

CHRISTOLOGY IN ASIA: MAJOR TRENDS IN CHRISTOLOGICAL REFLECTION FROM AN INDIAN CONTEXT¹

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INTRODUCTION

Any discussion about Christology from an Asian perspective cannot begin but with a mention that Jesus Christ choose to be born as an Asian and He is a son of the Asian soil. It is also a known fact that Christianity was born in Asia and the determinative ecumenical councils which includes Nicaea (325) and Chalcedon (451) which settled the doctrinal contours of the Christian faith happened in this continent. Christianity spread quickly to the east, thus as David Thompson points out “Asian Christianity is either as old as or older than European Christianity” (THOMPSON, 2008, p.3). Christianity reached India in the first century and China by the sixth or seventh century. However Christianity failed to take roots in Asia as in the west. The modern Christian presence in Asia owe much to the western missionary movements in the past centuries. Even then, the Christian presence in Asia is minimal may be with an exception to Philippines. This does not mean that Christian impact and influence on this continent is nominal. In several countries of Asia, including India and Japan the Christian impact outnumber their numerical strength in socio-political, ethical and philosophical

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spheres of life (PARRATT, 2012, p.14).³ And in our times, as Christianity is declining in the west, it is making its presence known, silently but steadily in Asia amidst a turbulent religio-political and cultural space it finds itself.

The purpose of this paper is to broadly sketch some of the major trends in Christological reflection in Asia. In no way this attempt is complete. In my effort to do so, I have primarily brought out illustrations from India. This is mainly because of my familiarity with the context of India and also due to the fact that the theological trends in Asia do share a common thread. In the concluding part of this paper, I will reflect upon some of the resources available to us we engage in a Christological reflection in Asia context.

THE CONTEXT OF ASIAN CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY

Although countries in Asia are unique in itself still there exists some commonalities. In order to better appreciate the Christological articulations in the Asian setting it is important to briefly understand the context of Asian Christian theological deliberations.

Asia is a land of extreme contrast and diversities. This is true in terms of its climate, geographical landscape, linguistic, ethnic, cultural and economic diversity (PHAN, 2011, p.2). However there are at least three realities which shape a common Asian experience. They are the context of religious pluralism, poverty and colonialism. These contexts often influence the theological articulation of Asian Christian theologians as they engage in the task of bringing Jesus to the masses of Asia.

Asian is often called as the cradle of the world religions. Peter Phan notes, Asia is “the birthplace of all the major religions of the world, not only Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Zoroastrianism (southern Asia), Confucianism, Taoism, Shintoism (eastern Asia), but also Judaism, Christianity, and Islam (western Asia)” (PHAN, 1996, p.402). This means theologians of Asia always had a task to clarify and relate how Jesus Christ stand in relation to the people of other faiths and how Christian faith can be articulated meaningfully in a religiously plural society.

The second context of Asia is that of poverty. Although not all countries in Asia are poor,⁴ it is the second poorest continent after Africa. Asia is noted for

³ See also “Christianity in Japan” in https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Christianity_in_Japan (accessed September 20th, 2019).

⁴ Macau, Qatar, Singapore, UAE, Hong Kong, Japan etc. are some of the wealthiest nations in Asia.

its fast growing economy and top business ventures. But still extreme poverty is a reality. Asia's huge population (60% of the world population lives in Asia) with scarcity of resources, concerns of food insecurity, poor governance, corruption and natural disasters make many countries in Asia vulnerable.⁵ In this context, an important question Asian theologians often try to answer is, "what Christ means to the poor in the context of structural injustices and economic inequalities?"

The third context of Asia is the shared experience of western colonialism and the subsequent rise of nationalism. The presence of "western colonial rule in several parts of Asia created a situation in which the boundary lines between the church and the colonial political order were blurred" (KIM, 2008, p.178). One of the bitter ironies resulted from this was that though Christianity was born in Asia, in recent centuries it came to be regarded, in its own birth place as a foreign religion imported by its colonizers (PHAN, 2011, p.2). The subsequent rise of Nationalism in the context of colonialism burdened Christians to prove their patriotism and commitment towards nation building. This made several Asian theologians to make conscious effort towards indigenization and develop theologies of nation building. The issues of religious pluralism, poverty and colonialism have shaped the contours of Asian portrayal of Jesus. Against this backdrop, let us look at some of the major trends in Christological articulation in an Asian Context.

MAJOR CHRISTOLOGICAL TRENDS IN ASIA

Theologians in their attempt towards a faithful articulation of Christian gospel in an Asian context have adapted at least three approaches. This includes inculturation, inter-religious and liberation approach. However it is interesting to note that a good number of theological reflection on the significance of Christ came from western educated non-Christian intellectuals. So we shall begin our discussion with a note on non-Christian appropriation of Christ by thinkers outside Christianity.

CHRISTOLOGY OUTSIDE CHRISTIANITY

Several serious Christological deliberations happened in India in the context of Indian Renaissance movements in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The Indian Renaissance leaders were not necessarily hostile to Christianity

⁵ "8 Important Facts about the Causes of Poverty in Asia," <https://borgenproject.org/causes-of-pov-erty-in-asia/> (accessed April 19th, 2020).

but were deeply influenced by the teaching of Jesus Christ and want to reform the Hindu tradition in line with European modernity by eliminating superstitious and unethical practices in it. The renaissance leaders were largely western educated high caste Hindu's who saw proselyting work of the missionaries and colonial rule as a threat. Several of them were attracted to Christ but distanced themselves from Christianity which they interpreted as an imported religion by the colonizers.

Raja Ram Mohan Roy (1772-1833) called as the "Father of Indian Renaissance" was a western educated high caste Brahmin. He is credited as the first Indian to have written seriously and extensively on Christian theological themes. Along with his Christian influence, he was shaped by the monism of Vedanta, Islam and western Unitarianism. He called himself as an 'ethical monotheist. It was the Christian ethics rather than Christian dogma which attracted Ram Mohan Roy (BOYD, 1969, p.18-20).

Mohan Roy's attitude towards Christ was one of reverence. He regarded Jesus as a great teacher and messenger of God. His book entitled, *The Precepts of Jesus* (1820) a collection of moral teaching of Jesus was intended appeal to the Hindu Intellectuals to bring moral reformation in Hindu society. Because of his monistic commitment he clearly adapted an Arian Christology. He articulated Jesus to be a created yet superior divine being. True to his Vedic lineage, he articulated God to be impassible and one. He clearly rejects two natures of Christ since God can have no connection with the matter. He also rejected the sacrificial and vicarious death of Jesus since God cannot suffer. He believed that Holy Spirit is the influence of God. However has no problem in accepting Jesus as Messiah and as the Son of God in a qualified sense. He accepted the virgin birth and the resurrection of Jesus. To him saving work of Christ needs to be understood through His teaching alone and not through his sacrificial death on the cross. His death is a supreme illustration of his great teaching (PARRATT, 2012, p.17-20). To him one attains salvation through repentance and doing the precepts of Jesus Christ. Although Ram Mohan Roy's Christological articulation was confronted to be heretic by several missionaries of his time, there were still several Christians who saw in his writing "a beginning of change for the better in the Hindu attitude towards Christianity" (BOYD, 1969, p.18-20).

Ram Mohan Roy's fascination towards ethical teaching of Christ was shared by several other significant national leaders of India. For example, Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948), the "Father of India" was deeply attracted to the moral teachings of Jesus particularly the Sermon on the Mount. He noted that Christ "belongs not solely to Christianity but to the entire world" (PARRAT,

2012, p.17). According Gandhi his ideals of passive resistance (*Satyagraha*), sacrificial suffering for truth, and selfless service was inspired by the servanthood of Christ and imagery of the crucified (PARRAT, 2012, p.17).

Another person of importance to our discussion is Bhimrao Ambedkher (1891-1956), the icon of Dalit⁶ liberation in India. To Ambedkar, Jesus was 'the physician of the untouchables.' His high regard for Christ made him to assume that Christianity would end the social discrimination in India. However, he became skeptical because he thought Christian churches instead of fostering social equality spread caste discrimination. But in spite of all failures, he still held Christ in high esteem and defended the Christian missionaries' service and propagation of the gospel (CHACKO, 2014, p.35-37).⁷

The purpose of the above discussion was to capture some of the positive perception of Jesus Christ outside Christianity. In this effort we saw how Jesus was accepted as a great ethical teacher who inspired Indian renaissance movements, a great moral leader who provided nonviolent method of passive resistance, and a champion liberator of the marginalized, who provides hope for the oppressed.

CHRISTOLOGY IN INCULTURATION THEOLOGIES

The concerns of the inculturation theologies have always been to relate and express the Gospel in relation to religio-cultural setting of Asia. Some of the pressing questions addressed by inculturation theologians were: (1) Can a person remain culturally Asian and while embracing Christianity as a religion? and (2) Should a person leave their traditional religious community to become a Christian? At the heart of these questions also was opposition to religious conversions and accusations against Christians abandoning/losing their traditional culture for a foreign one. Thus the attempt made by Inculturation theologians were to articulate gospel using Asian terms, symbols and spiritualities. These theologians tried to find continuity as far as possible with their traditional culture yet to remain faithful to the Christian faith.⁸ Most of the Inculturation theologians rejected Henry Kraemer's exclusivist position, *The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World* (KRAEMER, 1956), which argued for the discontinuity

6 The word Dalit means broken/scattered. In Indian context it is used to refer to so called outcaste or untouchable people according to Hindu caste system.

7 Laji Chacko, *Introduction to Christian Theologies in India* (Kolkata: SCEPTRE, 2014), 35-37.

8 See A. R. Victor Raj, *The Hindu Connection: Roots of the New Age* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1995), 120-49.

of Christianity with other faiths but appropriated in different ways the fulfillment theory articulated by J. Farquhar, *The Crown of Hinduism* (KIM, 2004, p.55-56). Thus, they saw Hinduism as preparing men's hearts for Christ, and what is foreshadowed in Hinduism is perfected in Christianity (KIM, 2003, p.114).

One of the significant portrayal by the Inculturationist theologians was to present Jesus as an Avatar (Incarnation). According to Bhagavad-Gita:

*Whenever there appears, A Languishing of Righteousness
(Dharma)*

When Unrighteousness (Adharma) arises, Then I send forth (generate) myself.

*For the protection of the virtuous, for the destruction of the wicked
For the establishment of the Right, Age after age I come into being.*

(BHAGAVAD GITA 4:7-8, 3: 24).

The word 'avatara' consists of two Sanskrit words namely 'ava' which means 'downwards'; and 'tara' meaning 'crossing or descent'. In Hinduism the word 'avatara' usually refers to 'the coming down or descent of God in some visible form (KATTACKAL, 1999, p.9). Bassuk (1987, p.3) points out that 'this passing, crossing, or coming down is symbolic of the passage of God from eternity into the temporal realm, from unconditioned to the conditioned, from the infinitude to the finitude – the descent of divine to our world.' In Christianity the incarnational event is not a 'mere' theophany or transitory appearance of God. But incarnation affirms that the logos or the Son of God was 'made flesh' or 'incarnated' by taking a complete human form(John 1:14). The word "incarnation" means "enfleshment". The earliest sense of the English word comes by adding 'n' to the Latin word 'incarnatio' (O'COLLINS, 2002, p.1). O'Collins (2002, p.1) clarifies incarnation as 'At a certain point in human history God acted in special, in fact unique, way through the once-and – for-all' 'sending' or 'coming' of his Son'. The etymological meaning of 'Avatar' and incarnation may sound similar but there are fundamental differences between them. Firstly unlike Avatar, where God enters a human body of flesh and blood, in incarnation logos or Son of God becomes flesh and blood. Two words which are of significance at this point, are 'homoousios' (Jesus is same substance with God the Father) and 'hypostatic union' (Christ as at once divine and human inseparably). Secondly the Christian doctrine of incarnation accepts only one *human* incarnation which is not repeatable. Whereas, Hinduism proposes repeatable forms of Avatars. Thirdly, historicity is central to incarnational event

in Christianity whereas it is not the central issue in Hinduism. Finally the sacrificial death and bodily resurrection of the incarnate Christ for the salvation of the world forms the central theme for Christianity. Whereas Hindu Avatars are thought to be triumphant creatures who defeat powers of evil with superhuman power and restore the righteous order. Once their mission is accomplished either they die or return to the heavenly world. Thus the concept of sacrificial death and resurrection is absent in Hindu Avatars.⁹

Some of the pioneering theologians who attempted to articulate Jesus as an Avatar was A.J Appasamy (1891-1980) and V. Chakkarai (1880-1958). Both these theologians were aware of the limitation of using the concept “Avatar” to present Christ. To Appasamy, the incarnation of Christ is once for all and unique so he argued: “We believe that Jesus was the Avatara. God lived on the earth as a man only once and that was as Jesus...It is our firm Christian belief that among all the great religious figures in the world there is no one except Jesus who could be regarded as an Incarnation of God” (APPASAMY, 1942, p.259).

Similarly to Chakkarai the incarnation or avatara of Christ is not mere theophany but a permanent, mediating union of God and man in Him. And this union is not just some “metaphysical or substantial union of God and man, but rather in Christ breaking into the uncertainties of history” (BOYD, 1969, p.171).

Inculturationalist approach met with serious objections both from the Christian community and from hardline Hindu zealots. Sebastian Kim (2005, p.177) points out that the proponents of the Inculturation theologies were largely drawn from high caste background who wanted to retain their Hindu tradition. Thus, their efforts to relate the gospel to Brahmanical traditions of Hinduism and the desire to remain culturally as Hindus met with criticism from Dalit and tribal Christian theologies as “simply a Christian form of high caste hegemony” (KIM, 2005, p.177). Moreover, inculturationalist theologies did not appeal much to Christians from Dalit and other outcast groups who saw conversion as a means of revolt and liberation from oppressive Brahmanical structure (KIM, 2003, p.120-121). From the hardline Hindu side, many thinkers like Swami Devananda, Ram Swarup, and Sita Ram Goel vehemently rejected the inculturationalist separation of religion and culture, arguing that Hindu culture grew out of Hindu religion. In addition, they thought that such attempts were a “deliberate and calculated design” to implant the Christian meaning of Christ into Hindu culture to seek converts (KIM, 2003, p.119). They also questioned

⁹ For more discussion see Gerald O’Collins, *Incarnation*, p.10-11. And also Bassuk, *The Incarnation in Hinduism and Christianity*, p.7-8.

how Hindu practices and theological concepts could be adopted by Christianity without hypocrisy (KIM, 2003, p.117-119).

CHRISTOLOGY IN INTER-RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

If the concern of inculturation theology was to present Christ in relation to Asian culture and religiosity, the task undertaken by the Inter-faith dialogue theologians was to work towards inter-religious harmony between adherents of different faith strained by communal tensions. By promoting dialogues between different religious communities, they hoped for mutual understanding, harmony and cooperation towards the wellbeing of all. To the proponents of Inter-faith dialogue an exclusive understanding of Christ and Christian Salvation is problematic to an inclusive acceptance of others. One of the leading representatives of Inter-religious dialogue was Stanley J. Samartha (1920-2001). He was the first director of the WCC's subunit for interfaith dialogue and was the pioneering figure who shaped the texture of inter-religious dialogue in India (KIM, 2008, p.55). Samartha notes (2000, p.118):

What *is* foolishness, and what *is* a stumbling block to neighbors of other faiths, is the Christian claim that *only* in Jesus Christ has God been revealed *once-for-all* to redeem all humanity. This claim has isolated Christians from their neighbors of other faiths in India, led to their theological alienation and spiritual impoverishment, and in a religiously plural society has made it difficult, if not impossible, for Christians to cooperate with their neighbors for common social Purposes.

Stanley Samartha in order to provide rationale for his inter-religious dialogue project, rejected Chalcedon Christology and proposed a revised Theo-Centric Christology. He argues that what is needed is not a "helicopter Christology," that is a Christology from above but a "bullock cart Christology," a Christology from below based on the concrete earthly realities of humanity. From his Theo-centric Christological formulation, he starts with an ontological priority of God as the universal creator and redeemer of all creation. He asserts that God's universality contradicts the claim that He has only revealed once and for all in Jesus of Nazareth. In the Incarnation event God present in Jesus was God's very self and Jesus was divine in that sense. But Jesus in his own being was not identical with God's self. Jesus was divine but not God. According to

him Christ is not limited to Jesus of Nazareth, there is only one Christ but Christ is also found and witnessed in other faiths. So what is important is to be open towards discerning and incorporating marks and witness of God's Christ in other religious traditions also. Samartha claims that Theo-centric Christology has the strength to recognize the distinctiveness of Jesus Christ-along with God's presence in Christ in other religious traditions. Such an openness according to him, will help Christians to cooperate with neighbors of other faiths for the common good for all in the society (SAMARTHA, 2000, p.105-144).

The proponents of Inter-religious dialogue may be genuine in their desire to bring better cooperation among people of different faiths. However, by rejecting deity to Jesus of Nazareth, once and for all incarnation of Son of God and revising the Chalcedon Christology, theologians of Samartha's school of thought compromise the centrality and finality of Jesus Christ in Christian faith and praxis. Thereby the very foundation and source of Christian faith, Jesus Christ the Corner Stone, is moved out its place. This could also mean the whole credibility of Christian witness throughout the centuries is put to jeopardy. This pushes us to a situation, which Vinoth Ramachandran (1996, p.32) summaries as:

We are the great blasphemers the world has ever seen! For no matter how wonderful a person may have been, and however God may have been actively present through him, if Jesus was not more than human, the Christian church has lived a lie. Its creeds and practices have been based on falsehood. It has elevated a mere human being to the level of God and worshipped him. We are guilty of most monstrous idolatry.

CHRISTOLOGY IN LIBERATION THEOLOGY

The purpose liberation theologians has been to relate Christian faith to socio-political and economic struggles of people. The liberation theologies in Asia emerged in conversation with Latin American liberation theologies of 1970s. Many of the Asian liberation theologians were aware of the limitations of Marxist analysis in dealing with the complex religiocultural context of Asian society. Therefore, eventually they developed their own strand of liberation theologies, drawing upon the indigenous cultural tradition and experience for the sociopolitical liberation in Asian context. There are different strands of liberation theologies in Asia. However all the liberation theologians see sociopolitical

and economic uplifting as the visible manifestation of redemption in a historical context and they locate and confront corporate or structural sins manifested in socio-political or cultural structures of the society. Dalit theology, tribal theology, feminist theology, and various forms of eco-theology are some of the stands of liberation theology from an Indian context. For our purpose we shall discuss briefly portrayal Jesus in the Dalit Theology.

The starting point for Dalit theology is the Dalit experience of suffering, oppression and powerlessness. The meaning of word Dalit means broken/oppressed/downtrodden/ or crushed. The purpose of Dalit Christology is to re-construct the image of Jesus Christ from a Dalit perspective. Dalit Christological reflection starts with an affirmation that Jesus was a “Dalit-of-his-own-time (NIRMAL, 1994, p.64)”. Arvind P. Nirmal, the father of Dalit theology notes Jesus is not only a friend and liberator of Dalit, but he himself was a Dalit. He notes “We proclaim and affirm that Jesus Christ whose followers we are, was himself a Dalit – despite his being a Jew (NIRMAL, 1994, p.64)”. Kirsteen Kim (2004, p.63) summaries Dalit Christological articulation in Nirmal thus:

The dalitness of Jesus was shown by his ancestors, which included Tamar and Rahab; he was referred to disparagingly as a ‘carpenter’s son’; and he identified with dalits – publicans, prostitutes, lepers and Samaritans. As Son of Man, Jesus was rejected, mocked and despised by those of the dominant religion. He cleansed the temple and allowed the dalits of his day – the Gentiles – access to it. He suffered brokenness (dalitness) when he died on the cross.

To Dalit theologians, the suffering, cruxification and the resurrection of Jesus Christ is central to their Christological articulation (KIM, 2004, p.64). Nirmal notes, “On the Cross, he was the broken, the crushed, the split, the torn, the driven-asunder man”, revealing his Dalitness (NIRMAL, 1994, p.39). Jesus underwent rejection, mockery, contempt, suffering and eventual death. These Dalit experiences Jesus underwent as the Prototype of all Dalits. The Dalits are vindicated through the cross and resurrection of Jesus, it gives them dignity and strength to fight against suffering. Thus, Christological reflection on Jesus as savior and liberator enables Dalit believers to identify with Jesus Christ in his suffering conjoined by their sharing in his offer of redemption and liberation (NIRMAL, 1994, p.66-69).

The main concern of the liberation and Dalit theologians were to relate the significance of the Gospel to the experience and struggles of Dalit and the

marginalized people. In their attempt to do so they presented Christ as the Savior and Liberator of the oppressed from the socio-political and economic structures which binds people. One criticism raised against this approach of doing Christology is that “Dalit theology starts from its own situation, and has projected this situation on to the Christ of the Gospels”. “It then becomes an ideological reading of the NT rather than a critical theological one” (PARRAT, 2012, p.109).

Dalit theologians no doubt were able to bring to the forefront the struggles of a people who forms a majority of Christian population in India. However there have been doubts raised, after more than three decades of theological articulation, whether Dalit theology had an advantage over against other spiritualities shaped by the Nicæan articulation of Christian faith, in impacting people’s attitude against Dalit discrimination or bring about some positive change in the plight of Dalits. One of the reason for this could be the failure of liberations theologies to address the root cause of all the discriminations- human sinfulness. Christologies which walk away from the central reason of Christ event, His vicarious suffering on the cross for human sin, forgiveness of sins and the gift of new life through faith, is empty and inept. Because the gift of new life establishes a new reality and identity in a Christian. Here one’s new Identity is depend not on some external socio-economic or cultural discrimination or circumstance. But upon Christ who declares and accepts one to be His own (John 1:12) and fellow heirs of His inheritance. Such a foundation and starting point provide one with spiritual impetus and a rightful world view to live out Christian life in dignity and to address oppressive socio-cultural realities for the common good of all.

ASIAN CHRISTOLOGY FROM A LUTHERAN PERSPECTIVE: SOURCES AND TRAJECTORIES

All theologies are contextual. This is true of Asian Christian theologies also. The uniqueness of each contexts do dictate the nature of questions faced by the theologians as they attempt to formulate a Christology that is biblical and relevant. However the debate is what should be the role of the context in an Christological articulation? Whether it determines the Christological content or it shapes our language of expression. In this discussion we have seen that different theologians have answered this questions differently. The methodology followed by the liberation and Inter-religious dialogue theologians have been a “theology from below,” where experience/context becomes final point

of reference. Several inculturation theologians also follow this pattern. The risk involved in this project is, sometimes fidelity to the biblical message is comprised to extend that one end up creating a novel “Christ” fashioned after one’s own imagination.

The task ahead for a Lutheran theologian operating in an Asian Context is twofold. An unconditional commitment to God’s witness as revealed in the scriptures and a serious attempt to engage and relate biblical message to the contextual realities. In this effort we are guided by two commitments and can be enriched by two theological themes. The first one is an unwavering commitment to the Word of God. This ensures that we are not preaching a different Gospel (Gal 1:6-10). By prioritizing scriptures as “the only rule and guiding principle” in our theology a commitment to proclaim Christ with all clarity is further strengthened. Robert D. Preus (1970, p.257) notes:

Scripture is the one source (*principium cognoscendi*) of theology; that is to say, the only way we know God and His will and the only source and norm for our speaking about Him is His own revelation that is contained in the sacred writings. This is a unique way of gaining knowledge, and no other way is open for knowing God and divine things. But it is a sure source of knowledge, more sure and certain than heaven and earth and all empirical evidence. Any other basis for teaching or preaching concerning Christ will only lead to error. “The norm and standard for portraying (Christ),” says Dannhauer, “is the divine Word. If one departs from this, he portrays not Christ but his own dream.

Another commitment, we need to foster is a better appreciation for the place and value of ecumenical creeds and Lutheran confession in our theological reflection. Generally speaking, creeds of the Church are an attempt to articulate its faith in intelligible terms. Scholars points towards the varied needs of the worship life of the church which necessitated the Creed. For example Creeds originated as a guide for preaching, affirmation of faith for baptism rite, Holy Communion, catechetical instruction, hermeneutic concerns and the like. Creeds were necessitated also because of heretical concerns. In this sense creeds sought to clarify authentic Christian theology over against heresies and possible misunderstanding. Creeds can also be seen as a standard, testimony and witness to the world. Although the creeds of the church (apostle creed, Nicene and the Athanasius Creed) have its own *sitz im Leben*, it cannot be reduced some faith affirmation of the past. This is precisely because the universal and fundamental tenants which gives content to

authentic Christian faith is best captured in these creeds.¹⁰

An affirmation of the ecumenical creeds as understood as the ‘*regula fidei*’- rule of faith is very significant at this point (MARTHALER, 1993, p.9), because, Creeds provide ‘grammar for Christian discourse’ (CHRISTOPHER, 2001, p.17). As John Leith (1982, p.9) observes, Creed help to defend the Church against different kinds of heresies. He further points out that the Creed do have a negative role, in the sense that it shuts the heretic out and sets the boundary within which authentic Christian theology and life can take place. It is true that there is a tendency to dismiss the authority of the creeds in setting agenda for our Christian discourse by dismissing it as a mere antiquarian curiosity (MACGREGOR, 1980, xiv). But as Emilianos Timiadis (1983, p.126) points out:

As we can see, ancient creeds were not instant compositions of texts during a synod. Rather, they were the outcome of a long process of faith, deeply permeated in the whole life-religious, disciplinary, liturgical, theological-of the entire church. They were expressing what already had become a living reality or what is commonly called tradition. This living tradition in the church is consistent throughout the history but was make know to each generation in terms understandable of the people. Of course, a new language always is needed. But there is a difference between talking about Jesus in a new way and talking about a new Jesus’.

Similarly, the place of Lutheran confessions in doing theology cannot be overstated. Charles Arand (2012, p.69-70) summaries Walther’s articulation thus:

As a record of how the church heard the Scriptures on matters of Doctrine, Walther argued that public confessions of faith serve three purposes. Firstly, they equip the church to confess its faith before the world. Second, by means of these confessions the church differentiates and distinguishes itself from heterodox communions. Finally, they serve the church as a common norm and form for its ministers by which all other writings are judged.

Arand (2012, p.70) further summarizes the distinction Pieper makes between the role of the Scriptures and that of the Confessions thus:

¹⁰ For further discussion about Creeds of the Church and Nicene Creed in Particular see John H. Leith, ed. *Creed of the Churches: A Reader in Christian Doctrine From the Bible to the Present* (Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1982), 1-11., Berard Marthaler, *The Creed: The Apostolic Faith in Contemporary Theology* (Connecticut: Twenty Third Publications, 1993), 1-52. and also Emilianos Timiadis, *The Nicene Creed: Our Common Faith* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 1-30.

The church, Pieper maintained, never refers to the Confession to support a truth. When that question arises, the church turns to scripture alone... the distinction must be made between *norma decisionis* and *norma discretionis* (“deciding norm” and distinguishing norm”). The former is Scripture; the later, the confessions. It follows, then, that when a church distances itself from her symbolical writings it ceases to be Lutheran.

Two theological tools which are helpful in clarifying our theological reflection in an Asia setting are Luther’s two realm theology and Theology of the Cross. One of the inherent problem present in theologies of Asia is the mixing up or confusing between the concerns of the left hand and right hand realms. Luther’s distinction between the two realms and his two dimensional understanding of human existence provides us with a conceptual tool to distinguish between the concerns of creation and redemption, thereby helping us not to confuse, mix, or compromise between concerns relating to our spiritual and temporal realms of existence. Herbert Hoefler (1982, p.9) rightly summaries,

The two kingdom distinction is an analytical tool. It helps to clarify the various issues involved in complex, inter-relating social questions. Using the distinction we do not facily solve our theological and practical problems. However, we do understand our various responsibilities better and thus make more balanced decisions in the developing situations of our life and work in the society.

Finally theology of the Cross is another resource we have to enrich our discussion. The theology of the Cross is both a theology centered on the cross event and an orthopraxis. It focus not only focus on a “God with us” but also a “God for us”. As a Christology, it takes as its starting point the incarnation. As Gorden A. Jenson (1997, p.21-22) summarizes:

The theology of the cross points constantly to a “down-to-earth” God. It is this God in our midst who acts to save us by being in solidarity with us, even to the extent of Christ exchanging his righteousness for our sinfulness. Christ does not escape from the cross, but goes through death in order that we might have life. The darkness is not avoided but faced head on. The cross also reveals that God acts for us. God does more than dwell with us through Christ. God also acts decisively for us, to give us that righteousness which we cannot obtain. This

Christological understanding of the theology of the cross provides the foundation for Luther's theology of the cross to act as an orthopraxis or way to "do" theology.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this paper was to trace major Christological trends from an Asian context. In doing so, we have discussed how the context played an important part in theologizing. The argument set forth in this paper was that for a faithful and relevant Christological formulation although context influence our questions, the starting point should be from God's revelation to us as revealed in the Scriptures. In this faithful Christological confession, in an Asian context, Ecumenical creeds, and Lutheran confession plays an important role and the theological themes of Luther's two realm and theology of the Cross further enriches our deliberations.

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