
The Role of Christianity
in The Asian Community
and Unification of Religions

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I. Introduction

Frankly speaking, this is one of the most difficult topics I have ever dealt with in my career. In fact, the given topic is something that can be divided into two different topics; one is, "Establishment of The Asian Community," and the other, "Unification of Religions and the Role of Christianity," both of which are equally difficult to tackle satisfactorily. Since my field is sociology, I decided to limit my presentation to focus on the function of Christianity, from the viewpoint of sociology in religion. In doing so, my study was formulated on the following four premises.

First, Christianity is rooted one-sidedly in Western culture. Second, Western culture, the womb of modern Christianity has become pathogenic and Christianity is too out-dated. Third, although they are not all the same in terms of seriousness, all societies in the modern world are suffering from the complicated cultural overlap of the old and the new, and from the orientation of Western and Oriental values. This caused all of the societies to be wandering at the loss of values. Fourth, all world religions, such as Christianity, Buddhism, Islam, and Hinduism, that have ruled human societies through a long history, have no ontological relationship with the Far Eastern countries such as China, Japan, and Korea. Moreover, these countries have

not yet established any world religion, yet they have played a very significant role, at least in Asia.

It is needless to say that a certain religion has its specific ontological socio-cultural backgrounds. In line with this point of view, my paper was addressed to diagnose the socio-cultural situations of the modern societies and the causes of the pathological problems in the functions of Christianity.

In short, my paper is focused on the inquires about the following two questions. First, whether Christianity, as such, would be able to make contributions to the establishment of the Asian Community and to the Unification of World religions? And second, if not, why is it unable to do so, and what reinforcements or corrections are needed in order for Christianity to function efficiently?

II. The Origin of the Problems of Modern Christianity

1. The Function and Destination of Western Culture

Not only Max Weber, but also many others have pointed out that Western culture has been characterizing modern societies. However, it is seriously questionable whether Western culture would be able to sustain the world of today and tomorrow as it had in the past.

When Spengler warned about the decline of Western civilization, he might have also implied the withdrawal of its influence upon future societies. In agreement with Spengler, there are many scholars who have paid particular attention to Oriental culture and Eastern thought. Through these cultures they searched for a key to solve the problems of humankind. Criticizing Westerners' way of observing Eastern religion, Frazier (1969) argued, "Comprehending an Eastern religious tradition requires immense discipline of the mind and a considerable capacity for openmindedness. Westerners can amass information about Eastern religious life simply by cataloging the facts in an encyclopedic fashion. Such factual knowledge, however, reveals only the husks of Oriental thought and ritual; it is not equivalent to comprehending either its significance nor its meaning. An adequate understanding of the religious traditions of the East requires that the human

significance be appropriated."

Zimmer (1951), also observed the spiritually superior nature of Eastern thought as it appeared in his saying, "Western thought is exoteric, objective and oriented towards verification according to established procedures, whereas Eastern thought is oriented toward religious intuition and the realization of spiritual unity." Campbell (1962) is not an exception from this train of thought. He argues, "in the East the great aim of the religious man is to find the overall cosmic unity that is hidden behind the veil of the temporal succession and cosmic change."

Scholars like those cited above not only point out the inferior and physical nature of Western thought, but also criticize Christianity, which is based on Western culture. For example, Zimmer, like Nietzsche, explicitly deplored Christianity by saying, "the Christian is a man who behaves like everybody else. Our professions of faith no longer have any discernible bearing, either on our public conduct or on our private state of hope. The sacraments do not work on many of us, they are a spiritual transformation; we are bereft and at a loss where to turn. Meanwhile, our academic secular philosophies are more concerned with information than with the redemptive transformation that our souls require."

As was warned by Zimmer, there is no hope left to be able to find a key to solve the problems of modern societies so long as we only rely upon Western culture and the Christianity that has grown out of it. Christianity as a world religion is now almost 2,000 years old. In spite of its long history, it could be diffused only to a limited proportion of the world's population and to a limited part of the world. Furthermore, Christianity has almost ceased its lively functioning, even in the Western societies where it grew, as well as among Christians all over. Our naive assumption that religion, society and culture are intermingled is flatly rejected when we review the function of Christianity, particularly in the Far East. Japan is the most westernized country, whereas, the number of the Christian population is very limited. Korea, where the Christian size is big, was far less westernized. Not many of the Chinese population had

accepted Christianity, even before the communist regime came into power. These examples raise serious questions about the capability of spreading Christianity and its function to unite world religions.

The ultimate goal of Christianity is to save human beings and to establish heaven on earth. This is seriously questioned when we ask whether it can be diffused all over the world during a given period of time. And whether the heaven on earth started to be realized even among the limited Christian societies and Christians. At this stage, we naturally come to think of the socio-cultural function of Christianity and the current situation of Western culture, the soil of Christianity. At least one of the reasons why Christianity doesn't diffuse as widely as expected nor does it function as efficiently as in the past, can be the fact that Christianity is one-sidedly rooted in Western Culture, while Western societies are becoming drastically pathological. In fact, Ernest Troeltsch boldly pointed out that Christianity and Western culture are never separable. Western Christians can never correctly transmit their faith to those living outside of the Western culture, who at the same time cannot say anything about Christ until they become Westerners.

2. The Pathology of Western Culture and the Obsolescence of Christianity

In our time no one can deny the reality that the Western societies are seriously becoming pathological. Even in the time when Western culture was sound and healthy, the Westerners had limitations in effective communication with the aspects of life and the spiritual realms with Oriental people. How can they provide solutions to all problems of modern societies? Talcott Parsons diagnosed the origin of the modern problems from Christianity when he was writing an article about "Christianity." He argued, "many of the intrasocietal and intersocietal problems that distress the modern world owe much of their salience and form of statements, to the processes of institutionalization of Christian values. The distress over the values is not so much a measure of the irrelevance of the historic impact of

Christianity, as it is a measure of the incompleteness of institutionalization." It is true that the high standards in the economic, health and education fields, certain fundamental patterns of equality, notably of citizenship and opportunity, and certain aspects of freedom and autonomy for individuals as well as associational groups are attributable to the contribution of Christianity. Parsons points out the trouble is, however, that the modern problems are irrelevant to the "historic impact of Christianity."

The most serious trouble is modern Christianity. It does not provide us with the solutions to those problems that are relevant to the historic impact of Christianity. Once Christianity does not function to solve modern problems as a world religion, the human being of today and tomorrow is only to be bereft. Then, can we draw hope from other world religions such as Buddhism, Islam, and Hinduism? It looks impossible, also because all of them are already too old and obsolete. What the religions are telling us today is that they are all rooted in the ancient societies of many tens of centuries ago. In line with this, Emile Durkheim who lived a century ago, said in his time, "We desire another, which would be more practicable... In other words, the old gods are growing old or are already dead, and others are not yet born." The basis of this diagnosis he described as, "the great things of the past which filled our fathers with enthusiasm do not excite the same ardour in us, either because they have come into common usage to such an extent that we are unconscious of them, or else because they no longer answer our actual aspirations; but as yet there is nothing to replace them. We can no longer be impassionate ourselves, for it was the principles, in the name of Christianity, that was recommended to masters."

As a sociologist of religion, Durkheim encouraged humanity by saying, "there are no gospels which are immortal, but neither is there any reason for believing that humanity is incapable of inventing new ones." He later clearly forecasted that, "A day will come when our societies will know again those hours of a creative effervescence, in the course of which new ideas arise and new formulas are found which serve as a guide to

humanity." Nietzsche's famous words, "God is dead" can be comprehended within this context.

In order for Christianity to be able to function universally and effectively in all cultural contexts, it should be refined and grafted with both the Western and the Asian cultures; thus, becoming capable of providing us with a design of living for modern people.

3. Cultural Overlap and Loss of Values

The people of 20th century live in quite a different society than could ever be imaginable by the Saints: explosions of information, knowledge, technology, population, the worsening of the environment and material resources, and the conflict of ideologies that never existed during the times of our Saints. Therefore, they left no gospel about these problems for us. We are badly in need of gospels on how to tackle these problems. And yet, no saint visibly appeared in front of us. This is why all of the societies of the modern world are in a bewildering state due to the loss of value systems.

The patterns of cultural overlap appear in such forms as compound, reservation, negotiation, synthesis, disorganization, and unification. Each individual society may be situated in a certain form of the above patterns. Regardless of whatever stage they stand on, what we need is neither to exclude other cultures nor conflict with different cultures, but to absorb and harmonize with different cultures. Therefore, we can come up with one that can solve the core problems of the modern human being. One of the ways of doing this, particularly for Christianity, should be reborn out of a new culture that is harmonized with the Western and the Oriental cultures. Pointing more in detail, the representative pathological phenomena of Western culture is mostly related to family norms, which are the most significant to the smooth functioning of all social orders. In contrast, Christianity is extremely lacking in messages about family norms. There appear only several phrases about family norms throughout both the Old and New Testaments. The Bible not only lacks family norms, but also social theories with which we can tackle modern problems of marriage, parent-child relationships,

divorce, sexual deviation and several others. Until modern Christianity can provide us with new gospels that fit modern situations, such as those previously mentioned, there will be no room for Christianity to devote itself to the establishment of the Asian Community and to the unification of religions.

4. The Culture and Population Weight of the Far East

The Far Eastern countries of China, Japan, and Korea have neither created a world religion in human history nor accepted any world religion on a national level, like Buddhism in Thailand or Islam in the Near East. However, Oriental thought, which originated from Chinese culture, has in general made a tremendous diffusion, not in the form of religion, but in the form of human norms, while the population of Chinese origin totals more than a fourth of the world's population. Not a single world religion landed in China on a massive scale. Japan is the same case. In this sense, Korea is a little bit different. They say Korea is the country where all different religions can peacefully cohabitate without causing any conflict.

Communism made China an empty vessel in terms of religion. It swept all the religious basis away from their society. Now, it has started to recognize that communism is not the gospel for them. China has started to search for an alternative to replace communism. Japan is full of material that swept out the spirituality of which the Japanese people are hungry for.

Summing up the points sketched so far, on one hand, it is now the time for these Far Eastern countries to do something with regards to world religion. On the other hand, with this connection, Christianity should also think about something that can develop a new relationship with these quiet countries. This means that Christianity needs to be reborn out of the Eastern cultural soil and to function in Asia for the establishment of the Asian community. There needs to be unification of the world religions, all of which were originated from the East. Not a single world religion was created in the Western culture, although, only Christianity migrated to the West for its growth. It is

most likely that Christianity now needs to return to its motherland in the East to mature. Once it completes its maturity in the East, based upon its growth in the West, it may have great potential to contribute to unifying world religions, harmoniously mixing West and East.

III. Tasks faced for the Renewal of Christianity

1. Renewal of Christianity

The major point of the descriptions given so far is that Christianity, per se, needs to be renewed. Without its own renewal, Christianity will be never able to make the expected contributions to establish the Asian Community or to unify of world religions.

Then, what would be the direction of this renewal? World culture is simply divided into the Western and Oriental cultures. In accordance with this concept of division of world culture or thought, Christianity that grew up in the West needs to be interpreted in the Oriental way of thought so that it can be smoothly accepted by the Oriental people. In order for Christianity to become the motivating energy to unify world religions, Christianity should be able to provide modern people with social theories and ideologies that can be readily accepted by both Westerners and Easterners.

As Jesus Christ himself confessed in the scriptures, John 16:12 & 13, the Bible was incomplete in his time. He mentioned this explicitly as expressed in this phrase, "I have still many things to tell you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of Truth comes, however, He (not I) will guide you into all truth." M. Weber (1963) also took the same position when he was saying that humanity is enchanted from the stage of magic to reach the stage of science through the religious stage. R. Niebuhr also stated that humanity walked through three stages: humanity as spirit, humanity as personality, and humanity as functioning to serve God.

Let us borrow Durkheim's point once more. He put the origin of philosophy and science in religion, and he further observed that religion was born at an early stage to fill the functions of science and philosophy. Yet he still kept the most fundamental function that

religion defines for all such basic concepts, the rule for our life is time, space, class, number, cause, essence, personality, nature, life and death. That is why religion is not and should not be separable from science.

Likewise, modern Christianity should be more scientified in the modern sense. It should be more reasonable and persuasive in telling us of such important religious issues as the creation, the origin of sin in the Fall, the Incarnation, resurrection, indemnity, second coming of Christ, Last Judgement, the new heavens and new earth, and the like. Otherwise, no modern people will be enthusiastic and passionate about the true and sincere way of life that can make God pleased.

2. Strengthening the Christian Function for Social Integrity

Modern societies are faced with a drastic pace of urbanization and industrialization that are accompanied by extreme social disorganization. This in turn causes all the maladjustment, psychological conflicts, mental and social illnesses from which all kinds of social problems occur. On the other hand, regardless of how speedy social change is, we can minimize the impact of such changes so long as there is an equilibrium function for the harmonized changes of the social sub-systems. The patterns of social disorganization may appear in such forms as: (1) competition and conflict between sub-systems, (2) a certain sub-system may over-perform or under-perform, and (3) certain norms stick to a conservative standard (as is the case in Iran).

With regards to this, we are inclined to question whether or not Christianity has played an equilibrating role to harmonize the functions of sub-systems such as the economy (material), jurisprudence, education, communication, role of military power, culture and arts, administration, and so forth. Clifford stressed the importance of the equilibrium role within religion for social integrity, and to harmonize all of the functions of the sub-systems.

In social integrity, there are several kinds, such as functional integrity, normative integrity and

communicational integrity. Was the function of Christianity sure of itself enough to meet the requirements in order to play the roles for all these integrities? What can we learn from the Bible about all these integrities? Let us forget about the past and think of the present and the future. Can Christianity function for the functional integrity of sub-systems? Can it function for a normative integrity? And, can it function for communicational integrity? Absolutely not.

Modern Christianity should try to strengthen and renew the function of playing roles for these integrities to contribute to the Asian Community and unity of different religions. It should create new ideas of unity that can formulate a common culture in the same dialogue. At this point, Christianity should be able to pull all the cosmic powers to God. He is the only being and oneness, but rules all creatures. He is the point of convergence. The Unification Church calls this "Godism."

3. Prescription for Treating Social Pathologies;

The problems that distress modern societies can be classified into two dimensions. Say for example, poverty, lack of resources, explosive population, destruction of environment, and lack of food are attributable to the dimension of a nation or government. On the other hand, divorce, juvenile delinquency, homosexuality, personality disorders, and family conflicts are something that can be attributable to the dimension of the family.

Toward both of these dimensions, the Bible and modern Christianity provide no persuasive message, but only repeat obsolete preaching. This style of preaching may satisfy the aged, but not the young people, who should inherit Christianity in the future world.

Really, we need a prophet or a second coming of Christ who can heal all of these problems. We want a modern Saint who has a key to the solutions for all of the modern problems since we can never be redeemed without the solutions to these problems. The ideas he brings should be practical to the societies of today and tomorrow, not of the past. He must be able to communicate to us what God desires of modern people.

4. Necessity of Victory Over Communism (VOC) Ideology

Many of the modern conflicts may be also attributable to the destructive influence of communism. More significantly, there is no guarantee that a nuclear war will not take place so long as Communism exists on this earth. Communism, however, is not simply a political ideology but a different form of religion. Parsons (1967) already mentioned, "The communist movement is quite another matter. It certainly should be classified, at least as a quasi-religious movement that has certain striking resemblances to Calvinism... Marxism is largely an offshoot of the German idealistic philosophy and as such is intimately associated with Protestantism."

As Parsons points out, Christianity is the religion that should be responsible for the overcoming of Marxism, since it is relevant to Calvinism or Protestantism. Unfortunately there is no systematic theology that can overcome communism yet. Rather, the influence and the size of the so-called liberation theologians are growing. Therefore, Ivan Vallier (1967) warned Christian theologians saying, "possibilities for the development of Christianity hinge on the theologians' capacities to establish competitive systems of faith vis-a-vis Marxism, existentialism and secular totalitarian mystiques."

What we need in our time is not only the VOC ideology/theology but also organized action and movement to totally eradicate communism from this earth. This is why Durkheim (1915) defined the characteristics of the coming Messiah as a "prudent man who has a very clear sense of what must be done."

IV. Conclusion

Despite my efforts and endeavors to develop this paper, I am never satisfied with the results. The major point I wanted to describe was the necessity of a renewal of Christianity; renewal of the theology itself and also the renewal of Christian leadership. Newness begins from a person at a certain point of time in a certain place. Otherwise, we can not define anything as

"new." We, in our time, are badly in need of someone as a new leader who has a new theology that can embrace all the different ideologies and come up with oneness and newness.

The establishment of the Asian community and unification of religions, therefore, should start from the efforts to search for a new leader, to have him as a strong axle and to follow him and the direction he gives us. Who told us about the necessity of establishing the Asian community and the unification of religion? We may pay our due attention to the person who initiated this idea.

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