

# Henry Martyn, the Bible, and the Christianity in Asia

***Dr Sebastian C.H. Kim***

***Director of the Christianity in Asia Project***

Along with many modes of missionary activity, the translation and distribution of the Scripture were a vital concern for Protestant missionaries in the nineteenth century. Stephen Neill commented that "the first principle of Protestant missions has been that Christians should have the Bible in their hands in their own language at the earliest possible date", whereas Catholic missionaries were engaged in translating mostly catechisms and books of devotion.[1] As the Protestant missionary enterprise rapidly grew in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, so the translation and distribution of the Bible was of great importance in many parts of the world. For this, the British and Foreign Bible Society and other Bible societies, and more recently the Wycliffe Bible Translators, played key roles in the translation and distribution of the Scripture. Eric Fenn of the BFBS even asserted that the missionary work of the church has been essentially "Bible-centred" in three ways: the Bible has been the source of inspiration for the missionaries, the basis of the worship of the church, and a means of evangelism in itself.[2]

What motivated the missionaries and mission agencies to engage in Bible translation? When we read the accounts of these missionaries, the prospect of making available to people the good news in their own language was the most frequent and common testimony.[3] However, R.S. Sugirtharajah, in his recent publication *The Bible and the Third World* points out that the Bible was introduced into Asia and Africa by Catholic missionaries before the colonisation of these continents. In this period, the Bible did not play a significant role in the lives of the believers and was only known through oral

transmission mainly through the liturgy and sermons so "non-textual means came to be regarded as the prime media of God's revelation and presence". [4]Furthermore, prior to the arrival of the Protestant missions, there were no translations available in the languages of Asia and Africa. The Bible was regarded as one among many sacred books and Christians did not try to subsume or surpass the religious texts of the other religions. In the contrast to this, Sugirtharajah accuses Protestants of a dogmatic attitude of "acknowledgement of the sufficiency of scripture, assertion of its authority over tradition, [and] treating it as the incorruptible Word against human error".[5] As a result, the pattern of Protestant mission has been one of "the denunciation of the natives' idolatrous practices" and "preaching accompanied by the presentation and dissemination of the Bible as the answer to their miserable state". He then went further calling the work of the Bible Society "scriptural imperialism".

Scriptural imperialism had its roots in the image the [Bible] Society invented for itself. It saw its mission in millennial terms and projected itself as the chosen agent of God to whose care the onerous task of transmitting God's Word had been entrusted. The oracles of God, which were first given into the custody of God's chosen, the Jews, had now been passed on to the Christians, especially the British, ...[6]

In particular Sugirtharajah found that the work of the BFBS was modeled on the administration of the British Empire.[7]This is not an uncommon criticism of the mission organizations of the colonial period and I do not intend to go into the debate since this problem of the relationship between mission and colonialism has been well discussed elsewhere, such as in Brian Stanley's book, *The Bible and the Flag*. But when Sugirtharajah criticises the intentions of these societies and those who are involved in the translation and distribution of the Bible as part of "scriptural imperialism", I find it necessary to raise some questions.

Sugirtharajah says:

The Society's intention of providing the Bible in the vernacular was another mark of scriptural imperialism. In colonialism's cultural conquest, vernacular Bibles, enabling the natives to read the Word of God in their own languages, could be seen as the sympathetic and acceptable face of its civilizing mission: it appeared to be a noble

cause. But behind this noble claim, one came across constant complaints by the Society's translators who found that the indigenous languages not only had no suitable vocabulary but also lacked concepts to convey the ideas of the gospel.[8]

Furthermore,

Scriptural imperialism was furthered by the Society's ambition to print the Bible at affordable prices and place it within the reach of all people; it was also prepared to print and distribute Bibles at a loss. Its aim was to make the Bible the 'cheapest book' that had been published. [9]

Here, Sugirtharajah dismisses the efforts of the organisations and missionaries by giving a few odd examples of people complaining about their difficulties in finding suitable vocabulary for their translation as evidencing an imperial attitude and the society's efforts to distribute the Scripture as widely as possible as an imperial agenda. Sugirtharajah's argument is that the Bible was used as a key part of colonial discourse and that the Western imperial powers, especially the British, used the Bible not only as the chief means to penetrate the people but also to control the people. Is this a fair assessment of the intentions of these people? Did missionaries have this colonial agenda when they were engaged in the translation of the Christian scripture? What is strikingly absent from Sugirtharajah's argument is accounts of the testimonies of the people who received the Scriptures and those local people who were engaged in the translation work. Were they simply serving the grand purpose of their colonial masters? Or do they have something to say to us? Were they just passive participants who were ignorant of their own traditions and accepted the Scripture without any value judgement on it? I would like to investigate these questions by looking respectively at the life of Henry Martyn, at the history of the Bible translation in Korea and also at interpretation of the Bible in India.

## **1. Henry Martyn - seeking the perfection of the vernacular Bible**

The story of the life of Henry Martyn always fascinates people who are interested in mission, though his missionary work in India and elsewhere was relatively short. We have his diary (journal) and a few biographies, but certainly more a comprehensive biography is called for. Looking at what we have, we can glance the life of Martyn - young, dedicated, pious and intellectual as well as his struggle with his passions, vocation and later, with his physical illness. His famous phrase, "let me burn out for God" could be described as the characteristic of his life as a whole, but along with this zeal to do God's work, he certainly had the intellectual capacity to accomplish his work as a translator of the Scripture. It could be argued that in terms of his achievements as a missionary, translating the Scripture was most significant one and what he enjoyed most. No doubt, if he were to live longer, he would have engaged in further translation work. Neill comments that "many of the early translations were rough-hewn and imperfect, in some cases laughably so; a great deal had to be redone", but "perhaps Henry Martyn's Urdu version of 1810 is unique in being still the basis of the version current more than a century after the translator's death".[10] Martyn arrived in Calcutta in 1806 and the following year, he was asked to translate the New Testament into Urdu (Hindustanee) and to supervise the Persian and Arabic translations. The New Testament Hindustanee Bible was completed in 1810, and then he set off for Shiraz in Persia to revise his Persian New Testament and to present it to Shah in Persia. And he died at Tokat, Asia Minor on 16 October 1812.

What motivated Henry Martyn to engage in translation work? Without doubt, first of all, it was his evangelical conviction of the centrality of the Scripture and its importance to himself. Since his conversion to Christian faith in his student days at St. John's, Cambridge he had been very much absorbed in reading the Bible and learning from it. As he said, "soon [after his conversion] I began to attend more diligently to the words of our Saviour in the New Testament". His deep devotion to God, along with the influence of Charles Simeon, Vicar of Holy Trinity Church, and the evangelical revivals of the period led him, to be involved in full-time Christian ministry, and later missionary work. It is also quite clear through his letters and diaries that he was convinced that the Bible would change the lives of the people just as he

experienced in his own life. Padwick comments that "in his writings [there are] increasing and deepening longings after God, numerous instances of delight and satisfaction in prayer, and many indications of his intense love of the Word of God".[11]

Furthermore, his love of the Bible became "intense" and later his translation work led him increasingly to appreciate its wisdom; as he testified, "what I have learnt from the Word of God is satisfying... which nothing else in the whole world is". When it comes to the Hindu and Muslim scriptures, Martyn hardly made any comment on them, he was preoccupied with his own Christian Scripture and perfecting the translation of that language.

But, his devotion to translation was greater even than his commitment to the Bible, his interest in logic and desire for an excellence in translation was equally, if not more important in assessing his motives. His academic ability is well known. He received the Member's Prize for a Latin essay and later became the Senior Wrangler of St. John's. His interest in language is evident when we read about his preoccupation with studying Bengali and Arabic grammar while he was ministering at Lolworth and thinking of going to India, perhaps anticipating his later involvement in translation work. He certainly enjoyed studying languages. In his nine-month voyage to Calcutta from England, he spent his time studying Bengali, Urdu, Persian and Arabic grammars. The fact that the very first missionary he met on arrival was William Carey may not be just coincidental. Moreover Martyn must have learnt about Carey's translation work and gained both inspiration and desire to engage in it himself.

His ability with languages made Martyn a recognised scholar but he was not content to stop at this, he was also determined to achieve perfection in translation. He set out for Persia "determined not to come forth again till he brought with him such a version as in all its niceties could satisfy the sensitive Persian ear".[12] John Malcolm, a British diplomat in Bombay, in his letter to the British Ambassador in Persia introducing Martyn, wrote:

Mr Martyn also expects to improve himself as an Oriental scholar; he is already an excellent one. His knowledge of Arabic is superior to that of any Englishman in India. He is altogether a very learned and cheerful man, but a great enthusiast in his holy calling.[13]

When he had completed his Persian Bible, he was determined to present it to the Shah of Persia, wishing to have it proved by the authority that his translation was the best and to gain recognition. Although Martyn could not in the event present the Bible in person, the Shah later wrote him a letter:

In truth [said the royal letter of thanks to the ambassador] through the learned and unremitting exertions of the Reverend Henry Martyn it has been translated in a style most befitting sacred books, that is in an easy and simple diction... The whole of the New Testament is completed in a most excellent manner, a source of pleasure to our enlightened and august mind.[14]

Martyn's enthusiasm and desire to perfect the translation was perhaps, more than anything else, what drove him to pursue his work. In the time of his greatest difficulty when he had not heard from his beloved Lydia for nearly ten months and was in ill health, his determination to excel in translation kept him going. He was obsessed with his work and it was a great comfort to him in the time of both physical and emotional pain, as he testified:

If I live to complete the Persian New Testament, my life after that will be of less importance. But whether life or death be mine, may Christ be magnified in me. If He has work for me to do I cannot die. [15]

Henry Martyn was perhaps unique in the combination of his linguistic ability, intense concentration, and particular circumstances, but he is not an isolated case among the missionaries who were involved in translation work. They may have operated in a colonial situation, and therefore benefited from the colonial establishment, but nevertheless they were mainly driven by evangelical conviction of the importance of the Christian scripture and the desire to bring God's word to the people they were with. To a modern reader, they might be naïve and they might be seen as arrogant in their approaches to the Bible and other scriptures, but it is not true to say that they saw the project of translating and distributing the Bible as a part of a colonial agenda. As Martyn's case shows, as part of their missionary intention to evangelise, many of them were personally inspired by the Scripture and interested in translating the Scripture. They may have been ignorant of the rich literary

traditions of the local culture, but they were not actively seeking to displace these.

This is also applicable to the case of the BFBS. Their motive was the evangelical one of bringing the Word of God to people who had no access to the Bible in their own language. The fact that the legendary and moving story of Mary Jones inspired many and triggered Christian leaders in England to start the Society shows its origin in a humble and simple desire to meet people's needs. One of the earliest BEBS pamphlets says its purpose was:

To diffuse the knowledge of the Holy Scriptures, by circulating them in the different languages spoken in the Great Britain and Ireland; and also, according to the extent of its funds, by promoting the printing of them in foreign languages, and the distribution of them in foreign countries.

Eric Fenn convincingly argues that it was the evangelical revival, more than anything else, which was the driving force behind this missionary work:

It was out of this movement, which none could doubt was a movement of the Spirit, that there came that fresh conviction of the universality of the Gospel which was to make the nineteenth century so notable a landmark in the expansion of Christianity. The fact that the new spirituality had been so closely connected with the recovery of biblical truth meant that the Bible moved into the centre of faith and practice again in a way which ensured that it would be at the very heart of the new movement when it came.[16]

As I have already pointed out, it is vital for us to listen to the voices of the people who received the Scripture in their own languages. I would argue first that though translation of the Scripture was mainly initiated by missionaries and often funded by foreign organisations, the local Christians were not just passive recipients or even simply collaborators with them, but rather they were actively involved in the work; and moreover, the way they interacted with the Bible resulted in the characteristics of Christianity in a particular context. In this sense, the Bible played a key role in shaping the life of Christians and the shape of Christianity itself. I would like to look at two distinctive forms of Christianity in Korea and in India to illustrate these points.

## 2. Korean Christianity as "Bible Christianity"

Christianity in Korea came into being in an unusual way. A Korean scholar named Lee Seng-Hoon went to China to study and met a Jesuit missionary there. He later became a Christian and was baptised in Peking in 1784. He then returned to Korea and started to share the Christian faith. Five years later, when Jesuit missionaries first came to Korea they discovered that there were already about 4,000 Christians on the Korean peninsula. The Catholic Church grew rapidly but soon it faced great persecution by the government. There were several reasons for this persecution. First, the Christians' refusal to practise ancestor veneration or worship. They were accused of not honouring the ancestors, which is a vital part of Korean culture. Second, the Christians were accused of being in contact with imperial powers and in fact, some Christians did help would-be invaders from the West.[17]The persecution of 1866 was especially severe. About 8,000 Christians were killed and almost the same number were to starve to death when they escaped to mountains.

While the Korean peninsula was closed to outside world, several Protestant missionaries, mainly those who were staying in China, were interested to come to Korea. K.A. Küztlaff (1832) and Robert Thomas (1866) came to Korea and though their visits were brief ones, their reports of their encounters drew the attention of other missionaries to this hidden kingdom. The most important figures in the translation of the Korean Bible were John Ross and John MacIntyre who were sent to Manchuria to work under Alexander Williamson of the Scotland Bible Society in 1872. Ross was interested in bringing the Christian message by trying to sell Chinese Bibles to Korean merchants at the "Corean Gate" in Younggu-port in Manchuria. [19] The merchants were intellectuals seeking new ideas and changes and, as Ross reported, they were impressed by Christianity through reading of the Bible in Chinese and wanted to be baptised and to go back to Korea to share it with others.

On his second visit to this port in 1876, Ross met Lee Eung-Chan who became the first Korean to teach both Ross and MacIntyre. He helped Ross

to publish the "Crean Primer" (1877), completed the translation of John's and Mark's gospels in 1878, and was also involved in the translation of more than half of the New Testament before he died of cholera in 1883. Around this period, several other Koreans including Baek Hong-Jun joined Ross and MacIntyre and were baptised in 1879. Through the help of these Koreans and through numerous revisions and corrections, Ross and MacIntyre were eventually able to complete the Korean New Testament (Yae Su Seong Kyo Jun Seo). It was published by Mun Kwang Publishing House of Shenyang in China in 1887.[20] Meanwhile, the translation of the Bible was also pursued by a Korean scholar named Lee Soo-Chung, in Japan in the same period. Lee, whose relative was martyred in the time of persecution, was a scholar who accompanied the Korean ambassador to Japan in 1882. He was given a Chinese New Testament Bible by a Japanese scholar and as he studied it he decided to become a Christian and was baptised in April 1883. Lee was soon encouraged to be involved in translation work in 1883. He started with a transliteration of the Chinese Bible into Korean. But from June of that year, he started to translate the gospel of Mark into Korean, a task which he completed in April 1884.[21]

Portions of the Bible and the New Testament in Korean were soon distributed to Koreans in Manchuria and Japan as well as in Korea by colporteurs who carried them from village to village. Kim Chung-Song was a colporteur who went to ZeupAn, the Corean Village in Manchuria, and led many people to Christian faith through his activity of selling portions of Korean Bible and brought them to China for baptism. John Webster and John Ross testified that as they visited Korean villages many of the people had already come to Christian faith through the reading of the Scripture and that it was reported that about 600 people were candidates for baptism and about a thousand families were reading the Bible every day in their family devotions. This phenomenon was not just limited to Korean communities in China but was also reported in various places in Northern Korea such as Ejoo, Pyeongyang, in North Korea.[22] Another key figure was Seo Sang-Ryeng who was also involved in translation work. He started in Seoul 1883 distributing about 400 copies of a portion of the Bible and as a result gained a dozen converts. He

then moved on to Bongchun and identified about 70 converts who wished for baptism and went to Seoryae and established an indigenous Seorae Christian community. The significance of the activities of the early Korean Protestant Christians for this study is that they were motivated to preach the Christian message to their own people in China and in the Peninsular and that the Bible was the key medium of their activities.[23] William Scott of the Canadian Presbyterian Mission said, "I consider the colporteur's work to be one of the most valuable aids to the evangelism of Korea". [24]There were numerous stories of the work of colporteurs:

A woman sat in her room one day, when a colporteur called with his gospel. At that time there was no man in the house, and as per custom, the women would not go out to the colporteur, who was stranding in the yard. So he commenced reciting from one of the Gospels as loud as he possibly could... The women listened to all he had to say about his new religion, and when he had finished sent a servant out to purchase a sample portion, which she read eagerly.[25]

Of course, Ross and MacIntryre were the ones who organised and pursued the translation, and their contribution to the Christianity in Korea is immense, but the efforts of Korean scholars who were involved in the whole process and Korean colporteurs are important to mention, as Min Kyeung-Bae, a well known historian, rightly insists. Here we see the Western missionaries and Korean converts were involved as a team in translation of the Bible and, though the expertise, finance and organisation were initiated by the missionaries, it was Korean converts, especially in the case of Lee Soo-Chung in Japan, who were taking on the task of translating and distributing of the Scripture.[26]The early Korean Protestant Christians were eager to read the Bible in Korean and there is no doubt that this contributed to the growth of the Korean churches even when the missionaries were not allowed to enter the peninsula.

Of course, the growth of the Korean church has to be understood in the light of the socio-political circumstances of Korean peninsular in the second half of nineteenth century and not just the availability of the Bible. However it is clear that Bible studies contributed the characteristics of the Korean church and its revival.[27]

Poor though Korea is, and afflicted with much economic distress, the country shows wonderful spiritual life in many places. It is the conviction of competent observers that the remarkable growth and development of the Korean church is due to the systematic teaching of the Bible, which has been one of the characteristic features of foreign mission work in this land... Country [Bible] classes are held in various districts and people may have walked 50 to 150 miles, with the

temperature below zero, in order to attend, and others have carried their supply of grain on their backs, being too poor to pay the necessary charges for their board.[28]

Similarly, William Blair and Bruce Hunt, reporting the revival movement of Korea gave credit to the place of the Bible study classes:

The Bible-study class system is a special feature of the Korean work. Each Church appoints a week or longer some time during the year for Bible study. All work is laid aside. Just as the Jews kept the Passover, the Korean Christians keep these days sacred to prayer and the study of God's Word.[29]

In fact, the tradition of Bible study was so much the hallmark of early Korean Christianity that one missionary called it "Bible Christianity":

The Christianity being developed in this land is pre-eminently a Bible Christianity. It is the Scripture that the evangelist takes in his hand when he goes forth to preach. It is the word of God that is being believed, and by which men are being saved. It is the Bible that is the daily food of the Korean Christians - his spiritual meat and drink. In a way that is difficult for one to understand who lives in a land of daily newspapers, magazines, and books coming from the press in a constantly increasing stream, the Bible holds the chief place in the mental or spiritual nourishment of a multitude of people in this land.[30]

The distinctive of Korean Christianity as Bible Christianity is due to the fact that the Korean education system was heavily influenced by the Confucian traditional method of teaching and learning. Confucian learning was highly systematised and people of the ruling and middle classes were required to learn the Confucian texts by heart. People were taught to accept the Confucian texts as the authority for socio-political principles as well as the daily practice of ethics and moral conduct. There was no critical evaluation of the texts, nor of their validity in the context of Korea, but they were regarded as given authority by the king and forefathers. People read them aloud or memorised them and recited them, and tried to follow their teaching literally. In the period when the Protestant Christianity was introduced in Korea, Confucian philosophy was largely questioned by the educated people, due to the corruption of the government and division and infighting between different

Confucian schools, nevertheless the mode of learning it inculcated is dominant in the Korean education system even to present day.

When the Bible was introduced to the Koreans, and once Korean Christians accepted it as the sacred text, it was revered as the authority above others. And they employed the Confucian method of learning as they studied the Christian scripture. They tended to accept the literal meaning of the text and tried to put it into practice in their daily lives. In this conservative approach, any new understanding or interpretation of the text has to be scrutinised by the traditional understanding of the text. This approach has in turn shaped the Korean church in which there is a strong commitment to the Scripture, which has contributed the rapid growth of the Korean church. There has also been an eagerness to study the Bible and follow literally what the Bible teaches. The scriptures so well learnt have been a source of strength for Korean Christianity especially in the time of persecution in the middle of the nineteenth century, during the Japanese occupation and during the Korean War.

However, this rigid and radical affirmation of Christian Scripture has also limited the development of Korean Christianity in various ways. Korean Christians tend to take the text literally and are reluctant to accept any new interpretations. The interpretation of the Bible by the missionaries which came with the introduction of the Scripture was "accepted as norm" or held "authority". Therefore any other interpretation has to be measured by this original interpretation. This is not to say that the Koreans accepted the interpretation of the early missionaries simply because they brought a text, but rather Koreans accepted that particular version of Christianity and they wanted to maintain their initial commitment. "Bible Christianity" could lead into biblicalism in which there could be no interpretation but only transmission of the text. This attitude may have contributed to a fundamentalist approach to the Christian faith and toward other scriptures and well as to people of other faiths. This preoccupation with the study of the Bible as the only authoritative text of Christian living tends to lead Korean Christians to be less concerned about the actual application of the teaching. In other words, this lack of interpretation of the text hinders any experiment with creative approaches to

the text, and as a result, the text becomes law, which either demands the literal obedience of Christians or becomes irrelevant to contemporary Korean society.

### **3. Indian Christianity and the Bible as *sruti***

The translation of the Bible into Indian languages is an enormous task in comparison to the case in Korea. There are more than 1,650 languages and the work is still being done by various organisations. In contrast to the Korean attitude to the Bible, Indian approaches to the Bible have not so much concentrated on studying the text itself, but rather on the interpretation of the Scripture, the application of the text, or on comparing it with other Hindu scriptures. Indian Christianity has a rich tradition of developing an Indian hermeneutics following the Hindu tradition of reading their scriptures, and this approach in turn has shaped Christianity in India. Robin Boyd, in his classic book *The Introduction to Indian Theology*, endorses the idea of Appasamy and asserts that the task of Christian theology in India has been the settling the "sources of authority", and that this source has been always the Christian scripture. However the scripture for Indians is not necessarily what is written but rather what is heard and seen. He continues:

[T]he conception of *sruti* itself is a valuable one, which represents a positive contribution of Indian theology to the world Church. The word, ... has the double meaning of 'Scripture' and 'revelation', both of which, according to the Indian conception, have their origin in hearing, *sruti* being derived from a root *sru* meaning 'to hear'. Furthermore Indian tradition, inducting Indian Christian tradition, does indeed give an honoured place to revelation by sight, the unveiling signified by the etymology of the English word (*re-velare*), as for example in Sundar Singh's *darsanas* of the risen Christ, and indeed the word *darsana*, or 'vision' of God, has deep religious significance in India. [31]

In addition to the sources of authority in Hindu tradition, there are various hermeneutical tools in interpreting the texts. According to Sugirtharajah, the Hindu approach of *dhvani* has been used to be alternative to Western literary and historical methods in illuminating the biblical texts. "Dhvani is a reflective and exegetical method used by Indian grammarians and in Sanskrit poetics"

and "like rhetorical criticism, it emphasizes the beauty and the aesthetic sense of the passage".[32] This understanding encourages Indian Christians to use the scripture creatively in various art and literature forms. More significantly, it tends to enhance Indian attempts to interpret the scripture in ways relevant to the Indian culture and society and these approaches have long been accepted and used in the Indian church tradition.

I would argue that there are three ways of approaching the scripture in Indian Christianity: First, articulating Indian Christology by interpreting the life of Jesus in the gospels. The concept of God-man is a very familiar one in Indian religious tradition. Jesus Christ is widely recognised as in this category and so the life and words of Jesus are admired by both Christians and Hindus. For example, Jesus was very early regarded as "guru" (Mazoomdar) or "*avatar*" (Appasamy). Indian theologians tend to see the person and teachings of Jesus as authoritative over against the systematisation of the text and the Christian doctrines. Indian Christian thinkers and theologians have been constantly struggling to re-read the life and teaching of Jesus and trying to revise the doctrines developed by the Western churches in this light. Second, Indian Christians have always been engaged in inculturating the text into Indian culture and Hindu philosophies. They have concentrated on the issue of bridging the Christian text with Indian contexts and making the text meaningful in such a diverse culture. While Korean Christians were trying to bring the life of the Christians in line with the Scripture so that their Christian practice might be up to the standard of the biblical teachings, Indian Christians have been wrestling with interpreting or reinterpreting the text into their own context so that the meaning of the text might be relevant to them. A third approach of Indian theologians is bringing the Christian scripture into relation to the other scriptures, but in this paper I will limit myself to the above two approaches.

Developing Indian Christology based on the life story of Jesus is a method that can be found in most of the writings of Indian theologians. Among the sources of the story of Jesus, the Gospel of John is most popular in India because of its mystical nature (Appasamy), which appeals to Indian concepts of spirituality. Abhishiktananda even said the gospel as "the Johannine

Upanishad" because of its resemblance with Hindu scriptures. Contemporary theologians from a variety of tradition most often use the Fourth Gospel in their theologising (Kim 2003).

One of the earliest attempts at Indian Christology can be found the work of Ram Mohan Roy. As a young Bengali Brahman, Roy was influenced by Islam and saw the need of reforming Hinduism. He openly criticised orthodox Hinduism for the practice of idolatry, which he saw as a corruption of Hindu philosophy.[33] Roy had a monotheistic faith in the unity of God grounded in *Vedanta*. [34] He believed that reason should merely serve to purify religion. [35] He was so attracted to Christian teaching [36] that he made a great effort to learn Greek and Hebrew and showed a remarkable ability to handle the biblical languages in his writings. In 1820 he published *The Precepts of Jesus: The Guide to Peace and Happiness*, which was a collection of the selected teachings of Jesus, mainly taken from the gospel of John, excluding his miracles, death and resurrection. For Roy, accepting the atoning death of Christ was not necessary for a true disciple of Jesus and following Jesus need not involve embracing exclusive Christian doctrines. [37] In assessing Roy's attempt, M.M. Thomas pointed out that Roy separated the teaching of Jesus Christ from the historical events of his life, death and resurrection and their biblical interpretation [38] For Roy, "knowledge of the moral law had it in its own power to reconcile men to God and empower them to lead the moral life". [39] Thus Roy's approach was, for Thomas, the prototype of "the struggle of modern India to define the truth and meaning of Jesus Christ in terms relevant to its life and thought", and was significant "in part as the church's witness to its faith in dialogue with a segment of the Indian mind". [40]

Similarly, the "Rethinking Group" of Madras, in their book, *Rethinking Christianity in India*, showed the Indian appreciation of the person of Jesus. [41] P. Chenchiah, a leading figure of the group, rejected institutional Christianity by separating Christ from Christianity, and sought what he called, the "raw fact of Christ". He emphasised the distinctive nature of Christ over against Christian and also Hindu tradition:

Jesus stands in relation to man as a new creation stands towards the old. His is not perfect man, but a New Man. In Jesus we have the

Creator's answer to creation's groaning for a new life... a "new given" that has entered the world. Hinduism makes the perfect man, Christianity the new Man... Jesus is the first fruit of a new creation.[42]

He saw that the heart of the matter for Christian mission was the creation of "new life" demonstrated in the life of Jesus, which he believed able to fulfil the "unrealised longing for a life here" of the Hindus.[43]He was not concerned for matters of church traditions and doctrines, which he regarded as western and irrelevant to Indians.

As a part of articulating Indian Christology, many others have employed various art forms including poems, painting and dancing in Indian style. This is most exciting and creative work, and many non-theologians have contributed a great deal to the inculturation of the Christian scriptures. One of the best examples of this approach was Narayan Vaman Tilak who made a significant contribution by composing numerous poems after his conversion. These poems were introduced into Christian worship and have enriched the life of the churches particularly in Marathi-speaking regions. In his later life started to write the life of Christ in verses, called *Christayana*, modelled on *Ramayana*, the great Indian epic. As P. S. Jacob points out, Tilak gave Christians a great *purana*, in the ancient literature form, as he attempted to present Christ in the Indian context.[44]

The attempt to present Christ in the Indian context has also been influenced by the Indian tradition of images or seeing as of vital importance to faith. Jyoti Sahi, a Christian artist, points out that Indians are interested in images "not just for what they are outside, but for the effect they have on the inner disposition for the believers" and the "connection between inner and outer is vital for the Indian mode of realising faith. [45]He further argues:

Christianity, therefore, should act like a midwife, and constantly bring to birth in a society the new from the old in a spirit of love and beauty. Christ himself describes this process, using the metaphor of a woman giving birth to a child. In this birth process there is struggle and agony. But the climax of this process Jesus is a new spirit of joy and celebration.[46]

Indian readings of the Christian scripture have been creative interpretations of the text and rich theological work has been produced from this sub-continent. This attitude toward the scripture comes quite evidently from the Hindu hermeneutical traditions of *sruti* and *dhvani*, and therefore it makes sense to the Indian hearers. This is not to say that Indian Christians are not interested in the text, but rather, they are more concerned with the image of Jesus Christ which comes through the text, particularly of the gospel of John, into the Indian living culture. The historical meaning of particular text and the context in which it was written are not of the same importance as the interpretation of it into the contemporary Indian context. It is the living manifestation of the scripture in experiencing Jesus Christ by hearing and seeing the gospel in their lives that matters most to Indians. Indian theologians have been constantly challenged to bring text into the midst of the people in a way quite opposite to the case of Korean Christianity. This approach has resulted in a very lively and interactive form of Christianity in which this wide possibility of expression naturally leads to a more creative interpretation of the Christian scripture.

However, this approach may have caused the Indian theology to have a tendency to apply the text too quickly into the context without careful examination of the context from which the text emerged. The dismissal of the Christian traditions and doctrines and also the radical inculturation of the text may have weakened the confidence of Christians who may not yet have grasped the text itself. Furthermore, the selective usage of Christian scripture might lead to a limited perspective on Christian faith. A lack of interest in the Old Testament is quite noticeable in Indian biblical tradition, perhaps due to the Hindu rejection of Semitic tradition, reflecting the tension with Islam. There is also a tendency to treat the Hindu tradition as the substitute for Old Testament tradition. As Boyd warned, there is an urgent need for Indian theologians to give attention to the Christian scripture as a whole.[46]

## **4. Conclusion**

Henry Martyn was an outstanding example of a nineteenth century Evangelical missionary in that he held the conviction that the Bible is the word of God and desired to make it available to the people in India by translating it into local languages. Moreover, he was meticulously absorbed in his translation work, which he so much enjoyed, and this, perhaps more than anything else, motivated him to translate the Bible into several languages. For many, the Bible has been the chief focus of their missionary work and they have devoted themselves to its translation and distribution. The motive of the people who are involved in this work is often a simple and humble desire to participate in God's calling in their lives. For various reasons Protestant missionaries got involved in this work and various Bible societies were founded on the simple desire to make the Bible, what they believed to be the word of God, available in other parts of the world. This humble desire cannot be regarded as "scriptural imperialism".

In the case of Korean and Indian Christianity, the attitudes of Christians toward the Bible was far from that of being merely recipients, but rather they actively participated in the translation, distribution and interpretation of the Bible even in the very early stages of the arrival of the Protestant missionaries. They took the Bible as their own and made it part and parcel of their culture and Christian practice so that the scripture has been a key source in developing Christianity in Korea and India. Furthermore, the way Christians appropriate the Bible determines the characteristics of their Christianity, as we have seen in the Indian and Korean cases. Philip Jenkins, in his recent book *The Next Christendom* points out the significance of the Bible in the new phenomenon of the rise of Christianity in Africa, Latin America and in Asia.

Looking at Southern Christianity gives a surprising new perspective on some other things that might seem to be very familiar. Perhaps the most striking example is how the newer churches can read the Bible in a way that makes that Christianity look like a wholly different religion from the faith of prosperous advanced societies of Europe or North America.[47]

Indeed, not only has the Bible, brought by the missionaries, been a significant catalyst of transforming societies in Asia (and also other parts of the world), but additionally the theologies and Christian commitments shown through the

way these Christians have accepted and applied the Bible into their own contexts reveal new aspects of Christian faith. Moreover, if Jenkins is right, it is this that will shape the future of Christianity.

**References:**

- i[18] *A History of Korean Church I* (The Korean Literature Press, 1989), 142-6.  
Lak-Geonn George Paik, *The History of Protestant Missions in Korea: 1832-1910* (Seoul: Yonsei University Press, 1929), 148-53  
Lee Man Yeol, *Korean Christianity and Independence Movement* (Seoul: Institute of Korean Church History), 175-211
- ii[43] P.S. Jacob, *The Experiential Response of N.V. Tilak* (Madras: CLS, 1979), 11.
- iii[45] Jyoti Sahi, *Stepping Stones*, 27
- iv[46] Robin Boyd, *An Introduction to Indian Theology*, 229.
- v[47] Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (Oxford: OUP, 2002), 217.

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i[1] Stephen Neill, *A History of Christian Mission*, 209. For example, though the catholics had been on the Fisher Coast in South india since 1534, the first translation of the New Testament into Tamil was completed by Protestant missionaries in 1714. the first Roman Catholic missionaries arrived in the Philippines in 1565, but the Scriptures into any language of the Philippines was made only in 1873.

i[2] Eric Fenn, "The Bible and the Missionary" in S.L Greenslade (ed), *The Cambridge History of the Bible* (Cambridge: CUP, 1963), 383.

i[3] See Wycliffe Bible Translators's websites on:  
[www.wycliffe.net/BibleTranslationPrinciples.html](http://www.wycliffe.net/BibleTranslationPrinciples.html)

i[4] R.S Sugirtharajah, *The Bible and the Third World* (Cambridge: CUP 2001), 37.

i[5] Sugirtharajah, 52

i[6] Sugirtharajah, 56

i[7] Sugirtharajah, 56-7

i[8] Sugirtharajah, 57-8

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- i[9] Sugirtharajah, 60
- i[10] Neill, 254
- i[11] Constance Padwick, *Henry Martyn Confessor of the Faith* (London: IVF, 1922), 172
- i[12] Padwick, 138
- i[13] Padwick, 136
- i[14] Padwick, 158
- i[15] Padwick, 144
- i[16] John Sargant, *Memoir of the Revd Henry Martyn BD* (London: J.Hatchard and Son, 1819), 387
- i[17] For instance, during the time of persecution in 1801, a Korean Christian leader wrote a letter to the bishop of Peking in which he appealed to the Christian nations of Europe to send an army to conquer Korea to bring religious freedom. But this letter was discovered by the authorities and brought down a furious persecution by the government.
- i[19] *A History of Korean Church I*, 146-148.
- i[20] Underwood and Apenzalar came to Korea with the Gospel of mark translated by Lee; it is used both Korean and Chinese in the text. However, due to political turmoil in Korea Lee escaped assassination by political opponents and had to return to Korea and died in 1886. Lee was highly regarded by other Koreans in Japan and made a great impact to the evangelisation of Korea especially by his involvement of translating of the Bible.
- i[21] *A History of Korean Church I*
- i[22] Lee Man Yeol, *Korean Christianity...*, 208, 209 (85% / 98% work was done by colporteurs).
- i[23] William Scott, *Report of BFBS (1916)*, 294.
- i[24] *Report of ABS (1916)*, 423.
- i[25] H. Underwood, *Korea Mission Field* (Sep 1908), 131-2.
- i[26] See Lee Man Yeol, *Korean Christianity...*, 177 & 206.
- i[27] *Report of NBSS (1930)*, 104.

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- i[28] William N. Blair and Bruce Hunt, *The Korean Pentecost and The Sufferings Which Followed* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust 1977), 67.
- i[29] Report of BFBS (1907), 70.
- i[30] Robin Boyd, *An Introduction to Indian Theology* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1975), 229.
- i[31] R.S. Surirtharajah & Cecil Hargreaves (eds), *Readings in Indian Christian Theology I* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1993), 200.
- i[32] In 1804, Roy published a Persian tract, *Tohfat al-Muwabhidin*, (A Gift to Deists) criticising idolatry and polytheism. - Kenneth W. Jones, *The New Cambridge History of India, III. 1: Socio-Religious Reform Movements in British India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 30. Also E. Daniel Potts, *British Baptist Missionaries in India, 1793-1837: The History of Serampore and Its Missions* (Cambridge: CUP, 1967), 229. Potts points out that Roy's monotheistic concept was very "Islamic".
- i[33] Kalidas Nag & Debajyoti Burman (eds.), *The English Works of Raja Rammohun Roy Part II* (Calcutta: Sadharan Brahmo Samaj, 1945), 60-61. In his *Translation of an Abridgement of the Vedant* (1816) Roy wrote that the "peculiar practice of Hindu idolatry, which more than any other pagan worship, destroys the texture of society, together with compassion for my countrymen, have compelled me to use every possible effort to awaken them from their dream of error: and by making them acquainted with their Scriptures, enable them to contemplate with true devotion the unity and omnipresence of Nature's God".
- i[34] M.M. Thomas, *The Acknowledged Christ of the Indian Renaissance*, 3rd ed. (Madras: The Senate of Serampore College, 1991), 3.
- i[35] Sophia D. Collet, *The Life and Letters of Raja Rammohun Roy* (Calcutta: Sadharan Brahmo Samaj, 1900), 109. See for example his letter to John Digby, in which he said, "the consequence of my long and uninterrupted researches into religious truth has been that I have found the doctrine of Christ more conducive to moral principles, and more adapted for the use of rational beings, than any other which have come to my knowledge".

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i[36] In his introduction he clearly stated the purpose of his writing by criticising those who uphold doctrines as guide-posts. He therefore wished to present the moral precepts from the gospels to "produce the desirable effect of improving the hearts and minds of men of different persuasions and degrees of understanding." He further wrote, "This simple code of religion and morality is so admirably calculated to elevate men's ideas to high and liberal notions of God, who has equally subjected all living creatures, without distinction of caste, rank or wealth..." - Nag & Burman (eds.), *The English Works...*, VI/4.

i[37] This was understandable because "in the Hindu understanding of reality, where everything returns again and again to the origin in a cycle, it is impossible to give a permanent value to a person, who is a historical reality, and so lives only for a brief space of time". Sunand Sumithra, *Christian Theology From an Indian Perspective* (Bangalore: Theological Book Trust, 1990), 41.

i[38] Thomas, *The Acknowledged Christ...*, 10-14. Thomas pointed out that Roy was moving from metaphysical Hinduism to ethical Christianity. What attracted him to the gospel was its ethics and therefore, for him and many Hindus like him, "the communication of the Gospel of salvation has to be in terms of the nature and fulfilment of the moral life". Thomas argued that it is not an "uncommon development for a Hindu to go through the moral ideal of Jesus to the secret of his personality and his work of salvation".

i[39] Thomas, *The Acknowledged Christ...*, 30-32. Thomas further challenged Christians with a pertinent question: "Is there not a path to understand and encounter Jesus Christ as the ground and salvation of reason and morality within a secular framework without a return to traditional religiosity?"

i[40] D.M. Devasahyam and A.N. Sunarisanam, *Rethinking Christianity in India* (Madras: Hogarth Press, 1938).

i[41] *Rethinking Christianity in India*, 43, 61.

i[42] *Rethinking Christianity in India*, 52.

i[44] Jyoti Sahi, *Stepping Stones: Reflection on the Theology of Indian Christian Culture* (Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 1986), 134.

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