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**Evangelical
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Editorial

Renewal to Relevance

In many countries, particularly in the West, the institution of the Church is under attack. The process of secularization has spread so much that Church's relevance is assessed by its participation in secular affairs of the world. An unexpressed thesis of the articles in this issue of ERT is rather the reverse: that only as the Church renews itself does its relevance become evident. In some of the Two-Thirds World countries, we are slowly realizing that what we need primarily is not social reform but Church renewal, not so much political leaders as servants of God. Church is the hope of every nation.

Both for the Church and for the individual disciple of Christ, renewal leads both to mission and relevance. I think that it is generally true that the world expects the Church to do her work, namely, to be God's prophet in a godless world. As the prophet Ezekiel says, if the trumpet makes a strange noise, how can the soldiers prepare themselves for the war? If the Church does involve in activities which are not germane to her own being, how can the world recognize her Master's voice?

Dr. Lim's article on the understanding of Church as the servant of the world; Dr. Houghton's article on the Indian caste system, which raises the basic question of human dignity and justice, and of man's creation in the image of God; Sam Vassell's emphasis on personal purity as an authenticating mark of the gospel; Samuel Escobar's concern for Latin American missionary enterprise; Brian Fargher's analysis of the charismatic movement; Dr. Geisler's article on the modern crises in Christology, bringing us back to the basic question of God's revelation—all are concerned about this twin issue of renewal and relevance in individual and corporate Christian life.

Paul's words to Roman Christians is apt here: 'I appeal to you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect'.

Editor p. 292

Asian Churches as Servants of God

David Lim

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Dr. Lim pleads here not so much for new forms of ecclesiology (such as the Basic Ecclesial Communities in Latin America, or ashrams in India) but rather for a new understanding of the Christian Church in Asia. This is a healthy and a very welcome approach since—thanks to the pluralist traditions of Asian societies, religions and cultures—such an understanding of Church is very badly needed. He describes at length the Asian multi-faceted situation (although unfortunately much of his discussion has had to be omitted due to the lack of space) and then deals with the churches' function in society in four basic areas: religious,

socio-cultural, economic and political His Filipino background is evident as he describes these areas which are right now in the flux in his homeland.

Editor

INTRODUCTION

We are living in an exciting and challenging time for missions, theology and ethics in Asia. We have begun to overcome our frustrations over our lack of resources to combat the 'foreignness' of church life and mission in the contexts of our vast continent. The stage is now set for fresh readings of the Scriptures and the discovery of grander theological, ecclesiastical and socio-political visions, not from without, but from *within* the living experiences of Asian peoples.

This article seeks to explicate some of the dimensions of what Asian churches should pray and work for, if we are to be faithful 'servants of God'. Briefly, it defines *servant-leadership* as any activity which helps people to function at their best, believing the best about others, reaching out and pulling them up with oneself, and seeking to push them up even higher—in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ (cf. [Mk. 10:42–45](#); [Phil. 2:3–8](#); [1 Pet. 5:1–3](#)). As Lao-Tze said, 'When the leader's work is done, the people say, "We did it ourselves."'

Looking at Asian (and perhaps all other) societies, we realize that 'servant leadership' is quite *counter-cultural*; for in most, if not all cultures, leadership tends to domineer over, rather than serve, the people—Jesus style. Our dominant leadership patterns have been paternalistic and authoritarian, with highly structured hierarchical [p. 293](#) systems; and in religious matters, priests, imams, gurus, shamans, bishops and pastors have held almost absolute powers.

And so this is precisely our challenge: Jesus, Paul, the apostles and the early church lived under similar autocratic customs and structures; yet they taught and tried to practice 'servant leadership', based on the doctrines of the impartiality of God, the common fallen *imago dei* of humanity (and hence, the equal value of each human being), and the universal scope of God's love revealed supremely and uniquely in Christ's redemptive work. Hinduism legitimized the archetypal caste system in India; traditional Buddhism and Confucianism, in whatever form, do not provide any basis for calling for social change. It is even harder for Islamic nations to allow new ideas in. Leaving room for a few exceptions, we can agree with Myrdal's comment that 'understood in [a] realistic and comprehensive sense, religion usually acts as a tremendous force for social inertia. The writer knows of no instance in present-day South Asia where religion has induced social change' (Myrdal, 1968, 103). We can even predict that in the midst of secularization, what is most likely is that, as usual, the religious authorities will follow the movement of society, and will supply their societies with ideological justifications in close conformity with the requirements of the economic policy their governments will have chosen (as evident also in Christianized nations in the West).

Asian Christianity has not fared (and may not fare) much better; but its arrival in Asia had naturally brought about reforms and resurgence among these ancient religions. Its impact had been greater than the proportion of its membership because it came with the Western conquerors, and in many cases its access to Western finances had no counterpart among other religions (until 1973 when Muslims found their oil to be profitable and useful in promoting their faith). Such association with the West helped keep Christianity more visible than one might have expected in Asia, but this has proven to be less beneficial in post-colonial times.

Though Christianity seems to be making some headway in its efforts to evangelize in such a threatening environment full of dominant religions, there seems to be no prospect of any great breakthrough in sight. Many of its 'people movements' have been among tribal folk; and so praying and strategizing to bring such religious adherents into the Christian fold still remains our formidable challenge.

TRANSFORMING ASIA: OUR BIBLICAL VISION

Do the Asian churches have a *blueprint* for a better way of life which [P. 294](#) would show that the Christian gospel is relevant and able to make life really abundant (cf. [ln. 10:10](#)) and worth living, not just in heaven, but in Asia today? In order to serve our Lord and our peoples faithfully, a wholistic worldview which we can apply to them wisely and meaningfully, in workable 'Christian social orders', seems a necessity.

More than just reacting to issues which Asia sets before us, we must also help create the spiritual agenda which our Lord sets for Asia. Let us be servant-*leaders*: as the Malaysians say, 'If you do not paddle, the boat will drift'. Sadly we have only criticized those things which we believe to be wrong. But we can not *lead* from a predominantly negative posture; we need to show the alternatives—for biblical and positive servant-leadership.

Through his death on the cross, Christ has set the agenda for the realization of salvation for fallen humanity. With him beside us and beckoning us, in spite of our minority status in much of Asia, we can (and should) make the gospel we preach visibly relevant to our people whom we have been sent to serve.

1. In Multi-religious Co-existence

People are essentially spiritual beings who exteriorize their souls through physical and social means. People act according to their belief-systems and so in this deeper sense, religion is the 'soul' of a culture. Through the secularization phenomenon, most Asians have shifted their religious piety from spiritual foci to material pursuits, and religious institutions have become just like private corporations. It is in these secularized contexts of enlarging 'markets' of free pluralistic choices that Asian churches are called to incarnate the gospel, and in the religious sphere, to coexist with many other churches, denominations, sects, cults and religions.

This calls for courage in creating *authentic traditions* which live through fresh and innovative re-experiencing of the spiritual realities as each religious community lives, loves and shares meanings among its members and with each other. We have to learn to handle different viewpoints and welcome dialogue as a method of clarifying issues and understanding one another. It is in this atmosphere of *interfaith dialogue* that we can best do evangelism, for example sharing Jesus with a Muslim friend who considers him to be an illegitimate son of Mary but does not know that the Koran teaches that he is the 'spirit of God'.

As 'servant-remnants' among non-Christian majorities, we must show a positive attitude towards people of other religions without [p. 295](#) losing our distinctive Christian character and our evangelistic concern. Each of us must thus learn what others believe and how to distinguish between the negotiables and the non-negotiables of the Christian faith. As Indians say, 'Do not burn the house to get rid of the rat'. This also involves learning how to form coalitions or networks for corporate action among Christians, between Christians and those of other faiths, and between religious and non-religious groups.

In societies where religion has been one of the chief causes for conflicts and wars, we need to seriously show *practical servant-love* first: *agape* and *chesed*, *zakat* and *bhakti*, *kuruna* and *zen* are starting points for 'lifestyle evangelism'. Through this neighbourly love, we may not only be joined with similar actions by those of other faiths, but also be able to convince them that the love of Christ is the true 'religion' revealed by the only God.

Of course, we must be wary of 'syncretism', the 'unjustifiable fusion of irreconcilable tenets and practices' with other religions (Ro & Eshenaur, 1984, 13). Yet emphasizing the uniqueness of Jesus Christ must not inhibit *theological contextualization* and *missionary incarnation*. Our great challenge is to use local symbols and art forms to convey our faith for our generation, knowing that humans tend to debase mystery into magic, just as some debase mystery into rationalistic formulae devoid of grace. The best antidote to this fear is the sincere desire to communicate God's revealed truth to the lost: 'theology that is mission-centred is itself the best protection against syncretism' (*ibid.*).

EVANGELIZING ASIA: OUR MISSIONARY METHOD

God has prescribed not only the goals of our kingdom-mission, but also the *means* by which such goals are to be attained. There are attitudes and methods which are right in themselves regardless of their consequences, because they are inherent to the gospel: love does not always bring about conversions, but it is right nonetheless; repentance does not always lead to happy endings, but it is right nonetheless. This section will elaborate on what [2 Corinthians 6:2b-10](#) means for Asian churches: how do 'God's servants' do his missions '... poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, yet possessing all things' (v. [10](#))?

Above all, we must pray for political and other institutional leaders 'that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness' ([1 Tim. 2:1-3](#)). Without downplaying the need for action in answer to our own prayers, we need to recognize that *acts of praying* are in transforming and evangelizing societies. We cannot p. 296 love the world until we have prayed for it ... and let God change our selfishness, our cowardice, our hypocrisy.

News of church growth in the past decades in Korea and China reminds us to use spiritual weapons (such as prayer, fasting, suffering) in order to overcome difficult religious circumstances. Only through intimacy with God can we find the perspective and the strength to live out his servanthood and compassion in our world. Such disciplines are not ascetic games, but life-offerings whereby we train our bodies and minds to become truly free to serve our God and our people in concrete works of love.

Second, in our concern to transform Asia, we must remember that the best weapon which God has given us is 'the sword of his Word'. To withhold the gospel is to deprive our people of what can turn their lives into exciting and fulfilling adventures of faith. To see lives and nations changed, Asia needs gifted and skilled *expositors and teachers of his Word*. Let us not be found ignorant or lazy or uncaring in taking time to serve 'full meals' of his truths to meet the total needs of our people.

To be his mouthpiece for our generation, we need to master the world as well as the Word. We need to study and work hard to *understand our times*, so that we can accurately, forcefully and relevantly (that is, prophetically) apply the biblical worldview, principles and values to our particular contexts. The churches in each generation have to discern and answer the questions which our contemporaries are asking; the gospel does not change, but the manner in which it is communicated and heard is greatly affected by our cultures. This is an exciting endeavour for us, for the backgrounds of both the Old and New Testaments are still very similar to ours: idolatries, polytheism, authoritarianisms,

social injustices, spiritism, lack of filial piety, and so on. Both the text and our contexts coalesce to set our theological and missiological agenda!

Third, we must be constructive rather than destructive. We should not try to impose our views through moral crusades, nor refuse to influence our societies for fear of reprisals; rather, we are to use gentle and patient *moral persuasion* which treats human consciences with the greatest respect (cf. Stott, 1984, 73–83).

In the midst of so many sensitive and explosive areas in Asia, we have to be more vocal and visible about our *non-violent stance*, to show that our convictions are independent of ideological interests. In many Asian countries, some government policies infringe on basic human rights. Many church leaders have rightly advocated *civil disobedience* to oppose such practices non-violently and suffer the legal consequences; we will know clearly someday how much just p. 297 laws have helped decrease the hold of societal evils, thereby giving people more freedom to respond to the gospel.

Fourth, as a minority we are tempted to panic for numbers of converts. But may we have the patience, perseverance and self-sacrifice to *make disciples* (not just decisions)—converts who do not just warm the pews and appreciate good sermons, but those who share Jesus with others and serve as blessings to others. Our missionary efforts will have to be executed primarily through grassroots evangelism, largely done by lay people in their homes and offices, through family and friendship evangelism; thus, let our Churches be training centres for more *lay-servants* (lay-ministers!).

Fifth, we cannot truly serve people with whom we are not willing to live. In the incarnation we seen our Lord leaving behind all privileges to come down and live among us as one of us ([Phil. 2:5–8](#)), so that through his *voluntary poverty*, those whom he was sent to save might no longer live in poverty ([2 Cor. 8:9](#)). The community where we serve must see how real he is, just where they live. Our lifestyles must be open to constant inspection; thereby we can be available to the people twenty-four hours a day, too. Our verbosity seems hollow in the character-oriented cultures of Asia; as Indonesians say, ‘Rippling water is a sign of shallowness’.

Without rejecting the material world, we must rediscover the *simplicity* and beauty of God’s creation. Amidst so much poverty, we must creatively find effective means of interpersonal communication which do not depend heavily on the sophisticated electronic technology; it may just be the rediscovery of the ‘old, old way’ of telling the ‘old, old story’, gossiping about Jesus in the shops and stalls. From our position of outward simplicity and inner humility, our people will see us as their equals, their friends, their partners. Moreover, if we limited our ostentation and our self-centred spending, we would have more resources for both evangelism and socio-political concern.

Next, we need to live in a position where we can know the truly needy; God is glorified whenever the needs of hurting people are met without their begging for help. The countryside in Asia is still where the majority are, but the town or city is where Christians are (cf. Digan, 1984, 35). Herein lies the weakness of the Asian churches: we are not where the majority of our people are today (though perhaps we are already where our people will probably be tomorrow). Yet if the Chinese revolution and the Indo—Chinese wars teach anything, it is the importance of the peasantry: ‘the fact that people in Asia are still mostly peasants should be reason enough for peasants to get priority in p. 298 movements like Christianity, which claims to give priority to people, regardless of their degree of importance in global politics’ (*ibid.*).

‘Rich churches in poor communities’! What a common criticism of the churches in most Asian countries. Among the reasons for this general impression are: the connection of the churches with the rich West, the flow of foreign resources, the relatively high standard of living of missionaries and some church leaders, large numbers of paid

employees in the churches and Christian organizations, and the growing size and number of Christian educational and welfare institutions. Our buildings, equipment and personnel seem to have become the symbols not of compassion, but of power and foreignness (cf. Itty, 1978, 149). This display of relative wealth appears so strange and inauthentic, not only because of the context of poverty around, but also because most Christians belong to the poorer sectors of society; they have very little to contribute to these institutions (cf. Bonk, 1985). Besides, this has proven to be a poor witness to our people (especially Buddhists, Hindus and Chinese) who see *voluntary poverty* as a religious value and a great virtue (Cherupallikat, 1975). The Catholics and ecumenical Protestants have started to see that the servant-church should be the church of the poor: will they be able to live up to the full implications of this conviction, or will it be just pious rhetoric?

We praise God that in spite of the hardships and dangers of our continent, Asian cross-cultural missionaries are on the move, especially from Korea and the Philippines, and inside Bangladesh, Burma, Indonesia, India and the Philippines. However, our people have bad memories of Christianity: gunboat diplomacy, the Opium War and other humiliating experiences are still fresh in the Chinese psyche. Other Asian nations also have 'gospel-cum-imperialism' engraved in their recent past, and 'gospel-cum-capitalism' in the present. It is a big challenge for Asian Christians to revise our image and convince our people that indeed we have come 'not to be served but to serve', to suffer with them and for them! When we have really *shared their sufferings*, then we shall have earned our right to be heard!

Lastly, the way we have tried to do missions has generally been too cheap: we may seem to have given up millions, but we have retained much for ourselves. Unless we are willing and able to lay down our very lives on behalf of our brethren for Christ's sake, we will never get Asia and the world evangelized. Many have suffered for the Lord in his service; some have to give up social position, wealth and sometimes family, and face the constant dangers of arrest, imprisonment and torture in order to share the gospel. p. 299

But too many of us have been little more than 'nominal Christians' who have been uncritical of the superficial Christianity which avoids anything that disturbs our comfortable piety and profitable status quo. We are not living lives in such a way that at any moment we might be required to give our lives for the sake of others. We fail to see that whoever serves others must also suffer with those whom he is helping to bear their burdens: there is no deliverance or salvation unless someone suffers and sacrifices! The servant's 'daily dying-to-self' lifestyle often leads ultimately to a saint's 'faithful unto death' martyrdom. In short, *Asia needs more Christian martyrs*.

2. In Pluralistic Socio-cultural Contexts

Asian churches continue to face the identity crisis of being minorities living in societies dominated by non-Christian religious majorities or highly secularized (communist or capitalist) nations. We recognize that the gospel will judge and destroy the idolatrous elements, and redeem and transform those which do not conflict with God's revelation (Ro & Eshenaur, 1984, 11f); e.g., family solidarity and filial piety in Confucian cultures, the spirit of self-sacrifice and renunciation of the world in service to God in Hindu societies, and the faith in the greatness and majesty of the all-knowing God in Islamic cultures.

Another problem is the Western image of the Asian churches. Though freed from Western political domination, Christian missions and Western economic expansion are presently seen as new forms of 'Western imperialism'. Though this does not imply that indigenous Asian Christianities would automatically make the gospel more acceptable to Asians (since the gospel will retain its *skandalon*), it does suggest that we must shed this Western image (in liturgical forms, evangelistic materials and strategies, financial base,

leadership and decision-making positions) to gain a better hearing from those whom we seek to win.

Indeed, Asians have started to take over the leadership of many Christian groups, and to found more indigenous groups; but their methods and programmes remain basically Western. It is because most of them are *Western-trained* or *Western-oriented*. Most churches are economically poor, but prefer to use modern media; since they can not afford the sophisticated equipments and complex organization involved in such kinds of ministries, they have tried to get funding from the West. Thus modern Western ideas and media are easily adopted whether they are relevant to the context or not, for ‘we have the money’! Creative ventures have lacked encouragement, and since [p. 300](#) those who pay the piper usually call the tune, uncritical uses of imported media predominate, for ‘we need the money’!

Instead, our gospel must be incarnated—internalized and exteriorized, nurtured and dressed in each of our respective historico-cultural contexts through creative encounters between our faith and the different cultures and people-groups. Sadhu Sundar Singh referred always to his desire to give ‘the water of life in an Indian cup’. What a challenge boldly to break our flower-pots so that the Plant could take root in our Asian soils! (Cf. Saphir Athyal in Ro & Eshenaur, 1984, 60). After all, our Asian contexts are much more close to those of the Scriptures than the Western forms that we have inherited or are trying to follow.

Perhaps we should revive popular festivals, with their media of live performances—seeing and hearing friends, neighbours and co-workers transformed into artists, actors and singers, thereby creating grand experiences of communal life. Asia has had many traditions of theatrical arts, from the folksy to the more sophisticated kinds. An excellent example is the Synod of Christian Protestant Churches in Bali: their church buildings are fashioned like mountains, for the Balinese associate mountains with God’s presence; they use coconut shells for communion cups, white robes for pastors and Balinese bridal gowns for weddings; they have dance-and-dramas for both evangelistic and pulpit ministries.

In areas where socio-cultural majorities dominate over minorities, we need to work for the acceptance of *pluralistic social orders* where all differences are freely shared and where the dignity of each person and group is respected. Pluralism would protect against demagoguery and legitimize (and even glorify) diversities and freedom to dissent; it would give everyone some elbow-room, so long as no one tries to elbow everybody else out of the room! This will always be a precarious if not an untenable situation to aim at, but we should exercise leadership in this fashion: let us serve as reconcilers, especially to help those individuals or groups which have been marginalized by being deprived of their dignity and security to contribute to the human project. Let us work to help retain any group’s *sense of peoplehood*: God does not merely reproduce carbon copies, but loves to produce new originals; he is never depleted of fuller and richer creativity.

3. In Economic Development

God and Asia will judge Asian churches by our response to the cries of [p. 301](#) the hungry, naked, homeless, handicapped, prisoners and refugees in our midst (cf. [Mt. 25:31–46](#)). Since World War II, we have developed technologies which could make everyone enjoy at least a bit of the good life; but instead, more and more are becoming malnourished, landless, and hopeless. Instead of getting wealthier and more humane, most of Asia sinks into deeper poverty! Even the ‘little Japans’ of Singapore, Hongkong, Taiwan, and South Korea have flourished as ‘export platforms’ dependent on ‘lucky access’ in the world

market and do not provide good models of just, participatory and sustainable economies of our Kingdom-vision.

From its beginnings in Asia, Christianity provided the first modern assistance to uplift our socio-economic conditions by founding schools, hospitals, social welfare institutions, relief work centres and agricultural training institutes, even in countries where Christians remain a minority (cf. Itty, 1978, 143–7). We have also started to realize the inadequacies of some social services which fail to address the root causes of poverty and injustice. Paternalism, lack of people's participation, inadequate understanding of systemic causes of poverty and other such factors have contributed to these good-but-not-good-enough services. Thus, we know that we should be providing the tools, training and opportunities necessary to enable our people, especially converts, to successfully function as responsible producers; *self-sufficiency* can be fostered through education, vocational training, employment and co-operatives (such as housing projects or credit unions).

We must lead in *modernizing the rural farms and the urban slums*. Rural development would mean more money to support church workers and assist families in need. Urbanization is irreversible, especially in light of the fact that only five per cent of a population is enough to produce a nation's food; thus the plight of the urban poor must be addressed since they will form the biggest bunch of Asia's new job-seekers. We must bring 'modern industry' in human small-scale levels (commonly called 'appropriate technologies') into these areas: it is foolish to worry about raising standards of living higher when the people around us are struggling for survival and dying of unemployment.

Christian professionals should be models of enablers rather than exploiters of these poor: let us be motivated by the desire to serve rather than by job security. We can use our education and advantages to help those who cannot help themselves. Their needs are simple: they just want to know where tomorrow's meals will come from; they just want to have a decent job, proper housing, a little culture, and a [p. 302](#) future for their children. If we can veer our societies and our resources to help *meet these basic needs*, then we will have demonstrated our servant-love to at least 75 per cent of our peoples.

We must *humanize our economies*: people are worth more than modern weaponry, luxury hotels, and giant dams, all of which are considered to be more important than people in Asia today. But Christ assures us that people are of much more value than all of these. Yet how many of our people have been expendable in our nations' march toward 'progress' to catch up with Western technological 'development'? Will our people continue to be sold for bigger GNPs without our prophetic voices announcing the gospel of the Kingdom where community, love and justice enhance personhood?

Perhaps our greatest challenge is to change the system which produces so many victims. Perhaps a *Christianized form of socialism* patterned after the Swedish and Canadian economies, or the Chinese communes and Israeli *kibbutzim*, may be the best for Asia. On a global scale, we need to join our voices with the 'Group of 77' in calling for a *New International Economic Order*, the concept of which was endorsed without objection by the United Nations in 1974 (cf. McGinnis, 1979).

Meanwhile, let us pay farmers, fishers, handicraft-makers, etc. justly for what they produce, and see to it that they keep their own resources. They should be free to form co-operatives after being provided training and credit to help them become small entrepreneurs in their own right!

4. In the Political Arena

In the past, Asian Christianity seemed to have been a significant force behind the rise of some ideals, such as patriotism (especially in Korea and indirectly in the Philippines), political democracy (especially in China), human rights (especially in Korea, Taiwan and

the Philippines), economic equality (especially in Japan and China), women's liberation (especially in China and India), and moral legislation, all over Asia.

To serve our fellow-Asians, we must continue to lead in the restructuring of our societies into more *just and free democracies*, according to the biblical vision of the Kingdom. Though there can be no perfect government, we must work for a political order which will be more conducive for good to prosper over evil.

Let us *visualize* our nations having the supreme power truly vested in the people, where they exercise such authority through their elected [p. 303](#) officials chosen in periodically held free elections. Let our societies be characterized by tolerance and appreciation for minorities, freedom of expression, and respect for the dignity and value of the human person, with equal opportunity for each to develop freely to one's fullest capacity in a co-operative community. As Confucius envisioned long ago, may we have political servant-leaders (may our churches produce many of these!) who (a) cultivate their personal conduct, (b) honour worthy people, (c) identify themselves with the interests and welfare of the whole nation, (d) show themselves as fathers or mothers to the common people, (e) show tenderness to strangers from other countries (cf. Lin, 1942).

In fast-changing political situations in Asia, we need to be *prophetic visionaries and activists* for Christ: we must help ameliorate those conditions against which we preach or write, or else we are just like parasites feeding off the sores of a sick patient in pain. To be authentic and credible in what we preach, we must show that our gospel can and does transform peoples. If we choose to stand afar and watch and talk about social sins without getting involved personally, then no matter how good or dynamic our message may seem, we are just 'clanging cymbals' (cf. Stott, 1984, 19–51). 'To see what is right and not do it is cowardice' (Confucius, *Analects* 2:24). Also, as Billy Graham says, 'We cannot simply mourn the fate of the earth. We cannot act as though we are helpless to work for the world's renewal. We must do what we can, even though we know that God's ultimate plan is the making of a new earth ... Signs indicate that the end of the age is near, yet there is no certainty. It may be several generations from now.'

Just as some of us have started to do, let us not just be the 'voice of the voiceless', but also those who let the voiceless gain voices of their own; let us not only do things for the poor but empower them to do things for themselves. Modern Asians have been taught to believe that our governments can solve our problems, when in fact they cannot. Their best way is to lessen our dependence upon them and their eventual totalitarian control by forming groups in which people are organized to meet their local needs. We need to *decentralize power structures* by organizing our people to help themselves locally.

The biblical goal in politics is *justice*, not power: the prophets denounced the abuse of power of their rulers; the early Christians refused to worship Caesar, and were thus persecuted; they did not sacrifice their integrity to the demands of political popularity and expediency. For those living in oppressive situations, we must pray and seek possible strategies that will produce just results; *non-violent* [p. 304](#) *resistance* has proven to be effective by Gandhi, Martin Luther King and recently Cory Aquino, since it puts injustice on public display.

Christian socio-political servanthood seems to be impractical for many who live *under communist rule*: Marxists have concluded that Christians are reactionaries, just as most Christians fail to see the good side of communism. But far from disappearing, Christianity has proven to be remarkably resilient (as in post-1949 China and post-1975 South Vietnam). The institutional churches may be isolated by the authorities, but the church has grown as many dared to become martyrs. Persistent concern for others' needs, a mixture of discretion and courage, and decisions made in the painful experiences of

persecution have a spiritual dynamic which will not leave non-Christian neighbours unaffected.

We should also lead towards a new Asian political order as our people seek fresh solutions for democratic decentralization of power. As ambassadors of peace and reconciliation, let us encourage more cooperative ventures in our regions, such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the newly formed South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation. Let us blur the past posture lines of confrontation between superpowers by furthering the movement of non-alignment that started in the Bandung Conference of 1955. At the same time, let us remember that our present political boundaries hardly correspond with our pre-colonial socio-political realities; our modern maps were made by the colonial powers. This should help us to understand and respect the demands of most revolutionary movements for autonomy today.

CONCLUSION

In the light of Asian realities and Christian hope, are these ends and means of our 'servant-leadership' role *realistic*? We believe that although there will be no perfect fulfillment until the *parousia*, God will bring about many surprising 'partial yet substantial' fulfillments if his churches remain faithful to their respective callings. Unlike corporations, universities and nations, churches have no pressure to succeed, for success is not the reason for our existence and mission. We are called to be God's servant-communities on earth, not for our own enhancement, but for the giving of help to those around us.

The whole of Asia (or any specific area) will not respond to Christ positively ... so we are not deluding ourselves. But we know that we are called to be faithful: the Almighty God has delegated the task of building his Kingdom to us, and this mission will not happen by itself! [p. 305](#) It needs self-sacrificing servant-leaders, which we each have to be. We are called to be self-effacing pointers, showing that God will intervene again to transform the world and all his people into a perfect society where his *shalom* (peace), justice, love, and righteousness reign. Our earthly roles will most certainly be fulfilled imperfectly often (by trial and error, perhaps), but the important thing is that our grain of seed is buried in the ground and dies ... so that it may multiply a hundredfold or more (cf. [Jn. 12:24](#)).

Our theological institutions face the challenge of training *servant-leaders* for Asian churches and nations. May we be open and able to bring together diverse theological traditions and insights to inform and enrich one another. May we help create theologies, ethics, politics, and economics that are true to the gospel of King Jesus and at the same time authentically Asian. May we be continually cooperative and supportive of other theological communities who are also engaged in this task of reflecting and equipping Asian churches with Spirit-gifted leaders who live and speak out from within the socio-political, historico-cultural and religious realities of Asia. May we produce graduates who will avoid the pitfalls of imbalanced piety, narrow theologies and affluent missions, but rather become balanced, open-minded and modest *servants* of the Most High.

'Servant-leadership' is extremely costly—very costly indeed, for it we are to be empowered by the Spirit, we have to pay the price of doing God's agenda in God's way, humbling ourselves to serve, and following the pattern of our Master rather than our own tastes. Though our message will not necessarily be well-received, let us be found faithful in giving all of our selves, committed to love him above all and to serve his people with our best until we meet at his judgment seat. What joy, then, to hear his 'Well done, thou good and *faithful servant*' for all eternity!

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Current Chalcedonian Christological Challenges

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Christology being the heart of Christian faith and life, the debates concerning it are perennially relevant in every situation. In this thought-provoking article, Dr. Geisler deals with five basic challenges in modern times to the age-old Chalcedonian formula: the logical, theistic, scientific, historical and soteriological contradictions. In a scholarly way he brings out the contradictions in the criticisms themselves, and gives the alternatives in a convincing manner. His missionary concern emerges clearly as he establishes the deity of Christ.

Editor

INTRODUCTION