

New Mexico Forum on Christian Faith of Chinese Intellectuals – Spirituality, Understanding and Character

Theme: “Three Streams in Unity and Theology in Culture”

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Evangelicalism in China: Self-Theologizing as the Fourth Self

Global theology is often framed as African, Latin American, and Asian theology. This has come to the forefront of our attention because of the shift of the center of gravity of Christianity to the Two Thirds World in the last 50 years or so. But evangelism and mission often happens before theological innovation, so really non-Western theology has only garnered widespread attention in roughly the last 10 years. Henry Venn, the General Secretary of the Church Missionary Society from 1841-73, coined the phrase the “Three-Self Church”¹ which includes: Self-Sustaining, Self-Governing, and Self-Propagating. Many people mistakenly think that the Three-Self Church is only in reference to the official Chinese governmental church (called the TSPM, or the Three-Self Patriotic Movement starting in 1951), but the phrase originated much earlier than China’s appropriation of it. However, missiologist Paul Hiebert brought up the necessity of adding a Fourth Self: Self-Theologizing.² Majority World churches can be “Three-Self” and still mimic their Western counterparts. Only when they start Self-Theologizing do they truly come into their own. Self-Theologizing means that they need to start writing their own worship songs, their own creeds, and their own theology. This is meat, not milk, and it is an important later stage in the growth and maturation of Two Thirds World churches.

We live in an exciting time where this is now happening. Beyond just creeds, now there is a movement toward major production of biblical commentaries. Very rarely are there TTW academic theologians who have not served in some sort of pastoral or missionary capacity. Bi- or tri-vocational pastors/missionaries/theologians are the rule more than being the exception. But they do not often have a unifying force, other than ecumenical conferences. But when something else brings them together, they can produce robust and exciting theology from new cultural frontiers.

Africa Bible Commentary

In 2006, a groundbreaking work was released: the *Africa Bible Commentary*³, where 70 African scholars (perhaps inspired by the Septuagint?) commented on every book of the Bible from solely African perspectives. What was unique was not just the cultural

¹ M. Warren, ed., *To Apply the Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971).

² Paul G. Hiebert, *Anthropological Reflections on Missiological Issues* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 97

³ Tokunboh Adeyemo, ed., *Africa Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), co-published with Word Alive Publishers in Kenya.

component but the racial one: every single author was a black African (there were not even any white South Africans), and practically all held a PhD in biblical theology. This commentary came out of a conference, but its roots went as far back as 1994: the Second Pan Africa Christian Leadership Assembly (PACLA II) in Nairobi, Kenya. It was determined that there was much “deficient knowledge of the Bible and faulty application of its teaching as the primary weakness of the church in Africa. They recognized that the church in Africa was a mile long in terms of quantity, but only an inch deep in terms of quality.”⁴ The Association of Evangelicals in Africa (AEA) was formed to respond to this need. But it took a missions organization, SIM (Serving in Mission) to turn this dream into a reality. AEA had the brains and the vision, SIM had the infrastructure backing, and out of this was born the *Africa Bible Commentary* (ABC). The endeavor was launched in 2001 but took five years to bear the final product.

Tokunboh Adeyemo (Nigeria) became the general editor, Samuel Ngewa (Kenya) helmed the New Testament portion in English, Tewoldemedhin Habtu (Eritrea) assumed the Old Testament section in English, while Issiaka Coulibaly (Côte d’Ivoire) managed all the French entries. It was published by Word Alive, a Kenyan publishing house, and Zondervan became its Western publishing partner for distribution outside Africa.

The commentary has much to say not only about each book of the Bible but how relevant it is to the African context. After all, so much of the Bible takes place in Africa (Egypt, Ethiopia, etc.), so actually in many ways African culture is much closer—literally and figuratively—to Biblical culture than our Western culture is, and many of the Church Fathers were also African (Augustine, Tertullian, Origen, etc.)

South Asia Bible Commentary

Then in 2015 came a follow-up to the ABC: the *South Asia Bible Commentary*⁵ (SABC). Rather than being originally an indigenous endeavor, this was inspired by the *Africa Bible Commentary*. Fourteen Langham scholars gathered in 2005 in India to form the Langham Partnership Regional Council for South Asia (LPRC-SA)—perhaps not quite an ecumenical conference in size but certainly in spirit. Langham is the name of John Stott Ministries in the UK, and they have long given out scholarships for the sake of the Fourth Self, self-theologizing. The Langham Scholarship is awarded each year to promising theologians from the Two Thirds World to fully fund their PhDs at major research universities in the West (for international credibility)⁶ but the stipulation is that they must

⁴ *Ibid.*, viii

⁵ Brian Wintle, ed., *South Asia Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), co-published with Open Door Publications in India.

⁶ There is much to be said on this topic. I realize that one objection is that, even if it is all indigenous authors writing the Bible commentary, most earned their PhD in the West, so they may not be as indigenous in their mindset. But this does not worry me, because PhDs are for people to make an original contribution to knowledge (which is basically self-theologizing!), it is not about downloading information. I am more concerned about non-Western pastors who get their MDiv in the West. But like the Langham scholarship, these nationals who get their PhD in the West (in order to establish their

return to their home context after they graduate (in order to enrich the Majority World church and avoid “brain drain”). Pieter Kwant, the Programme Director for Langham Literature, passed around the ABC for the South Asian theologians to see at the 2005 meeting, and the Asians had a moment of “holy jealousy” that the Africans have produced such a volume and they have not!⁷ This led to a project that even exceeded the ABC. Though the SABC’s scope only extended over the countries of India, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Bhutan, and the Maldives—a geographical area much smaller than Africa—the denseness of the population and the fact that India is a sub-continent meant that there was just as great a population and diversity of cultures as Africa.

The SABC ended up being longer than the ABC (1807 pages as opposed to 1612), with more contributors (92 instead of 70), and more editors: Brian Wintle was the general editor, the Old Testament submissions were edited by Havilah Dharamraj, Jesudason Baskar Jeyaraj, and Paul Swarup, and the New Testament part was edited by Jacob Cherian and Finny Philip. Though all of the authors were indigenous to South Asia (paralleling the ABC), there were fewer who had PhDs in biblical theology. They also partnered with Zondervan as its publishing arm in the West, although its principle publisher in Asia was Open Door Publications, based in India. Though South Asia has a multitude of languages, it is really English that is the *lingua franca*, so the SABC was necessarily published as an Anglophone project.

Content-wise, the SABC is, unsurprisingly, concerned with the interaction of competing religions. South Asia is perhaps the most pluralistically diverse religious context on earth, having Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, Bah’ai—and even Judaism—in the mix.

Latin America Bible Commentary

Thus far we only have two books in this Global Theology commentary series. However, a third biblical commentary is due to be released shortly, from Latin American perspectives. It is actually not called the *Comentario Bíblico Latinoamericano* (CBL) because that name was already taken and it refers to an existing Roman Catholic publication. So the forthcoming volume will be called the *Comentario Bíblico Contemporáneo* (CBC) to avoid confusion.⁸ The General Editor is C. René Padilla (Argentina), the Old Testament editor is Milton Acosta (Colombia), and the New Testament editor is Rosalee Velloso Ewell (Brazil).

The CBC is finished in terms of its content but is in its final editing stage. It differs from the other two commentaries in significant ways:

- The initiation of this has no Western roots, whether SIM or Langham or anyone else. It is 100% Latin American in its origin and production. It was born of three streams

prestige/fame/credibility) need to return to their homes and set up seminaries there, and hopefully after some years those seminaries will become prestigious enough to stand on their own in terms of prestige, and then the nationals no longer need to go to the West.

⁷ *Ibid.*, vi

⁸ Information on this section was generously provided by Ian Darke of Letra Viva in Costa Rica

who were trying to do the same thing at the same time: Brazil, Spanish IFES, and Kairos in Argentina. Rather than try to all invent the wheel independent of one another, they merged and decided to work together. The one thing they could all agree on was that this had to be completely a Latin American initiative. Langham did provide some of the funding for it in the later stages, but the ownership and vision remained all Latin American.

- Its primary language is not English, but rather it will be published in two editions: Spanish and Portuguese. Zondervan will eventually translate it into English and publish it outside of Latin America (and it will be called the *Latin America Bible Commentary* in English since that name is not yet taken),⁹ but the original Latin American editions will be a joint publication between Certeza Unida (the publishing arm of IFES in the Spanish-speaking world) and Kairos (René Padilla's foundation in Argentina).
- Most of the authors do not have PhDs. Unlike Africa, which has a lot of evangelical seminaries and infrastructure, Latin America paradoxically does not despite having a higher literacy rate, because of the dominance of Catholicism. The dividing line between Catholics and non-Catholics (Pentecostals, evangelicals, mainline Protestants) is significant in Latin America, so there was an intentional move to not include any Catholic authors otherwise it would be completely rejected by many non-Catholics. But there was also a sensitivity to not demean Catholicism in any way so as to not cause any friction. Also, among *evangélicos* in Latin America, the need was for practitioners, not theologians *per se*, so the development of people who were "pure" academics did not happen.
- The shortage of qualified authors meant that there was not a racial qualification to be considered, especially since Latin America is so racially mixed anyway. Expats were allowed to be contributing authors to the CBC, as long as they had spent the majority of their life in Latin America. Ironically, despite how difficult it was to find evangelical Latinos with the proper academic credentials, the final tally includes around 160 authors contributing to this volume.

I look forward to seeing what kinds of theological emphases the CBC has. I would guess that *misión integral* (holistic mission) would be a big part of it, as that has been the main theme of the *Fraternidad Teológica Latinoamericana* (Latin American Theological Fellowship) practically since its inception.

In addition to the commentaries from Africa, South Asia, and Latin America, there are also planned volumes for the Arabic world¹⁰ and the Slavic world (particularly Russia)

⁹ Although the Hispanophone and Lusophone versions of the commentary will be released soon, the English-language version will not appear for a few more years because it still needs to be translated.

¹⁰ The Arabic commentary is interesting because the authors are still clashing over some of the original theological controversies that rocked the early church, e.g. *filioque* and icons and the relationship of the two natures of Christ. This makes sense because these were originally controversies from that part of the world.

in the future. Whether or not there will be sufficient interest in the Western world to translate those volumes into English remains to be seen.

East Asia Bible Commentary

Very oddly, there is no volume planned for East Asia. This seems like a gross oversight given the explosive growth of the church in places like South Korea and mainland China.¹¹ As mentioned above, although “Three-Self” is a word that has been coopted by the governmental church in China (much as the swastika was originally a Hindu/Buddhist symbol of blessing before it became coopted by the Nazis), its origin was from Henry Venn of the CMS a century earlier. The Confucian idea of Rectification of Names¹² can be operative here: taking the name back to its original meaning, similar to what a lot of evangelicals hope to do in light of the fact that politics and the media have distorted and usurped the original meaning of the word “evangelical.”¹³

In the making of a Self-Theologizing (the Fourth Self) Bible commentary for East Asia, the following is what I would hope and expect. Of course, I am only one person offering a personal perspective, so I would be eager to hear what the respondents of my paper have to add about what they would like to see in an East Asia Bible Commentary. I will divide this into three sections: regions, authors, and content.

1) With regard to regions, I am glad that the SABC set the precedent of having a single Bible commentary just for South Asia. One of my pet peeves is when people lump together all Asians. Asia is the largest land mass in the world, with so many disparate cultures and areas, roughly divided into East, Southeast, South, Central, and West Asia (West Asia is more commonly known to us as the “Middle East” but that is a very North Atlantic perspective so I prefer calling it West Asia). Even the two most populous countries in Asia, China and India, despite being geographical neighbors, could not be more different. That is because they have the natural “Great Wall” of the Himalayas (highest mountain range in the world) serving as an impassable barrier between them since the beginning of humanity.

East Asia, just as South Asia, deserves its own Bible commentary.¹⁴ However, even East Asia is not homogeneous. If we consider the three major countries of East Asia to be Japan, Korea (South and North), and China (I am including Taiwan and Hong Kong and Macau with it, not for political reasons but for cultural reasons), even then some difficulties arise despite only having to deal with three countries. All three countries are Confucian, but

¹¹ In fact, this would be true of all four “Little Tigers”: South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, as well as traditionally Muslim places like Indonesia. See the 2010 documentary “1040: Christianity in the New Asia” for video evidence of this.

¹² Thanks to Zhiqiu Xu for this reference

¹³ Its original historical meaning was articulated by David Bebbington of the University of Stirling, Scotland: Biblicist; crucicentrist; conversionist; and activist (the so-called “Bebbington Quadrilateral”).

¹⁴ This begs the question if all of Africa should then not be lumped together (divided between Saharan and Sub-Saharan).

mainland China has the additional influence of Communism (as does North Korea) which “flattens” the hierarchy and eliminates honorifics.

But there are good reasons for lumping these countries all together. First of all, for pragmatic reasons: we cannot have a commentary for every country of the world, otherwise we would have some 200 commentaries. Like the Apostle John said, not even all the world would be able to hold all the books that would be written! So regional commentaries make a lot more sense. Secondly, though there definitely is diversity amongst the various East Asian nations, we do not have to have individual national commentaries to see that cultural diversity, it can be expressed through individual authors as long as the list of contributors is carefully curated. Thirdly, East Asia has a common worldview—Confucianism—which binds these countries together, so having an EABC is not arbitrary.

Still, there are also linguistic difficulties: Chinese uses pictograms, Korean uses an alphabet for the most part, and Japanese uses two different syllabaries (hiragana and katakana) with the addition of Chinese characters, so there is a question of which system of writing to use. I would say that a hypothetical future EABC should be translated into Chinese and Korean (similar to the CBC being translated into Spanish and Portuguese) since the number of Japanese Christians is miniscule.¹⁵ The aim of the commentary, after all, is to boost the theological education of existing Christians, not to evangelize non-Christians. (And, of course, eventually the hope is that Zondervan would translate the EABC into English.)

And size presents a problem. China is huge compared to Korea, so there would be an imbalance. Unlike Latin America, where Brazil does not dominate even though it is the largest country since there are so many other Spanish-speaking countries, East Asia is overwhelmingly Chinese. And even the global church needs the Chinese. When the Lausanne III Congress (Cape Town 2010) was convened and Chinese did not show up, that was a far cry from being “*the whole church* taking the whole gospel to the whole world” as Lausanne’s motto purports. China is just a dominant force in the world in general. As an example, the prayer guide *Operation World* covers the entire globe, but mainland China alone warranted a prayer guide all its own called *Operation China* which is massive and details every ethnic minority group in China. So maybe China alone deserves its own commentary. But all the other one-volume commentaries are regional, not country-specific, so an East Asia commentary makes more sense (and “Chinese” can also include the greater Chinese diaspora in Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, etc.)

2) With regard to authors, it is interesting that when the greatest theologians in the world today are listed, almost none include any East Asians. There are always Latino theologians mentioned, like René Padilla or Gustavo Gutiérrez. There are African theologians who are well-known, like Kwame Bediako or Lamin Sanneh. There are renowned South Asian theologians, like Ajith Fernando and Vinoth Ramachandra. And of course, European and North American theologians are always in abundance, nay,

¹⁵ Even then, the decision needs to be made to use simplified Chinese characters (used by mainland China and Singapore) or traditional characters (used by everyone else: Taiwan, Hong Kong, overseas Chinese, etc).

overrepresented. But East Asia representation is largely missing. How can this be, given the huge number of East Asian Christians?

One major problem is language. Now that English is the *lingua franca* of the world, it is self-perpetuating (i.e. the “rich” continue to get richer). Because Africa and South Asia have had a large history of being colonized, ironically English ended up being the commercial language that unifies all their different countries, but this also made their Bible commentaries easily accessible to the world (this is not without biblical precedent—the reason the New Testament was written in Koine Greek rather than the Jewish holy language of Hebrew is because it was the commercial language of the day, and meant to spread to as many people as possible). Not so with East Asia: English does not dominate the region as it does Africa or South Asia. At Cape Town 2010, there were almost no mainland Chinese or Korean speakers on the platform which initially seemed baffling. But it probably was the language issue: all the East Asian speakers on the platform were from English-speaking Asian regions like Hong Kong and Singapore and Malaysia (the same was true of the African speakers: almost all were from Anglophone, rather than Francophone, countries in Africa).¹⁶ Universities are the same way. All the top-20 ranking universities worldwide according to the three major ranking systems (QS Shanghai Jiao Tong, The Times, U.S. News & World Report) are English-speaking. No matter how strong Beijing University, or Seoul University, or Tokyo University, become in teaching or research, it will not attract non-Asian-language speakers unless they can somehow learn Chinese or Korean or Japanese which is quite challenging. Whereas, plenty of East Asians will enroll in English-speaking universities in the West. So, ironically, the skill of non-Westerners to be multilingual means that they always end up adapting to the West and the West never has to adapt to them because they just assume everyone will just learn English. Certainly there are theologians of East Asian descent in the West who are notable, but the goal of the *East Asia Bible Commentary* is to only employ native East Asians with PhDs in biblical theology to write the book. And finding 70-90 such scholars may prove to be quite a daunting task. Or maybe it won't, given that East Asians highly prize education. Here there is a difference between the Chinese and Korean contexts, however: the rise of the megachurch in Korea means that being a pastor is more of a prestigious, and more of a path to wealth, than being a scholar. So many of the brightest minds in Korea may not actually have PhDs because they are spending their time and energy shepherding large congregations instead of writing theology. Perhaps their sermons would be a better source to theologically mine than their books.

Actually there already are plenty of good theological books and Bible commentaries being written in Chinese and Korean, so self-theologizing is not a problem. In China, Amazing Grace Publishers is in the midst of finishing up a massive 43-volume commentary series on the entire Bible.¹⁷ And there are already have several completed Bible commentary series in Korean.¹⁸ None of the authors would be names familiar in the rest of the world, but they are doing plenty of self-theologizing. Of course, the EABC would have to be a one-volume commentary, so the existence of already-completed commentary series

¹⁶ Allen Yeh, *Polycentric Missiology: 21st-Century Mission From Everyone to Everywhere* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2016), 134

¹⁷ Thanks to Derek Chung of Hong Kong for this information.

¹⁸ Thanks to Sungmin Chun, Academic Dean of VIEW, for this information.

does not negate the necessity of writing an EABC as a one-stop-shop easily-accessible tool. And, like the *Latin America Bible Commentary* which will be published in two original languages of the region—Spanish and Portuguese but later translated into English for the rest of the world—a potential *East Asia Bible Commentary* would have to be published in two different editions: Chinese and Korean but later translated into English for global consumption.

To successfully complete a Bible commentary, it not only requires people with PhDs, and nationals with the impetus to start such an endeavor (it would not truly be self-theologizing if the motivation were from outside), but also money which leads to printing presses. With regard to money, China has now become a world economic power. As such, Amity Publishing, based in Nanjing, China, is the largest publisher of Bibles in the world. Gone are the days when people like Brother Andrew have to smuggle Bibles into China. And outside of the country, Zondervan (with the initiation of Pieter Kwant from Langham Partnership who keeps continuity amongst these various series) is truly living out the definition of facilitation in this “Facilitator Era” by publishing Two Thirds World theology for a global audience.¹⁹

Finally, a good editor is all-important, who can bring unity amongst the authors, as well as theological coherence. He or she would have to choose authors bearing in mind theological and denominational and international diversity. The editor would have to make sure that nobody takes minor points of theology and turns them into major ones, and that there are no contradictions amongst the authors’ theologies. The Chinese church is doing a good job of attempting to bring their “three streams of unity” together: Spirituality, Understanding and Character. It is this kind of ecumenical cooperation which is needed.

3) With regard to content, there are religious considerations: should Buddhism be the main contextual lens through which to write to an East Asian audience, since it is the most widespread religion in that region of the world? Or maybe Confucianism is a safer bet for being the contextual lens, given that it is a philosophy more than a competing religion. Either way, it depends on how far one takes Don Richardson’s Principle of Redemptive Analogy.²⁰ Can one be like the Apostle Paul on the Areopagus (Acts 17), seeing the Athenians’ “unknown God” as pointing to Jesus? Can the Gospel be transmitted via Taoist

¹⁹ Ralph Winter said that there were three eras of Western Protestant missions from 1800–2000: (1) 1800–1910 (coastlands of Africa and Asia), in which William Carey was the chief catalyst; (2) 1865–1980 (penetration inland), in which Hudson Taylor was a prime figure; (3) 1935–present

(frontier missions among unreached indigenous peoples), of whom Cameron Townsend was an example par excellence. But according to Tom Steffen, *The Facilitator Era: Beyond Pioneer Church Multiplication* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011), now we are in the Facilitator Era, from the late 1900s onward. Missions is from the reached to the reached, led by people like Rick Warren. Unlike the first three eras, which were all long-term pioneer mission work, the Facilitator Era is one of partnership, often via short-term missions.

²⁰ As explicated in his books *Peace Child* and *Eternity in Their Hearts*.

language as the first missionaries to China, the Nestorians, did?²¹ Can we be as contextual as Jesuit Matteo Ricci, when he dressed up like a Confucian scholar and used that kind of language and ritual to explain Christianity in the Chinese Rites Controversy? Or as radical as Protestant missionary James Legge's Term Controversy when he ascended the steps of the Temple of Heaven in Beijing and sang the doxology to *Shangdi*, the chief god of the Chinese pantheon?

Dealing with the difference between the TSPM governmental church and the house churches could also be a sticky issue in terms of content: how much would the Upside-Down Kingdom (such as Mary's Magnificat where God "has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate") be accepted by those in power in the TSPM? This kind of "liberation theology" perspective seems like something which the house churches would identify with (the oppressed often write great theology, as the Protestant Reformers could have attested when under pressure by the Catholic Church), given their similarity to the Latin American BECs (Base Ecclesial Communities). Or perhaps the Communists would actually like the radical teachings of Jesus, much as Italian socialist movie director Pier Paolo Pasolini was so taken by a vision of Matthew's Gospel that he produced a famous movie²² based word-for-word on Jesus's life. Maybe the TSPM church and the Chinese house churches can find common ground in the radicality of Jesus, and maybe South Korea and North Korea can find the same shared resonance. But there are also some major differences between Chinese and Korean culture and theology, e.g. Chinese tend to be egalitarian and Koreans tend to be complementarian.

Of course there is also the opportunity to express indigenous theologies like *Minjung* theology or Water Buffalo theology.²³ But it seems that these kinds of theologies are more novelties than a viable theology for and from the people. They are even viewed suspiciously by Christians from their own country. There is a saying in Latin America: "Liberation theologians chose the poor, but the poor chose Pentecostalism." It seems that, in Korea, liberation theologians chose *Minjung* theology but the masses chose Pentecostalism (or prosperity gospel), especially as South Korea has grown increasingly wealthy.

In talking with my friend Sungmin Chun,²⁴ the Academic Dean of VIEW (Vancouver Institute for Evangelical Worldview) in Langley, British Columbia, which is a Korean seminary that is part of the ACTS seminary consortium, he made some observations:

- a. Should Korean self-theologizing stay with the "essentials" of the faith as outlined by the Apostle's Creed and Nicene Creed? If so, isn't this just a repetition of Western theology and not really Korean theology? If Koreans wander afar from Nicene "essentials," however, such as bringing in *Minjung* theology or integrating Korean folk religion, is it still Christian or is it syncretism?
- b. What is Korean theology, anyway? Isn't it just any theology done by Koreans?
- c. Consider that East Asia has been so influenced by the West already. So, modern East Asia does not need as much indigenous contextualization. Modern-day

²¹ Martin Palmer, *The Jesus Sutras: Rediscovering the Lost Scrolls of Taoist Christianity* (New York: Ballantine, 2001).

²² *Il Vangelo secondo Matteo* (1964)

²³ Kosuke Koyama, *Water Buffalo Theology* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1999).

²⁴ We did our D.Phil. at Oxford University at the same time, which is where I know him from.

Koreans would not resonate with Confucian or Buddhist concepts, so using those as contextual touch points would seem old-fashioned to them. I would add, however, that perhaps it's both/and, rather than either/or. Vinoth Ramachandra of IFES in Sri Lanka said at the Edinburgh 2010 conference, "China and India together produce more science and engineering graduates every year than North America and Europe combined. But Asian mission studies dissertations and the bulk of articles in mission studies journals focus on historical studies of religious sects and denominations, traditional tribal cultures or exotic new religious movements."²⁵ Westerners are being influenced by Eastern ideas, such as dialogical teaching as Jesus did, or pluralism from India.²⁶ And Easterners often now have a Western style of teaching, what Paolo Freire calls the "banking" model where the teacher lectures and the students just "download" the information.²⁷ The lines between East and West are becoming more and more blurred in our globalized world.

- d. If "heresy is the mother of theology" (e.g. the Ecumenical Councils were responses to heretics, forcing the church to articulate orthodox theology), then perhaps Korean theology is a response to whatever heresies are going on today in Korea. For example, what is our response to prosperity gospel? To building projects of megachurches where there is a lot of corruption? To hereditary succession of senior pastors in megachurches where it becomes a dynasty instead of looking at who is most qualified to lead?²⁸ This can also be a prophetic call to American organizations who practice such things, such as Franklin Graham succeeding his father Billy, or Robert Schuler's son taking over the Crystal Cathedral. Koreans point to these American models to legitimize their own successions. Perhaps the Korean church needs their own Reformation—what would that look like?

However, the place where I see the greatest potential is in its missional theology. Asia is literally the "ends of the earth" from Jerusalem, and the Chinese have been so eager to bring the Gospel "Back to Jerusalem"²⁹ via Central Asia. But this would necessitate an encounter with Islam. David Aikman recounts: "Muslims prefer Chinese to Americans. They don't like Americans very much," one Chinese Christian said bluntly. He outlined several reasons why Chinese Christians can succeed where Westerners have failed. A major

²⁵ Vinoth Ramachandra, "Reflections" in Kirsteen Kim and Andrew Anderson, eds., *Mission Today and Tomorrow* (Oxford: Regnum, 2011), 334-36.

²⁶ Lesslie Newbigin, British missionary to India, posited that Europe was the toughest mission field as it became increasingly pluralistic, in *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989).

²⁷ Paolo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum, 1999).

²⁸ Last week's (March 10, 2017) impeachment of Park Geun-hye, South Korea's first female president, is a case-in-point in a secular setting. She mainly got elected because her father used to be head of the country, but she was clearly unqualified for the job and got removed due to corruption and abuse of power.

²⁹ Paul Hattaway, Brother Yun, Peter XuYongze, Enoch Wang, *Back to Jerusalem: Three Chinese House Church Leaders Share Their Vision to Complete the Great Commission* (Milton Keynes: Authentic Publishing, 2003).

advantage is that the Chinese government supports the anti-American objectives of some political groups in the Middle East “so the Muslim nations support China.” He added, “Besides, we have a lot of experience of persecution.”³⁰ To see Acts 1:8 have a great reversal, going from the uttermost parts, to Samaria, to Judea, to Jerusalem, may be the greatest sign that the Asian church has come of age and has taken up the mantle of its forebears.

Conclusion

The *East Asia Bible Commentary* has not been initiated, but I can’t imagine that it will never happen. This chapter is a call to provoke “holy jealousy”! However, it will require an indigenous movement of East Asian theological experts to get it started—most of whom must have PhDs in biblical theology, and whom must be evangelical. The PhD is necessary for quality control, to ward off charges of immaturity (even if a church is young, surely 70 people who are qualified to write can be found amongst, for example, 100 million Chinese Christians!). And the evangelical identifier is to have consistency in theology, as that is a label that transcends denominations but inspires trust. In keeping with the others in the series, probably it will have Langham backing, and it may also be translated into English and distributed in the Western world by Zondervan. It is a sorely-needed resource in East Asia because of the sheer numbers of East Asian Christians, and a one-volume commentary is compact enough to be accessible to laypeople. It is true that there are theological seminaries in Asia that can serve the native population, but given the amount of East Asians who come to the West to get their theological education, perhaps that is a sign there are not enough. And, the kind of education they get in a Western seminary is not always what they need to minister properly in their home contexts, thus the need for the EABC.

Beyond creeds and commentaries, there are many other forms of Self-Theologizing, namely theological books. I look forward to the day when an East Asian theologian will write the next multi-work *magnum opus* on the scale of Kenneth Scott Latourette’s *A History of the Expansion of Christianity* or Carl F.H. Henry’s *God, Revelation, and Authority*.

Ultimately, if an *East Asia Bible Commentary* is written, it must be translated into English for the world at large. Even if there is already a lot of self-theologizing happening in East Asia, the problem is that almost none of it is being distributed globally. The West needs to learn from the non-Western world, in the same way that there are four Gospels written from different cultural perspectives. For example, Matthew is the Jewish Gospel, and Luke is the Gentile Gospel, but that does not mean that Jews shouldn’t read Luke or Gentiles shouldn’t read Matthew. We are more enriched when we learn about God from different cultural perspectives. But all of it was written in the common commercial language of the day, Koine Greek, for ease of mass distribution (which would be equivalent to English today).

When Western Christians are asked if non-Western Christians ought to accept the Nicene Creed, usually the answer is “yes,” even if I explain that the Nicene Creed is a response to Western theological battles. But when I press back, “Then do Western

³⁰David Aikman, *Jesus in Beijing: How Christianity is Transforming China and Changing The Global Balance of Power* (Washington, D.C., Regnery, 2003), 12-13.

Christians need to accept creeds written by non-Western Christians?” they balk. I think that it needs to go both ways. For example, the West can teach the Majority World about Christology, but the Majority World can teach the West more about Pneumatology. If Westerners protest that they are suspicious of non-Western pneumatology because it often can veer toward heresy like health-and-wealth, I would say to not throw out the baby with the bathwater. What can be done is: Majority World theologians need to get together and have an ecumenical council, condemn heretical teachings about the Holy Spirit, codify right orthodox teaching, and share it with the Western world so that Western Christians can learn. Even if a particular culture has never debated a particular theological issue in their context, it is helpful to learn from other cultures who *have* fought such battles, as a sort of “vaccine”³¹ against future heresy, so that they do not need to reinvent the wheel. So it is that the *Africa Bible Commentary*, the *South Asia Bible Commentary*, the *Latin America Bible Commentary*, and a hypothetical *East Asia Bible Commentary*, serve not only the people of that cultural context, but provides a good theology for the global church at large.

³¹ This analogy was suggested to me by Sungmin Chun.