

Burying Anti-Jewish Christian Practices as Peace Building: A Challenge for Asian Churches

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ABSTRACT

In this article, I challenge the prevalent mindset among Asian Christians that says they have nothing to do with the Holocaust. When Asian Christians regard the Holocaust and the scholarship in Jewish-Christian relations as peripheral concerns for Asian churches, they run the risk to be the contagious agents of anti-Judaism. Through revisiting briefly the development of anti-Judaism in classical Christianity and its manifestations in Asian theologies, I challenge Asian Christians to teach a different Christianity.

The practices of religious education in Asian Churches are standing dangerously at a crossroad. On the one hand, Asian Christians are maturing in their critique of Western theological domination through reaffirming Asian cultural resources for theologizing. On the other hand, the resulting Asian theologies concerning Jews and Judaism are no improvement on the Western colonial theologies which they seek to correct. When I use the term “Asian Christians,” I have Chinese, Koreans, Japanese, Taiwanese, and Singaporean in mind. Also writing as a Canadian, I have Asian North Americans in mind. Asians in Asia need to discern for themselves the relevance of my analysis.

Asian Christians are eager to proclaim the gospel to Asians in ways that are hospitable to Asian mind. Such attempts often begin with revisiting Asian cultures and experiences. The final products, however, seldom include anything about Jewish-Christian relationships. In efforts to re-examine their understanding of the gospel, Asian Christians rarely revisit the political circumstances in Antiquity from which Christianity emerged. Asian theology, as a result, is often conducted in isolation from a critical reassessment of the first century. Among Asian churches, there is little interest in examining the problematic teachings of Christianity as the result of the *Shoah* (Holocaust).

In an effort to understand why the *Shoah* occurred, many Christians, mostly in the West, have awakened to see the complicit role Christianity has played. For many years, various Christian denominations have published declarations denouncing anti-Judaism. These church bodies asked for forgiveness and vowed, “Never again.” The subsequent contributions of Jewish-Christian dialogue have led to critique of the most basic assumptions of Christianity. Many

Christians are awakened to realize how Christianity distorted Judaism in the name of Jesus. Just recently, on September 10, 2000, a group of notable Jewish scholars and rabbis published *Dabru Emet: A Jewish Statement on Christians and Christianity*, a full page ten-point statement that was printed in the *New York Times*. They urged Jews to view Christianity differently because as these notable Jews argue, Christianity has changed. To inspire more discussion, a book called *Christianity in Jewish Terms* (2000) is published as a result. Likewise, on September 1, 2002, *Christian Scholars Group*, a Jewish-Christian study group sponsored by Boston College published a ten-point statement *A Sacred Obligation: Rethinking Christian Faith in Relation to Judaism and the Jewish People*. The scholars who drafted this statement offered their personal journeys in Jewish-Christian relation by publishing *Faith Transformed: Christian Encounters with Jews and Judaism* (2003). These Christians scholars, both Catholic and Protestant, urged Christians to examine their faith in light of the church's renewed understanding of Judaism. These are significant milestones.¹

However, most Asian Christians find the theological discourse raised by the *Shoah* irrelevant for Asian Christians. Most contemporary Asian theologians, except a very few, do not employ the *Shoah* as a major theme in their research. I see the following mindset as a reason:

Asian Christians had nothing to do with the Shoah. Theologically and socially, antisemitism is a European issue. We Asian Christians were far away from the atrocity – geographically, culturally and time-wise. Instead, Asian Christians living in North America should be focusing on our experiences of discrimination and exclusion. The mission of Asian churches is to bring Jesus to Asians. In order to bring Jesus to Asians, the church's new strategy is to reconfigure the gospel message using Asians' experiences, philosophies, and cultural resources. Too much concern about European problems is a waste of our time.

The purpose of this article is to challenge this mindset. By revisiting the development of anti-Judaism in Christian thought, I invite Asian Christians, theologians, and educators to take post-*Shoah* theological reflection seriously. Asian Christians rightly argue that they were not physically involved in the *Shoah*. But Asian Christians have inherited a Christian self-identity which has denigrated Jews and Judaism. In a religious sense, Asian Christians are also responsible for the *Shoah*. Religion is one of the major sources that can spark hatred and violence. A fundamental step in educating for peace and justice is to examining religious teachings and assumptions. In the following statements, I will clarify what I mean by supersessionism, anti-Judaism, and the complicity Christianity played in that horror. While I am not discussing the *Shoah per se*, I treat the *Shoah* as a significant watershed for theological/educational reflection.

SUPERSESSIONISM, ANTI-JUDAISM, ANTISEMITISM

More than fifty years of biblical scholarship after the Second World War and years of Jewish-Christian dialogue help us to identify one of the key problems in classical Christian teaching: Supersessionism. Supersessionism (Latin, *supersedere*, to sit upon and preside over), is a theological claim that Christians have replaced Jews as God's chosen people. Christianity is regarded as having achieved special status as the "fulfillment" of Judaism. Supersessionism assumes many forms. The classic expression is to split the New Testament from the Hebrew scripture, making a theological claim that says the Law is against grace. Hermeneutically, the Hebrew scripture is argued as the preparation for the New Testament, hence, giving the Hebrew scripture a destination: "old" testament. A common interpretive mode among Christian fundamentalists is to look for Christ in every Hebrew scriptural text. Supersessionism encourages Christians to read the Christian Bible as a single whole. For example, Kendall Soulen helps us to understand that supersessionism functions in Christian theology as an interpretive mode in which it provides the interpretive instrument to hold the two testaments together as a *single* canonical construal.² A canonical construal as Soulen explains, "...is an interpretative instrument that provides a framework for reading the Christian Bible as a theological and narrative unity."³ That is, it "hangs together" the complex biblical texts as a single whole with its central overarching plot: Jesus Christ. A preacher need not intend to cause any harm to Jews, but supersessionism is reinforced by saying something like:

- The Jews were wrongly waiting for a political messiah and that is why they failed to see Jesus as their messiah.
- Judaism in Jesus' days had become hypocritical and legalistic.
- Christians worship on Sunday because Jesus' resurrection changed everything.

Supersessionism became the standard canonical interpretive lens to foster a triumphal posture toward Jewish people, a key theological engine of anti-Judaism.

Anti-Judaism refers to theological attitudes, arguments, and polemics that distort and disparage Judaism in order to support the Christian claim of superiority. Anti-Judaism is not just a matter of hermeneutical views. Centuries of negative appraisal of Judaism and defamatory preaching, such as the *Paschal Homily* of Melito of Sardis (d. ca. 190), taught Christians to think of their Jewish neighbors as sinful, even demonic. Anti-Judaism is a dangerous theological lens that fueled the development of modern antisemitism.⁴ Most Asian Christians have very little contact with contemporary Jews and Judaism, and most are not aware of the existence of rich resources in Jewish-Christian scholarship. But through reading the Christian Bible especially the

New Testament, most Asian Christians get a negative appraisal of Judaism. It is common to find that Christian preachers ridicule Pharisees as legalists and enemies of God's mission. Some maintain that God has forsaken the Jews because they did not accept Jesus as the messiah. Judaism is considered to be inferior when compared to Christianity, despite the fact that Judaism and Christianity came from the same religious heritage. Judaism's vision of God is believed to be incomplete without Jesus, although monotheism is the heart of both religions. Since the Pharisaic movement became the progenitor of rabbinic Judaism, the perception of Judaism among many Asian Christians is likely to focus on the realm of work-righteousness, legalism, and unfaithfulness. Anti-Judaism is the seedbed for the development of modern antisemitism.

Antisemitism is a term coined by Wilhelm Marr in the late nineteenth century that depicts Jews as an inferior ethnic group. Modern antisemitism does not require a theological rationale, though the long legacy of anti-Judaism has created fertile soil for antisemitism. As Mary Boys says, "A theological or religious ignoramus can be an anti-Semite."⁵ I am mindful that there is no difference between anti-Judaism and antisemitism from the perspectives of the Jewish victims; rejection of Judaism can easily "slide over" into antisemitism. Yet, this distinction is made for the purpose of probing Christian theological reflection. Christians who with utmost sincerity claim that they are not anti-Semites can turn around and make anti-Jewish theological claims. This happens because supersessionism runs deeply in Christian understanding of religious identity. This religious identity has been reinforced for centuries through Christian doctrines, legislation, practices of Christian worship, and educational materials. Even though antisemitism does not require theological rationale, it is necessary for Christians to confront centuries of anti-Jewish theology that provided the seedbed for the development of antisemitism.

Although most Christians would denounce antisemitism, supersessionism lives on. This problematic conventional Christian teaching that Christianity has superseded Judaism and therefore replaced it as the true Israel is still observable in many churches. To charge Jews of deicide, unfaithfulness, and legalism, despite no supporting facts, depicts a sickening Christian habit. Many Christians seem satisfied to portray an inferior Judaism as a platform for building their self-identity. To be Christian, for many, means to reclaim a victorious religion in which Judaism has failed. The temptation is too great to equate Christians as God's only spokespeople.

ANTI-JUDAISM AND THE CHURCH

How can a religion founded on the love and forgiveness of Jesus have contributed to the horror of the *Shoah*? A brief trip back in history will help us to answer this question.

Ancient Jewish people have a strong tradition of polemical criticism. For example, take Isaiah's oracle against Israel:

Therefore the Lord does not take pleasure in their young men. Nor does he have pity on their orphans or their widows; for every one of them is godless and an evildoer, and every mouth is speaking foolishness. (Isa. 9:17).

Despite the harsh sayings, none would accuse Isaiah of being an anti-Semite. As a member of his own people, Isaiah's oracles have been treated by Jewish people as prophetic voices. Similarly, the New Testament writers, most of them Jews, employed the same Jewish rhetorical tradition to stir up conversations within the Jewish community. The defamatory words we term "anti-Jewish polemics" represent intra-community disagreements. When the Jesus movement from the second century onward became solely Gentile in membership, followers of Jesus were no longer Jewish. Gentile Christians picked up these polemic writings, with or without consciousness of the Jewish contexts of the materials. These writings, which condemn the Jewish neighbors of the Gentiles, are the beginning of a primitive form of anti-Judaism. From this perspective, to call the intra-community accusations found in the New Testament "anti-Jewish texts" is misleading.

Despite the fact that most biblical writers were Jews, early Christian theologians failed to take the political circumstances of the writings seriously. Instead, early church theologians who were Gentile Christians seized the texts written in anti-Jewish polemics and developed the foundational blocks for doing Christian theology. Over the years, a body of literature we now term *Adversus Judaeos* (Against the Jews) developed, based on sermons and theological arguments. This literature formed part of the foundational block for educating Christian self-identity. Most importantly, it reinforced a triumphal Christian self-identity: Christianity alone is the true religion God intends for the world. This argument was developed by the medieval church to condemn the "perfidious" Jews who refused to convert to Christianity. The theological argument for Judaism being obsolete is the foundational building block of classical Christian doctrines. The Christian church applied this same argument against other non-Western cultures and religions during the missionary expansion of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The concept of the supremacy of Christianity had taken shape.

An illustration of the early development of anti-Jewish thought is the controversy posed by Marcion, declared a heretic by the church in the second century. The responses of early church

leaders to Marcion's teachings give a clue to the "birth" of anti-Judaism. These responses of the early church to Marcion served more than just to suppress heretical teachings; their comments became the template for thinking about Christian self-identity.

Marcion was a popular Christian leader who posed much concern for early Christian leaders in the second century. As a subgroup of the Gnostics who denied that the God of the Hebrew scripture is the true God, Marcion assumed a dualistic understanding of God. Marcion's reading of the apostle Paul led him to argue that the God of Abraham was a cruel God of Law, whereas the God revealed by Jesus was a God of love. He argued that the "Old" Testament is to be abandoned as religiously authoritative because Christians have been liberated by the God revealed in Jesus.⁶

By differentiating the God of the Hebrew scripture from the God of Jesus, Marcion invited harsh criticism from other Christian leaders of his time. For example, Tertullian (ca. 160-225), a North African theologian, fiercely rejected Marcion's position, as revealed in his *Adversus Marcionem* (Against Marcion). In arguing that the God of Abraham is the same God of Jesus, Tertullian admitted the "inferiority" of God's "old" law. But it was not because of inferiority on God's part; rather, it was the "inferiority" of God's people with whom God was working at that time. Thus, Tertullian contributed to the anti-Judaic myth by blaming an unfaithful Jewish people. Tertullian wrote, "This law was not laid down because of its Author's hardness, but by reason of that supreme kindness which preferred to tame the people's hardness, and smooth down with exacting obligations their faith, as yet unpracticed in obedience."⁷ To argue against Marcion, Tertullian blamed iniquity on the Jewish people as a noticeable theme.

Justin Martyr (ca. 100-160 C.E.), in his lengthy *Dialogue with Trypho the Jew*, asserted that the Mosaic Law was no longer valid. Justin argued that the law was given only because of the Jews' hardness of heart, and its purpose was to keep Jewish sinfulness in check. Justin wrote, "For the law promulgated on Horeb is now old, and belongs to yourselves alone; but this is for all universally."⁸ On the iniquity of the Jews, Justin adds, "The Lawgiver is present, yet you do not see Him; to the poor the Gospel is preached, the blind see, yet you do not understand."⁹ John Chrysostom (ca. 347-407 C.E.) wrote, "Here [in the synagogue] the slayers of Christ gather together, here the cross is driven out, here God is blasphemed, here the Father is ignored, here the Son is outraged, here the grace of the Spirit is rejected. Does not greater harm come from this place since the Jews themselves are demons?"¹⁰ Furthermore, Ignatius wrote, "It is absurd to speak of Jesus Christ with the tongue and to cherish in the mind a Judaism which has now come to an end."¹¹ In the late second century, Melito of Sardis preached a defamatory sermon charging that

Jewish people had committed the worst crime in history: Deicide. For the next nineteen hundred years, the charge of deicide echoed throughout the centuries. Melito said:

O wicked Israel, why did you carry out this fresh deed of injustice, bringing new sufferings upon your Lord – your master, your creator, your maker, the one who honored you, who called you Israel? But you were discovered not to be Israel, for you have not seen God or acknowledged the Lord. He who hung the earth in place is hanged. He who fixed the heavens in place is fixed in place. He who made all things fast is made fast on the tree. The Master is insulted, God is murdered. The King of Israel is destroyed by an Israelite hand.¹²

As we have seen, early Christian theologians employed the same rhetorical skills, not as members of the Jewish community, but as Gentile Christians who condemned Judaism as an inferior religion. The boundary between a reasoned debate and an emotional polemic was crossed, with the escalating intensity of accusations.¹³ These theologians displayed strong determination to rescue the church from heresy. At the end, the Bible and the character of God were rescued, but it was done at the expense of the character of the Jewish people. In their theologizing, early church theologians imposed collective guilt upon Jewish people for the death of Jesus. Consequently, they charged that Jews were no longer the true Israel of God because they forfeited their right by rejecting Jesus of Nazareth. Both the Marcionites and the early Christian theologians denigrated Judaism. Although these arguments were made a long time ago, variants of these arguments live today in many Asian churches.

The Christian church, almost solely Gentile in membership, came to enjoy political ascendancy from the fourth century onward. The Gentile Christian church exercised dominance by proclaiming its religious teaching as the only legitimate teaching. Through the church-sponsored state legislations, Jewish life suffered tremendously. Under the former Roman occupation, Judaism around the empire was a respected religion. It attracted many God-fearing Gentiles because of its morality and religious teaching. However, under the *Christian* emperors and church officials who considered Judaism an obsolete religion, state laws made Jewish lives miserable – a “fitting” punishment for rejected Jesus. From the medieval period onward, many Christians viewed Judaism not only as inferior, but also as an enemy of the church and a menace to society. Based on the premise that Judaism should no longer exist; some synagogues were converted into churches. Jews were excluded from public offices, marriages between Christians and Jews were strictly prohibited, and Jewish properties and their lives were not as well protected as those of Christians. Jewish life deteriorated further in the twelfth and thirteenth century as the Fourth Lateran Council of the Church in 1215 prescribed the absolute segregation of Jews and decreed that all Jews should wear a yellow label as an emblem of their exilic status.¹⁴ During the

Spanish Inquisition, Christian authorities offered Jews “freedom” through conversion as a way to avert their miseries. That is why Jewish scholar Jules Isaac called Christianity “the teaching of contempt.”

The sixteenth century gave Jews some breathing room as the target turned to the Pope. However, Reformers’ opinions of Jews showed the enduring power of the *Adversus Judeos* tradition. Martin Luther is a good example. The young Luther realized his initial friendly attitudes toward Jews did not convert them to Christianity. Luther in his older age wrote a treatise entitled, *Concerning the Jews and Their Lies* (1543). In this infamous treatise, Luther recommended burning synagogues, Jewish schools, houses where Jews live razed and destroyed, rabbis forbidden to teach, their prayer books seized, safe travel for Jews abolished, and Jews be burned in the unquenchable fire of divine wrath.¹⁵ One might argue Luther had no intention to carry out what he wrote, yet, Adolf Hitler faithfully executed Luther’s wishes! And the Nazis loved to circulate Luther’s words. As a member of the German Catholic Church, Hitler was reported to have said that he merely intended to do more effectively what the church had been doing for centuries in regard to Jews.¹⁶

The Christian church remembers Luther not just as a great reformer of the church, but also as a principal and dominant shaper of German modern history.¹⁷ In 1972, the University of Munich published a large volume documenting the fact that there were anti-Jewish writings and deeds recorded in Germany every year since Luther’s death.¹⁸ According to this publication, Nazi ideologies generally used Luther as a source for their anti-Jewish theses. In its anti-Jewish propaganda by the Nazis, *Der Stürmer* published innumerable anti-Jewish articles citing Luther. Even though the Reformation was a milestone religious movement, anti-Judaism permeated deeply the reformers’ regard for their Jewish neighbours. Thus, the Protestant movement missed the chance to detour the path of antisemitism.¹⁹ When Hitler came to power in 1933, he already had a handy religious tool to persecute Jews: anti-Judaism. For the next twelve years, Nazi anti-Semitic policies employed traditional Christian anti-Jewish images fashioned by supersessionism, while rejecting Christianity. Jewish scholar Yehuda Bauer calls it “Christian antisemitism without Christianity.”²⁰

The history of injustice done by Christians to Jews in the name of Jesus has been well documented by scholars such as Clark Williamson, William Nicholls, Marvin Perry, and John Conway. The rich body of Jewish-Christian scholarship informs us that Hitler seized the theological legacy of Christian anti-Judaism as the foundational ideology and added the unprecedented element of genocide. This habitual way of thinking about Jews and Judaism in a negative fashion resembles what Max Weber called “traditional authority.” By “traditional

authority,” Weber means the “routinization” of authority associated with status.²¹ That is, anyone at anytime may interpret anything Jewish in a negative manner. Such interpretation is “supported” by the plethora of historical literature as authoritative. The sin of Christianity, accordingly, is that it played the complicit role of providing a religious seedbed to mistreat Jews. Many European Christians functioned as bystanders for Hitler because many had been “educated” to behave indifferently to Jews. In my opinion, Asian Christians have a duty to purge anti-Jewish preaching and teaching from the pulpit and classroom. As Christians, we need to reexamine our theological assumptions in reading scripture. We need to examine to what extent we have internalized supersessionism in our theologizing. We need to critique our own inability to debunk colonial Christian teachings. It takes courage to open the pages of history in which we will see the sins of Christianity clearly. Unfortunately, many Asian Christians have no knowledge of what Christianity has done to Jews. The flight of Jews under the governance of Christian Europe remains an “underside of history,” well sealed and forgotten. No wonder Rabbi Irving Greenberg argues that post-*Shoah* theology cannot be done without showing credibility in the presence of the burning children.²²

ANTI-JUDAISM IN ASIAN LIBERATION THEOLOGY

Contemporary Asian Christians are deeply committed to tell the story of Jesus to Asians in ways that are hospitable to Asian mindsets. A prerequisite, however, is to examine Asian Christian theological assumptions and methods: What have we learned? Who taught us that? What do we think now? Asian Catholic theologian Peter Phan points out that the *Shoah* is not adequately incorporated within the writings of Asian Christians.²³ Methodologically, in making new theologies for Asians, Asian Christians will miss correcting a fatal mistake of the Christian Church when they do not intentionally incorporate theological reflections on the *Shoah*. The tragic consequence is that Asian Christians potentially run the risk of repackaging anti-Jewish teaching, by the rubric of Asian experience and culture. Despite having good intentions to share the gospel, the message is potentially troublesome, especially when anti-Judaism is still observable in Asian churches. In the following selected excerpts from the writings of Asian theologian C. S. Song, we have a glimpse of this problem:

- “Thus on the cross Jesus became uprooted from his own race, his own nation, his own religion.”²⁴
- “Once again God seemed to be making a fool of Israel. God did not seem to be playing their game. For God the unbroken existence of Israel as a messianic nation did not seem to matter.”²⁵

- “It [first-century Judaism] is this religion of the law that was later opposed by Jesus. And it was this same religion that was to send him to the cross.”²⁶
- “What he [Jesus] has encountered in the religion of his day is not the reign of God but the reign of the religious hierarchy, not the power of God, but the power of religious leaders, not the saving love of God but the fear with which people are taught to view God.”²⁷
- “God of traditional religion that demands blind submission has already been shaken... Jesus is not a God of retribution.”²⁸

One would expect Asian liberation theology as a corrective movement to Western theological establishments to display high sensitivity toward anti-Jewish expressions. However, the problematic past seems to continue. These theological assertions portray an unfaithful Judaism which fails to recognize God’s mission through Jesus. They also depict Judaism as an enemy of the gospel. Song paints a vivid picture of Jesus’ religion as everything contradictory to the religion of his day. Jesus’ religion was love, compassion, self-sacrifice and justice. Jewish religion in Jesus’ days was a religion of law and hierarchy. Jesus’ God is Abba-God: a God who demonstrates intimacy and passion. Jewish religion is about fear and domination. Song argues that “the religious authorities have completely misrepresented God’s reign to people.”²⁹ The ministry of Jesus, however, was to unmask the hypocrisy of the religious leaders of his day. It was Jesus’ ability to expose the hypocrisy of what Song called “traditional religion” that sent Jesus to the cross. The cross, according to Song, is the “height of human defiance against that Abba-God” and is “a defeat of a God domesticated by an organized religion.”³⁰ Although Song’s writings employ the gospel stories extensively, there is no sign of the usage of the contributions of Jewish-Christian dialogue. Rather, Song perpetuates a classic Christian image that portrays Jesus against his own religion.

Phan has documented the danger of Song’s theological approach related to Judaism. In Phan’s judgment, most Asian theologians have not been well acquainted with the complexity of first-century Israel.³¹ After pointing out Song’s problem of portraying the God of Israel as the ‘God of retribution,’ and Song’s contrast with the ‘Abba’ of Jesus, Phan writes:

[Song] runs the terrible risk of perpetuating the injustice, perpetrated throughout the history of Christianity, of stereotyping Judaism and different groups of Jews when he ascribes a legalistic concept of God to Judaism and an oppressive and hypocritical behavior to specific groups of Jews, such as the Pharisees and the members of the Sanhedrin.³²

In “Five Stages Toward Christian Theology in the Multicultural World,” an article collected in *Journeys at the Margin*, we read a different C. S. Song. Song denounces traditional theology that teaches supersessionism.³³ One has to read this section very attentively. Fast reading is not recommended, because the reader will run the risk of misunderstanding Song. In

this section, Song gives a three-page description of traditional theology fashioned by supersessionism. If one does not follow carefully, it appears that Song is promoting supersessionism. But Song is denouncing supersessionists that teach the Hebrew scripture as nothing but old and outdated. He argues that God's covenants with Israel remain valid. This section shows how much Song understands the *Problematik* of anti-Judaism, and he urges all Christians to purge such theological lens. Is this Song's guiding principle all along, or might it suggest a revised position concerning Judaism? Song's former publications contradict his vignette in *Journeys at the Margin*. It is possible that Song discusses the Jewishness of Christianity in the realm of method, but the method has not been incorporated in his reconstruction of Asian theology. We are still waiting to see Song write a well-articulated Asian theology that pays attention to the scholarship of Jewish-Christian relations, especially regarding Christian origins in light of the complexities of the Second Temple period.

This problem demonstrates how little attention Asian churches pay to the contributions of Jewish-Christian dialogue. Even with good intentions of constructing the gospel meaningfully to Asians, supersessionism runs deeply in Asian Christian understanding of Christian identity. By perceiving antisemitism as an exclusively Western issue, Asian churches fail to grasp the theological root of antisemitism (i.e. anti-Judaism) where *all Christians* regardless of culture and race can denigrate Judaism in their self-talk. Asian Christian reassessment of the Jesus movement in the complex origins of first-century Israel becomes imperative.

The point I am pressing is that Asian theologians and church pastors need to avoid preaching the gospel via a negative and over-simplistic view of Judaism.³⁴ Without making adequate reference to the complex political chaos ancient Rome created for the backdrop of the emergence of Christianity, Asian theologians are still imprisoned by the anti-Jewish tradition of the pre-*Shoah* era. As we have seen in C. S. Song's writings, there is a tendency to portray Jesus' ministry in ways that one is led to think that Jesus was the *only* Jewish man in Palestine who cared about the poor and the oppressed.³⁵

As pioneered by C. S. Song and others, Asian Christians have started to offset the domination of Eurocentric Christianity. These Asian church leaders address the legitimacy of Asian religions and cultures as materials for theologizing. In terms of offsetting Western domination, they have achieved an impressive (though unfinished) accomplishment. However, this is only half of the problem. Another serious mistake the Western church made was to misjudge the place of Judaism in Christian theology. For two thousand years, Christianity developed its own self-identity by denigrating Judaism. Through the works of colonial missionaries, many Asian Christians believe that to be Christian necessitates the rejection of

Judaism. This serious mistake made by the church was debated and critiqued since the end of World War II and is gradually being purged. Yet, Asian church leaders have not adequately considered it.

BURYING ANTI-JEWISH CHRISTIAN PRACTICES: A CHALLENGE

The challenge the *Shoah* posts is *not* about teaching the Christian faith the Asian way, but teaching a *different* Christianity. It begins with examining the fundamental premises of Christianity. I offer these suggestions for reflection:

1. *Re-Membering the Christian Tradition.* The need to reexamine the relationship between Christians and Jews has been largely triggered by the soul-troubling reality of the *Shoah*. Since Jewish-Christian dialogue is being carried out most vigorously in the West, it is relatively easy for Asian Christians (even in North America) to bypass its significance and dismiss it as *another* Western theological issue. The *Shoah* may seem distant from Asian Christians separated from it by time, space, language, and culture. It seems that the impact of the *Shoah* on their psyches has thus been minimal, and it is relatively easy for Asian Christians to be disinterested in Jewish-Christian dialogue. Asian Christians may have concluded that they have nothing to do with the *Shoah*.

To address the geographical and cultural distancing, my challenge for Asian Christians is this: During the week of Passion, many Asian Christians sing the hymn, “Were you there when they crucified my Lord?” The hymn is potentially anti-Jewish, depending on how one understands the pronoun *they*; nevertheless, the hymn calls for solidarity and communality. If Asian Christians think that they have nothing to do with the *Shoah*, they are saying they were there in first century Israel and in Christian Europe but not in twentieth century Poland. Asian Christians must purge this ahistorical way of approaching their faith. By professing faith in Jesus, Asian Christians share the glories and scandals of the Christian movement, both past and present.

Asian Christians can claim physical absence during the *Shoah*; however, as part of the Christian family, they were there, figuratively speaking. It is an aspect of being in communion. Speaking as an Asian Lutheran, when I become a member of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, I inherited the whole legacy of Lutheranism, including its anti-Jewish teaching. I cannot just walk away by saying: “I was not there when Luther wrote his anti-Jewish treatises.” Most contemporary German Lutherans were not there, either. While we were not there in literal physical presence, we were there as participants in the theological tradition. Because I am willing

to stand alongside German Lutherans, I am “naturalized” as a guilty participant in Luther’s anti-Jewish rhetoric. However, I rejoice with the Lutheran church worldwide when the church denounced Luther’s anti-Jewish writing. If I am not part of the family, I have no reason to celebrate. Similarly, to free Asian Christians from the legacy of anti-Judaism, we must be able to see ourselves as participants in this problematic anti-Jewish tradition and in turn, confront the tradition. Asian churches will fall short in liberating Asian Christians from the “captivity of the Western church” when they do not perceive anti-Jewish theological traditions as part of the Asian Christian tradition. Physically, Asian Christians were not in Auschwitz, but supersessionism is still the assumed hermeneutical lens in most Asian pastors’ sermons and teaching. That is enough to be an issue.

2. *Confronting Christian Complicity in the Shoah.* The notion of “Asian Holocaust” directs Asian Christians away from critiquing the *Shoah*. Some Asian Christians consider their primary task to address the genocides occurring exclusively in Asia. While I believe that all genocides are important materials for theological and ethical reflection, I as an Asian Christian cannot ignore the *Shoah* because of the Christian connection to the genocide. A significant difference between the genocides occurring in Asia and the *Shoah* is two thousand years of Christian supersessionism. What the *Shoah* does for Asian Christians is to heighten our awareness of problematic Christian teaching, thus inviting all Christians to reexamine our Christian beliefs regardless of race and culture. Just because Asian Christians in Asia and in North America were not physically involved in the horrific event of the *Shoah*, it does not mean that Asian Christians have purged anti-Jewish teaching from their theology and preaching. If Christianity characterized by the love and forgiveness of Jesus can contribute to horrific incidents such as Auschwitz and Birkenau, there is no guarantee that the new forms of Asian theologies will not lead to other forms of oppression. What I am calling for on the part of Asian Christians, particularly in North America, is a serious reexamination of the relationship with Judaism after the *Shoah*. How Asian Christians will relate to religious others and how we will conduct our lives in pluralistic societies is in part a signal of our willingness to confront the legacy of anti-Judaism that has been so deeply rooted in the Christian heritage.

3. *Re-Appropriating Jewish Religious Traditions for Asians.* Asian theologians and pastors are constructing new Christian expressions that are more hospitable to Asian minds. In this task of doing *Christian* theology, Asian theologians, pastors and laity cannot ignore the Jewish roots of Christianity. Post-*Shoah* theological reflection is a necessity, not an option. What I mean is that almost the very fabric of Christian faith, that is, the concepts of God, creation, redemption, and congregational practices such as worship and confirmation, have Jewish

connections. The sacred texts that Christians call the Bible were almost all written by Jews with a backdrop of Jewish values and cultures. Even though the target audiences of Asian theologians and pastors are shaped by Asian cultures, Asian Christians make implicit reference to Judaism when we talk about Jesus, and the early church did so when they interpreted scripture. The question is: To which Judaism are Asian Christians referring? Do we mean the Judaism that we have learned from the pre-*Shoah* Western theology, or the Judaism that Christians have been rediscovering as the result of Jewish-Christian study and dialogue in light of the *Shoah*? While the message of Christianity has a universal scope, its value, vision and expressions are anchored in Judaism. That is, Asian Christians cannot even begin telling the Christian story to Asians without grappling with its historic roots in the Jewish community. It is virtually impossible to understand the message of Christianity and to proclaim its vision without properly understanding its closest sibling: Judaism.

Attention to Asian peoples' experiences of discrimination is essential to most Asian theologians and pastors.³⁶ Yet, the church's ability to respond to contemporary experiences of Christians hinges on its understanding of the experiences of Christians in the past. Questions such as, "Who am I?" and, "What can I offer?" are crucial to the task. How the church understands its own original formation is critical to the church's responses to the crises of our times. Without keen understandings of the complexity of Christian origin, Asian Christians will distort not only our self-identity, but also eventually God's mission in creation. It is precisely because of the need to honor the experiences of people that post-*Shoah* theological reflection matters. Asian churches tend to be preoccupied chiefly with Asian cultures and contexts, as if Asian cultures and contexts are the only legitimate contexts that Asians may consider.³⁷ Ironically, such exclusivity in doing theology without engaging in dialogue with Jews is to commit the exact same mistake Western Christianity made. The need to pay tribute to Asian cultures and histories is legitimate, but it cannot be done at the expense of Judaism.

The *Shoah* challenges Asian Christians to be conscious of our methodology when articulating a new Christian theology. Peter Phan is correct in saying that Asian Christians are blessed with the opportunity to retell the Christian story from the Asian cultural perspective. But it should not be done by forgetting or bypassing what has happened in the non-Asian past. Phan invites Asian Christians to stand on both sides of the boundaries – both memory and imagination.³⁸ As Christian educators, we cannot afford to blindly condemn the Western establishments. Because of that, I suggest Asian theologians and educators employ an inter-disciplinary approach in constructing Asian theology. This inter-disciplinary approach is a simultaneous three-way conversation that involves Western theological traditions, Asian

philosophical resources, and scholarship in Jewish-Christian relations. This approach, I argue, will answer Asian feminist theologian Kwok Pui-lan's question. In her book *Discovering the Bible in the Non-Biblical World*, Kwok asks, "How should Asian Christians avoid anti-Judaism in their interpretation?"³⁹ I suggest Asian churches begin by not regarding Jewish-Christian relations as peripheral scholarship. When Asian Christians turn toward Asian cultural resources, we must not forget the first century Jewish contexts, especially the political circumstances. Life in the Roman Empire, experiencing the destruction of the Second Temple, formed the backdrop of the New Testament. Christianity comes from the same ancient Jewish heritage. This approach to Asian theology will better protect Asian churches from the anti-Judaism virus.

4. Reassessing the "Pros" and "Cons" of Asian Communal Ethics. Post-*Shoah* theological reflection is particularly important for Asian Christians who live in North America. In *Bystanders*, Victoria Barnett discusses the ethics of indifference through studying the issue of bystanders during the *Shoah*, and she discusses the basic human instinct to observe order and authority.⁴⁰ When facing an oppressive regime, the basic instinct of survival rules. Reading Barnett's account of the bystanders provokes a chilling feeling of ethical indifference. What does it mean to live in community? What does it mean to live as humans in a multicultural continent? Barnett asserts that, in a totalitarian society, "mass behavior loses the capacity and the desire to think or act independently."⁴¹ Consequently, inadequate presence of dissenting voices allowed the Nazi regime to accomplish their act of genocide. The illusion of normalcy is thus established. Barnett notes that the rescuers were a significant minority, mainly individuals, not groups. However, she identifies one key characteristic of these rescuers. These individuals were able to think critically and process information independently.

It is essential for Asian Christians to question the consequences of "collective ethics." If there is any situation where the phrase "collective consciousness" or "communal identity" is undesirable, it would be studying the ethics of bystanders as Barnett has articulated. Asian churches will find the study of the *Shoah* the perfect place to discuss the "pros" and "cons" of Asian collective ethics. Asian peoples, shaped by Confucianism, treasure the familial ethics of community. Such collective ethics shape the communal consciousness of how Asians think and behave. Yet, one of the values of studying the *Shoah* is to encounter the danger of conforming to the collective good. Communal ethics is not risk-free. It has its danger, too. For example, collective ethics makes little room for individuality and unconventional expression. Individual voices are not heard in the name of communal wellbeing. The study of *Shoah* will expose the dark side of collective ethics.

By saying this, I do not imply that Nazi racist policy and Asian communal cultures are the same thing. Nevertheless, conforming to the collective good is unmistakably one of the key

characteristics of Asian ethical virtue.⁴² Communal right is “worshipped,” whereas individual right is secondary. Sacrificing oneself and one’s ideas for the sake of the common good, and/or sometimes, for those who are in authority is a virtue. In the web of relationship, Asians are taught to think collectively. Without awareness that critiques these ethics, Asians’ ability to question the *status quo* or break from established norms is relatively weak. The question for Asian Christians becomes: “When does social collectivism lead one into social indifference and when does it lead one into social solidarity with other human beings who are suffering?” In the name of community, many Asians have experienced injustice, exclusion, and violence, not from the dominant North American Western societies, but within their own families and communities. The study of the *Shoah* will stimulate Asian Christians to understand how the mechanism of prejudice works.

Asians have a strong tradition of respect for authority figures. These authority figures may be parents, teachers, pastors, professors, and so on. Thus, it is difficult for Asians to challenge people who hold these positions, because of the tradition of respect. In addition, Asians are more sensitive to shame than guilt. Not to lose face in public becomes a crucial medium of social control. In light of these factors, Asians are likely to be the last to speak out against social injustice. Conformity to the assumed cultural expectations is deeply entrenched in all Asian communities. Difficult as it is for most Asian Christians, lack of such individual effort and critical thinking skills can lead to more suffering. Uncritical acceptance of norms prescribed by society, church, or any community is dangerous.⁴³ As participants in multicultural and pluralistic societies, studying the *Shoah* challenges Asian Christians to be more sensitive about the mechanism of unjust policies and to stand up as God’s agents of peace, justice and love.

5. Reconstruction Requires Un-Learning and Re-Learning . Revising Christian teaching in order to respond to the growing pluralistic phenomenon in North America has not been the most urgent mandate for most Asian Christians in North America. Rather, combating discrimination and liberalism have been principal imperatives. For most conservative evangelical Asian Christians, terms such as “revising,” “deconstructing,” or “reconstructing” invites nothing but wall building. This is understandable if Asian Christians understand that newcomers desire security in foreign lands. To cope with discrimination and marginalization, many Asian Christians hold on to the “firm” traditions of the past. The sense of security is jeopardized with the suggestion that the “firm” foundation of the past needs to be revised. This is one of the reasons that evangelicalism attracts many Asians.

Asian Christian educators need to help Asian Christians to see their self-centered world. This self-centered world is created because of past grievances and hurt and also because of their ethnocentric interests. Geographically speaking, many Asians abandon the geographic boundaries

of “Chinatown,” but not its effect on the psyche. The “Chinatown Complex” is still observable among many Asian North Americans in dealing with other cultures and people. That is, there is still a tendency for Asian North Americans to erect boundaries in order to exclude others. As much as Asians are victims of dominant Eurocentric cultures, Asians themselves are capable of causing injustice to other minorities, such as gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and the transgendered.

Asian Christians often articulate the need to “see beyond one’s world,” as a challenge to Euro-Americans and their theologies. Many Asian people direct little effort toward challenging ourselves to see beyond our own confined world. Asian Christians need to take seriously Asian theologian Andrew Sung Park’s idea where he says, “[Asians] must acknowledge that our community is guilty of patriarchy, exploitation, and racial bias.”⁴⁴ Through articulating a theology of transmutation, with emphasis on mutual challenge and respect in interracial relations, Park argues that Asian Christians need to do three things: first, to challenge the United States (and Canadian) society; second, to challenge other ethnic groups; and third, to challenge Asian communities. Park invites us to think seriously about what it means to care for other cultures.⁴⁵ Instead of lamenting a state of marginalization, a hyphenated person who belongs to both worlds should seize the opportunity to fashion a new, different world.⁴⁶

Asian Christians in North America have perceived themselves as victims who have been marginalized by the dominant society. However, victims need to be rescued; they are powerless to amend their fates. In a democratic society, Asian Christians’ hope is to fight for justice until the oppressors repent. This quest for justice makes Asian Christians in North America numb to the injustice they create for Jews and others. Therefore, Asian Christian educators and theologians in their theologizing must do more than just address discriminatory experiences and/or cultures of Asian people. While the quest for justice is a legitimate and continuing issue, unless Asian Christians in North America operate beyond the “victim mindset,” there will be little motivation or power for us to clean up their our own house by getting rid of the of anti-Judaism virus.

6. *Rethinking the Practice of Christian Worship.* Supersessionism spreads not just through theological discourse but also through the hymns and practice of Christian worship. Asian Christians need to be aware that supersessionism spreads through the teaching and preaching of esteemed theologians and pastors. It is very likely that the anti-Judaism virus is spread every Sunday through worship and Sunday school activities. To live as post-*Shoah* Asian Christians, Asian Christians are responsible for unmasking supersessionism in worship and preaching. In *Has God Only One Blessing*, Mary Boys helps us to understand supersessionism in hymns. For example, Boys brings our attention to the popular Advent hymn, *O Come, O Come Emmanuel*: “O come, O come Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel, that mourns in lonely exile

here until the Son of God appear.” The lyric depicts Judaism, in contrast to Christianity, as still in the dark. This is a clear display of supersessionism. To purge supersessionism, Asian Christians could seriously consider this alternative:

O come, O come, Immanuel
 And bless the place your people dwell,
 Protect and keep us day and night,
 And bring the blessing of your Light.⁴⁷

This means that when worship leaders and pastors choose hymns, we cannot afford to pick hymns because of the beautiful tunes or because the hymn titles fit with the occasions. Rather, we must be diligent in checking to see if the lyrics contain the unwanted virus.

Moreover, Asian preachers and theologians need to be careful in how we interpret the two testaments Christians called the Bible. It is of utmost importance for preachers to respect the specificity of those texts. For example, the Gospel of John (19:20): “... the doors were shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews.” Imagine what image regarding the Jewish people we are giving to those who hear this verse year after year. Also imagine the effect if the preachers do not intervene by saying, “The disciples were all Jews!” Whenever we read an anti-Jewish text, whether it is caricaturing the Pharisee or Jewish customs, worship leaders and pastors must be conscious that those texts show nothing but the internal disagreement among Jews in first century Israel. Asian Christians who are not Jews must handle with extreme care the quarrels in another’s house. Anti-Jewish rhetoric represents the intra-community dispute, not proof texts for denigrating Jews and their religion. It would be unimaginable for the writer of the Gospel of Matthew, a Jew himself, to nullify the Jewish way of life, including its religious traditions, values and vision, because of Jesus. We must make every attempt to avoid approaching the Hebrew text as nothing but providing a foundation for interpreting the gospel

CONCLUSION: WHAT IS AT STAKE?

Post-*Shoah* theological reflections are a forgotten topic among Asian churches because most of them think they have nothing to do with the horror. The resulting tendency is to minimize the importance of Jewish-Christian dialogue, theological reflection on the *Shoah*, and dialogue with Jewish-Christian scholarship. Such an attitude is dangerous to the future of Asian churches. By dismissing post-*Shoah* theological reflection, Asian churches perpetuate anti-Judaism through their teaching and preaching. Minimal participation of Asian Christians’ in Jewish-Christian dialogue also means that Asian Christians have fewer resources with which to construct a different

Christianity. The task of religious education for Asian churches is extremely critical, because their colonial understanding of Judaism and Christianity must be challenged. Asian Christians need to unlearn anti-Jewish Christian tradition and to relearn Jesus anew. They must bury anti-Jewish Christian practices. A new Christian theology and practice must be grounded in a portrayal of a faithful and vibrant Judaism. Because of that, the task of Asian Christian educators is more than to pass on the faith of the saints, or to repackage “the same old gospel” with an “Asian look.” Rather, it is to transform the presuppositions and assumptions of Asian Christians regarding their understanding of their Christian self-identity and of Judaism. Asian Christians’ critique of Eurocentric theology remains a cosmetic task until it deals with the root cause of Christian superiority.

What is at stake is that as Asian churches are steadily growing in Asia and in North America, Asian Christians run a terrible risk of being the contagious agents of the anti-Judaism “virus” through their preaching and teaching. To build peace, not hatred and misrepresentation, Asian Churches’ cannot bypass taking a serious look at the Christian heritage inherited from Western Christianity. Religious beliefs are integral to the human quest for meaning and purpose in life. Defamatory teachings in sacred religious texts can be the source of conflicts. Therefore, examining religious ideas is imperative to peace building in pluralistic society.

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