jesus Christ without any cause for shame or even shyness.”³⁸⁸³⁸⁹ “Clearly, he does not understand the difference between general revelation and special revelation; nor does he understand the deficiencies of non-Christian religions, so he commits the common error of thinking that all religions flow together in one great harmony.”³⁹⁰ In particular, Xie believes that we can establish our own righteousness, as in Confucianism, rather than needing to trust in Christ’s blood to cleanse us from our sins and his righteousness to bring us justification before God.

In *Christianity’s Mission with Regard to China Today*, Xie wrote, “The mission of Christianity in China today is to organize a great revolutionary movement. A people’s revolution, social revolution, and spiritual revolution.” He denies that theology “has a universal standard and is a

³⁸⁶ 50-51

³⁸⁷ 51

³⁸⁸ The meaning seems to be that they are as worthy of respect as the Christian Scriptures, and not to be considered inferior as vehicles of God’s revelation.

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³⁹⁰ 55

truth that does not change with time. Thus, he opines that ‘Chinese Christianity can have different conceptions of God in different ages and in each individual person.’”³⁹¹ He does not think that Christianity came to overthrow ancestor worship, and he believes that Chinese philosophy advocates the same sort of ethical conduct as does the Bible.

He asserts that, while science is universal and unchanging, theology, which is based upon philosophy, will differ according to time and culture. Chinese theology, therefore, must rise up from Chinese culture rather than from the Bible. Xie’s belief in science can be seen in his statement that he distorts Jesus’ words, “I am the way, the truth, and the life” to mean “the way is the realization of democracy, truth is the goal of science, and human life is the nexus where the highest truth and the ultimate way may be intimately combined.”³⁹² Like many others, Xie believed that theology must adapt to changing conditions, and that Christianity was basically an ethical system.

He believes that Jesus’ teachings were an adaptation of Greek thought, so Chinese today can adapt Christianity to fit Chinese philosophy and ethics. He approves of the views of Clement of Alexandria, who tried to combine Greek philosophy and the Bible. He also likes Arius, the heretic, and opposes Athanasius, who used the Bible to refute Arius’ thought, which came from Greek philosophy.

Xie was educated in a liberal seminary in America, so he was influenced by the rationalism and humanism of theological liberalism. He therefore opposed the idea of “salvation by faith” in Christ alone.³⁹³ He also equates being “born again” with exerting strong effort to make oneself

³⁹¹ 58

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³⁹³ 64

better.³⁹⁴ He believes that our idea of God comes from our social experience, not from revelation. He strongly opposes the idea that God is “omniscient, omnipotent, all-loving, omnipresent, one, absolute, infinite, eternal.”³⁹⁵

Though Xie is long gone from us, I quote his teachings because they are not too different from what we hear from various voices outside and inside the church today. For example, Ding Guangxun taught “justification by love” rather than justification by faith; Openness theologians hate the idea that God is unchanging and sovereign; many Christian theologians begin with one form of human thought, such as philosophy, science, sociology, or psychology, rather than from the Bible.

Indigenous Theology and Philosophy (From Chapter 4)

The Battlefield of Chinese and Western Thought

“The essence of Indigenous Theology is humanistic philosophy. Though the self-proclaimed goal of its advocates is to ‘wash away the stain’ of Western influence, they are unaware that they cannot escape the bondage of many ideas that they have inherited from their ancestors. Furthermore, since in their youth they received training in liberal theology, as well as the deceptions of western anti-Christian philosophy, in order to critique Indigenous Theology we must discuss the question of philosophy.”³⁹⁶

As we saw in a previous lecture, the West has been led astray by humanistic philosophy. Chang believed that modern China was a “battlefield” in which modern Western thinking and

³⁹⁴ 65

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traditional Chinese philosophy were struggling for supremacy. In fact, however, both of these are fundamentally humanistic, so neither one can bring truth or salvation to the Chinese people.

“Indigenous Theology is the baneful product of the philosophy of a Western anti-Christian culture. Starting from the new Culture Movement in China, this trend has further intensified.”^{397,398}

The Revolution in Ancient and Modern Thought

“Looking at the entire sweep of human intellectual history, we can see that, regardless of time, in both East and West, philosophers have opposed the truth. They have placed unwarranted faith in the wisdom of this world, believing that ‘man is the measure of all things.’ Regardless of many developments, twists, and turns, it always degenerates into the trap of humanism, from which it is unable to extricate itself.”³⁹⁹ “It is evident that, regardless of whether they are ancient or modern, Chinese or non-Chinese, thinkers who disobey God and do not believe Christian doctrine, and who thus have no standard of absolute truth, are all ‘taken captive’ by ‘philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world’ (Col 2:8).”⁴⁰⁰ But “mankind’s problem does not have to do with whether our systems of thought are new or old, but whether truth is present or absent. The urgent need is for the blood of Christ to cleanse us from our sin and purge out the poison from our thoughts, so that our conscience and natural instincts are freed from the dominion of corruption. Only this can bring

³⁹⁷ The New Culture Movement of the mid-1910s and '20s. Scholars like Hu Shi had classical educations but began to lead a revolt against Confucianism. They called for the creation of a new Chinese culture based on global and Western values, especially democracy and science.

³⁹⁸ 74

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us the glorious liberty of the sons of God and, by our submission to Christian doctrine, access to the truth” (Rom 8:20-21; John 8:32).⁴⁰¹

As we have seen, some early church writers were so influenced by Greek philosophy that they tried to harmonize human ideas with God’s revelation. Today, in the Chinese church, some writers don’t realize how much their ideas have been shaped by traditional Chinese thinking, and they also try to merge biblical and human thoughts. Like Chang, I believe that the basic problem with this sort of thinking is that it does not start from the Bible, but from human reason.

Indigenous Theology and Culture (From Chapter 5)

What are proper Christian attitudes toward culture? “In general, we can divide the responses into three types. First, the rejecters, who think the church should oppose culture. Second, the compromisers, who surrender to culture. Third, the evangelicals, who seek to transform culture. The advocates of Indigenous Theology belong to the compromisers who surrender to culture.”⁴⁰²

Opposition to Culture

“The most prominent representative of those who would oppose culture is Tertullian (150–220 [or 160–240]). He would cry with a loud voice, ‘What has Athens to do with Jerusalem? What has the Academy to do with the church?’ ‘Those compromisers who would adulterate Christianity and Stoicism, Platonism, and Sophism are anathema!’”⁴⁰³ “He thought that the faith of the Christian and Greek philosophical thought were as incompatible as fire and ice. To try to integrate Christian thought with Socrates or Plato is to turn it into something that is neither fish

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nor fowl. ‘We have the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not need to rely on disputation; having our faith, we need no other.’⁴⁰⁴⁴⁰⁵ “Even if there is some truth in their writings, it comes from the light of the Bible.”⁴⁰⁶ “Tertullian loved God with all his heart, and was fully committed to protecting the truth of the gospel; his fame will last forever. But his merely passive antipathy toward culture is, practically speaking, of no help in facing the maladies of this world. It does not enable the church actively to lead or transform society and culture; rather, it leaves the church in another-worldly, independent situation outside of the culture.”⁴⁰⁷

“There has been another movement in church history that opposed culture—Pietism—which appeared at the end of the seventeenth and beginning of the eighteenth century. . . . With simple faith, they sought to elevate the spiritual life of believers. Sadly, they went too far, over-emphasizing the spiritual and neglecting the rational side of Christianity. They pursued personal purity, and thought that culture and society were impure, convinced that we need not concern ourselves with such matters, lest we be tainted with worldliness.”⁴⁰⁸

“Aside from the Pietists, in our day we have the Fundamentalists, who faithfully hold to the truth and defend it.”⁴⁰⁹ “Not only do they place Christian truth in total opposition to culture, but in education, philosophy, society, and politics they are becoming increasingly dualistic, leaving the church in a spiritual vacuum and placing it in a condition of being under attack from all quarters,

⁴⁰⁴ See Tertullian, *Prescription against Heretics*, 7, and *Apology*, 46.

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⁴⁰⁸ 81-82

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so that the truth cannot penetrate society and culture and the gospel cannot be universally proclaimed.”⁴¹⁰

Surrendering to Culture

“In total opposition to the Pietists and Fundamentalists are the compromisers, who advocate adaptation to culture, even surrender, ‘becoming friends with secularity.’ The earliest representatives were the Gnostics, who were really extreme indigenizers.⁴¹¹”⁴¹² “Though it called itself Christian, the Gnostic movement was really a compromise between Christianity on the one hand, and Judaism and Greek philosophy—especially Neo-Platonism—on the other.”⁴¹³ “They sought to make Christianity adapt to contemporary culture, employing a so-called ‘scientific’ and ‘philosophical’ principle to explain Jesus’ person and work.”⁴¹⁴ In the Middle Ages, Peter Abelard fell into this error.

In modern times, philosophers and theologians in the West have also tried to make Christianity seem “reasonable” and to deny any fundamental conflict between the gospel and culture. Liberal theologians have equated the kingdom of God with the kingdom of man. “In order to accommodate Christianity to culture, they promoted the ‘Social Gospel,’ which today has become ‘Liberation (Revolutionary) Theology,’ which not only surrenders to culture, but prepares the way for atheistic Marxism.”⁴¹⁵”⁴¹⁶ Ding Guangxun of the Three Self Patriotic Movement sometimes gave a similar impression, as have many others. “Sadly, Chinese scholars

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⁴¹¹ Or *contextualizers*.

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⁴¹⁵ Anderson, *The Theology of Christian Mission*; Chang, *The True Gospel vs. Social Activism*; and Hocking, *Rethinking Missions*.

⁴¹⁶ 85

who promote Indigenous Theology, having imbibed the poison of rationalistic Western philosophy, employ the same approach in their attitude towards culture.”⁴¹⁷

Transforming Culture

Some of the early church fathers believed that Christianity should transform the culture. Among them were Athanasius and Augustine. Augustine rejected his earlier compromise with Greek and Roman thought and later emphasized that the Bible must be our sole authority. “He was convinced that Jesus Christ not only saves the soul, but also transforms human culture. Such a transformation cannot come from human ability, but must issue from a change from being centered upon Caesar to being centered upon Christ. Humanism must be fundamentally changed in order for people’s lives to have a new direction, power, and inner vitality. Only thus will man’s existence, corrupted and cursed as a result of our fall into sin, be restored from ruin and reveal its good nature as originally created.”⁴¹⁸

“Most people imagine that the troubles in society stem from corrupted systems, unaware that the real cause is mankind’s fall into sin, which has resulted in the corruption of human nature and of culture. The corruption of culture flows from the corruption of human nature. Man was created good.”⁴¹⁹ “Today, every corruption in spirit, mind, life, and society is a symptom of our fall into sin.”⁴²⁰ Nevertheless, God is redirecting and refining the noble impulses of mankind, enabling the people of ‘the City of God’ to have proper motives and goals as they make their way through the joys and sorrows, trials and tribulations of life.”⁴²¹ “Now all mankind is in bondage to sin, so that

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⁴²⁰ Augustine, *City of God*, 19:6.

⁴²¹ 87

we say with Paul, ‘In me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I do’ (Rom 7:18–19). Augustine held that our heart cannot submit to our will, cannot submit to itself, cannot do what it wants to do. Are there not so many things that we want to do, but lack the strength to perform? It is not surprising, then, that effort we put into culture often proves to be in vain. The evil result of original sin is not just that it hinders our moral conduct, but also harms society as well.”⁴²²

“Jesus, however, came to heal, to renew, and to save the world, and even to save culture, so that we could escape corruption and death. The incarnation and substitutionary death of Christ highlight the seriousness of human sin and demonstrate the greatness of God’s grace. Through his revelation and teaching, he enables people to turn from the path of destruction; to escape Satan’s grip; to turn to God, the Source of all good; recover the true meaning of love; forsake the love of the world and replace it with the love of God.”⁴²³ “Jesus Christ restores the moral character that we had lost, and leads us along the path of righteousness. He also transforms our loves and our moral principles,⁴²⁴ so that, as we make our way through life, regardless of happiness or sadness, we have proper motives and goals in accordance with God’s will.”⁴²⁵⁴²⁶

“In Augustine’s thought, the character of all of our intelligence, wisdom, knowledge, learning, mathematics, logic, science, engineering and technology, and literature must be fundamentally transformed, so that it might be put to the service of God. In this way, every created being will be happy and joyful, mankind will be blessed, and all of our actions and political life, once the

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⁴²⁴ Or *qingcao*.

⁴²⁵ Augustine, *City of God*, 14:9.

⁴²⁶ 89

nature of culture has been reformed, will reflect the love and glory of God.⁴²⁷ On the one hand, Augustine opposed the humanist view of culture, as well as any compromise of Christianity with culture; on the other hand, he did not approve of the total rejection of culture proposed by Tertullian and others like him. He advocated a transformation of the character of a culture that centered on Caesar and opposed the truth, in order to replace it with a culture with God at the center, one that aimed to establish ‘the City of God.’⁴²⁸ For example, “All the creativity and design of science and art should have the glory of God as their goal.”⁴²⁹

“Like Augustine, John Calvin (1509–64) was a theologian of culture. As Abraham Kuyper has noted, Calvinism is an ‘all life-embracing system.’⁴³⁰ Calvin believed that the Reformation was not just a simple, superficial movement, but was a total, comprehensive movement to change all facets of human life—in a word, a movement to transform culture. The church’s major mission is to proclaim the gospel, but the reformation of the church will also serve as ‘salt and light.’ Its necessary and natural outcome, the outward expression of its inner glory, will shine on all of our existence, influencing culture and society. Furthermore, only if human wisdom, intelligence, and cultural systems receive enlightenment from God and conform to his truth, will they have value.”⁴³¹

“Calvin believed that everyone on earth receives a calling from God and has a holy cultural mandate. Anyone who had received the Lord’s saving grace should live to God’s glory by fulfilling this cultural mandate. His view of culture, however, differed from a secular position

⁴²⁷ Augustine, *City of God*, 19:13; *On Christian Doctrine*, 2:25, 26.

⁴²⁸ 89-90

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⁴³⁰ Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism*. Calvinism is also sometimes called a “world and life view.”

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that regards only this world, for it looked to the next life as its goal... Culture is not in itself our goal, but should aim to serve and glorify God. If our actions and labor, as well as the creativity and progress of culture do not have the purpose of glorifying God, they are not only worthless, but harmful.”⁴³²

Conclusion

“The church’s commission is to preach the gospel to the whole world, but if we are to complete this mission, we must fully understand the all-embracing nature of the work of gospel proclamation and the importance of culture.⁴³³ We must, therefore, guide the church back to the right path and remedy past defects, since we cannot either surrender to culture or completely oppose it, but must employ a creative, inspiring, revolutionary, and comprehensive course of action. We must arise and actively lead society and culture, transforming a secular, humanist, and rebellious culture... Though China is a nation with an ancient culture, because the truth of God has not yet been able to spread widely, the culture lacks impetus.”⁴³⁴ “The proponents of Indigenous Theology do not know how to transform secular culture, and commit the same mistake as the compromisers who surrendered to the world. We who are evangelicals need to enter this struggle immediately, guide people back to the right path, and remedy the situation, in order to revive the nation and benefit the people.”⁴³⁵

Indigenous Theology and Religion (From Chapter 6)

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⁴³³ See Bavinck, *Impact of Christianity on the Non-Christian World*; Chang, *Strategy of Missions in the Orient*; and Chang, *Zongti Biandaoxue (Comprehensive Christian Apologetics)*, vol. 4.

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⁴³⁵ 91

“Proponents of Indigenous Theology have an inaccurate understanding of God, the revelation of the one true God, the teaching of the Bible, and the true definition of religion. As a consequence, they fall under the domination of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism, with which they compromise.”⁴³⁶ Chang is going to summarize these teachings briefly in this chapter, based on his own experience. “By middle age, I was sunk in the darkness of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism.”⁴³⁷

The Emptiness of Confucianism⁴³⁸

“Concerning the origin of the universe as well as mankind, Confucianism denies the doctrine of creation by God, holding instead to the concept that everything has developed as a result of the interplay and interpenetration of *yin* and *yang*. Simply put, this is naturalism.”⁴³⁹ “As for the fundamental nature of man, and the question of whether it is good or evil, Confucius has only, ‘By nature men are alike. Through practice they have become far apart.’^{440,441} “Most people think that Confucianism promotes the idea that human nature is basically good, but that is not necessarily the case. Xunzi vigorously advocated the evil nature of mankind.”⁴⁴² “Confucian scholars believed that ‘the principle of heaven is far from reach, while the procedure of human duty is nearby.’ ‘If we don’t know about life, how can we know about death?’⁴⁴³ Their view of life is to be content with what one is and to focus on what is practical.”⁴⁴⁴ “They cannot solve the

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⁴³⁸ See *Asia’s Religions*, chaps. 2 and 3.

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⁴⁴⁰ Confucius, *Analects*, 17:2; Chan, 45. Translated by James Legge (1815 – 1897).

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⁴⁴³ Confucius, *Analects*, 11:11.

⁴⁴⁴ 95

huge problems of life and death; we must admit that this is the great shortcoming of Confucianism.”⁴⁴⁵

The Emptiness of Buddhism

“Basically, the Buddha was an atheist.”⁴⁴⁶ “Buddhism has two views of human nature. On the one hand, they say that ‘all life possesses the Buddha nature.’⁴⁴⁷... On the other hand, they also say, ‘The heart tempts one to do evil.’⁴⁴⁸... They believe that all phenomena in the universe are illusory and impermanent. The life of man is one of the illusions in the universe. Man’s perception of himself is merely an illusion... The great goal in the Buddhist life, therefore, is to be enlightened, and escape from the lure of the three realms (the realms of desire, form and formlessness).”⁴⁴⁹ “Since Buddhism is atheistic, it does not believe in any outside source of power or help. Buddhists emphasize that enlightenment originates from within oneself. Strictly speaking, therefore, Buddhism is not a religion, but a school of philosophy.”⁴⁵⁰ “The end is the extinction of life in Nirvana, and not eternal life. In short, Buddhism is a philosophy that brings suicide to the soul.”⁴⁵¹

The Emptiness of Daoism⁴⁵²

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⁴⁴⁷ *The Great Nirvana Sutra.*

⁴⁴⁸ Or, *Ba Da Ren Jue Jing.*

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⁴⁵² See Chang, *Asia’s Religions*, chaps. 4–5; Chang, *Zongti Biandaoxue (Comprehensive Christian Apologetics)*, vol. 3, chaps. 11–12.

“Daoism has no firm and clear understanding of the Creator.”⁴⁵³ As for ethics, “Daoism considers the happiness of man to consist in purification and non-action, to ‘return to the truth and recover simplicity’; live in harmony with nature; and return to the original condition of nature. They thus think that only if man obeys and submits to heavenly truth can he attain to the highest good.”⁴⁵⁴ “With reference to its opposition to human self-importance and self-righteousness, it is superior to Confucianist philosophy, in that it opposes human pride and self-confidence. Christianity, on the other hand, is in some way similar to Daoism at this point. Nevertheless, on the one hand, Christianity warns us that ‘unless your righteousness exceeds *the righteousness* of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven’ (Matt 5:20), while on the other points us very clearly to the right path: ‘Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness’ (Matt 6:33).”⁴⁵⁵

“Daoism merely teaches man to model himself after nature: ‘Man models himself after Earth. Earth models itself after Heaven. Heaven models itself after Tao. And Tao models itself after Nature.’⁴⁵⁶ But their understanding of nature is that it is a mass of uncertainty and chaos. It cannot be clearly described. In short, their frame of mind is exalted, but their understanding is confused.”⁴⁵⁷ “Sadly, their notion of the Dao is ineffable and illusory.”⁴⁵⁸ At its best, it amounts to a fanciful form of pantheism—ineffable, empty speculation; at most it can be considered a kind of illusory pantheism, which doesn’t know the Triune God and thus cannot give incorruptible,

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⁴⁵⁶ *Tao-te-ching*, 25; Chan, *Source Book*, 153.

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⁴⁵⁸ It is like trying to grasp the reflection of the moon in a pool of water.

unending life to mankind. ‘To live together with Heaven and earth’ is not eternal life, since heaven and earth alike will be dissolved (2 Pet 3:12).”⁴⁵⁹

(Chapter Seven, “Indigenous Theology and Humanism,” will not be treated in detail here.)

Indigenous Theology and Indigenous Church (From Chapter 8)

A Misunderstanding of the Indigenous Church

In contrast to those who wanted to expel all foreign missionaries in order to build a truly indigenous church, Chang believed that “A true Christian is a citizen of the kingdom of God, and should not harbor any notion of boundaries between East and West, much less racial prejudice. ‘The members should have the same care for one another’ (1 Cor 12:25), offering mutual help and pulling together.”⁴⁶⁰ In other words, we must understand the real meaning of an indigenous Chinese church.

The Foundation for an Indigenous Church

“If we want to establish a truly ‘indigenous church’ that will take root and never be eradicated, we must shake up this anti-Christian cultural structure and philosophical system.”⁴⁶¹ In the past, “the church merely emphasized the subjective nature of Reformation teaching on the salvation of the soul, while it neglected the objective side, which is its power to transform the world. This includes the ‘vertical’ application of God’s sovereignty to the entire world, as well as the ‘horizontal’ application of the truth of the Bible to society and the nation. ... If we are to establish an indigenous church, we must employ a new strategy of proclamation, in order to create a new social and cultural environment that will both be advantageous for evangelism and enable the gospel to take root in pagan nations.”⁴⁶²

That does not mean that we neglect the core of the gospel—justification by faith, the Cross of Christ, and individual salvation, in order to preach a “social gospel.” But, “if we want pagan nations to discard their native religions, we must first sweep away obstacles to the gospel by thoroughly transforming and renewing a culture’s philosophical system and ideology.”⁴⁶³ “Only

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thus will pagan nations receive the message of Christ and believe in the truth. Only thus will their cultures be enlightened by Christ and be renewed and thoroughly transformed, becoming ‘good soil’ so that the seed of the gospel can be deeply embedded in the soil and bear fruit.”⁴⁶⁴ “Only in this way can a truly ‘indigenous church’ be established on a firm foundation.”⁴⁶⁵

The Mission of the Indigenous Church

“Furthermore, an even greater significance of establishing an ‘indigenous church’ lies in mobilizing believers in every region of the world. From the standpoint of the long history of the East, the development of [Protestant] Christianity has taken place in only the past 150 years.⁴⁶⁶ Measured by the number of believers and the proportion of them in the total population, some areas have less than five percent Christians. Clearly, our past efforts at evangelism have not yet been characterized by a whole-scale and vigorous mass movement.”⁴⁶⁷

“That is absolutely not to say, however, that Christianity is a foreign religion unsuited to the East. I must re-emphasize that the origins of Christianity are in Asia; it is not at all a Western religion, but a movement raised up by God in the center of the globe to save people from all over the whole world.”⁴⁶⁸ Even though China does not allow foreign missionaries to preach openly, that does not mean that it is closed to the gospel. It really means that a new open door has been given to the church around the world to preach the gospel in China in new ways. “The retreat of foreign missionaries from China, therefore, does not amount to ‘rejection of the other,’ but a rejection of our own ‘sense of dependence.’... The major goal of establishing an ‘indigenous church’ is to awaken the self-awareness and a sense of responsibility within the universal church, so that the church in every nation”⁴⁶⁹ can play its part in bringing the gospel to the whole world, including China.

The Transcendent Nature of the Church

“Furthermore, Christian truth is God’s way of salvation for the world. The Christian church, therefore, is a worldwide, spiritual society, not limited by nation or race. To use nationalism, whether of the East or the West, to turn the church into an organization that is narrowly national and uniting it with a local culture, not only eliminates the universal and spiritual nature of the church, but also rebels against God’s will and the royal authority of Christ. To promote ‘Indigenous Theology,’ or over-emphasize an ‘indigenous church,’ therefore, is to distort the nature of Christian truth, which is from heaven. There is a danger of turning the church into something merely human, or even pagan, and thus losing its transcendent, heavenly nature.”⁴⁷⁰ The early church fathers came from Asia and Africa, not Europe, like Christ and the Apostles. Christianity is not a Western religion, but a faith for the whole world. “The essence of the church should not be limited by human nature. If we turn it into a national organization,⁴⁷¹ we shall strip it of its heavenly, transcendent character, a danger that results from an over-emphasis upon an

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⁴⁶⁶ Chang must have been composing this sentence in the mid-twentieth century.

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⁴⁷⁰ 126-127

⁴⁷¹ Chang refers here to the idea of creating a “Chinese” church, with distinctly “Chinese” theology and characteristics, implying also a rejection of “Western” theology and characteristics.

‘indigenous church.’ The church transcends human culture, and is not restricted by any kind of cultural prejudice. It can, however, be fully inclusive by absorbing eminent cultural institutions and fine cultural elements resulting from common grace to construct a new whole to express its own spirit for the benefit of worldwide proclamation. For example, every language has its beautiful and distinctive expressions. When we write, we can’t just be ‘neither Chinese nor Western,’ but must use idiomatic expressions and literary quotations, as long as they are not in opposition to the truth, to render our style elegant to glorify God’s name. That being the case, our question, then, is only whether the elements of the whole that we construct are consistent with Christian truth and the heavenly goal of the church, not whether they are Eastern or Western. They must transcend the limits and prejudices of any national government or culture.”⁴⁷²

“The church is a holy, heavenly organization with its own internal, spiritual life-force, so that it is able to break through these limitations and prejudices and ‘Christianize’ every kind of element⁴⁷³ and bestow upon it a holy image. The church, therefore, represents a transcendent principle that is completely different from the ordinary, and represents the coming into the world of that which belongs to the kingdom of heaven. It is therefore incompatible with many secular notions, and will arouse powerful hostility from secular society. At this time, the most evident and challenging manifestation of that hostile power is a narrow nationalism, of which Indigenous Theology is one form which this sort of spirit takes. This kind of conflict is not a battle between East and West, but arises from the ancient, original conflict between the power of ‘the spiritual and the worldly.’ At present, the conflict engulfs the entire world, so the church, both East and West, must actively participate in this universal spiritual warfare and remove obstacles to the spread of the Word of God, so that the gospel of the kingdom of heaven might be spread throughout the earth. We must dispel Eastern and Western prejudice and limitations and pray for the kingdom of heaven to come, so that ‘the nations of those who are saved shall walk in its light, and the kings of the earth bring their glory and honor into it’ (Rev 21:24). This is the greatest vision of mankind and its ultimate hope.”^{474,475}

Christian Doctrine and the “Substance-Use [Essence-Application] Principle” (From Chapter 9)⁴⁷⁶

“‘Essence’ cannot change: It is a universal standard, immutable throughout the ages.

‘Application’ can change: It should adapt to place and time.”⁴⁷⁷

The Penetration of Christian Doctrine: Tearing Down Strongholds

The theologians of the early church opposed the pagan philosophies and religions of their day, but “some theologians in certain denominations of the Chinese church, by contrast, do not follow the example of their forebears to do battle with spiritual forces in the heavenly places, but rather ‘giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons’ (1 Tim 4:1), they promote so-called ‘Indigenous Theology’ ... Recently, even among evangelicals, there are some who do the same,

⁴⁷² 127

⁴⁷³ Or to make every element subservient to Christian truth.

⁴⁷⁴ See Dawson, *The Historic Reality of Christian Culture*, chaps. 12–13.

⁴⁷⁵ 127-128

⁴⁷⁶ Or *mingti dayong*; i.e., be clear on the essential principals, and apply them effectively. Sometimes translated as “Substance-Use Principle,” as in Samuel Ling’s translation of the *Critique of Humanism* in this volume.

⁴⁷⁷ 129

agreeing with what the Indigenous Theology proponents are saying.”⁴⁷⁸ Chang gives examples from the twentieth century, such as Zhao Zhichen, Wu Leichuan and others, but we could offer examples from our own time of theologians who seek to mix Christianity with elements of Chinese religion, culture, and philosophy.⁴⁷⁹

What is the proper approach? Chang believes it is to use what he calls the “Substance-Use” principle. “It is essential to apply the ‘Substance-Use Principle’⁴⁸⁰ and to adapt our theology to the local situation (so-called indigenization, or ‘contextualization’). We must apply our theology to the current trends of thought, the situation of each nation. Engaging in a flexible strategy and going on the offensive against humanism, we should seek to penetrate society and culture [with the truth]. Of course, we must actively preach the gospel in order to bring salvation to individual souls, but we must also create an environment that is advantageous to the spread of the gospel. ‘Adapting to the local situation’ does not mean surrendering to the environment, but preparing the soil for the seed of the gospel in order to go on the offensive against secular culture and philosophy and every kind of social science, and to wage a comprehensive campaign of proclamation.”^{481,482}

“The non-Christians now occupy the schools, bookstores, and newspapers; we barely have a foothold. The classic Chinese dictionaries are full of Confucian, Buddhist, and Daoist terms and concepts, with hardly any Christian flavor. The academic culture is dominated by non-Christian scholars.”⁴⁸³ (We could say almost the same thing today as he did fifty years ago.) “This sorry situation has resulted from neglect of cultural education by the church, allowing the devil to gain a foothold.”⁴⁸⁴

“Further, we must consider whether the inability of the truth to be propagated widely and of the gospel to flourish might not be only because people don’t believe, but might perhaps lie with the coldness and indifference of ordinary believers—their superficial study of the truth; their not seeking for deeper knowledge of the faith; their weakness and incompetence. We need true and sincere faith, as well as unwavering resolution, firm and assertive courage, and a spirit of learning and reflection. Having faith, we need to ‘add to [it] . . . knowledge’ (2 Pet 1:5). We must love God not only with our heart, but our mind as well (Matt 22:37). Only thus can we take up our daunting mission and assume leadership in cultural scholarship.”⁴⁸⁵

“Many faithful Christians only focus on their relationship with God (Vertical Relationship), but neglect the broad application of Christian truth to life in this world (Horizontal relationship). They do not understand the ‘Substance-Use’ principle and do not penetrate every aspect of human life with the sovereignty of God and universal principles of Christian truth. That is, they do not construct an ‘all embracing life system.’”⁴⁸⁶ “If we really want to propagate Christianity

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⁴⁷⁹ Examples include C.-S Song; Archie C.C. Lee, Kwok Pui-lan, K.K. Yeo, Zhang Chunyi. Theological movements with this tendency include “*Huaren*” theology, “*Zhongguo*” theology, “*Huaxia*” theology, “*Zhonghua*” theology.

⁴⁸⁰ Or *mingti dayong*.

⁴⁸¹ See Chang, *Shijie Xuandao Zhanlue Zhongxin* (*Strategy for World Missions*).

⁴⁸² 130-131

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⁴⁸⁴ 131

⁴⁸⁵ 131-132

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widely, we cannot ignore matters of culture and religion.”⁴⁸⁷ “The literature of Confucianism, Buddhism, Daoism and Hindu philosophy is vast, and they place prominent advertisements in the newspapers. The works of Christian systematic theology and apologetics, on the other hand, are as ‘few as morning stars,’ and popular Christian publications are mostly shallow tracts, almost nothing in comparison.”⁴⁸⁸ (That is why Chang decided to write books, in order to engage Chinese culture with the gospel, and to motivate Christians to apply the gospel to all aspects of life.) The culture of today is a mix of traditional Chinese thought and modern Western philosophy, both of which are humanistic and opposed to gospel. We must overcome this obstacle by preaching a faith that addresses the mind as well as the heart, and that opposes error with truth in every domain of life.

The Mission of the Christian Church

“After I believed in Christ, I began to write books. Upon the publication of my first works, *Yuan Dao (The Way: An Investigation Concerning Divine Truth)* and *Shengdao Tong Quan (A General Interpretation of Christian Truth)*, a number of pious and orthodox believers thought that I was promoting Indigenous Theology because I had quoted from many Chinese classics and employed many phrases and terms from Confucian, Buddhist, and Daoist writings. Little did they know that I was actually opposing Indigenous Theology and was in absolute disagreement with it. Though both Indigenous Theology proponents and I use similar sayings and terminology, Indigenous theologians are making far-fetched comparisons, compromising with pagan views, and even surrendering to them, while I deploy such terms so that the leading intellectuals of our country might understand the truth and be saved in a more natural way, by building on what they already know. Towards those theories that are opposed biblical truth, however, I engage in sharp critique and even refutation, so that they might thoroughly repent, forsake emptiness, and believe in the gospel.”⁴⁸⁹

“Now we must consider further the question of what sort of attitude we should take towards Chinese culture, philosophy, and religion.”⁴⁹⁰ While we hold onto the truth, we must also be aware of our cultural environment, so we can preach the gospel in a way that people understand. “Our missions strategy should follow the principle, ‘If you want to capture brigands, first seize their chief.’ We should begin by contending with Gentile cultural and philosophical leaders. We should imitate the example of our fore-runners, inheriting their spirit, in order to pull down ‘strongholds’ and cast down ‘arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God’ (2 Cor 10: 4–5).”⁴⁹¹

The seventeenth-century Pietists meant well, but they neglected matters of culture, and thus Europe did not have a chance to hear Christian truth applied to all arenas of thought. So, “we must not only study the Bible and understand it, but must put it into practice, using biblical truth

⁴⁸⁷ 133. This is why I have written *Confucius and Christ*. It is intended to encourage Chinese Christians to study Confucius carefully and use their study to help non-Christians see both the value and the limitations of Confucius, so that they could find the full truth in Christ. In particular, I hope that the book will help Chinese men see how they can imitate Christ more faithfully.

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to solve current problems.”⁴⁹² “We must not stay in our own little circle, cling to things that are incomplete, and simply oppose liberal theology and Indigenous Theology. We must leave our lovely little ivory tower and go with Paul to debate with the pagan philosophers on Mars Hill⁴⁹³ (Acts 17:22).”⁴⁹⁴

“We ought to study deeply and understand our nation’s culture, philosophy, religion, and similar matters, so that we can apply the truth to today’s situation and ‘dispense the right medicine to the disease’ when preaching the gospel to our countrymen, especially to intellectuals. We should advise the proponents of Indigenous Theology to see clearly the differences between Chinese traditional culture, philosophy, and religion, and Christianity, so that they do not try to compare things that cannot be compared or compromise the truth. They must not think that ‘all paths lead to the same destination,’ lest they all lead to the same destruction, because ‘There is a way *that seems* right to a man, but its end *is* the way of death’ (Prov 14:12; 16:25).”⁴⁹⁵

Of course, we must study the Bible carefully first, so that we can discern the errors of non-Christian philosophy and religion, lest we compromise the truth with error. Then we can address the weak points of other belief systems, using three approaches.

First, we must show that man-based philosophy, humanism, can never explain the mysteries of the world or lead us to a knowledge of God. That is because man himself is fallen, and in need of salvation, and cannot know God apart from revelation.

Second, we must be clear about the real definition of religion. “Proponents of Indigenous Theology prattle about religion, but they are completely at a loss when it comes to distinguishing between true and false religion.”⁴⁹⁶ True religion is not philosophy, but “is the revelation of God and the salvation of God.”⁴⁹⁷ “Or they mistake religion for ethics, not realizing that true religion is the marvelous grace and love of God. The gospel of the Lord coming to earth to save men is not an ethical teaching for advising and regulating people. To be sure, Christianity is an ethical religion, it has a supremely holy and good model, with a goal that saints should always honor, but ethics and salvation are inseparably connected with each other, with salvation as the root and ethics as the fruit. Only a true religion of redemption can become a true ethical religion.”⁴⁹⁸

(I believe that this is a major misunderstanding among many believers today.)

Confucian and Buddhist ethical teaching contains much truth, but it cannot enable us to fulfill God’s righteous demands. In fact, the best that human ethical teaching can do is to produce a sense of self-righteousness. “Only when we are empowered by God’s special grace, which comes through the redemption wrought by the death of Christ, and by relying on the sprinkling of the shed blood of Jesus, the transforming work of the Holy Spirit, which causes us to be born again and sanctified, can we constantly ‘[escape] the corruption *that is* in the world through lust,’ and become ‘partakers of the divine nature’ (2 Pet 1:4). Our salvation is from God, not our own self-righteousness.”⁴⁹⁹

⁴⁹² 139

⁴⁹³ Or the Areopagus.

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“Or, in the area of reason, some are trying to gain understanding by themselves, using religion to gain clarity about their own nature to turn from error to understanding, to be enlightened, and to be liberated from existence. They don’t know that the mystery of the Way⁵⁰⁰ is ‘hidden . . . from the wise’ (Matt 11:25)”⁵⁰¹ and we need God’s revelation. “Or, in the realm of emotions, seeking relief and consolation by themselves, some make religion into an emotional crutch that will relieve the troubles of their heart.”⁵⁰²

“We must rely on God’s grace to ‘be delivered from the bondage of corruption’ so that we may gain ‘the glorious liberty of the children of God’ (Rom 8:21).”⁵⁰³ “The true meaning of religion is a mystery hidden from eternity, but now revealed to believers through the Holy Spirit and disclosed in these last days by the incarnation of the Son of God.”⁵⁰⁴

We must also be clear about the nature of theology. It is the study of God, and its content is found in the Scriptures. Chang criticizes the proponents of indigenous theology: “Sadly, not only do proponents of Indigenous Theology not only ignore the Bible, but also vilify Christian truth. In their works, besides sometimes quoting out of context and twisting the Bible to suit their purposes, they never quote the Scriptures, but kowtow to our Chinese sages. Even more ridiculously, they deceive our people by saying that they are only seeking to promote Indigenous Theology and remove the stench of the West, but they are only deceiving themselves, since they worship the most offensive sort of anti-Christian secular Western scholars and liberal theologians, obsequiously accepting their views in opposition to the truth.”⁵⁰⁵

The same situation is true today, unfortunately. Frequently, proponents of indigenous theology fail to distinguish between general revelation and special revelation. General revelation comes through the created world order, events of history, and the heart of man, including his conscience and his sense of God. “The purpose of general revelation is to enable people to know that there is a God (so that they are without excuse; see Rom 1:20–21) and thus to seek God. By relying only on general revelation, however, it is difficult to gain a complete insight, and we cannot know the correct way to life.”⁵⁰⁶ This sort of revelation, therefore, can only provide us with very unclear knowledge, but cannot offer an accurate, much less infallible, knowledge of the Triune God, who is the only true God.”⁵⁰⁷

“As we have said earlier, we can have no hope of salvation through natural religion of general revelation. The reason is, first, that men do not have a correct knowledge of God, so they turn to self-deification or make their own god, turning the living God into an empty and imaginary philosophical concept.”⁵⁰⁸ “Secondly, they do not have an accurate understanding of sin, and so become conceited, self-righteous, and unwilling to repent of their sins.”⁵⁰⁹ “Finally, they do not

⁵⁰⁰ Or *Dao*.

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⁵⁰⁵ 150-151

⁵⁰⁶ Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, vol. 1, chap. 3; chap. 5, p.14.

⁵⁰⁷ 152

⁵⁰⁸ 156

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understand salvation correctly, so they wrongly try to save themselves, thus rejecting the Lord and denying the gospel, which is actually the most serious crisis facing mankind.”⁵¹⁰

Special Revelation

“The object of special revelation is the born again believer, the child of God. By his Spirit, God grants him revelation that only the spiritual person can fully comprehend. The natural, fleshly person, which includes all varieties of pagans, ‘Christians’ who have not been born again, liberal theologians, and proponents of indigenous theology, cannot understand the gospel, and even consider it as foolishness. Nor do they comprehend special revelation, which only those who have the Holy Spirit can understand (1 Cor 2:14).”⁵¹¹ (Chang’s meaning here is not that the Bible is totally incomprehensible to non-Christians, but that its personal import and some of its doctrines will not have an impact on the hearts and minds of those who do not believe.)

“The content of special revelation falls into three categories. . . . First, with respect to God, we understand the Trinitarian nature of God, his omnipresence, omniscience, omnipotence, holiness, righteousness, and incomparable glory. Second, with respect to men, we see the horror of original sin, our total depravity, and our utter inability to save ourselves. Third, with regard to the *Dao*,⁵¹² we are enabled to know the great wonder of God’s saving grace, which is completely dependable and irresistible. Those who believe gain life; those who do not believe perish (John 3:16).”⁵¹³

“The manner or means of special revelation can also be divided into three categories: First through the prophets. There is a fundamental difference between Christianity and pagan religions. The former is the revelation of the true God, and does not issue from man’s thought or traditions.”⁵¹⁴ (Chang is speaking here, of course, about the Scriptures, which were composed by inspired prophets and apostles.) “Second, through miracles. Miracles are the ‘revelation of fact’⁵¹⁵ and go hand in hand with God’s verbal revelation, each one complementing and completing the other. According to his own will and purpose, God uses supernatural power and acts to verify his words and promises as well as the greatness of his saving grace (see Heb 2:4). The incarnation of the Lord Jesus was the climactic miracle, for in this way God revealed himself in the flesh, as ‘the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us . . . full of grace and truth’ (John 1:14).”⁵¹⁶ “Third, through theophanies. In the Old Testament, the ‘Angel of the LORD’ is the ‘bodily presence and speech of God.’ His climactic ‘presence’ took place when God became incarnate in Christ. Through the Lord Jesus and his Holy Spirit, ‘Immanuel’—God with us—becomes a spiritual reality through the followers of Christ, the perfect manifestation of which will come when Jesus returns and the New Jerusalem descends from heaven.”⁵¹⁷ At this point, Chang quotes a great deal of Scripture about the return of our Lord in glory to save his people

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⁵¹² Or *word*.

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⁵¹⁵ Or *reality*.

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and to punish those who do not believe in him, and prays that the proponents of indigenous theology will repent and be saved.

Conclusion (From Chapter Ten)

Proponents of indigenous theology do not believe the Scriptures and thus they cannot construct a theology that is faithful to God's special revelation. Many preachers, however, do not study Chinese philosophy, religion, and literature well enough to proclaim a message that confirms what is true, exposes error, and expounds biblical doctrine in a way that speaks convincingly to educated Chinese. "As far as strategy is concerned, to win over the intellectual leaders is more effective than winning over the masses. Zeng Guofan said, 'Whether the customs and ethos of a place are good or bad depends largely upon one or two men.' A person in favor with the general public will always influence tens of thousands to follow his lead."⁵¹⁸

"Sad to say, proponents of 'Indigenous Theology' do not have such a plan, but merely repeat the mistakes of our forebears. They have imbibed the poison of liberal theology, compounding the evil, re-doubling their efforts and thus making the 'tragedy' even worse. They get things all backwards and fail to distinguish between 'essence' and 'function,' by taking philosophy as the foundation for theology. They do not regard the Scriptures as the standard of truth, being completely ignorant of the absolute transcendence of the Christian faith over time and space and of the truth that God's Word is 'settled in heaven' forever (Ps 119:89). Advocates of indigenous theology, in order to make theology more indigenous and more Sinicized, reverse the proper order of things by elevating the sages of China and promoting the wisdom of men. They replace theology with philosophy, put man in the place of God, and substitute the thought of men for the revelation of God. That is why they can say that 'theology differs, according to particular peoples and times.'"⁵¹⁹

"Christianity and the religions of the world totally differ as to the truth of God's special revelation."⁵²⁰ "Because they are misled by the secular notion that Christianity and other religions are parallel but not contradictory, they confuse the Word of God with worldly religions and even seek to compromise with them, robbing Christianity of its distinctive essence and leaving only its name."⁵²¹

"May God open the eyes of their hearts and bring them 'from darkness to light, and *from* the power of Satan to God' (Acts 26:18), as happened to me when I was delivered from the darkness of paganism after fifty years. When I see others drowning, I feel as if I myself am also drowning. That is why I have spoken from my heart and composed this book with much toil and tears.

Please do not imagine that this is just an ordinary book or regard it as unimportant. I hope that it

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⁵¹⁹ 166-167

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will give you understanding and enable you to attain ‘to a living hope, . . . to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away’ (1 Pet 1:3–4). Amen.”⁵²²

Lit-sen Chang: Evangelist, Prophet, Theologian for the World Church

Lecture Four

Lecture Four: Two Great Theologians of the Twentieth Century: Lit-sen Chang and Carl F.H. Henry

Jesus said, “A prophet is not without honor, except within his own home...” Indeed, two “prophets” of the last century have fallen into neglect and even dishonor in the past few years, and need to be brought back to the attention of God’s people and honored once again. Both of them made major contributions to the church in their own day, and have much to say to us now. They are Lit-sen Chang (Zhang Lisheng) and Carl F. H. Henry. Though they were born far away from each other, and were brought up in very different cultures, as mature men they became friends and co-laborers for the gospel. Their relationship was a wonderful example of cross-cultural cooperation and of the universal nature of the Body of Christ. We shall discuss their similarities, and how they both deserve our attention and our study in the twenty-first century.

Before examining their similarities, let us first look at their differences. Chang was born in China before the Revolution of 1911, and received a classical education. His parents were Buddhists, and from an early age he came under the influence of traditional Chinese religion and philosophy. He did not become a Christian until he was about fifty years old. Carl Henry was born in a nominally Christian home in the United States and was baptized as an infant, though he was not yet born again. While still a young man, however, he became a sincere believer in Jesus Christ, and attended a Christian college (Wheaton College, Illinois), where he received a thoroughly Christian education.

In his early years, Chang was more interested in government and law than he was in religion. Carl Henry, though always interested in the ways in which the gospel might have an impact on society, was always primarily a theologian. As a young man, Chang was very involved in government service, which Carl Henry never did, though he did cover local politics as a newspaper reporter before going to college.

Chang was married before he became a Christian, so his family life was not started on biblical principles. Henry married a Christian girl and always tried to live out Christian ideals in his relationship to his wife and children. Chang's wife was not highly educated, though she was from a wealthy family. Henry's wife was poor, but had received a higher education, and became his intellectual partner and helper throughout their long life together. Though Henry was a great scholar like Chang, he spent more time with his wife, and more time in recreation, than Chang did.

As for education, Chang earned only a bachelor's degree, though he supplemented his education with study at universities in Europe. Henry, on the other hand, earned two master's degrees and two doctorates, one in theology and one in philosophy. After he graduated from Gordon College (Massachusetts), Chang mostly remained in the Boston area, teaching at Gordon College and writing. Carl Henry taught at several seminaries and traveled widely around the world until late in life.

They differed in their view of the connection between apologetics and systematic theology. Chang believed that the two should not be connected, so he wrote a four-volume work on apologetics and an eight-volume work on systematic theology. Carl Henry also published separate volumes dealing with apologetics and theology, but his great work, *God, Revelation,*

and Authority, combined the two. In these six-volumes, Henry both expounded the Christian faith and responded to different views held by both Christian theologians and non-Christians. Each method has its value, of course.

Their writing style differed, also. Although both were very eloquent and wrote in a high, literary style, Chang was far more confrontational than Henry. Like the Old Testament prophets, John the Baptist, Jesus, and the Reformers Luther and Calvin, Chang did not hesitate to say that those within the church who taught false doctrine were wolves in sheep's clothing, false prophets, and enemies of God. Henry employed a much gentler approach, although he also made clear that liberal theologians and compromising evangelicals were enemies to God's truth. Instead of sharp language, he used irony, sarcasm, and humor.

General Similarities

Although they were different in many ways, they were also very similar. Intellectually, both men were extraordinarily brilliant. From their youth, both worked extremely hard, and always excelled in their studies and in their writing. Their massive erudition came from many years of arduous self-study even more than from what they had learned in school. This was especially true of Chang, since he started studying theology later in life, but the writings of both men show that they read widely, thought deeply, and interacted with many other thinkers.

Both men made the Bible the center of their study, thought, and writing. Each of them could quote or refer to many different parts of the Bible, and almost always their use of the Bible was appropriate and accurate. The Bible furnished them not only with their basic worldview, but also with subordinate categories and words with which to expound God's truth and to analyze the thoughts of others. Their writings are filled with quotations of the Scriptures.

At the same time, they both read the writings of great Christian theologians such as Augustine, Calvin, and many outstanding modern thinkers as well. They did not try to develop their theology on the basis of their private understanding, but stood in the tradition of orthodox Christianity. They also read the books of liberal Christian thinkers. When they criticized someone, they did so with careful knowledge of the person's literary works. They both often quoted the very words of those with whom they disagreed. They did not engage in what I call "evangelical slander," by which some evangelicals will criticize a theologian without really reading his works carefully. This is especially true of Carl Henry, who has been unfairly charged with many mistakes by people who apparently have not taken the time to study his writings.

They both possessed a profound understanding of their own culture. Chang was well acquainted with Chinese philosophy and religion; he also studied Western culture and thought. Carl Henry knew only a little about Eastern thought and religion, but his knowledge of Western philosophy and modern popular culture was extraordinary. In their writings, both men carried on a dialogue with leading non-Christian thinkers and their ideas. They tried to show where these were inconsistent or in conflict with God's revelation in the Bible.

Since each one believed that church leaders must be trained well in theology, they both spent a great deal of time in theological education. Chang taught at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in Massachusetts, and Henry was one of the founding faculty members of Fuller Seminary in California. He left Fuller to become editor of *Christianity Today*, and later was critical of its turn away from biblical inerrancy, but accepted invitations to lecture there. He also taught and lectured in many other seminaries.

In their general theological outlook, both stood within the Reformed tradition. Carl Henry was a Baptist, so he didn't believe in infant baptism, but he did accept many of the important tenets of Reformed thinking, such as the sovereignty of God and the relevance of the Bible to all of life and all domains of human endeavor. Chang, though, Reformed in theology, was ordained as a Baptist minister. In his later years, he attended a congregation of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. Of course, both men also believed in human responsibility and in our obligation to preach the gospel to all people.

Now let us look a bit more closely at three major areas of thought and action in which Chang and Henry were similar: evangelism and missions, faith and reason, and *sola scriptura*.

Evangelism and Missions

Both Lit-sen Chang and Carl Henry had a passion for the salvation of lost souls. They firmly believed that we are all lost in sin and in need of a divine Savior—that unless we repent of our transgressions, turn to God, and trust in Jesus Christ as our only Redeemer, we shall be lost for all eternity. They accepted what the Bible said about heaven and hell, and spent all their energies trying to persuade people to turn from worthless idols, including intellectual idols, and worship the one true and living God.

Chang and Henry believed that our greatest problem is not our circumstances, such as finances, or health, or political situation, but our relationship with God. Since all men have fallen short of the glory of God, and since we cannot save ourselves by our works or by worship of false gods, we must trust in Jesus, the divine and human Son of God, who gave himself for us as a propitiation for our sins. Both believed that the soul is more important than the body, and that

salvation for the soul through faith in Christ would lead to the resurrection of the body on the last day, to enjoy eternal life in a new heavens and a new earth.

Both men lived out their convictions by constant evangelism of all sorts. Each one engaged in personal evangelism. Chang wrote letters to his old friends, urging them to repent and trust in Christ, and some of them did. Henry took advantage of every opportunity to share the gospel with people he met on his travels around the world.

The Bible says that faith comes from hearing the Word,⁵²³ and both Chang and Henry accepted countless invitations to preach in churches and at evangelistic meetings. Henry preached several times at the annual Easter service in the Rose Bowl in Pasadena, California, and probably thousands of times in student meetings, faculty gatherings, and churches all over the world, always proclaiming that faith in Christ alone was the only way to salvation. He always carried an evangelistic tract with him, and would walk through it with anyone who showed an interest in the gospel. Chang traveled much less, but engaged in constant personal evangelism with his friends in China through correspondence; he also preached evangelistically in churches in his area.

In their writings, too, both men sought to bring readers to faith in Christ. Especially through apologetic works, they aimed to convince non-believers of their errors and turn them to the truth of Christ. Chang explicitly says in his apologetic books that he yearns for his former colleagues, and even proponents of indigenous theology, to find salvation by faith in the truth of the Scriptures.

⁵²³ Rom 10.

Not only did they believe in the necessity of local evangelism, but they also promoted world missions. Henry was the organizer of the Berlin Congress on Evangelism with Billy Graham in 1966, and traveled around the world constantly to promote the cause of evangelical theology in dozens of countries. He always had a heart for worldwide evangelism and church growth. Chang, of course, cared most passionately about his own nation, China, but he was committed also to the worldwide spread of the gospel. In 1968, Carl Henry asked Chang to write a book for the upcoming congress on evangelism in Asia, which was to be held in Hong Kong. *Strategy of Missions in the Orient* shows just how Chang yearned for God's truth to be proclaimed effectively to the people of every nation and culture in Asia. Chang, like Henry, was deeply concerned about the decline of Christianity in the West, and exerted his efforts to explain the causes of this turning from God and to equipping Christians to communicate the whole message of God to a dying culture. In other words, the world was on his heart, as it was on Henry's.

Both Chang and Henry believed that we must communicate "the whole counsel of God."⁵²⁴ That is, they were convinced that we should call individuals to salvation through repentance and faith in Christ as the first priority. After that, however, they thought that we should teach Christians how to imitate Christ and follow him in every aspect of life—at home, at work, at school, in the media, education, government, and economic life. In other words, they wanted believers to be "salt and light"(Mat 5:13–16) in all domains of society.

In particular, as intellectuals, they desired for truth to prevail in the academy, the arts, and public discourse. They sought to teach believers how to recognize the false ideas that dominate our culture, and to replace them with biblical concepts. Particularly in philosophy, which they saw as

⁵²⁴ Acts 20:27.

the leading force in a culture's intellectual life, they wanted to point out the weak points and errors of non-Christian thought and to demonstrate how the Bible answers our deepest questions and gives us proper categories for thinking about life, death, and reality. They knew that Christian theologians throughout history have fallen into the temptation of making non-biblical concepts their starting point, rather than building their theology upon the Bible. Each one followed in the heritage of Augustine and the Reformers by insisting that Scripture must form the absolute standard by which we measure all philosophical and religious systems. We shall return to that later.

Unlike most liberals and many contemporary evangelicals, they opposed the Social Gospel. That is, they did not think that Christian evangelists should focus on the problems of society or politics. Instead, they wanted to direct people to God's truth as revealed in the Bible, and to Jesus as the only savior from sin. At the same time, however, they opposed the fundamentalists, who would not address matters of culture and politics. Since the Bible contains principles that apply to economics, law, and politics, Chang and Henry wanted these to be communicated clearly by believers who were working in those areas. That is to say, they agreed that the main message of the Bible deals with our relationship with God, but they also saw that God commands us to love others as ourselves, and that believers need to be taught what this means in every corner of the world.

As we know, Chang believed that the gospel would not penetrate every Asian culture unless Christians knew how to expose and refute errors in other religions and philosophies. Before people could really understand Jesus and what he came to do, they must see the things in their culture that need changing and how Christ has come to bring healing to every aspect of individual and social life. Henry, also, like Francis Schaeffer, whom both Henry and Chang

admired, agreed that Christians must understand their culture and preach the gospel in such a way that false ideas would be replaced by God's truth. It is not enough, in other words, to quote John 3:16. We must explain who "God" is; who Jesus is; the condition of the "world"; the nature of true faith; how sinners are lost without Christ; and what Jesus has come to offer—eternal life. And we must do all of this while showing the difference between what our culture believes and what the Bible says.

Both Henry and Chang thought that general revelation could teach all people some things, such as the existence of God, but they also believed that we need special revelation from God in order to be saved from our sins through faith in Christ. Thus, they valued the good things in other religions and philosophies, but they insisted that these world views were insufficient to lead us to God, and that any attempt to mix them with Christianity would lead to disaster. They agreed with the Reformers that Christian theology must seek to penetrate culture, and not be based upon non-Christian ideas.

Both Chang and Henry tried to mobilize the entire church around the world. They knew that world evangelism would take the energy and gifts of all believers everywhere. They appreciated the work of Western missionaries, but longed for Christians of other nations to take their proper role in bringing the gospel to every creature.

In summary, both Chang and Henry had a remarkably comprehensive understanding of evangelism and missions, and lived this out in their own life and ministry.

Faith and Reason

Chang's book, *Zen-Existentialism: Spiritual Decline of the West*, was also written at the urging of Carl Henry. Henry had seen some of Chang's work on this subject and thought he should share his insights with the English-speaking world. The book ends with an appendix, "Where is Modern Theology Going?" by Henry. Carl Henry saw that both Zen and modern Western thought, including some theology, had rejected the possibility of knowing anything for sure about the supernatural realm, or God. He also saw that Zen and modern theology denied the possibility of objective revelation that could be communicated in meaningful terms.

At the end of this appendix, Carl Henry called for a theology that would have four emphases. First, God has revealed himself to the whole world through general revelation, and to his chosen messengers through special revelation. Second, because of his revelation, we can really know God. Third, the revelation given in Scripture is intelligible and is expressed in words that have objective meaning. And fourth, God's revelation in Scripture is true for all peoples, cultures, and ages. Lit-sen Chang would agree with all these statements.

Both men believed that the Bible is the Word of God, given in words that were revealed by God. They were convinced that we could understand the Bible, using our reason and the illumination of the Holy Spirit, and that we could communicate the truths of Scripture in propositions that have universal meaning. That is, they both believed in objective truth that can be known and shared with others in words.

They rejected the idea that men can find out the truth by their own reason or their own intuition. In opposition to Zen and to Existentialism, they did not put man at the center of their theology. They believed that people needed to have God's revelation in order to know God and understand themselves and the world. They could not find ultimate meaning by looking inside themselves.

Furthermore, they believed that the truth of God was reasonable. It was not anti-rational or irrational. God spoke in ways that could be understood and analyzed by human reason, though of course we never fully understand God. A fundamental conviction for both Chang and Henry was that there was an absolute difference between good and evil, truth and falsehood. Contrary to Zen, they opposed the idea of some ultimate unity of all opposites.

For Carl Henry, this meant that the law of non-contradiction is part of God's own nature and was a fundamental feature of his revelation. That is, a statement could not be both true and false at the same time. All human communication depended on this assumption. Many theologians, even evangelicals, have criticized Henry at this point, and have accused him of being a rationalist, but they are both wrong and inaccurate. They are wrong, because they also assume the law of contradiction, even when they criticize Henry, because they say he is "wrong." That assumes a basic difference between "right" and "wrong." Secondly, Henry was not a rationalist because he started with God's revelation, which must be received by faith. Reason is only a tool which we use, with the Holy Spirit's help, to understand the Word of God in Scripture. Furthermore, those who accuse Henry of being a rationalist use reason to do so; they try to use logical arguments to show that he is wrong.

Both Chang and Henry believed that God revealed his truth in propositions, that is, in sentences that have meaning. They did not say this to exclude other means of revelation. As both Henry and Chang pointed out, God's revelation comes to us in history, human experience, dreams, visions, miracles, and other ways. However, the majority of the Bible consists of clear propositions. This is true even of the narrative portions, which are composed of countless statements of what happened, along with explanations of the events of history. Furthermore, key parts of the Bible, such as Jesus' teaching and the epistles, contain thousands of propositions

which are true for all time, such as “God is love”; “God is light”; “God loved the world”; “Christ loved me and gave himself for me”; we are “justified by faith, not by works.” Unlike Zen Buddhism, Existentialism, and Barth, Chang and Henry believed that God’s revelation to us came primarily in sentences composed of words, and not in mysterious personal encounters.

Chang and Henry both stood with Zen, Existentialism, the Hippies, and neo-orthodox theology in their opposition of dry rationalism. They did not think that man was made up only of a mind, or that our human experience consisted only in thinking. They both had deep personal experiences of God, which they believed came as a result of the working of the Holy Spirit in their hearts. Furthermore, they emphasized that God’s Word had life-giving and life-transforming power. It was not just a collection of words and sentences on the pages of Scripture, but was inspired by the Spirit and used by the Spirit to convict of sin, give faith, and implant a new heart of love. Rationalism insists that we can figure things out by ourselves, without God’s help. Chang and Henry knew that we need God’s revelation given in Scripture and God’s Holy Spirit to cause us to believe the truth, experience it in our hearts, and live it out daily.

Both Zen and Existentialism, as well as much of modern philosophy, claim that human language cannot express God’s truth. That is why they oppose the idea of propositional revelation and seek personal experience instead. Chang and Henry, however, would say that God created us in his own image, and created human language; he used human words to communicate his eternal truth, and gave us the Scriptures in words that are true and accurate, because they are inspired by the Holy Spirit. In other words, God overcame the limitations of human ignorance and frailty by enabling his chosen spokesmen to write the Bible in words that faithfully expressed God’s mind, his nature, and his will. Furthermore, we can use human language to communicate truth, as long as we remain faithful to God’s revelation in the Bible.

Both Zen and Existentialism made the individual self the center of the universe. Neo-orthodoxy, while holding to some traditional doctrines, nevertheless made the individual's experience of God's Word the only place where revelation takes place. They turned our attention away from God's objective reality and revelation our own inner experience. This trend has been followed in modern Evangelical theology and church life, as I noted before. So much preaching is about how God can make *me* happy. So much teaching and worship is all about how *I* feel, and it is meant to make *me* have some emotional experience of God. Too many Christians make decisions based on their personal intuition, rather than on the teaching of the Bible.

Furthermore, too many Christians live for themselves. It is all about how *I* can be happy, *now*, rather than about how they can love and serve God and other people. Like the practitioners of Zen and Existentialism, they make themselves the center of the universe, rather than submitting to the objective revelation of God in the Bible, and the needs of others, which should be our main consideration. Both Chang and Henry taught that we should live for God and for others, and they set us examples of devotion to God's kingdom and the welfare of others throughout their long lives of faithful service. They both constantly sacrificed their own pleasure and comfort in order to spread the gospel and to help other people.

In summary, both Lit-sen Chang and Carl Henry put their faith in the truth of Scripture; they did all they could to communicate this truth to others; and they fought against both the irrationality and the self-centeredness of Zen and of Existentialism.

***Sola Scriptura* (Scripture Alone)**

In the *Critique of Indigenous Theology*, Lit-sen Chang repeatedly criticized proponents of indigenous theology for trying to mix non-Christian concepts with biblical concepts in order to

produce something that would appeal to Chinese intellectuals and be more acceptable to them.

Likewise, in his great work, *God, Revelation & Authority*, Carl Henry did all he could to expose the folly of mixing the Bible with alien systems of thought.

In this, both men were following in the footsteps of Luther and Calvin, who themselves were influenced by Augustine. Augustine had tried many different ancient philosophies and religions, and finally decided to base all his thought on the Bible. The Reformers criticized the Roman Catholic Church for following Thomas Aquinas in combining the philosophy of Aristotle with Scriptural teaching to produce a synthesis. Both Chang and Henry pointed to church history to show how this mixing of God's revelation with man's speculation always produced a hybrid product that could not bear lasting fruit. Chang mentions Clement of Alexandria, Justin Martyr, and others in the early church, who used Greek and Roman philosophical categories to understand and explain the Bible. Henry showed from the history of Western theology and philosophy that whenever we begin with a philosophical idea, instead of with the Bible, we end up with a wrong understanding of truth.

In the West, the philosophies of Plato, Aristotle, Kant, Hegel, Nietzsche, and modern linguistic philosophers like Wittgenstein have had great influence. So have the ideas of Karl Marx, Sigmund Freud, and Charles Darwin. In the twentieth century, Western theologians have come under the sway of all of these thinkers, as well as the Romantic Movement, the Existential movement, sociology, psychology, and other alien systems of thought. These have affected theology and turned people away from the truths of the Bible. All of these other philosophies begin with human speculation, not with divine revelation.

In China, of course, Western influence has been great, but so has the influence of Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism. In his criticism of indigenous theology, Lit-sen Chang pointed out how all of these Chinese ideas have some similarity with Scripture, but also have many more differences, and these are fundamental. He showed that the Bible and all other world views start from different assumptions and rest on different foundations. The Bible begins with God and his revelation; man as created in the image of God; the current fallen and sinful state of all people; the salvation brought to us by the sacrifice and resurrection of Jesus; the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers; and the life of the world to come.

Chang showed how Christians such as the Nestorians have been tempted to use non-Christian words and concepts to express Christian truth, with the result that they confused people, lacked power in evangelism, and failed to penetrate Chinese culture with the power of God's truth as revealed in Scripture.

A major difference which Chang pointed out between Christianity and all other worldviews is the Bible's teaching that we are slaves to sin and cannot save ourselves. Because of sin, we are also unable to know God or our duty, apart from God's revelation in the Bible. In other words, all other religious and philosophical systems ignore both our fundamental ignorance and our fundamental sinfulness and alienation from God.

This goes back to the difference between general revelation and special revelation. Wise men of all cultures have been able to understand some things about the universe, and even some things about God and man. But their true ideas are mixed in with errors, and their systems lack completeness. The Bible, on the other hand, contains no errors, and all that is true in human religion and philosophy is already contained in the Scriptures, which are sufficient for us to

know and serve God. The problem with all attempts at indigenous theology, whether in the East or in the West, is that they think too highly of general revelation and too little of special revelation.

One reason for this is the assumption that science has shown the Bible to be false in some of its statements. Both Chang and Henry knew that modern science arose in the West after the Reformation because people realized several basic truths. First, the world was created by God and is therefore good. In other words, matter is important, as is our life in the material world. Roman Catholics had taught that only “spiritual” things were important, and that the only really valuable occupation was that of a priest or nun. But the Reformers saw that the Bible affirmed all of life, and that all honest occupations were honorable. Secondly, they taught that the world, as created by God, displays his glory by its order, beauty, and variety. Thirdly, they rejected the authority of Aristotle, whose philosophy had hindered the progress of science, because the Roman Catholics had depended on his scientific theories to interpret the Bible. After Aristotle was dethroned, people began to investigate the world in a new way, and modern science was born.

After the enlightenment, however, more and more philosophers began to see human observation as superior to God’s revelation. They rejected God, and looked for ways to explain the world without the use of the Scriptures or of the idea of God as Creator and Sustainer. They began to think that the only true knowledge came through science. Then, in the nineteenth century, some German biblical critics rejected the possibility of miracles. When people accepted Darwinism, they had to say that the first chapters of Genesis were wrong. Then the whole Bible came under attack. The result was that biblical critics doubted the truth of the Scriptures and threw out doctrines like creation, the fall of man, miracles, and the deity of Christ and his second coming.

Both Chang and Henry realized that modern science, though wonderful in many ways, has made many mistakes, and is constantly revising its conclusions. Even evolutionary theory is now seen to lack scientific proof. They also knew that archaeology had repeatedly confirmed the Bible's historical narratives. The result was that they were confident that they could believe that the Bible was God's inerrant word. That is why they could base their theology on the Bible, and the Bible alone.

Sadly, many of the ideas which Henry and Chang opposed continue to be very influential today. Some evangelical theologians say that human words cannot express truth about God, and so they oppose the idea of propositional revelation. Others believe that science has shown that Genesis is wrong, not knowing that evolutionary theory is now in crisis from scientific evidence that it is wrong. Others use various linguistic theories or philosophical ideas to analyze the Bible, rather than starting from the Bible itself and using it to analyze and evaluate all other systems of belief. Still others think that unless Christianity is mixed with Chinese religion and philosophy, we can't hope to persuade Chinese to trust in Christ. They don't seem to remember the failures of such efforts in the past, or the great successes that came in the early church and in the Reformation, when brilliant intellectuals found that the Bible made more sense than rival belief systems.

Conclusion

Both Lit-sen Chang and Carl Henry exerted immense influence in the twentieth century. They were respected for their knowledge, their wisdom, and their elegant literary style. However, both have been neglected in recent years, and even rejected. Chang's books were out of print for a long time. Hardly anyone reads Carl Henry anymore, and even evangelical theologians are saying all sorts of false things about his theology. I am happy to say, however, that both Chang

and Henry are now beginning to receive the attention they deserve. Chang's systematic theology has been unofficially republished in simplified characters and printed in two volumes. An American press is reprinting two of his works, and has published my translation of his *Critique of Indigenous Theology*. At least two books on Carl Henry, including one by me, along with several very good doctoral dissertations, have brought him back to people's attention, and there is a bit of a renewal of interest in his theology.

Dear friends, I hope that these lectures will have shown that Lit-sen Chang is a theologian whom we should read today and that Carl Henry also deserves careful study. These two giants of the twentieth century are gifts of God to the whole church. I pray that we will follow their example of love for God and for his kingdom; their careful study of the Bible and zeal in preaching the gospel; their observation of their culture; and their lives of simple faith and utter dedication to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory forever. Amen.

Lecture 5

A Chinese Christian Critique of Confucianism

Lit-sen Chang (Zhang Lisheng) was born in Wuxi, China, in 1904. For the first fifty years of his life, he rejected Christianity and believed in Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism, finally committing himself to Zen Buddhism. A brilliant legal scholar, he served in the government of the Republic of China during World War 2 and then founded Jiangnan University in order to “extinguish” Christianity. Then, while living in Indonesia, he was dramatically converted to Christ. Immediately, he began an intensive study of the Bible, and commenced teaching comparative religions at various Christian schools. After graduating from Gordon Theological Seminary (now Gordon-Conwell), he was invited to remain as a lecturer in missions. His book, *Asia's Religions: Christianity's Momentous Encounter with Paganism*, was probably written in the 1960s. It was published by China Horizon through P&R Publishing in 1999.

Part One: Christian Critique of Confucianism

This substantial volume first discusses different approaches to world religions, then examines Confucianism, Daoism, Buddhism, Zen, Hinduism, and Islam, all from a Christian point of view. In each case, Chang offers a “Christian Understanding” of the religion, then a “Christian Critique.”

For more on Lit-sen Chang, see *Wise Man from the East: Lit-sen Chang (Zhang Lisheng)*, edited by G. Wright Doyle.

Christian Understanding of Confucianism

I. The Nature of Confucianism.

Is Confucianism a religion? This question has been debated hotly for quite a while. After surveying arguments pro and con, Chang concludes that Confucianism is not a religion, because Confucius himself did not claim to be a prophet or teacher of ultimate truths; he confessed that he did not know about such things, and that he had not measured up to his own standards of ethical perfection.

“Confucius teaches only attainment, but provides no atonement. As he himself confessed, his own attainment was a tragic failure. Not only was he not sure or enlightened about the ‘truth’ and ‘life’ but he also did not know about the way’ (*tao*) to heaven.”¹ Chang acknowledges religious elements in Confucianism, such as a belief in the necessity of faith; a sense of “Heavenly Mission” (or mandate of heaven); the existence and power of divine beings; the use of sacrifice; prayer; and vows. Nevertheless, “Confucianism exists as a religion not because it has any sound theological argument, but simply because of its practice.” (39)

In fact, Chang avers that “there is only one true religion - Christianity; all other religions are false. . . . A True religion must have two basic factors: the *religio objectiva* (God and His revelation), and the *religio subjectiva* (the fear of the Lord). From these two factors, we conclude that Confucianism is not a true religion.” (39)

Confucius himself believed not in the biblical Father in heaven, but Heaven. His religion was therefore only a “rudimentary primitive monotheism.” (40) The later Neo-Confucian shift to belief in the Ultimate (*tai ji*) or the Ultimateless (*wu ji*) means that “they have no redeemer, and no way of salvation.” (40) Likewise, the subjective aspect of Confucianism focuses not on the fear of a transcendent God but on the ordinances of heaven. One should reverence devils and gods but keep a distance from them. Its ethical teachings center on *ren* (*jen*; benevolence to man), not on the fear of God. Confucianism is, therefore, a “system of humanism, rather than a true religion.” (40)

II. The Classics of Confucianism.

1. The Five Classics. Chang briefly describes the five canonical classics (*Canon of History*; *Canon of Poetry*, or *Odes*); *Canon of Changes* (*I Ching*; *I Jing*); *Record of Rites*; *Annals of Spring and Autumn*). He pays most attention to the *I Jing*, which he believes “underlies almost all Chinese philosophy,” and which “denies the existence of God, [and] . . . eternity or the ultimate reality; there is no being, only becoming (change or *I*). Therefore there is no absolute and no truth.” (41-42)

Commenting on the *Book of Rites*, Chang notes that in his role as a compiler and editor Confucius “winnowed away some materials of high spiritual value” and could thus be classified with the liberal or modernist theologians of our time.(42)

2. The Four Books are *The Book of Great Learning*; *The Doctrine of the Mean*; *The Analects of Confucius*; *The Works of Mencius*. The last of these he calls “an exposition of Confucius’ teachings with their relevance to social and political issues.” (43)

III. The Basic Teachings of Confucius

Chang states that Confucius’ “teaching has been the most potent single factor in shaping the life and character of the entire Chinese people, and has been accepted by Chinese people as having the stamp of absolute truth and finality. For twenty-five centuries Confucius has been the life guide of the Chinese [people]; his teachings touched every corner of human activity and permeated all phases of life. ” (43-44) Before summarizing this worldview, he asserts that it is “centered on man, not on God. . . Confucianism is a mere system of humanism or a system of personal and social ethics.” (44)

The concise outline of Confucian doctrines which follows includes its teachings on man, the family, society, and on government. I found this most helpful. “Man’s original nature is good. . . All men are educable to be a saint or a sage.”(44) Society is built upon the ideal man, who is indispensable for an ideal society and government. Of course, the family, as the basic unit of society, holds pre-eminence in this ethical system. Love within the family will extend outward to all mankind, and thus must hold first place in our hearts.

The ideal man seeks to build the ideal society, which is “a kingdom of the righteousness of man, not the kingdom of God.” (45) Its moral character will flow from the example of virtuous men, not laws. The five cardinal virtues – *ren* (benevolence), *yi* (righteousness), *li* (rules of propriety or decorum), *zhi* (wisdom), and *xin* (fidelity or faithfulness) – guided the efforts of each person to develop into the mature citizen. This person fulfilled his proper role in each of the five key relationships (ruler-subject; father-son; husband-wife; elder brother-younger brother; friend – friend).

The ideal government will be presided over a ruler who embodies these virtues. An evil sovereign is answered to the people, and may be overthrown if they decide that the Mandate of Heaven has been withdrawn from him. The final goal of such government will be a return to the Golden Age in which true righteousness and peace prevail.

Christian Criticism of Confucianism

Now Chang turns to an evaluation of Confucianism from the standpoint of the Bible. He frames most of his critique within classical theological categories.

God (theology proper)

Confucius, as Chang has noted, downplayed or disregarded previous “spiritual” elements in Chinese thought, and turned the focus from a Supreme Ruler (Shangdi) to Heaven, which was mostly conceived of as an “abstract concept, not a person.” (50) “As a result, there came spiritual degeneration.” (50). Gradually, people began to worship their ancestors, so that “the tide of ancestor worship began to grow into an overpowering swell.” (50)

In the Song and Ming dynasties, Neo-Confucianism developed the earlier idea of the unity of heaven and man into a sophisticated pantheism in which “One is All, All is One,” and every man possesses the Supreme Ultimate. “They deify themselves and, in fact, deny the personal God, and became naturalists or ‘practical atheists.’” (50)

Creation

Confucius would not discuss the question of ultimate origins. Zhu Xi, the great twelfth-century Neo-Confucian thinker, “advanced the view that the universe and all things were composed of two principles, *li* and *ch’i* [*qi*]. These two are co-eternal, infinite, distinct, and formed the groundwork of creation.” (51) Consequently, Chinese intellectuals turned toward “naturalism, materialism, or agnosticism, and the living and almighty God was expelled and had no relation with the lives of the Chinese people, though they are not aware of this serious fact!” (51)

Man (anthropology)

Orthodox Confucianism teaches that man’s nature was originally good, but becomes degenerate because of ignorance and a “clouded” mind, which it tries to “clear” by self-cultivation, which Chang classifies as “self-righteousness.” According to the Bible, however, no one is righteous, and all are born in sin, which no amount of self-discipline can overcome. “True manhood can only be restored by turning back to God and becoming ‘partakers of the divine nature’ (2 Peter. 1:4) through regeneration.”

Sin and Salvation

“Like other non-Christian religions, Confucianism teaches nothing about original sin, redemption, forgiveness, atonement, and sanctification.” That is because, throughout Chinese history, “the great ‘sages’ taught the Chinese people that there is no original sin and that only acts of conscious volition are considered to be sin. Man is as able to desist from sin as to commit sin, so it was urged that man can stamp it out by sincerity (*ch’eng*) or devotion to do good.” (53)

Chang tells us that he used to be a follower of Wang Yangming, who believed in the “unity of knowledge and practice of righteousness,” but found that he could not attain to this unity by self-effort. As a Christian, he accepted the biblical teaching that we are saved by God’s grace alone,

through the atoning sacrifice of Christ on the Cross in our place, which we receive through faith, not works.

Ancestor Worship

Turning now to a key component of traditional Confucianism, Chang discusses ancestor worship. He acknowledges the dilemma this has posed for missionaries and Chinese Christians, for “the Bible teaches filial piety but condemns idol worship – including ancestor worship,”(54) on which he wrote a separate book. (His son has told me that Chang ceased all ancestor worship activity the day after he became a Christian.) To solve this problem, he goes to great length to demonstrate from Confucian writings that “the true meaning of filial piety is not ancestor worship.” (55)

He concludes that “there is no necessary logical relation between filial piety and ancestor worship. . . Filial piety . . . only commences with the respect of parents. It should be culminated in the fear of the Lord, our Father in heaven. Therefore, faith in God is not in contradiction with but is rather the ultimate fulfillment of true filial piety in its fullest sense.”(55)

Last Things (eschatology)

As most people know, “Confucius was concerned primarily with man’s earthly career here and now. . . ; the whole system of his teachings was centered in the realm of the things temporal and not of the things eternal” (2 Corinthians 4:18). Confucianism, therefore, lacks any teaching on individual resurrection, judgment, eternal life, a new heaven and a new earth. There is no hope beyond the grave.

Chang concludes that, “in the end, Confucianism is a form of humanism.” Consequently, “‘Salvation belongs unto the Lord’ (Psalm 3:8), not to Confucius. . . The Chinese people’s efforts for national regeneration will be futile, unless they repent and go back to God, the fountain of living waters and our hope of glory.”(57)

Part Two: Critique of Indigenous Theology

Chang’s critique of early 20th-century Chinese indigenous theology flows from several principles. The first is that Christians must attempt to construct a truly indigenous theology. The second is that this theology must be based upon the Bible, though in dialogue with Chinese concepts. Third, this dialogue must not assume that the Bible and Chinese classics are equal partners; rather, the Scriptures hold initial, controlling, and final authority. That means, fourth, that we must not imitate the mistakes of theologians throughout history who tried to integrate biblical concepts with alien philosophical systems of thought.

Chang believes that the Gnostics, Platonists like Clement of Alexandria and Origen, and Aristotelians like Thomas Aquinas went astray in their efforts to forge a synthesis of Christian and non-Christian teachings. Likewise, modernist theologians in the West and in China subordinate the doctrines and values of the Bible to assumptions and concepts from science, philosophy, psychology, and political theory. To make matters worse, Chinese IT proponents also use categories from Chinese religion and philosophy to interpret and apply the Scriptures to contemporary society.

Thus, though he fully supports the task of creating a Christianity that speaks to all aspects of Chinese culture and tradition as well as to the modern condition, Chang insists that we must

begin with God's revelation, and see all other writings, ancient and modern, in the light of Scripture. For example, as we shall see below, he re-interprets the core Confucian ethical demand for filial piety in accordance with the core biblical assertions that there is only one God; only he should receive any form of worship; and he, as heavenly Father, deserves our ultimate loyalty.

Lessons from Church History

"Fallacies of Indigenous Theology" in China

1. Errors of the Roman Catholics

Early Indigenization 44-45

Indigenous Theology (IT): Its proponents do not understand the Bible. "IT reflects and transmits national prejudice." 46 IT theologians "elevate the sages; promote human wisdom; replace the bible with philosophy; put man in God's place; and replace God's revelation with human speculation" (9)

Recent papal approval of ancestor worship; true filial piety 45-46 "Being filial has nothing to do with the worship of ancestors." 46

Paying careful attention to filial piety, surely, should be to 'revere our heavenly Father,' and reverence towards our heavenly Father is the true essence of filial piety, and its greatest righteousness.' 46

Modern IT theologians are humanists. They seek mostly earthly change for individuals and society.

E.g. Wu Leichuan, who "thought that the kingdom of heaven proclaimed by Jesus was a sort of ideal society" here on earth. 49 "He also holds the Holy Spirit and *ren* of Confucianism to be the same thing. He 'fully believe,' therefore, that the 'truth' of Jesus and the doctrines of China's philosophers can be 'harmonized.'" 50

Likewise, Li Jingzong and other contributors to *Ching Feng*, the publication of Tao Feng Shan in Hong Kong, "claims that Christian theology should not only blend with traditional Chinese culture, but also advocated new trends in modern Chinese thought." Li thought that the philosophy of the great Neo-Confucian writer Wang Yangming could be the foundation of a new indigenous Christian theology. Chang counters, "It is theologically dangerous, however, thus to mix heavenly truth with human wisdom. It's like using human hands to sew heavenly clothing!" 52

Because of his influence and representative role in early 20th-century indigenous theology, Xie Fuya receives extended treatment by Chang. For Xie, Christian categories can be assimilated into, and radically transformed by, traditional Confucian notions of ultimate reality and of human ethical transformation, with the emphasis shifted from God to man. In the tradition of activist Confucianism, Xie also promoted a social revolution, using Jesus as the example of self-sacrifice for the sake of the common good.

Adapting the famous words of Abraham Lincoln, Xia affirms that “Chinese Christianity must be ‘of,’ ‘by,’ and ‘for’ the Chinese people.” Chang comments: Clearly, he does not believe that ‘of Him and through Him and to Him are all things’ (Romans 11:36), for he replaces God with man.” Chang criticizes Xie for both his humanism and his rationalism, each of which is fully characteristic of Confucianism. Xie’s attempt to subsume Christian theology under the categories of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism also receives a strong rebuttal from Chang.

¹ Lit-sen Chang, *Asia’s Religions: Christianity’s Momentous Encounter with Paganism*, 38. All quotations in this section will be from this book and are referred to by page number only (in parentheses) hereafter.