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Evangelical Responses to Religious Pluralism in Asia

Bong Rin Ro

This paper, presented at the German Evangelical Theologians' Conference on the Uniqueness of Christ, held at Tübingen, Germany August 1991, will be published with other papers in book form in German.

'A theology is created in Europe (Germany), corrected in England, corrupted in America,' said an European theologian in the 1960s, and 'crammed into the Third World' we may add in the 1970s and 1980s. Today we can say that a theology is created from particular cultural contexts in the Third World often will incorrect interpreted texts of the Scripture as proof-texts. Consequently, numerous contextual theologies have been created from the Third World and very widely discussed in the theological arena.

In Asia where all major living religions are reviving and where poverty, injustice and suffering are still prevalent in so many parts within the continent, the theology of socio-economic-political justice, peace and the theology of religious pluralism dominate the minds of Asian theologians. These two important areas of theological discussion were clearly portrayed by a Korean female theologian at the last WCC General Assembly.

I. THEOLOGICAL SHOW AT 7TH WCC GENERAL ASSEMBLY

This past February in Canberra, Australia, the 7th WCC General Assembly was held for two weeks with some 4,000 participants. This author attended the meetings as an observer. On the second day of the Assembly there was an exciting theological show with a group of Korean traditional dancers. Ms. Hyun-kyung Chung, young professor of theology at Ewha University, appeared on stage dressed in a white Korean traditional dress, known as the 'hanbok' and danced along with others, to invoke over twenty spirits of the dead and of nature along with the spirit of Jesus Christ,

Come. The spirit of Hagar, Egyptian, black slave woman exploited and abandoned by Abraham and Sarah, the ancestors of our faith ([Gen. 16:21](#)) ...

Come. The spirit of male babies killed by the soldiers of King Herod upon Jesus' birth ... p. 71

Come. The spirit of Mahatma Ghandi, Steve Biko, Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X, the struggle for liberation of their people ...

Come. The spirit of Earth, Air, and Water, raped, tortured and exploited by human greed for money.

Come. The spirit of the Liberator, our brother Jesus, tortured and killed on the cross.¹

Then she burned the paper which listed the spirits of the dead just as a Korean shaman (Mudang) invokes the spirit of the deceased in a trance. Finally she read her prepared major theological paper.

Since her return to Korea, there have been heated theological discussions on her presentation in Canberra and the WCC movement as a whole. Evangelical theologians criticized her theology of the Holy Spirit in four major areas. First, she did not consider

¹ Chung Hyun-Kyung, 'Come Holy Spirit, Renew the Whole Creation', a theological paper presented at the 7th WCC General Assembly in Canberra, Australia, Feb. 8, 1991, pp. 1-2.

the Holy Spirit in the Trinitarian context but as a spirit like other spirits. Secondly, she did not mention the Spirit of God to convict man for repentance of sins and for spiritual salvation but used it for the promotion of 'freedom, justice and integrity of man.' Thirdly, she used the shamanistic formula to invoke the spirits of the deceased ones and of nature; and fourthly, she compared the Spirit of God with the bodhisattva of Buddhism who refused to enter into nirvana for the sake of others.²

One interesting fact in Professor Chung's paper is that she used eight scriptural passages to prove her theology of the spirits. Her contextual theology is certainly an excellent illustration of modern liberal theologies which derive from contexts and collect Scriptural texts as proof-texts. Many other Asian theologies have been created since the end of the Second World War in a similar fashion in which theology starts from context to text.

II. TWO-PRONGED THEOLOGICAL ISSUES TODAY

Since the Theological Education Fund (TEF) put out the Third Mandate Period (1972–77)³ which emphasized the new concept of 'Contextualization' P. 72 in theological education, Asian theologians from different countries have produced different forms of Asian contextual theologies.

The author divides these Asian theologies into four categories:

1. Syncretism: Raymond Pannikar (Unknown Christ in Hinduism), J. S. Samatha (the Unbound Christ), M. M. Thomas (Salvation and Humanism)—Hindu Christian Church.
2. Accommodation theology: Kozuke Koyama (Waterbuffalo theology), Song Cheng Sen (Third Eye Theology), Lee Jong Yong (Ying Yang Theology and Theology of Change).
3. Situation Theology: Gustav Gutierrez (Liberation theology), Kazoh Kitamori (The Pain of God Theology), Kim Yong-Bok (Min Jung (mass of people) Theology).
4. Biblical oriented contextual theology: Evangelical Theologians' Task.⁴

However, these various Asian theologies are dealing with two fundamental issues in the Asian society, namely liberation theology which deals with socio-political-economic issues and religious dialogue and pluralism in dealing with other living religious of Asia. These two pronged theological issues are also intimately inter-related for the common purpose of establishing the just and peaceful society in this world.

A. Liberation Theology

Although Liberation Theology had its origin in Latin America in the early 70s, its implications have been felt around the globe by stimulating the creation of different contextual theologies. The Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) has been promoting an Asian version of liberation theology through the *CCA News* and other publications in terms of campaigning for human rights, economic justice and political freedom in our society. In fact, the CCA's deep involvement in socioeconomic-political areas in many countries in Asia plus accusations against their political leaders caused the Singapore police to seal off

² Kim Myung-Hyuk, 'Critical Evaluation of Prof. Chung's Lecture', *Christian United Newspaper*, March 17, 1991. Choe Hong-Suk, 'Critical Evaluation of Prof. Chung's Lecture', *Christian United Newspaper*, March 23, 1991. Bong Rin Ro, 'Theological Analysis on the Doctrine of the Holy Spirit of the WCC General Assembly', *Pastoral Monthly*, (May 1991), pp. 163–168.

³ Bong Rin Ro, 'Contextualization: Asian Theology,' *The Bible and Theology in Asian Contexts* (Taichung, Taiwan: Asia Theological Association), 1984, pp. 63–64.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 68–74.

the CCA office on Dec. 31, 1988, and to ask its foreign staff to leave the country within a week.

Four countries in Asia where liberation theology has impacted the local church level are India, the Philippines, Taiwan, and Korea. Liberation theology in the first two countries is more related to the economic exploitation of the poor; in the latter two, it is related to p. 73 political freedom. Street demonstrations led by ministers wearing their clerical collars and holding each other's shoulders are common scenes, particularly in Taiwan and Korea in recent years. The recent violent demonstrations with students throwing fire bombs and rocks at the riot police in the streets of Seoul had their headquarters at the most famous Roman Catholic cathedral in Myongdong, Seoul. The police finally forcefully entered the church to arrest the leaders of these demonstrations.

Minjung (mass of people) Theology provides the theological basis for instigating social and political revolution in South Korea. Dr. Hyunkyung Chung in her paper at the WCC General Assembly in Canberra stressed the importance of Minjung theology in liberating suffering people from their unjust society. She said,

I came from Korea, the land of Spirit of *Han*. *Han* is anger. *Han* is resentment. *Han* is bitterness. *Han* is grief. *Han* is broken-heartedness and the raw energy for struggle for liberation. In my tradition people who were killed or died unjustly became wandering spirits, the *Han*-ridden spirits. They are all over the place seeking the chance to make the wrong right. Therefore the living people's responsibility is to listen to the voices of the *Hans*-ridden spirits and to participate in the spirits' work of making the wrong, right. These *Han*-ridden spirits in our people's history have been agents through whom the Holy Spirit has spoken her compassion and wisdom for life. Without hearing the cries of these spirits we cannot hear the voice of the Holy Spirit.⁵

Certainly, Liberation Theologies such as Minjung Theology has awakened the conscience of both liberal and conservative Christians afresh to crucial mundane issues which cannot be avoided by the Christian church. Even though Liberation Theology has twenty years of history with massive literature and audio-visual materials, it will continue to be an important theological issue in the years to come until it loses its steam.

B. The Uniqueness of Christ and Religious Pluralism

A more serious theological discussion which is developing in Asia today is in the area of the relationship between Christianity and other Asian religions. Today's world is moving toward a pluralistic society both in the secular and religious spheres of life. Liberal theologians have criticized evangelical Christianity for its lack of acceptance, tolerance, and exploration of other religions, such as Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Confucianism, Shintoism, etc. They say evangelical p. 74 Christianity is going against the trends of time. Dr. Sun-Whan Byun, President of the Methodist Theological Seminary in Seoul, a leading liberal theologian in South Korea, stated recently in a religious dialogue seminar for religious dialogue with a Roman Catholic theologian and a Buddhist monk:

The Korean church must depart from the traditional dogma that Christianity is the only true socio-historic religion and adopt a new theological attitude for the coming 21st century. We looked at the history of the Christian church, passing from the exclusive Judaistic culture which centered around the Jordan river to the paradigm of Greco-Roman culture which centered around the Irisos and Tiberu rivers. Now she must create a new theological paradigm which is based on the pacific region, especially the Han river of Korea. The Korean church at the present time has been increasingly isolated from other pluralistic cultures due to her preservation of non-creative traditional doctrines, extreme

⁵ Chung, p. 2.

biblical authority without new interpretations, and offensive attitudes towards other religions. The strong exclusive tradition of the church has maintained that Christianity is the only absolute religion and that other religions are under the domination of dark evil. Therefore, we must strive to bring changes quickly in our concept of missions with universalism and pluralistic mission concept.⁶

Dr. Byun declared that our religious theology today should not be 'missiological' but centred around religious 'dialogue,' and that we should discard the old-fashioned idea that Christianity has the only truth. Therefore, the task of modern theologians is not only Liberation Theology but also the liberation of religions from Christian absolutism. Many other liberal theologians of both East and West would say 'Amen' to Dr. Byun's concept of religious pluralism.⁷

Liberal theologians in the West who spend hours in research and writing often do not fully understand demonic influences of other living religions in Asia. Asians who live in the midst of these religions are fully aware of these evils. Asian Christians ought not to let 'outsiders' affect our understanding of the Scripture and of these religions.

The question of universalism and religious pluralism has been extensively discussed among Asian theologians. A number of renowned liberal theologians in Asia, such as M. M. Thomas and Stanley Samartha in India, D. T. Niles and his son Preman Niles of Sri Lanka, Kosuke Koyama of Japan and C. H. Song of Taiwan have written many books on Asian theologies and religious pluralism. [p. 75](#)

D. T. Niles of Sri Lanka, who was one of the key founders of the East Asia Christian Conference (ECAA) which became the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA), an Asian branch of the WCC, wrote *Upon the Earth* (1968). On whether a person who rejects Christ will be saved at the end, he wrote: "The New Testament does not allow us to say either yes or no to the question, "Will all men be saved?"⁸ God made us. God loves us. Jesus died for us. Our trespasses are not counted. When we die we shall go to Him who will be our judge. These affirmations are true of all men and for all men whether they know them or not, like them or not, accept them or not."⁹ His son, Preman Niles, an Old Testament theologian who headed up the Theological Committee of CCA, is another proponent of universalism within the ecumenical movement in Asia today.

Dominant theological liberal influences within the Church of South India and the Church of North India as well as the Roman Catholic Church have hampered the growth of the church in India. Religious syncretism and pluralism have become very popular in both Hinduism and the Christian Church. M. M. Thomas, former Director of the Christian Institute for Study of Religion and Society in Bangalore and former Chairman of the Central Committee of WCC, interprets salvation in terms of humanization by which man finds his true humanness which has been oppressed by social injustice, war, and poverty.

⁶ Byun Sun Whan, 'Christianity must come out of exclusive mentality,' *Christianity Newspaper*, Dec. 1990, p. 6.

⁷ John Hick, *Introduction to Religious Philosophy* (Seoul: Religious Book Pub., 1987), pp. 193–197. Paul Knitter, *No Other Name?* (Maryknoll: Orbis), 1985.

⁸ Harold Lindsell, 'Universalism,' *Let the Earth Hear His Voice* (Minneapolis: WorldWide Publications, 1975), p. 1207.

⁹ Louis King, 'New Universalism: Its Exponents, Tenets, and Threats,' *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* (Summer 1965), pp. 9–10.

Therefore, his views of salvation are horizontally oriented towards humanity at the expense of the vertical relationship with God.¹⁰

Christ's universality is taught by both Raymond Panikkar in *Unknown Christ of Hinduism* (1964) and Stanley J. Samartha in 'Unbound Christ'. Both emphasize that Christ is present in each person even in the life of a Hindu: therefore, the mission of the church is to bring Christ out of a Hindu instead of bringing Christ to the Hindu. Salvation is interpreted in terms of Hindu doctrine of *advaita* (non-duality or at oneness) which draws God, the world, and man together in a single conception of unbroken unity. Therefore, the cross and the resurrection of Christ are seen in context of *advaita* and not as a historical fact that accomplished the work of salvation. Samartha p. 76 opposes a concept of 'Christomonism' and asserts that all revelations are relative.¹¹

Two prominent liberal theologians must be mentioned here who have become prolific writers on Asian theology. Choang Sung Song, former Principal of Tainan Theological Seminary in Taiwan, speaks of Asian spirituality which ought to accommodate the gospel of Jesus Christ. The gospel which we have inherited from Western missionaries is a first or second eye theology (or first or second dimensional theology) and we need a third dimensional theology from our Asian culture.

We must go beyond dogmatism and syncretism. Dogmatism as the product of the age of Western religious absolutism and syncretism as the outcome of the era of liberalism should be superseded.... Exegesis of Christian faith in Asia must ... take place in multi-religious contexts.¹²

In his book *The Compassionate God* (1982) Song rejects the exclusive view of the atonement of Christ and affirms the merciful and compassionate God who will restore all men from everywhere and anywhere from all religions to himself.

Kozuke Koyama, a Japanese missionary who taught at the Thailand Theological Seminary in Chang Mai, north Thailand and former Executive Secretary of the Association of Theological Education in Southeast Asia (ATESEA), believes in God pervading the created order exemplified in a water buffalo in North Thailand plowing through a rice field of tranquility and also in the tapas, the Hindu symbol of divine heat-energy within the cosmos.¹³ Koyama does not see the need of spiritual conversion among Thai people but stresses the need of accommodating Thai culture by the Christian minority in Thailand in order to work together and to establish the just and peaceful society.

There is no doubt that religious pluralism has already become a crucial theological issue and that it will become more so in the future. This pluralistic concept has also influenced the evangelical constituency around the world. Some evangelical theologians, interested in p. 77 new directions, have developed more positive attitudes towards other religions and criticized the traditional Protestant theology of condemnation. When I attended the Evangelical Theological Society (ETS) meeting in San Diego, California, in November 1989 with some five hundred other evangelical theologians and missiologists in North America, religious pluralism was the hottest issue. When Dr. Clark Pinnock in a

¹⁰ M. M. Thomas, *Salvation and Humanisation* (Madras: CLS, 1971), p. 40.

¹¹ Bruce Nicholls, 'A Living Theology for Asian Churches: Some Reflections on the Contextualization-Syncretism Debate,' *The Bible and Theology in Asian Contexts*, ed. by Bong Rin Ro and Ruth Eshenaur (Taiwan: A TA, 1984), p. 125. See Knitter, pp. 156–157. See also Carl E. Braaten, 'Why Do We Say that He is?' On the 'Uniqueness and Universality of Jesus Christ,' *Occasional Bulletin* (Jan. 1980), p. 6.

¹² Choan Seng Song, *Christian Mission in Reconstruction* (N.Y.: Orbis 1977), p. 181.

¹³ Knitter, p. 136. See Kozuke Koyama, *Waterbuffalo Theology* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1974).

panel discussion criticized traditional conservative Christianity for its absolute dogmatism against other religions, there were sharp disagreements by three other panel members against Pinnock's ideas. This heated discussion awakened the sleepy mind of every person in the auditorium that afternoon.

III. 'FROM CONTEXT TO TEXT' METHODOLOGY IN ASIAN THEOLOGY

Most Asian Contextual theologies have one common characteristic in their hermeneutical methodology, i.e., 'from context to text'. The Asia Theological Association (ATA) has held 10 theological consultation for the last 20 years on different theological subjects, such as Contextualization/Asian theology, God in Asian contexts, Christian alternatives to ancestor practices, etc.¹⁴ Asian evangelical theologians, in fact, have had ample opportunities to discuss theological issues which are related to other Asian religions. One important conclusion out of the many theological consultations is the realization that hermeneutics plays the most important role in understanding Asian theology.

Dr. Yu Dong-Shik, former professor at Yonsei University Graduate School of Theology in Seoul, who is known as 'the Raymond Panikkar of Korea,' advocated the presence of Christ in believers of other religions. First of all, he rejects the monistic concept of Hinduism that teaches that all religions came out of one principal truth, Brahman; therefore, all truth is fundamentally one from which all other religious truths derive. Syncretism is an outcome of Hinduism and Buddhism. Dr. Yu in rejecting syncretism believes that God accomplished salvation through Jesus Christ. In explaining the relationship between Christianity and other religions, he uses the symbols of the sun and planets. The sun in itself emits light, but the planets and moon do not emit light from themselves; however, the planets and moon can reflect p. 78 light from the sun, and thus they can also produce light; therefore, as the light of the gospel of Christ shines upon other religions, the latter can also emit the light of Christ. Consequently, according to Dr. Yu, all other religions also have the hidden message of the gospel in themselves.

As Father Panikkar mentioned, the way that they (Hindus) receive their salvation is not from their own religion but from the Gospel of Christ. However, although they do not actually know the name of Christ, they do live under the grace of the Gospel not according to the Christian way but according to their own religious fashion.¹⁵

Therefore, Dr. Yu continues to say that according to the Christian perspective we should not divide this world fundamentally between 'inside' and 'outside' according to Paul Tillich's terminology of 'latent church' and 'manifested church', but we should rather consider all men of the world as God's children who belong to the church. He says,

If we call mankind Christians who receive salvation from God, then there is not a single non-Christian in this world. The only difference between Christian and a non-Christian is that the former realizes his salvation while the latter does not ... There are only two kinds of church; the church that realizes the fact (salvation) and the church that does not

¹⁴ ATA conducted a consultation on 'Christian Alternatives for Ancestor Practices' in Taipei, Taiwan, Dec. 1983 and the 7th ATA Theological Consultation on 'God in Asian Contexts' in Manila, Jan. 1985. Consequently, ATA published two books: *Christian Alternatives in Asian Contexts* (1985) and *God in Asian Contexts* (1988).

¹⁵ Yu Dong-Shik, *Korean Religions and Christianity* (Seoul: Christian Pub., 1965), p. 179 (in Korean).

recognize it. Therefore, history is the history of development of the hidden church as church.¹⁶

Dr. Yu suggests that the Christian must look at other religions from a new perspective for three basic reasons: first, the characteristic of the gospel itself; second, since every religion claims to be absolute, Christianity ought to abandon its exclusive claims and sense of superiority; third, it is an obsolete nineteenth century idea that since the white man dominates the whole world, Christianity also ought to model itself after Western Christianity, the white man's religion.¹⁷

Of course, both liberal and evangelical theologians recognize the necessity of contextual theology, and both groups of theologians also agree to avoid the domination of Western theological thinking in Asia. Nevertheless, one basic difference between the two camps is the hermeneutical methodology, i.e., the liberal theologian proceeds in his theology 'from context to text' while the evangelical theologian goes 'from the text to context.' p. 79

For example, Dr. Yu interprets [Ephesians 4:6](#) as a proof-text for his universalistic concept, 'One God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all,' is interpreted as,

Therefore, if salvation is brought by Jesus Christ, Son of God, this blessed message must be given to all men everywhere. If the redeemed mankind is called Christian, there is not a single person in the world who is not Christian. The only difference is that one believes and receives the redemptive fact in Christ while the other does not realize it. If the place where Jesus is present is called church, then the whole world is the church.¹⁸

If one looks at the context of the passage, [Eph. 4:1-16](#) very carefully, one realizes that Paul is talking about the spiritual gifts of church leadership (vs. [7, 11](#)) which are given to a small number of people in order to equip the saints for the work of services to build up the body of Christ (v, [12](#)).

[Eph. 4:4-6](#) says,

There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

Therefore, this passage does not refer to universal salvation as Dr. Yu interprets it. There are also many other scriptural passages that speak against universalism.

IV. ASIAN EVANGELICAL APPROACHES TO RELIGIONS PLURALISM

In the past, evangelical theologians were busy evaluating critically liberal theologians of the West as well as of Asia. However, there has been an increasing number of Asian evangelical theologians surfacing in the theological arena. In the past evangelical Christians and missionaries discarded any cultural values of heathen religions and stressed the spiritual conversion from the past way of life. Today, an increasing number of evangelical theologians are trying to find some common grounds between the Christian faith and other living religions. Both Ken Gnanakan and Bruce Nicholls of India start their

¹⁶ *Tao and Logos*, (Seoul: Christian Pub., 1978), pp. 96–97 (in Korean).

¹⁷ *Ibid.* pp. 98–99.

¹⁸ *Ibid.* pp. 96–97.

theology with the Doctrine of Creation, i.e. the natural revelation of God. Gnanakan says, 'My own stress on the need for our theology to start from Creation specifically aims at recognising a commonality on which God's revelation becomes accessible to all created beings.¹⁹ P. 80 This general revelation does not lead a person to his salvation but rather directs him to the special revelation in Jesus Christ.'

Nicholls, on the other hand, stresses the Trinitarian doctrine of God in the Asian context as Creator, Redeemer and Life-giver. The uniqueness of the incarnate Son of God in Jesus of Nazareth distinguishes him from other claimants to incarnation, while his resurrection from the dead has no parallel in other faiths. Salvation is only in Jesus Christ, but the Holy Spirit works beyond the frontiers of the Church.

Left-wing evangelical theologians, especially from the developing countries, who are very much concerned with social concern and poverty try to restudy the Christological issues in the Scripture in order to discover the social dimensional aspect of the gospel. Many Korean evangelical theologians expressed their concern on the mandate of the church. Even though the left-wing conservative theologians may hold all the traditional doctrines of the Christian church, their priority of their faith does not rest on the saving grace of Jesus Christ which provided the forgiveness of sin and external salvation. Dr. Kim Ki-Hong of Asian Centre for Theological Studies (ACTS) expressed his concern at the 8th ATA Theological Consultation on Urban Ministry in Asia:

Let us not substitute the biblical knowledge of God and man for a syncretistic contextualized point of view ... Let us not confuse the salvation of God with man-made ways of salvation. Without a proper knowledge of God, we can never diagnose people's problems correctly, and therefore any proposed solutions are in vain.²⁰

Another important theological matter which we should consider is the distinction between God's natural and supernatural revelation. Paul speaks about natural revelation manifested in God's created universe ([Rom. 1:20-21](#)) and man's inner conscience ([Rom. 2:15](#)) and also emphasizes that man can know God through the natural revelation. Furthermore, God has revealed himself through special revelation through the men of God in the Old Testament and Christ and the apostles in the New Testament. Therefore, one key question in our 20th century world is whether the believers of Asian religions and even atheists who receive God's natural revelation can obtain salvation without God's special revelation in Christ. Therefore, the fundamental theological question does not rest on the assumption of preservation of traditional theology, contextual theology, religious pluralism, liberation p. 81 of religions from Christian absolutism, but it rather rests upon how we would interpret the gospel of Jesus Christ in the Bible and how we should apply it to different contexts. Therefore, biblical hermeneutics is the key answer to evangelical theologians in the challenges from Asian contextual theologies and religious pluralism.

CONCLUSION

The relationship between Christianity and other religions is becoming increasingly acute today and will be more so in the future. Evangelical theologians must strive to understand the content of Christ's gospel first and teachings of other religions and our various contexts. They must also open their minds to see what is happening in the Asian

¹⁹ Ken Gnanakan, 'Pluralism and Some Theological Implications,' unpublished paper at WEF-Theological Commission Consultation, Wheaton College, June 18-22, 1990, p.7.

²⁰ Kim Ki-Hong, 'Key Theological Issues in Asia,' *Urban Ministry in Asia*, ed. by Bong Rin Ro (Taiwan: ATA, 1989), p.13.

theological arena and be willing to dialogue with those whose theological persuasion is different from theirs.

Evangelical theologians in Asia and around the world need to work together through theological discussions in order to produce more joint evangelical theological declarations on key theological issues such as Liberation Theology and religious pluralism for our time. For example The World Evangelical Fellowship-Theological Commission will conduct a consultation on 'The Unique Christ in Our Pluralistic World' at Wisma Kinasih (near Jakarta), Indonesia, June 16–20, 1992. The 10th ATA Theological Consultation will also be jointly held with the WEF-TC consultation in Indonesia. Through these consultations we hope to have a better understanding of the new theologies arising today.

Dr. Bong Rin Ro is Executive Secretary of the Theological Commission of the World Evangelical Fellowship based in Seoul, Korea. [p. 82](#)

The Authentic Jesus

John Stott

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An abridged extract from The Authentic Jesus by John Stott (1992).

Today nearly a million Moslems live in the United Kingdom. The second largest Hindu community in the world outside India (after Durban) is in Leicester, and there are Hindu temples in Birmingham and Wolverhampton, Manchester and Leeds, Coventry and Bristol, and numerous smaller towns.

This situation has had a profound effect on many Westerners who had never before questioned that, if they had any religious commitment, it was to Christianity.

How then are we to think of other religions? The word that immediately springs to most people's minds is 'tolerance', but they do not always stop to define what they mean by it. It may help if we distinguish between three kinds.

LEGAL TOLERANCE

Legal tolerance ensures that every minority's religious and political rights (usually summarized as the freedom to 'protest, practise and propagate') are adequately protected in law. This is obviously right.

SOCIAL TOLERANCE

Social tolerance encourages respect for all persons, whatever views they may hold, and seeks to understand and appreciate their position. This too is a virtue which Christians wish to cultivate; it arises naturally from our recognition that all human beings are God's creation and bear his image, and that we are meant to live together in amity.